

# Oxford Group Activities in Bloemfontein

## Daybreak in Youth Camp

### VIVID IMPRESSIONS

#### Planning a New and Better South Africa

(By a Special Correspondent in the Oxford Group Youth Camp)

"Wake up! Wake up!"

A young man from Kenya, in khaki shorts, is shouting into the tent. The Maritzburg schoolboy is the first to stir; then the Rhodesian shows a leg. The remaining pair—Stellenbosch and the Transkei—dawn into bilingual consciousness.

It is daybreak over the youth camp of the first national assembly of the Oxford Group in Bloemfontein. Daybreak seems to be their favourite hour.

If these Oxford Groupers were birds instead of men, they would make life miserable for that early worm.

But all the members of this national assembly rise early—old as well as young. That is the first shock for the visitor who penetrates the surprising doings that have been going on these last few days at the Bloemfontein Town Hall and on the playing-fields of St. Andrew's School.

Youth is the next surprise. In this assembly, which is so very unlike other assemblies in the central town of the Union, the young outnumber the old at every point, mix with them perfectly, and—lead the operations. Yet even the old cannot stay old in this company.

There is an elderly missionary lady who motored all the way down from Rhodesia in an open car, sleeping on the veld by night, to reach the assembly. In Bloemfontein she has been walking ten miles a day. It keeps her fit, she says.

#### REBORN IN BLOEMFONTEIN

There is the country editor who was born in Bloemfontein 62 years ago, and after a lifetime's absence from the town got "reborn" in it last Thursday, he declares. Proofs thereof are coming in. He has spent his journalistic career upholding the interests of the English-speaking section of his community. On Thursday night he could be seen discussing with a Dutch Reformed clergyman from the same district the fascinating possibilities of devoting his remaining time to upholding the interests of the community as a whole.

The mixture of places these people come from is another first impression for the visitor. Here are Rhodesians and Kenya folk sitting at meetings alongside people from Bethlehem and Bloemfontein and struggling with their aid to grasp what the Afrikaans speakers are saying. Equally natural and spontaneous is the mixing of both races, both sexes, all ages, all occupations.

#### PLANNING A NEW SOUTH AFRICA

They like Bloemfontein, with its fine public buildings and beautiful gardens, but they have been so busy planning a new and better South Africa under God's control that they have hardly seen it yet. Two got lost in it for two hours the other night—a Rhodesian tax-collector and a clergyman from a remote corner of the Union. By the time they found their way, the parson had also found a cure for dwindling congregations. His happy face next morning was one of many facial changes in an assembly where it becomes increasingly difficult to recognise your friends.

Often these people collect in hundreds at the Town Hall, whose beauty and magnificence have left them sometimes lost in wonder—and sometimes lost in the passages. They listen not to expert speakers, but to ordinary men and women who are saying—and apparently doing—extraordinary things.

God, these speakers declare, can do everything, if a man will only listen to find out His plan. God solved his problems of business management, a dapper business man declares. God stopped the quarrelsome Native servants from fighting, a housewife says—but not until He had stopped her husband from their frequent rows.

God put an end to the problem of Native strikes on a farm.

God told a merchant to study his Natives' wages and taxes, and then to give them a living wage...

Refreshingly unusual was the teacher who admitted: "The cause of the weakness of my class at their work, before I met the Group, was simply the laziness of the teacher!"

#### CONSULTATION OF YOUNG MEN

Youth, however, is apt to spring surprises on the older people, holding its councils of war at St. Andrew's School. Come to a consultation of young men in a sports pavilion. They are working out how to love and help their country, instead of themselves.

Up jumps an Afrikaner, who had, from childhood, a feeling of inferiority

towards English-speaking people. He left South Africa and had no wish to be troubled with it again. And then God told him, he says, that it was a mean thing to be ashamed of his own people. He has come back to help his country.

"I am half English and half Afrikaans, so I have suffered all my life from the bitterness of the two sections," a newcomer says. "Here for the first time I have actually seen the answer, watching how you fellows get on."

Here is another Afrikaner with a grievance just about unique in national history. "Why is it," he demands, amid laughter, "that whenever I talk English to the Englishmen here, they reply to me in Afrikaans?"

Jack Slater, former Springbok rugby wing, is speaking: "Youth wants an adventure big enough to take all its energies. That's why most of us spent our energies on a lassie, or on politics, or on football—or all three." Here in the national assembly they were finding a bigger adventure. In the past South African youth had known the problems of the country and did not see them as a job of work. "Look at the wonderful opportunity for us to answer these problems. I believe God's plan through us is to build up in Africa a new world power."

#### BUILDING A NEW NATION

What prevents that plan? What else except the opposites of the four standards of the Group—absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness and absolute love. And the gathering began piece by piece to fit in how each individual could build a new nation, starting with himself, his own family and his own job.

They are a wonderfully mixed crowd, these Voortrekkers of the twentieth century, as they like to think of themselves. Sportsmen, fellows with foreheads bulging with brains, farmers and parsons, they all claim to be "ordinary chaps." But the "ordinary chap," with God behind him, they believe, can do the extraordinary thing.

