

THE OXFORD GROUPS AT WORK IN PRETORIA.

A Minister's Impressions.

It may interest some of the readers of the *METHODIST CHURCHMAN* to have a little information as regards the Oxford Group and its achievements in the administrative capital of the Union. When the first visiting Group from America came out in 1928 it struck root, and produced great results in a few, and this was the case, only more so, when the Group of twenty-three men and women came the next year, some of the workers remaining for a time to carry on. Having God in it, the movement has spread and grown, toning up all the churches, influencing the whole community, and resulting in making Christians far better Christians than they were, and securing the conversion of people, both in the churches and outside the churches.

The Group leaders are chary about statistics, but it can only be to the glory of God to say that there are thirty Groups in the city, both English and Afrikaans, embracing hundreds of men and women, who testify to great blessing as having come to them through this movement. Nine of these Groups are connected with different churches; five are at the Pretoria University; three at the Union Buildings (i.e., the great Government administrative and Civil Service buildings); three at different hospitals; three at the Normal College; three (N.B.) at the Central Prison—the prison for long sentenced offenders—two Native Groups and several in private houses.

Once per month there is a united Group meeting held in St. Andrew's Hall, and the writer, having attended the last three meetings, was greatly impressed by them. Here are some of the impressions: The numbers present, the hall being crowded with about four hundred and fifty men and women; the type of people attending, well-dressed and mostly of the middle classes, while the working man and his wife were there as well; the difference in the conduct of the meetings (which are mostly for witnessing) and the ordinary appointments of Church services, as regards hymn-singing, the reading of Scripture, and audible prayer (though silent prayer is often observed); the brightness, buoyancy, and sanctified hilarity of many present; the variety of the churches represented, the leaders and people, both ministers and laity, men and women belonging to different denominations but united in this, their experience of an indwelling, living intimate and controlling Christ; the social status of many of the speakers—doctors, advocates, solicitors, civil servants, university professors, students, teachers, ministers, men from offices, and the wives of such folks, and others, especially young ladies; the character of the meetings, which were to all intents and purposes, glorified old-fashioned Methodist love-feasts, and young and middle-aged (but few old) folks told the large audience what Christ had done for their souls, some showing that he had done great things for them for which they were glad; the frankness and fulness of the testimonies given, sometimes making almost painful hearing, and suggesting

if you break your word, they will not trust you again. Keep your word, for in this way you will be helped to grow up to be true men and women.

the Roman Confessional but without its secrecy; the harmony and goodwill existing between the English and the Dutch attenders with no sign of racialism; the thought that while the movement is of God there is a good deal of the human in it with things to be shed and deficiencies to be supplied.

Some may ask: What does the Group movement stand for? It stands for what was brightest in the old-time religion of the people called Methodists, for the forsaking of everything wrong in one's life and conduct—repentance; for conversion—a central theme in Methodist preaching; for radiance, happiness and joy in the soul—*alias* the Witness of the Spirit; for full surrender to Christ—entire sanctification; for "sharing"—a new word for what our grandfathers called giving their experience; for fellowship—otherwise the old Methodist "camaraderie" between brothers and sisters in the Lord; for soul-saving service, urging that everyone do what he or she can by witnessing for Christ to win others to Him; and is not this old Methodism?

Talking over these things with one of our ministers two years ago I said: But we have all this in Methodism! He replied: "We had it in the olden days but we haven't got it now," and I felt that I could not gainsay what he said.

Some people have feared that the Group movement will develop into the formation of a new denomination, but the Group leaders would greatly deplore such a thing and they do all practicable to prevent it. That is why there are no official statistics and no organization; and that is why the Group, while thoroughly evangelical and evangelistic, proclaims no system of doctrine.

Some complain that there is but scanty reference to some of the vital truths of God's Word, but that does not mean that these truths are not believed and received. The Group spirit is quite content to leave the sacred deposit of sound doctrine to the churches and their ministers, as "Stewards of the mysteries of God," feeling that its great calling is to set forth certain essential things that have been forgotten by the Church in general and allowed to pass into desuetude.

Through the Group movement, it seems that the Holy Spirit appeals to the Universal Church to get back to the ideals and ways of the Primitive Church. It is said of the first great group of converts at Jerusalem: "They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' teaching and in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers." This is what the Oxford Group is after.

It is regrettable that so many of our people live in small communities where this great instrument of blessing—the Oxford Group—is not available. For such to get the O.G. publications (obtainable from our Book Room at Cape Town) and read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them would lead to great good for fellowship.

Or if this be not practicable I would say: Let such persons avail themselves to the full of the helps and privileges that our beloved *Alma Mater*, Methodism, has to give in the name of the Lord, and this will lead them into the secret place of the Most High and weakness will turn into power, sadness into gladness, aloofness into "camaraderie," reserve into fellowship, and failure into triumph, and victories will be won for our King, and His Kingdom will spread and prevail.

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