

A Glimpse of M.R.A.

By Rev. L. A. Hewson

AT the Oxford Conference, World Methodism was committed to an evangelical campaign in 1953. I have written about my dismay at this 'alarm-clock' technique: Who are we to try and set an alarm clock for God? Is it not for us to wake up to God's alarm clock that is already urgently ringing? Vast spiritual movements do not leap into mass momentum at zero hour, like Hitler's invasion of Russia. "The wind bloweth where it listeth . . ." and it is to individuals that the pointed and inescapable challenge comes: "Ye must be born anew." Jesus said 'ye' not 'thou' because what goes for Nicodemus goes for every other Pharisee.

"The wind bloweth where it listeth . . ." I began to listen for the 'sound thereof.' I had heard and seen something of the wind of the Spirit here in South Africa before I left. In the Youth Camps for instance. I read of the work of the Iona Community in the Church of Scotland.

I was stirred by the spiritual strategy of the Roman Church in sending ordained priests as workmen into the factories of France. I heard a black man at Hyde Park ask defiantly: "What is the Church DOING about the rising tide of race hatred?"

Only half an hour before I had been at Methodist International House where about eighty people, black and white, live under the same roof, and the Spirit of God is conquering race hatred.

ASSEMBLY AT CAUX

It was just at this time that there came as a complete surprise a week's visit to the M.R.A. Assembly at Caux in Switzerland. I went out very much in the mood of armed neutrality, and even now there are queries in my mind.

But, as Mark Twain said to the man who gave up reading the Bible because there were so many things he couldn't understand: "What troubles me is not the things I can't understand, but the things I can!"

Everywhere else I have been in South Africa and in England, most people are apprehensive about the future or resigned and apathetic. Only the finest Christians I know could be described as both aware and assured. What are you to make then of a crowd of people who are keenly interested in world affairs and yet are serenely confident?

They actually believe that God is winning one strategic victory after another where human relations are

at clash point if not at flash point, in the home, in industry and at the raw edges of racial contact.

They actually believe that God can show people how to cope practically with every human problem.

ATTITUDE TO COMMUNISM

Caux is high above Lake Geneva, but that exaltation is more than the remoteness of mere altitude. And when I heard and saw it in people who

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had agonised under persecution it seemed simply indecent for complacent and comfortable me to suggest that they were out of touch with real life.

Another thing was a new attitude to Communism. Almost everywhere else I have read about except the countries that Communism has already swallowed up, governments and peoples seem in mortal dread of the monster.

The M.R.A. people are not in fear and trembling, and seemed to have no time for the fearful hatred of communists one is so used to elsewhere. They believe that they know a much better way to do the best thing in the Communist programme — building a new world.

A lot of people are not convinced by the M.R.A. programme, but I was most interested to see a number of Communists who are convinced, and, what is more, being trained revolutionaries and born fighters, they carry their new conviction into action on the old battle front.

Again, there was a wonderful sense of community. Coming from South Africa I was specially sensitive to that. Thank God I was no stranger to the reality of community. I am one who is immeasurably indebted to his brethren, and I have been taught to take very simply and literally the inexpressible meaning of Holy Communion. But

nothing that I know in Methodism to-day is doing just what the Class Meeting at its best did for members of society: make repentance, confession and forgiveness something to sing about every day!

As a consequence I have found how fatally easy it is for resentment and estrangement, prejudice and pride to creep in. How they breed, and blind and paralyse!

The folks I met at Caux have the very same things to cope with; but I envied them the effectiveness and the promptness with which they dealt with them. The result was something more than a community spirit. It was a community of spirit. Was it too much to say a community of the Spirit?

But most impressive of all was the news of transformed lives. When this happens within the organised Church, as thank God, it does, we claim that God is at work in our midst. I recognised His handiwork at Caux. There you are constantly hearing that all men need to be changed; that all men can be changed; that all men can know they are changed; and that all men can be totally changed. And to a Methodist there was a strangely familiar ring about all that.

It was gathered up in a remarkable Sunday morning service to which I referred once before. I must save the story of that till next time.