That is why, early every morning, silence falls on their camp, while young men in tents and under the trees and on the playing-fields listen to God for the details of His plan for Africa and themselves.

Daybreak is their favourite hour. Will their hope come true of a new daybreak, over Africa?

## DRIVING FORCE OF YOUTH

### Giving Leadership for National Reconstruction

One hundred young men and women filled the platform at last night's meeting of the Oxford Group national assembly.

By way of a prologue, an ex-Serviceman told how in the War men gave together and died together. They destroyed the sinner but left the sin alive. They had given themselves for their country and came back demanding their rights as heroes. Depression followed the War, and largely these men had failed to adjust themselves to the changed condition of their country. That country they defended was today being destroyed by materialism and moral decay, and they themselves had become part of the destroying force.

"In 1914," he said, "something happened that affected the whole world. Every young man was wanted. Tonight we shall see what the new enlistment means."

"Light-heartedness prevailed, and yet these young South Africans showed that they meant business. They have accepted voluntary responsibility to bring South Africa under God's control.

Mr Bob Lund, who has recently returned from London, set the lead for the evening. Life for him was dominated by the spirit of take and "get my rights." He told how thrilled he was whenever he was asked to give, but there was never a programme that took the place of this material security.

#### PERSONAL PROBLEMS

"Personal problems," he said, "constantly brought me back to the place of my rights and the 'get' way of living." He has found in the Oxford Group freedom and love for others and the thrill of adventure for which he has always looked.

The youth of South Africa, he believed, were patriotic under the skin. These young men and women were giving their lives for their nation. They were out to stem the tide of materialism.

Schoolboy Wilson told how he became responsible in his home when his father was changed and was honest about his own irresponsibility.

Several University students declared that the Oxford Group had a cure for futility, boredom and examination failures. One student told how he had to choose between going on a hockey tour and an Oxford Group team. Responsibility for national reconstruction was the greater attraction.

This national reconstruction is not a theory, for when men are changed the nation becomes different. These young men and women spoke with the conviction that comes from first-hand experience.

A young Afrikaans farmer from Natal instanced how his change led him to tackle soil erosion and also to develop his Natives' lands—things he did not do when his aim in farming was the immediate return he would get for himself. Today he holds his farm in trusteeship for the nation.

#### THEY FOUND NEW FITNESS

He was followed by a young journalist who told how a party of townsmen camped for a fortnight on this farmer's lands and built a large water conservation dam. They did this to get first-hand knowledge of their country and its problems. In the "platteland" these men from the city captured the pioneer spirit of the Voortrekkers. The immensity of the task for which they voluntarily made themselves responsible, gripped and used every bit of mind, energy and will they had. Softness and inertia

disappeared, and quite incidentally they found new fitness.

Mr Jack Slater, former Springbok rugby player, said the physical energy of the youth of South Africa under God's control was worth more than all the gold mines of Johannesburg.

Mr Johannes de Kock, whose family is well known in Bloemfontein, said how eight years ago he met the Oxford Group in Bloemfontein. His friends gave him a week "to get over it." In these eight years he has travelled with Oxford Group teams in Europe and America and all over South Africa.

"The driving force of my life all these years has been real concern for the other man and for the nation. That I should speak in my home town as part of this army is worth everything in the world to me."

#### SHAKING HANDS

The Rev. F. J. Berning Malan, Dutch Reformed Minister from Graaff-Reinet, gave an inspiring address, in which he told how he met a young German in 1929 in Madras, India. These two men had both lost a brother during the Great War, but on the opposite fronts. The German said: "Let us shake hands over the graves of our brothers." "At that moment," said the Rev. Mr Malan, "a vision for my nation was born, where we would shake hands over the graves of misunderstanding and past strife. All these years I have been unable to realise my ideal, but now I have discovered how to begin. These young people have the answer I want."

The general public will have their first chance to see the work of the national assembly tomorrow, when meetings open to all will be held in the Town Hall at 4 p.m. and 8.45 p.m.

## SAID AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Hon. W. M. Leggate, C.M.G., former Minister of Internal Affairs, Rhodesia.—The Oxford Group is the most cheerful society I have ever met; the joy in their faces is their greatest advertisement. As a result of this assembly I expect to go back and make a better job of my farming.

When my party went out of power, I left with a sense that there was need to go deeper. I feel that no government can carry through legislation in advance of public opinion. I am certain that a complete answer is in the Oxford Group, with its message for the ordinary man. The stress on the value of the ordinary man for the welfare of the community is one of the most useful features of this assembly. The future of the State lies in the ordinary man. Brain and intellect are not necessary, but the ordinary man following the Light will be a leader in the community.

Senator E. H. Brookes.—I am here for myself and for 340,000 voters representing 1,000,000 Natives. They are asking what we have to give them. We shall never see the way out until we get rid of the sense of insecurity in Europeans. Christ alone can take it away. Anyone who says he has the solution to the Native problem is very daring. I say I have a solution for the Native problem. I have found it in my personal life, and I find it works. If enough other people can find it, the solution is in sight.

All true education is sharing; that is what we are coming to realise. The ability to receive as well as to give. In approaching the Natives we have got to receive as well as give; our work would be more effective if we remembered that.