

THE OXFORD GROUP AND THE CHURCH.

(The following article, written by Norman Price, Pretoria, South Africa, will probably interest readers of the "Gazette."—F.W.C.)

When I first encountered the Oxford Group I had long since ceased to have the slightest interest in, or regard for, the Church. As in the case of most modern people with intellectual pretensions I had fully satisfied myself that the Church had definitely and finally fallen out of world leadership, and that the scientists were leading the human race into all truth, that ecclesiasticism had been weighed in the balance and had been found wanting because of its persistent refusal to face facts, and because of its habit of making out a case for what it had been taught to believe. I was quick to say the Church had failed the world in 1914, and that when a similar crisis occurred it would undoubtedly fail again, and that the Church itself disrupted and torn by internal dissension had no message of peace and goodwill, since it did not succeed in living peace and goodwill. All this and much more, I thought and freely expressed. Most of I now perceive was a simple projection of my own inner defeat. Up to that time, it had never occurred to me that a more fruitful enquiry would be to ask myself not what the Church was doing in 1914, but what I was doing in 1914, and more important still, what I was doing at that moment. I had never learnt to ask myself such questions, until I came in contact with the Group, and then I learnt in a flash that the thing of primary importance for not only myself but for the whole world, since I was making an inevitable contribution to the world, was where I stood and what my contribution was.

Was I a part of that negative element, the satanic army, that is so busy breaking down what God is persistently building up? I learnt that God was continually infusing His Holy Spirit into His Church, but that failure came through the human element in the Church, finding the way out through compromises, instead of through sacrifice. Through my contact with the Group I was brought to grips with myself in a way that seemed to me to be no less than tragic. I felt the props and

the supports of my whole life slipping away, until I was left in a stark loneliness face to face with myself and with the terrible challenge of Christ. I came out of that experience a new creature, with all my old values undermined, and with a totally new direction to my life. One of the very first thoughts that began to crystallise in my mind was my relation to the Church of God on earth. For me, it was no easy task to break habits of thought that had grown hard and obstinate with the passage of time, but finally through sharing my difficulties with others in the fellowship of the Groups, I was gradually led to become a member of the Anglican Church. By this time my wife had become fully identified with the Oxford Group, and together we decided to be confirmed. We joined a confirmation class, and, for several months, received instructions together with a number of people rather younger than ourselves. I shall always be grateful for those classes. It was there that my eyes were opened to some of the riches of spiritual life and experience that are the heritage of the Church.

I learn there, and have since deepened this knowledge, that in the sacred repository of the Church are all the truths necessary for redemption, and that a proper use of the opportunities offered by the Church cannot fail to lead into that larger and more universal life, of which Christ is the prototype. I saw also in the clearest possible way that the Church had preserved throughout the ages, often through terrible difficulty, caused by attack from without and dissension within, the essential truths of Christianity, and that I had to thank the Church for all the world knew of Christ and of His revelation of God. Finally, I saw that the Group, to which I owed my own spiritual experience, and what spiritual life I had, owed its own existence to the Church; that it had arisen in the churches, and would finally be absorbed into the Church, as I had heard it put, and that it needed the Church as fully and completely as any individual needed the Church, for in the Church are to be found the great primal verities, imbedded in the Creeds and inherent in the teaching that has come down the ages. But this was not all I saw. I saw also, that just as

the Group needs the Church, so the Church needs the Group, as God's effective instrument for world salvation in these modern times, if the world is to survive the impending crash. God has called into vital being the Christian fellowship of the Group, which is not primarily a fellowship at all, but where the members are in spiritual fellowship because they are engaged together in twos, threes, half-dozens, and larger teams, in the greatest war of all times, the age-long war against the disruptive and devastating forces of evil. This war is being urged with renewed intensity at all times, in all places, by the Group. In prisons, in offices, in factories, in slums, in palaces, and in humdrum suburban villas. It is not and never has been a case of the Group or the Church. It is now and always has been the Group and the Church. They are both necessary to each other. Unless the Church has something to offer to the youth of the world, which is more all-embracing, more satisfying, more demanding, more vital, deeper, richer, nobler, and more self-sacrificing than Fascism, Nazism and Communism, the world will turn from the Church, and give itself to one of these secondary things that may do much but cannot transform the nature of man. It is here that the Group with its God-given vision of world redemption meets the case, and offers to the Church and to the youth of the world something that can be used by God in His scheme of world redemption through Jesus Christ that can capture and set on fire the imagination and that does issue in experiences comparable to those related in the Acts of the Apostles.

BOARD OF MISSIONS NOTES.

Touring In China.—Miss Beryl Steven (S.P.G., Peiping) writes: "I am at present in the city of Ch'i-Chou for a few days, thawing and getting our breath after more than four months of wandering. I still have a bit to do before I go up to Peiping for my term holiday. I have had a very busy term, but very happy. I began my wandering in the Hokien parish in September, and went there from Peiping by train, boat and cart—a three days' journey. It was the nicest bit of travelling I