TAKE HEART

The Memoirs of BASIL BUCKLAND

A quest for effective living

Extract from
OXFORD DIOCESAN MAGAZINE
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Take Heart

Basil Buckland
Linden Hall Publishers £2.50

96 pages of parochial anecdotes, the distillation of 50 years of Anglican ministry, neither great literature nor a milestone in publishing presentation; yet a small book that presents the heart of Christian ministry: transforming lives by the power of Christ. For Mr Buckland the mission of ordained ministry took him to the South London suburb of Penge, the inner-city streets of Battersea during World War II, rural Staffordshire and the pottery towns. His characters have nothing to tell us of jumble sales and fetes, of troubles with the choir or problems of restoration appeals; they have everything to tell us of knowing God in Christ and the transformation he brings to life, home, family, work, and social action.

The men and women to whom he introduces us are many and varied . . . a Staffordshire miners' leader, and ex-public school army officer. Alec Smith (son of Rhodesia's Ian Smith) and the Earl of Harrowby. All share their faith in Jesus (most from a background of apathetic agnosticism or antagonistic atheism) and their reliance on the local Church and its ministry.

In these days, when parts of the Church seem to have a perennial identity crisis and some clergy a never-ending inner conflict as to their role in society, Mr Buckland's book brings us down to earth. It brings us back to our Lord and his command to make disciples, to the Holy Spirit and his life-changing power. To quote Elsie, one of his Battersea parishoners, dying of cancer: 'Above all is the joy of having faith and hope to give to those who come to see me and to know that, when I am too weak to give anything, Jesus can give the most. Death is one more step in faith, and faith has always been an adventure.'

Robert Key

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of
BASIL BUCKLAND

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I am grateful to Michael Hutchinson for his help over this publication of my late husband's memoirs, and for his meticulous editing of the manuscript. Also to Mrs. Patricia Ducé for typing it out so beautifully.

NORAH BUCKLAND

FOREWORD

"Take Heart" is the story of a man who always believed that with God the ordinary person could do the extraordinary thing. He wanted to show how rich and fascinating life can be if you let God take charge. As his Oxford friend, Michael Hutchinson, said at the Service of Thanksgiving for Basil Buckland's life in St. Nicolas Church, Newbury: "Through his book there shines a selfless quality. He says very little of himself. He writes about the people who came into his and Norah's lives, not what he said and did, but what the people around him were inspired to be and do."

Brought up on a farm, he had a life-long interest in nature. He felt an affinity with St. Francis of Assisi and in middle-age became a vegetarian. Nevertheless he devoted almost all of his working life to industrial city parishes (Leeds, Battersea, Stoke-on-Trent) where he felt the need was greatest and when in the rural parish of Sandon, Staffordshire, he extended his ministry informally into the nearby cities of Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent.

Together with his commitment to Moral Re-Armament, he was active in the Church Army, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and the British and Foreign Bible Society, of which he became a Life Governor.

In all, he sought to be an active, practical Christian. His starting point was the need to make the world a better place and he spent his life seeking to contribute at all levels: personal problems; industrial problems; local government and national issues. He was concerned for the integrity and quality of the leadership in the Church of England. He constantly stressed the central importance of divine guidance and of high standards of personal morality.

My friendship with the Buckland family started in November 1943, when military accommodation in London became so short that some of us staff officers were paid an allowance to make our own arrangements. I then had the good fortune to be invited, as Basil tells in Chapter 7, to join the community in Old Battersea House.

The ten months I spent there marked a turning point in my life. My efforts over the previous four years to live out the Christian faith, which I had rejected as a student, had been joyless and humourless. A broken engagement had killed something in my heart. In Basil and Norah I found true friends who never tried to control and who always encouraged me. Christmas at St.

Peter's Vicarage with a nativity play in which their two sons, Peter and Michael, played a full part, was an unforgettable experience. I left for France some months later with a new sense of joy and expectation.

It was at the Vicarage, some two years later, that I took the decision to ask the girl to whom I had been engaged seven years previously to marry me. We celebrated our re-engagement at a civic Advent service in St. Peter's.

As proxy godfather to Michael in the place of Michael Sitwell, who had been killed taking part in the Normandy invasion, I have been privileged to visit the Buckland family and to see Basil at work in Sandon, in Longton, in Ardington and in Newbury. His great care for Norah after she had suffered a stroke was a challenge to all.

