

Letters to the Editor

CHRISTIANS IN CONFERENCE

THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC TALKS

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—Will you allow me to add something to what has already been so well said by Dr. J. H. Oldham and Dr. William Adams Brown with reference to your leading article on "Christians in Conference" on August 2?

You suggest that "a World Conference of Christians might have been better employed in pondering specifically religious subjects, instead of devoting much of its time to political and economic issues." I can only say, Sir, that it seems to me ironical that the immense expenditure of hard thinking represented both by the Conference itself and by the years of arduous preparation for it should be met at its close by a judgment couched in the terms of this facile distinction. As a member of the Conference, I should say that our whole time was taken up by the consideration of problems, the very existence of which is ignored and evaded when this distinction is stated in an absolute form and the matter left there. Our whole time was taken up in pondering neither "the specifically religious" in general, nor political and economic issues as such, but precisely the bearing of religion—the Christian religion—on the political and economic life. You cannot but agree, Sir, that this is a subject on which Christian thinking is both confused and divided at the present time. It appears to me, therefore, that the strenuous effort made at Oxford to reach a clear and united mind on this issue was no whit less necessary or urgent than the effort now being made at Edinburgh to reach a clear and united mind on questions of Faith and Order.

As a member of the section of the Oxford Conference which discussed particularly the relation of the Christian Faith to the economic order, I would only add that the report was submitted to a full meeting of that section before being given out in its final form, and that it was adopted not only unanimously but also very enthusiastically. Of the two dissentients at the plenary session, one was not a member of our section; the other was a member but did not attend our final sectional meeting. Your reference to Mr. J. M. Speers's word of criticism might inadvertently create the impression that he was a dissentient. But this was very far from being the case. No member of our section contributed more usefully or cordially than he towards our final attempt to express our united mind.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

JOHN BAILLIE.

The University of Edinburgh, Aug. 5.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—The leading article in your issue of August 2 (which reached me yesterday in the West of Ireland), in commenting critically upon the conference of the

Churches recently held at Oxford, remarks that "in something less than a fortnight about 800 members, speaking a variety of tongues, set themselves not merely to discuss, but to reach united conclusions about, social and national life, the economic order, international affairs, . . . &c." The conference was certainly ambitious in the task to which it set its hand; but, for two reasons, it was not quite so foolishly ambitious as your comment suggests.

(1) There were in actual fact only 400, not 800, full members of the conference. They alone could take part in the discussions, or vote, at the full conference meetings; they alone were present at the meetings of the five sections into which the conference was divided from the beginning; and these sections, in which it was always intended that the main work of the conference should be done, consisted therefore of not more than 80 persons apiece.

(2) Though the conference itself lasted only a fortnight, elaborate plans had been laid three years before, and by the time the conference met a large amount of preparatory work had been done in almost all the countries from which delegates came, as well as by members of the research organization at the centre.

"Members of the sections complained," your leading article continues, "that they had not been invited to vote on the highly controversial reports which were presented to the whole conference." One such complaint was certainly made, in the hearing of the whole conference, by a member of the section concerned with the economic order. As that complaint received wide publicity, it is perhaps worth noting that the other members of that section believed, and some of them hastened to assert in public, that the report had in fact been adopted by the section with one dissentient.

Finally, if any of your readers happen to study at first hand the full report of that particular section when it is published next month, they will find, I believe, that it makes no attempt "to identify the teaching of Christ" with the "nebulous Socialism" to which your article refers—or even with the nebulous Conservatism to which your article makes no specific reference. Whatever its faults may be (and all of us who were concerned in its composition would admit that their name is legion), the report received eventually the deliberate approval of every member present at the final meeting of the section—including that of the American business man whom your article quotes as a critic of the section's report to the conference.

Yours faithfully,

JOHN MAUD.

Connemara, Aug. 4.

THE CHRISTIAN FRONT

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—The letters which have already appeared in *The Times* in regard to "The Christian Front" drew most proper attention to the disunity of aim and conflict of interest that now disturb all human life and relationships throughout the world, whether social, national, or international. That is surely to-day the greatest menace to modern civilization. On one point all thoughtful people must be united. No effective unifying or harmonizing principle has yet been discovered in any system of social or political philosophy, or method of political organization, or science of national or international statecraft. Quite plainly human ingenuity and human intelligence have failed to find a remedy.

It cannot be God's plan or purpose that no remedy should be found. He surely has

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one. The most urgent duty of every Christian is to try, under God's guidance, to find the remedy and then apply it with faith and unremitting intensity of purpose.

We have been deeply impressed with signs around us of the revival of conviction in this sense. We believe that many a humble Christian is striving by prayer and effort to help forward God's purpose and we thankfully recognize that men are banding themselves together to seek and to find the road to it. The Oxford Group is a notable example. This worldwide movement stands out as a challenge to the Churches of to-day to be up and doing.

The dominating motive which animates these efforts, whether in the Group or elsewhere, is a pledge of loyalty to apply under God's guidance the spirit and principles of Christ to individual conduct and to every department of social and national and supernatural life. These workers for Christ are striving in common with all the Churches of Christendom, and in loyal cooperation with them, to drive home as a fundamental principle, that every one in every nation is in Christian duty bound, in all possible and practicable ways, to apply and insistently work for the general application of the principles of Christ not merely to his own problems, but most especially to those of his community and nation, and of the nations of the world.

