

THE CAMBRIDGE HOUSE PARTY.

Church of England newspaper

"QUITE HONESTLY I WAS MUCH HELPED."

By
The Bishop of Norwich
 (Dr. Bertram Pollock).

I had the privilege of attending the first few days of an Oxford Group Movement House Party recently held in Cambridge. I had heard much about the Movement and had already learnt that it had discarded some of the mistakes which had exposed it to criticism in earlier days. New efforts naturally in their earlier stages adopt ways of working which a longer experience discredits. For example, in the frank "sharing" of individual experience which is an essential part of the Movement, a greater reserve is now being put upon the exposure of personal details in the confessions which are made.

I may say in a word that the whole vast enterprise struck me rather as a Method than a Movement. I do not see much risk of it developing into a sect. It is a method, with a loose organisation, which presses upon those who are associated with it a personal apprehension and application of some of the all-important aspects of Christian truth and practice.

The whole setting was very fresh and eager, but I did not feel that I was hearing anything with which I was wholly unfamiliar; *the emphasis was special, but the points that were stressed were to be found in Holy Scripture and in the lives of Christ's disciples through the centuries. This being so, I can see no reason why the Movement should consolidate itself into a separated denomination unless somehow or other it was driven to do so by a lack of sympathy on the part of the Church.*

If on leaving Cambridge I felt that there were certain items of the Church's teaching and work, and specially of its worship, that I had missed, it may have been that, had I stayed to the end of the meetings, I should have found some of the things of which I felt the lack. There was much confession of sins, and some very acute expositions of the self-deceiving weaknesses of human nature. These constituted a severe self-examination. But less was said of the glory of forgiveness. In the short chapel service on Sunday at 11 a.m. we said the General Confession, but we did not hear the Absolution or any equivalent. And in this same service the testimony of men tended to replace the spirit of humble awe in the presence of Almighty God.

We heard really fine and sincere words about surrender to Christ, but less about life in Christ; the parable of the Vine and the Branches was not mentioned. Nor, *while I was present*, was there any allusion to the Sacraments, which

bring us to Christ as the Source and the Food of our spiritual life. Thus the manward side of our Christian progress became very prominent, and the Godward side was less arrestingly to the fore.

There is a further danger, that when people give new names and use fresh terms in describing old and recognised points in the Christian's faith and pilgrimage, they may imagine that they have discovered something which is itself fresh in the world of Christian experience. On the other hand it must be said, and said very emphatically, that we owe very much to those who have brought forward new phrases to describe old ideas. The Group Movement has been very happy in this, and it clearly and effectively commends the Gospel to the present generation to whom the old-fashioned terms of "justification," "sanctification," "the in-dwelling of the Spirit," may make no appeal and may seem to belong to a phase long left behind. Provided that we have the real thing it does not make much difference in what syllables of the English language we describe it.

I came away rejoicing in the inclusive doctrine of the Church of England, from which so many of our dissenting friends split away, partly because they did not know that the truth for which they stood was all the time to be found in the Church's teaching, and partly because the Church itself had allowed one and another of such truths to be overlaid or to fall into the background. And I also was thankful that the fullness and proportion of our faith are to be found so richly and so tenderly expressed in our Prayer Book, which in its teaching comprehends, with much besides, all that I was delighted to hear brought out at the Group. *Quite honestly and simply, I was much helped by my visit.*

For what did it all mean? Here were men and women, mostly young, testifying to their experience of the joy of a conquering and "expulsive" Christian faith. If sometimes they spoke with some religious exclusiveness, and mutual admiration towards the members of the Group and with a claim to a novel exploration, this was perhaps, after all, a sign of enthusiasm and confidence. These young men and women do believe and act as believing in the present guidance of the Holy Spirit. They believe that a life of complete surrender to Christ is a vocation of happiness, sending them out into the world to share with others what they have found, and to

bring others in. And in this connection I must say that one delightful young man used the phrase that the "sharing" (of the experiences of sin and of liberation from it) "must be Christ-centred and not self-centred"—indeed his addresses filled in some of the blanks that I was feeling.

One who has been a true friend to the Group said that the culminating effect of the witness of the many who had tried and profited by the "quiet time" with God every morning, was far more persuasive than the most eloquent words of any preacher in the pulpit recommending the very same thing. He was quite right.

It was what I saw that arrested me as much as what I heard: the eager faces, the bright look in the eyes of so many, the happy bearing, the candour of fellowship. These young people show that we *have* direct communion with God without priestly intervention; they had got hold of a secret which *worked*. It may have been a secret which was first disclosed to me in my old home long ago. But here it was, lighting up, and triumphing in, the hearts and characters of a new generation. No wonder that, in the words of Malachi, those who are possessed by this secret love to "speak often one to another." With a grateful personal remembrance I like to think of the Book of Remembrance which "was written before Him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His Name" (Mal. iii. 16)—as they did in the Group at Cambridge.