

OXFORD GROUP IN AMERICA.

"WARMEST OF WELCOMES."

By Loudon Hamilton.

After a voyage of preparation, and on arrival the warmest of welcomes, we were whisked off to Briarcliff Lodge amid the wooded heights overlooking the Hudson. The house party began next with some 400 people, since increased to 600, under the leadership of Rev. Samuel Shoemaker, Jr. Rector of Calvary Church, New York City. It was obvious at once that great things were impending. The labours of precious years were bearing fruit many fold. Expectancy was in the air. Anything might happen. It began to, almost immediately.

6,000 MILES TO A HOUSE PARTY.

We found some people had come almost as far as we had. Six came from California especially for the house party, 6,000 miles in all. Canada, Florida, Texas, and the Middle West are also represented. A missionary on leave from the Congo had used all her savings to come. A needle woman, only partially employed, prayed for extra employment to let her save enough to come. Her prayer was answered and she came. Bill Pickle is here, the leading figure of a now famous story, once a bootlegger, whose life was changed 21 years ago through the agency of Dr. Buchman, the influence of whose change on the life of that University was as profound as it has been permanent. Only last week a group met, the continuation from Bill's original change. There are university professors of all denominations, leading business and professional men and women, younger married people and a large proportion of students. A noticeable feature is the number of older people who have come because of the change in their children. We used to think the older generation had to convert the younger. Here it is sometimes the other way about, the problem may be the prodigal parent. Many are not afraid to say they have come from homes once unhappy, now happy, or others from homes still unhappy who have come because they have known of someone who has found the answer through the groups.

MIRACLES HAVE HAPPENED.

We have just spent three days together and already miracles have happened. We ought not to have to call what should be constant Christian experience a miracle. We have always believed in history that Christ can change times. Yet we are surprised when it happens. Life on this basis is normal Christian living. At a house party like this we see happening what ought to happen in every Church, lives being changed through the power of the Holy Spirit and men and women finding Christ in their own lives. How else is revival to come in the Church?

A FEW EXAMPLES.

Amid a wealth of instances, we can only select a few. A high American priest told us of pessimism gone, financial problems in his working-class parish solved; his exclusiveness broken down; now in closest fellowship with Nonconformist ministers. A distinguished authority on the Renaissance, once a Princeton professor, witnessed to his progress from rationalism and intellectual pride. A Wall-street broker said he was no longer even worried. A missionary from China spoke of her release from things hitherto unrecognized in her life which had been blocking power at the Sunday service. A successful business man told us of his wife's change first, and their daughter of nine beginning to keep quiet times, of his own formal religion and artificial ethics, finally chaperoning his wife to a house party with a bottle of whisky and a novel, where to his own surprise he tried a quiet time with revolutionary results. A City Hospital doctor gave her life to Christ, now knowing that otherwise she could not hope to save a friend from contemplated suicide.

A NATION-WIDE MOVEMENT.

In addition to the miracles of changed individuals, there is the new movement abroad of the Holy Spirit on a new scale and at a new pace. We are bound to think for a nation-wide movement. The task is not just to create experience, but to apply and relate it to the needs and opportunities of the day. And this is manifestly the day of opportunity.

"JESUS CHRIST AND TWO THIEVES."

THRILLING STORY.

The following thrilling story is contributed by Mr. Reggie Holme, of New College—an Oxford undergraduate who is now studying for Holy Orders. His life was changed at an Oxford Group meeting two years ago.

There were really three thieves including myself. Two years ago at Oxford Christ challenged me through the Groups, to Absolute Honesty with myself and others. I "handed over the controls" to Him, began living under His directions and was soon told, among other things, in my morning quiet times, to pay back money falsely claimed from an insurance company for damages to a racing motor-cycle.

Two years after, in February this year, I told a Y.M.C.A. Sunday gathering of release through Christ from areas of dishonesty, impurity and selfishness and of the sense of purpose which had replaced the old pagan sense of futility. I mentioned also the restitution to the insurance company. A young man who had come, he said later, quite "by chance" into the meeting, came up after the address and asked for a talk. His name was Jack but, though strangers, we had one acquaintance in common, a girl in the audience, whom some of the girls in the group were trying to reclaim from a life of sin. She had been invited to hear my witness as the result of guidance that came in quiet that afternoon and quite "by chance" (I wonder!) Jack was the only other person in the room whom she knew.

"SHARED EXPERIENCE."

The address I gave had come to me in a time of quiet before the meeting, and it was evidently intended for Jack. He liked the note of what Dr. Reid recently called "shared experience," and he, in turn, told me where he was failing to reach Christ's standards of absolute honesty and purity of life and motive. He had the same sense of futility and drift, of which I had spoken. As we talked, he began to see that God could run his life and tell him, if he listened, what to do, step by step.