We write this letter to urge the crying need of mankind that this fundamental principle should be emphasized and insistently applied broadcast throughout this and other countries. What nations imperatively require is a development of the sense of personal responsibility to bring men and women and all administrations and Governments to a spirit of loyalty to God. This alone can unite a chaotic world. Yours faithfully,

SALISBURY, J. W. MACKAIL, ERNEST BROWN, DAVIDSON.

Letters to the Editor

UNIVERSITY LIFE

THE CAREER OF ERASMUS

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—Upon reading the letters in to-day's issue of *The Times* I was reminded of a passage in the autobiography of Erasmus, printed by way of preface to a seventeenth-century edition of the *Colloquies*, a dumpy duodecimo, which I bought in the eighties when I was an undergraduate at Trinity. I noted the passage at the time, and it has stuck in my memory. The life, *Vita Erasmi, Erasmo Auctore*, is written in the third person and records how the writer lost his father and mother by the plague when he was a lad of 13. He was left in charge of three guardians, who sent him to the university, and his comment is "Illic vixit—id est perdidit—annos ferme tres." Erasmus must have wasted his time to great advantage, if we may judge by his later career.

Yours faithfully,

C. F. CLAY.

Upton House, 11, Grange Road, Cambridge, Aug. 3.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—Dr. Lyttelton's letter brings us to the fringe but hardly to the heart of the educational problem of the universities. The Cambridge University Education Society has recently challenged all the faculties to set their houses in order. As Chairman of the Board of the Faculty of Mathematics I have been in close touch with representative students of that faculty and I am sure that the real problem lies deep in the prevailing conception of education.

We university teachers set before ourselves two main purposes:—(i) The advancement of knowledge by teaching and research and (ii) the training of leaders for every branch of national life. In each of these our outlook has been materialist. We have assumed that greater knowledge and control of natural forces is as a matter of course a benefit to society and that a closer attention to existing human and economic factors will lead to progress. Human nature is taken to be an unchangeable element.

But our students are missing a sense of values and purpose. They begin to feel that finding a career resolves itself into seeking a niche in a society which we assume to be permanent but which actually is in danger of being destroyed by the very forces which we are teaching it to use. They fear that we university teachers are the blind leading the blind and they vaguely hope that we shall not all fall together into the ditch. This is the real meaning of the suspicions with which both student and parent look at us. What remedy? The Minister of Labour was reported in your columns last week as saying that "the greatest possible service is being done to the nations at this critical time by those who insist upon the necessity of listening to God." Education gives to youth the freedom and purpose which it

seeks when it brings mind, will, and emotion under the single motive of discovering God's plan for the world. When we at the universities accept the responsibility implied in this conception of our task we shall be helping to release those deeper forces in human nature which can reverse the drift to chaos and to supply the Empire and the world with new leaders who can bring in a new order.

Yours faithfully,

E. CUNNINGHAM.

St. John's College, Cambridge, Aug. 1.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—In Monday's issue of *The Times* Mr. Laurence and Mr. Pollitt, of Trinity College, Cambridge, mention in passing the abruptness of the change from public school to university life, and the difficulty experienced by some undergraduates in accustoming themselves to the new, and necessarily freer, conditions of study. Here, I believe, schools can, and often do, help. At any rate, in my own school, on the side for which I can speak, a serious effort has long been made to prepare senior boys for the greater liberty in regard to their work which they will enjoy at the universities. The methods used are scarcely of general interest.

The results achieved can be summarized by saying that during the last 10 years not more than three boys so prepared have taken lower classes than they should have done in Honours examinations at Oxford and Cambridge, whereas at least six, as the outcome of hard and purposeful work, have been placed a class higher than the ability they showed at school led one to expect.

Yours faithfully,

T. W. THOMPSON.

Repton, Aug. 2.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—Your correspondents on university life, except Dr. Lyttelton, do not answer "B.A.'s" point; they miss it. The value of general culture—books, music, general lectures, societies, debates, &c., and above all conversation and friendship—is not in question. They are a precious boon. But the result is apt to be superficial if these opportunities are not reinforced by a course of steady reading on some chosen subject. The men in a university may be grouped as follows: (a) those who read almost continuously, caught by their subject or by social pressure for a good degree; (b) those who read fairly steadily and use the other opportunities; (c) those who read practically nothing.

My whole point was that group (c), a large one, does not comprise men uninterested in books. The lure to real study is not always strong; like all worth-while activities it is difficult and unattractive; the satisfaction comes afterwards. Supervision and the examinations are both means to this end. As "B.A." has said, modern distractions are greater. Their opposition therefore needs strengthening. It is not an insult to a young man to suggest that he needs guiding and spurring (although the gradual elimination of the latter—i.e., examinations—waits on increased proficiency in the former).

Yours faithfully,

P. A. NOWELL.

25, Park Parade, N.W.10, Aug. 3.

ARAB INDEPENDENCE

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—It is a very strange manner to understand geography to pretend that Palestine is to the west of the four Syrian cities Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo, or even the districts of those names, as Mr. James Malcolm appears to believe.

I never admitted that Palestine was referred to in the reserve mentioned in Sir Henry McMahon's letter to King Hussein.

Yours, &c.,

ADIL ARSLAN,

Geneva, Aug. 2.