

## THE OXFORD GROUP HOUSE-PARTY.

The Near East was well represented at the house-party of the Oxford Group in July 1931, at Oxford University. There were two from Persia, two from Egypt, seven from Turkey, one from Greece, and one from North Africa, as well as some six hundred others, mostly from the British Isles. Other mission Council areas were also represented, for example, C. F. Andrews, friend of Ghandi, was one of the leaders.

A house-party is an informal type of conference with gaiety and seriousness, laughter and facing of deep personal failure. It is not a leaders' party, in fact the human leadership for so large and smooth running an affair was most notable in its inconspicuous retirement. "The Holy Spirit," they said, "is the leader"—a claim evidently justified. Nearly everyone participates in the meetings at one time or another, so they cannot be too large. For that reason, there were three separate house-parties run at the same time in three different Oxford colleges, all three combining only on Sundays. One group was international with many Continental Europeans, especially Dutch and German, another group was mainly for students and young people, and a third for those who had had experience in mission work, the ministry, or educational work. Most of the Near Easterners were assigned to this last house-party, where they spent two weeks of fellowship.

The Oxford Group Movement is not a separatist movement but seeks, in its own words, "to serve the Church from within in recapturing the life of power in Christ as it

was in New Testament days." One found all kinds of denominational background from Anglo-Catholic to Quaker. The movement is both international and inter-denominational and even inter-confessional and aims at sending back the individuals it touches into their own communions with a revitalized spiritual life. Bishop Roots, the presiding bishop of China, who has always been interested in church unity, has said he feels that this movement has the answer, in its higher challenge for Christian service.

The writer had had only one brief personal contact for six years with the Groups. He was much impressed with the growth of the movement in two radically different directions during this period. The first was the growth in size, influence, and outreach. After the main Oxford house-party was over, plans were considered to answer calls for advance growing out of the work in Scotland, England, Wales, Scandinavia, Germany, and Holland in Europe, with special thought given to the request for a Geneva house-party this January just before the Disarmament Conference. This latter arose through the convictions of Rear-Admiral Drury-Lowe, Secretary of the British League of Nations Union, and Mrs. Alexander Whyte of Scotland, both at the Oxford house-party. South Africa has work going on, on a nation-wide scale which has already had marked results in race relations as C. F. Andrews so eloquently testified. Kenya and Tanganyika and Australia also figured in plans. The United States already

has several house-parties planned with more called for, and there is further activity in Canada.

Consideration of calls from India, the Near East, South America, France, and from the United Church of China all had to be postponed till next year because of the pressure of more immediate demands on the leaders. However, the missionary vision and worldwide sweep of the movement is apparent from this hasty summary, and if the six years have shown this much growth, in the next six years the influence of the group should be of far-reaching value to the cause of missions everywhere.

The genius of this work is the marshalling of the rank and file of the Christian Church as a united missionary body of witness for Christ. Without the limitation of routine procedure or denominational confinements, where the primary task is witness and the only tie is the Holy Spirit, there comes a fluidity and mobility to respond under guidance to the openings of special opportunity that challenge so suddenly in this day of change.

The growth of the work mentioned above is lateral. The house-party impressed me also with a growth in depth, that is to say, growth in depth of thinking and spiritual insight by the Fellowship and growth in disciplined living by its members. Henry P. Van Dusen of Union Theological Seminary has said he knows of no movement producing a more disciplined leadership than the Oxford Groups and this also impressed me strongly at this house-party. It was a humbling but very healthy experience for me to see others younger and less experienced than myself more effective in bringing new life and vitality to others because they were more able to use their own experiences and because more disciplined than myself.

Among the leadership one finds all types. For example, Canon Grensted, Oriel Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion in Oxford and author of "Psychology and God," which he delivered as the Bampton Lectures of 1930, led a series of meetings on spiritual diagnosis and helping people in trouble. A leading surgeon of the West End of London who had been forced through drink to give up his practice was of great aid to many whose difficulties were similar. Since his own conversion last spring his craving for alcohol has been completely taken away. His straightforward story of what Christ has done for him was very telling. Very different from them both was a man who had recently been Communist organizer in Scotland. He had come to see that when he could not maintain a fellowship with his own brothers he could not bring in a world-brotherhood. This man, with his still fiery faith in econo-

mic justice, but transformed in his own life through the power of Christ, made the greatest impression of all on a noted missionary statesman who visited the house-party.