Next day at lunch it was clear that God had spoken to Jack, for he produced from his pocket a cup stolen from a car whose owner was unknown. We had a quiet time with several of the Group and the guidance was clear. It would involve restitution to the police. This meant almost certain imprisonment with hard labour. Jack carried it out, confessed to all the thefts he could remember at the time, of cycles, overcoats, gloves, etc., and was allowed bail. In subsequent quiet times the Holy Spirit reminded him of further felonies and confession was thus made "by instalments." Once, he said later, he was tempted to keep back a pair of suede gloves, to which he had grown attached, but further quiet made it clear to him that there must be no compromise.

When restitution to the police was over, guidance began to come about; honesty with his family, who knew nothing of these thefts. A visit to them resulted in renewed fellowship with a brother with whom he had not been on speaking terms for eight years.

The trial was conveniently adjourned so that Jack could grow adequately in the new life and stand on his own feet, if it meant prison. "Food, air and exercise" are what a baby needs, so for spiritual "food" we studied together the prison episodes in the Bible, for "air" we had quiet, listening to God, and prayer, and for spiritual "exercise" Jack got into action in the lives of others, often through bits of restitution he made.

JACK'S ACCOUNT OF SURRENDER.

At the hearing of the case, when it did come off, the Spirit dominated the court. When asked finally if he had anything to say, Jack gave a clear account of his surrender to God and three of us found that the "witness" box gave a good chance for "witness." The Bench, police and audience certainly found food for thought in Christ's four absolute standards of Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness and Love, while the reporters were so convicted that they left out the uncomfortable word "absolute." Jack faced the verdict of three months "inside" with complete calm and no regrets.

He had already witnessed to Thief No. 3, his confederate, and guidance soon came to me to tackle the latter. He had raced against some of us in our pagan days on a motor bike with an "Anzani" engine, and we gave him that as a nickname. Further, his mother and sister had been won to Christ through

the Groups, so that there were natural points of contact. And the jargon of motor-cycle racing is curiously well adapted to the Gospel, of which Thief No. 1 is now training to be a minister.

Since the racing days, "Anzani" had been through hard times and in bad company. He and "Mrs. Anzani" had camped for six months, till as late as November, in a tent by the river and had experienced a truly Egyptian plague of frogs. Another time when rations were short it was only too easy to put six pounds of pork down to an unsuspecting lady. Yet again, when "Anzani" needed certain alibis, a week of railway fares to London was saved by simply selecting a car each morning from an Oxford car park and driving back in a different car of London origin each evening.

DIFFERENCE IN JACK'S FACE.

Such activities were rudely cut short by Jack Cook's change. "Anzani" saw the difference in Jack's face for himself and read in the papers an account of the trial. We heard rumours that "Mrs. Anzani" had him under lock and key for fear he would get converted! He knew when we met, that decision for Christ would mean following Jack's example of restitution. We talked motor-cycle "shop" for a while and then I told him of my own past defeats on all four of those uncomfortable "Absolutes" and of the progressive victory and direction in life which Christ had given me for two years. Three days later "Anzani" was willing to take God on His own terms and we had a quiet time to find out the next move. This was for "Anzani" to be honest with his "in-laws," who were in the dark about his recent activities. The next step after that was concluded was to tell the detectives about his surrender and about the resultant restitution. It was exactly timed, for they were going to "pull him in" any way, as we discovered, and a day later might have been too late. We knew we were on the track of God's will definitely when we got off the 'bus in central Oxford late that night, and the one detective on duty "happened" to be standing at the 'bus stop, trying to look like a harmless citizen. As we talked it turned out that the detective and I had met before—when after I had been celebrating the end of an examination, he had arrested me for tearing a drainpipe off a house and marching up Holywell with it "at the slope." Naturally, he was intrigued by the apparent change from those days and we got talking with him also.

AMUSING RESTITUTION.

One piece of restitution was amusing, for "Anzani" and Jack had unwittingly (and unsuccessfully) tried house-breaking on what turned out in daylight to be the house of a friend of the former!

"Anzani" also was known to the girl who was at the Y.M.C.A. meeting and his witness next week at the service preceding it deepened the challenge to her. She had seen the undergraduate thief changed two years ago and had prophesied it would only last three weeks and here were two others changed within a fortnight before her eyes, and the undergraduate was, under God, the agent.

At the court there was witness to Christ from the dock again and "Anzani" spoke of the Pilot he had taken on board to steer him through the shoals ahead. He was put on probation for 12 months. Soon after, God led him back to a job in the Pressed Steel Works, where he has a group of five, and is not only creating experience of Christ but relating it to a situation.

Jack Cook comes out at the end of this month (and an outside meal is definitely the first move!) Several cases of restitution as a result of his witness are known to us, even affecting the Prisoners' Group in Edinburgh gaol. One man has said that for him to be absolutely honest and gave himself to God would perhaps mean penal servitude for life. What would it mean for you?