

Group Movement's London Campaign Opens

TESTIMONY IN A STRANGE ATMOSPHERE

Evening Dress, Laughter and Flashlights

No evangelistic mission has ever opened in London amidst such strange accompaniments as did the Oxford Group Movement Campaign on Monday evening. Extraordinary public interest was displayed. The Central Hall, Westminster, was packed with intent listeners, and the speakers went off in relays to three overflow meetings. But crowded religious meetings are in themselves no new thing. At the Central Hall meeting there were things both new and surprising.

The audience was a strange spectacle in itself. As one moved slowly up the great staircase, having passed through the serried lines of smart saloon cars outside, one got the impression of being in the foyer of a theatre on a "first night." Evening dress, gilded shoes, powder and lipstick, and the ceaseless chatter of an exciting social occasion—it is not often that these things are associated with an evangelistic effort. This audience made good listeners, however. They listened eagerly and closely, as if they wanted something and hoped for something. It was an invitation meeting, but the ready response to the invitation seemed to indicate that the Groups will not lack audiences during their weeks of campaigning.

Equally unfamiliar was the aspect of the platform. Special trains had brought 250 dons and undergraduates from Oxford and 150 from Cambridge to attend the meeting. With interested visitors—including several Bishops and Free Church leaders—they filled the orchestra, and some, failing to find seats, sat cheerfully dangling their legs over the edge of the platform. There were no hymns or prayers (except a closing benediction by Bishop Perrin); laughter was ready and frequent, as were Oxonian jests about "those queer

people who go to Cambridge"; and the flashlight photographer was in action throughout the evening.

But it was the things said that mattered. How much they mattered is a question for long and careful thought. To compute the value of what was said is perhaps to pass judgment on the Group Movement as a whole; and it is not yet time to do that.

After a few words from the Bishop of Calcutta (Dr. Foss Westcott), who is heart and soul with the movement, the meeting was handed over to young Oxford and Cambridge. The meeting seemed to have been planned deliberately in order to display the academic gilt-edging, so to speak, of the Groups. Each speaker was announced with a notification of his "name and college" and of his particular distinction in work or games.

Rev. Cuthbert Bardsley (Eton and New College, Oxford), who acted as introducer, said they believed implicitly that God has a plan and a purpose for London through individuals. "We believe that when individuals are changed, when their lives are offered to the will of God, these individual lives will go out with a new vision, purpose and power, to alter and purify life of the city."

This was the main point in all the speeches. One after another these young men testified to their new-found belief that the world cannot be changed until men are changed. "I made a speech on peace," said Mr. David Graham (formerly secretary of the Oxford Union), "and had a fine peroration about the love of humanity as the only way to peace. Then I went home and had a first-class family quarrel with my sister."

Mr. Garth Lean (Worcester College, Oxford) told how his "surrender" focused around a dubious personal relationship. When that was put right he was able to talk to unemployed Welsh miners, and had seen them changed in turn, losing their grudge against society and finding that "God supplied their material needs." Mr. Basil Entwistle, a First Class Honours man at Oxford, had found that "if I listen God speaks." There was a liberation of mind and imagination and will. Mr. Peter Phelps (Oxford and Cambridge) testified that "God takes charge of my life, and takes me on step by step if I listen." Mr. F. Tugwell (Mansfield College) was the only one of the "team" who used such a familiar phrase to describe his experience as "the solution of moral conflict."

Each of these speeches seemed to place a central emphasis on the idea of Guidance. The testifiers seemed to have come to a perfect rest (one must not say a halt) in the surrender of the will. No one stated explicitly that he had been "guided" to any definite practical enthusiasm or indignation or form of service—except, of course, that of pushing on the "snowball," as one of them phrased it, of the Group Movement. This has to be said by way of explaining a certain sense of thinness or anti-climax in these touchingly sincere testimonies.

Perhaps it was part of the careful planning of the meeting that the young men's testimonies, so fresh and earnest and engaging, were allowed to lead up to the more arresting and, now and then, more embarrassing witness of the older men. Mr. Cuthbert M. Cox (Head Master of Berkhamsted School) confessed bluntly and bravely that he had been "lazy and self-indulgent." A new-comer to the Groups, Rev. H. C. L. Heywood (Dean of Gonville and Caius), said that in contact with the Group fellowship "I seemed to see parts of me which had not been seen for years, and which, if I may continue the metaphor, had not been washed for years." Professor L. W. Grensted freely catalogued certain personal failures and faults of his own to show that "this movement is not simply a thing for undergraduates." Dr. Grensted made a curious reference to "being vain of preaching in a scarlet robe" until he remembered that Christ was clad in mockery in a scarlet robe. There were other speakers, including the daughter of a Bishop and a member of the League of

Nations secretariat; but all the testimonies were alike in their essentials.

Dr. Frank N. Buchman, with his sharp, smiling face, sat silent and watchful throughout the proceedings. Not even his name was mentioned. He may perhaps have been reflecting that this meeting was not making so immediate and striking an effect on the audience as well-wishers to the movement must have desired. It fell, frankly, a little flat—probably because the Group method is not really suitable for large public meetings. The Groups have hit upon a most effective way of arresting attention. Each "witness" speaks definitely as a person, and there is something infallibly exciting or moving about an utterly personal testimony. There was ample proof, moreover, of the success of the Group method in compelling men to look into their own hearts with a candid and searching gaze. This also is good. What follows on "surrender" is now the great question. We may get more light upon that question as this remarkable mission proceeds.