

THE OXFORD GROUP MOVEMENT

DR. BUCHMAN INTERVIEWED

RESULT OF WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA

A technical difficulty in writing about the Oxford Group Movement is (says a London message to the "Manchester Guardian") that one must not describe those who are in it as its members. Ask Dr. Frank Buchman, the Lutheran pastor from the United States, who founded the movement, how many people in Great Britain now belong to it and he will reply: "People do not belong to us. We have no members, no organisation. Our only organisation is the Church of Jesus Christ. It is not our aim to take people from faith to faith. It is our aim to revitalise religion, and to give people a quality of life so that they will get back to their Churches."

One of their colleagues, a man who was formerly works manager to an electrical firm in the United States and who is now an ordained clergyman, emphasised the point that the Group Movement does not conflict with the Churches, but strengthens them. The tendency was for people influenced by the Group Movement to go back to the Churches of their youth. "As the result of our work in South Africa," he said, "there have been a hundred extra candidates for the ministry there."

The floodlight of publicity has fallen so recently upon the Group Movement in this country that few people realise how long ago it took root. It was early in 1921 that Dr. Buchman, at the request of two Anglican bishops whom he had met in China, first went to Cambridge, and then, on the invitation of a third bishop, to Oxford. Considerable interest was at once aroused at both universities, and groups were formed. Ever since then he has had his headquarters at Brown's Hotel in Dover-street, and has watched the steady, quiet growth of the movement in this, and in forty-seven other countries. Many years ago Harold Begbie, writing about the Group Movement, said that Dr. Buchman "considered privacy essential to his method and regarded publicity as a grave danger." This partly accounts for what seems such a sudden emergence of the movement into the news.

THE LONDON CAMPAIGN

The Group Movement has begun to work on a large scale. Last October 30 of its representatives drawn from several nationalities visited Canada, and the United States and remained there for eight months conducting an extraordinarily successful campaign. Now a team of 500 men and women are starting a campaign in London which will be carried on throughout the winter.

A "Guardian" representative, seeking an interview with Dr. Buchman at his headquarters, found many workers there some of whom had just returned from their meetings at Eastbourne. Dr. Fos Westcott was there, the Rev. J. H. Watt of Edinburgh, a clergyman of the Episcopal Church in Scotland who took part in the Canadian and American campaigns and has come to share the team's work in London; the secretary of the Oxford Union; two young Canadians; a South African; the Oxford man who joined the first group formed at that university and who has for many years been leader of the movement in Scotland; an American, and a number of other young men and women whose association with the movement extended over many years of many months.

"SHARING"

At the outset of the interview which he gave me, Dr. Buchman quoted what the secretary of the Oxford Union has said about the movement: "The Oxford Group has taught me to see in Jesus Christ working through the Church the answer to personal, social, racial, national and international problems." When it was suggested that the answer was as old as Christianity, Dr. Buchman said "Quite so. There is nothing new about this. What is all the fuss about? Our aim is simply to revitalise religion."

Dealing with some of the criticism that have appeared, Dr. Buchman said he thought Dr. Jacks's recent letter was good. "He has got one side of the movement that very few people have got, but he does not understand the 'sharing' part of it," he said. Dr. Buchman did not succeed in making it quite clear why the word "sharing" was used to denote the Group's practice of exchanging individual experiences and confessions of sin and failure. He said the idea of sharing first

came to him many years ago when "wild, unruly orphan lads were living with him. His success with them only began when he "came down to meet them on common ground, telling them of his own youthful experience and difficulties."

He said the impression that the people of the groups went about confessing their sins was false, though they must be willing to make confession if guided to do so. "We agree," he said "that there are often times when people should not confess, and we should not hesitate to tell them when it is selfishness in confession. A good psychiatrist will tell you there are things you must not say."

In reply to the suggestion that many people pictured a group meeting as rather like a scene at a spa, with all the visitors talking about their ailments and their cures, Dr. Buchman said this view was quite wrong.

"The emphasis is generally on confession," he said, "a sharing of one's victories rather than one's sin." Confession worked out very well in family life, he added. The husband who felt he must acknowledge and apologise for his inability at breakfast—to use a home example—would not wish to repeat the offence, confession, and apology the next day."

GUIDANCE

On the question of guidance, another important aspect of the movement which has roused much criticism, Dr. Buchman quoted approvingly from a letter:

"The teaching of the Group Fellowship on the subject of guidance should be the normal experience of every Christian soul. If the whole being is God-centred, then the thoughts are at His service, ready for His direction, with the result that common sense becomes increasingly sanctified. The ability to receive guidance grows as the soul, through grace, responds to God's will with deeper surrender."

"We believe that every person ought to be a life-changer," Dr. Buchman said. "That, of course, implies a feeling of mutual goodwill and a readiness to give and take. The people of a group should be willing to be told about their faults and to offer like advice. People generally make confession in their absence of other people's faults. If you are living in a sharing fellowship people will not talk about your faults behind your back. If they are guided to do so, speak about them frankly to you."