Side by side with him was a man who recently ran for Parliament on the Conservative ticket. And so it went, all sorts and conditions of men.

But no less effective in the leadership were the women. Who could forget the striking story of a recent young graduate of Oxford, a leader in her college, who told of her change from modern cynicism and self-satisfaction. Her witness came just before that of the ex-Communist in a memorable combined service in Mansfield College Chapel led by Dr. Buchman, in which the elements of an early Christian service were included—of praise and prayer, teaching, quiet, and fresh witness. Then there was a woman in social service, and one who was a justice of the peace, who told of the real effectiveness that had come into their case work following their own surrenders to Christ. And Mrs.—, who had been won by her student son, and who in turn won her husband during the house-party, was a typical illustration of families united.

The house-party had much time for quiet and prayer, much time for individual tasks, opportunity for all to witness to new decisions or battles won, time for Bible study, in our group led by the vice-principal of Corpus Christi College, and time for teaching the points of emphasis of the movement.

First is the necessity of a decisive turn to Jesus Christ in the surrender of one's entire life, an act which should be absolute, and which should be concrete in that we should see exactly what definite changes it would mean. This initial act of surrender must be maintained daily as new revelations of God's will for us unfold and new areas of our nature become evident so that self-dedication will be made time and again. This means facing up continuously to traits, tendencies, and sins, and getting them out in the open where they can be decisively dealt with.

The ideal of a morning quiet time for Bible study, meditation and prayer, an unhurried time of considerable length, is held up as a necessity. Stress is laid on a conception of prayer which includes listening to God as much as speaking to Him. The guidance of the Holy Spirit is taught as a fact as real now as it was in New Testament times. This guidance gives us our directions and also checks us in our mistakes and sins. The importance of an intimate, sharing fellowship is urged, with group prayer, checking one another, and team work, where is possible the kind of corporate response to the plans of the Holy Spirit that first separated Paul

and Barnabas in the Antioch group for the work whereunto He called them. From this corporate emphasis the name "Groups" has been given the movement.

That every Christian should be a witness, and should be intelligently used, under God, to let His Spirit loose in the lives of others, is held up as a norm of Christian living. Not to use is to lose. If we have really found the victorious life, obviously we will want to give it to others. Their joyous response to this principle partly explains the remarkable growth of the Groups in recent years. The willingness to share one's personal experience has brought in a scientific factuality which has caught people by its sincerity and definiteness. Sharing thus illustrates principle by the case method.

The ideal of the movement is a changed world, nothing less. But they feel that this must be built on changed lives—individual, family, social, national, and then international salvation. For the individual it means discipline in learning and following God's will as he finds it in Christ, in fellowship, and in his prayer periods.

In order to give the whole flavor of the houseparty I can do no better than give an excerpt from the London *Sunday Referee* which shows the impression it made on the editor. He wrote in part as follows:

"During the past fortnight there has been taking place in three of the colleges of Oxford University a gigantic international houseparty that may eventuate in a world-startling religious revival.

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"Already the new religious movement centred in this remarkable house-party is awakening the most somnolent of all sleepers—the intellectuals.

"B.A.s, M.A.s, LL.B.s, M.B.s, Honours men and women in great number, and many Oxford Dons are to be seen at the meeting rooms in the three colleges or strolling together arm-in-arm on the rose-bordered lawns discussing nothing more intellectual or scientific than "Christ the Wisdom and Power of God" and the need of daily self-surrender to Him as the solution of life's riddle.

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"A healthier, livelier, gayer, more courteous and unselfish band of cultured men and women does not exist. Here at St. Hugh's, St. Hilda's, Lady Margaret Hall are groups of young and middle-aged men and women who are taking Christianity to its logical limits and practising the faith, courage, and recklessness of the early Apostles.

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A new automobile may stop, a racehorse may die, the wireless may fade out and a watch run down. But the Acts of the Apostles continue; they appear to continue impressively in many acts of the groups now gathered at Oxford University, who find in the New Testament the secret of perpetual motion galvanising any man, any woman, any type, any class, in any age, into unexpected vitality and startling power."

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