

# The Oxford Group

By R. E. KNOWLES

Fresh from Oxford, fresh from the Atlantic, impelled and borne hither



Canon Grensted

by that "guidance" which is the master note of the Oxford Movement, there arrived in Toronto to-day one of the most eminent scholars, teachers, philosophers, preachers in the United Kingdom, Canon L. W. Grensted, professor of philosophy at England's greatest seat of learning, canon of Liverpool cathedral, Bampton lecturer in 1930, foremost among the personal religious influences of the Church of England and a devoted force in the "Groups" and all their activities.

Speaking with Canon Grensted this morning, I came in contact with a

great mind, an earnest and ingenious soul, a tender and catholic heart. When I remarked on the rarity of finding a professor of psychology in this particular kind of work, the canon informed me that the soul of the Oxford Movement is two fold, its basic theme being definable as "the psychology of God." He went on to say: "psychology without God is futile, even dangerous; with God, it is a penetrating and comforting power."

## Finding Spiritual Impulse

Going on to speak of his Liverpool canonry, I asked our eminent guest if he had ever met, in Liverpool, the famous Ian MacLaren. To which he replied, almost gleefully: "Rather—he gave me, himself, Harnack's 'History of Doctrine.'" When I replied that the famous author might easily have given him something more interesting, the Canon defended the volume with ready zeal, and went on to say that in the driest of subjects spiritual impulse might be found.

This reminded me that the Canon was famous as a mathematical scholar, whereupon I asked him if mathematics had not made faith

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more difficult. Asked for the reason, I replied that mathematics are not distinguished as an aid to the emotional or the imaginative, this countered by the Canon's declaration: "It was when engrossed in my mathematical career that I resolved to be a parson." My reply to the effect that "surely this Oxford Movement doesn't make exact thinking the sine qua non of religious progress," brought from the scientific expert (who is, by the way, a specialist in entomology) the assurance that "we don't make a success of life by thinking—to live first, and to think after, is a golden rule"

## Converging Guidance

The "exact" element, thus under discussion, impelled me to ask a very straight question thus: "Prof. Grensted, one of your sovereign words, in this Group, is 'guidance'. Please tell me, if you may, just how that divine guidance is communicated," to which came this reply: "Even the guided can not precisely say—except this, that God has His own way of using instruments—if such are ready to be used." "Do you hear a voice?" I asked, eliciting the answer: "through circumstances, through inward hearing and response, the voice of God can be heard. This very trip I've taken—it came that way. I did not come, did not consider coming, till I was 'guided' forth, and here I am!"

I asked the professor if, on the way, any voice had further guided him. "Yes," was the immediate answer, "the very first day out, there came to me the instruction that, on this mission, there were just three things I supremely needed, obedience, simplicity, love. These shall be the key to all I shall do or seek to do. We are all here under orders."

## Right at Home

Naturally, I queried: "Whose orders?" With equal naturalness came the reply: "God's, ultimately—and checked up by the team." Enquiring as to whether or not the spirit of the "Group" is on the defensive against all that is called Higher Criticism or Modernism, the canon replied: "Well, I am an Oxford theologian—you know how Oxford theology is generally construed—but I could not be more at home anywhere than in the bosom of this Movement."

Knowing that Canon Grensted was a member of the archbishop's committee on "Spiritual Healing," I inquired of this all but universal specialist how far that craft was consistent with the scientific spirit. "It is a scientific and religious reality," was the reply; "it is the healing of the spirit, with physical consequences. The relation between the two is close and vital. I myself vouch for this—that I actually know a young lady who was cured of diabetes by my talking to her of the love of God. I am speaking of what I saw, of what I know beyond doubt or peradventure," was the quiet and convincing addendum.

## Attracted By Criticism

When I ventured, though not without misgiving, to ask this regally endowed intellectual how he first

came to associate himself with a Movement so simple of faith and non-technical of creed, the earnest scholar said: "Three things, I think. First, I saw the 'changing' that was going on around me—and what can change has power. Second, my sportsmanlike instinct—I was attracted to the Oxford Group by the bitterness with which they were criticized. And, third, there I was, a chaplain of Oxford, doing my job—but not getting near the men. But when I found the basis—it's in the Movement—of what is natural, simple, honest, I found myself in the very heart of men because I was in the very heart of life. Those three great ingredients I found in the Oxford Groups."

Just at this juncture came the most tumultuous interruption my journalistic career has ever known. For just then the door of 391 opened and Dr. Buchman ushered into the spacious room the most refreshing and wholesome gang (no disrespect) I have ever encountered in connection with anything bordering on church or religion.

These were about twenty, stalwarts nearly all, of the flower of Oxford—one or two from Cambridge—who had come over, all bound for Toronto and the souls of men. Really, it was a picture—bright eyes, strong straight frames, glowing cheeks, most of them young parsons (some in sweaters and all in mufti), introduced as chaplains here, professors there, incumbents yonder. One has been "oar" of an Oxford college—another the "first in theology" of the university—another captain of the Cambridge football team, this last provoking Canon Grensted into an attempt to give me his own autobiography as a rugby celebrity, the same rather swallowed up in the wholesome riot of sight and sound that filled the room with mirth and the sheer flavor of happy humanity.

## Petty Grounds of Fear

I declare that the trade-mark, and the dominant symptom, of these Oxford evangelists is—downright happiness. In that sign, I believe, they will conquer yet. Religion does not all consist in refraining from saying "Great Heavens!" the gross profanity of which utterance, at a luncheon attended by one of Toronto's ministers, I observe to have been the chief count of his misgiving as to the reality of this great Movement, together with the fact that a lady, engaged to speak in his church last Sunday, was not feeling well enough to undertake the formidable task but actually did feel able, later on, to go to a friend's house for tea!

O, tempora, O, mores! As I thought of this wretched diagnosis of what it means to be a Christian—why is it that the only two places it is thought profane to mention lightly are heaven and the other place—as I surveyed this happy, healthy, self-free coterie of the best of Oxford out on this sacred quest, and as I recalled again the artificial grounds of fear lest they lack "the root of the matter" in them, I besought my inmost soul with the famous words of the English sage: "Let us rid our minds of cant!"