There was a "no nonsense" quality in Basil. He was impatient with shilly-shally sometimes in others, always in himself. Faced with a hard challenge, he did not argue about it, he accepted it. This was his strength, even if sometimes we would have liked to know more about the struggles that went on in his spirit.

Basil always had wider issues in mind. While living in Battersea, he found much inspiration from the example of the Clapham Community, who in the late 18th century gathered at Battersea Rise and provided the spiritual force behind William Wilberforce's fight to abolish slavery and to reform the morality of his time.

It is a tribute to the infectious quality of Basil's life that so many of his friends living "in retirement" appear to be advancing in their Godgiven commitment to remake the world and that, as with Basil, new life can be seen springing up around them. One of them writes: "He had an avowed ambition to go all out 'until the whistle blew' for the end of the game, as it did so poignantly on Christmas Eve 1985. It is to be hoped that what he has written will inspire others to carry on where he left off."

William Stallybrass

January 1987

William Stallybrass was a lecturer in Languages at The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (1947-71) and the first Director of Studies of the Ghana Military Academy (1960-61)

We are all to be the bridge-builders in the world, the bridge between God and man, found for us in the face of Jesus Christ, the bridge between the Jesus of history and the living Christ of our experience, the bridge between Christian and Christian, the bridge between Christians and a world where our allies will be the God-seekers, the peacemakers, and friends of the poor.

But if you would seek to put the world to rights, do you begin with some other person or with yourself? It is a day to remember that the confrontation of God with man calls out not the interest of the spectator but the fresh and renewed response of the seeker.

The Most Reverend Robert Runcie,
at his enthronement as Archbishop of Canterbury,
on the Feast of the Annunciation, 1980

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

I Peter, 1,3

INTRODUCTION

The marriage ceremony was over, and we were preparing to drink a toast to the fine young couple who were setting out on their new life together. Standing beside me, glass in hand, was an old friend of the bride's father. He was a successful business man and a respected District Councillor, but he was worried about the future — not just for himself and his contemporaries, but for the world in which the new generation would live. He enumerated some of the problems: unemployment, insecurity, industrial and social unrest, family breakdown, the collapse of moral standards and of faith in God and man. It was a long and sombre catalogue of human frailty and failure.

Finally he said, "What can we do, Vicar? Beyond providing yet more social services and perhaps finding another use for some of our churches, what in Heaven's name can any of us do about anything that really matters?"

I said, "I don't know. But I think that if we were sufficiently determined to find out, and were ready for anything He might show us, God would tell us."

It may be that we have listened to too many beguiling voices, which have turned out to be snare and delusion.

A generation ago Prime Minister Harold Wilson was enthusiastically proclaiming that the new age of science and technology had well and truly dawned. Everything would now rapidly improve for everyone. Our own prosperity as a nation was assured, and we should be able to help the under-developed countries to get on their feet.

Earlier another Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, had informed us that we "had never had it so good". West Germany's "economic miracle" was gathering strength. The Americans put a man on the moon and announced "a great step forward for mankind". Even the theologians were proclaiming the new gospel that man had come of age and could now manage his own affairs.

It all sounds pathetically silly now. The much-heralded age of science has not solved our problems. In a world of plenty millions starve. Other millions in the more prosperous countries are without work or purpose, and live in fear of one another.

The hopes of the Harolds, and many more, have been ground into the dust by events. In their place the prophets of doom take the field. Their theme is a familiar one. By over-population and underproduction (despite mountains of

butter, beef and grain and oceans of milk and wine); by polluting the earth and squandering its resources; by piling up ever more terrible weapons amid explosive tensions between the "haves" and the "have-nots"; by growing antagonisms between races, classes and generations we are being swept to destruction.

Many — and not only the young — turn to violence in desperation because they see no other way of making their protest heard, or of changing what they perceive to be wrong. Terrorists make our cities their battlegrounds, and our own people fight each other in the streets. Violence is not so much mindless as hopeless.

So is there a hope for this torn and tortured world of ours with its teeming millions made in the image of God — a hope which goes with faith and love to bring in the true revolution of God at work in human hearts and wills? Could it be that God is even now preparing a future which will take us beyond our finest dreams, laying its foundations in the men and women whom He calls to be fellow-workers with Him in creating it?

Five men sat at lunch in a London restaurant discussing these matters. All were men of the world. One had lived for many years in the Middle East. His son was at that moment in southern Africa and his daughter in New Zealand. Another had just returned from Canada and the United States. A third had business contacts in many parts of Asia — particularly in India. Yet another had a special concern for France and the European countries. I was the fifth. All of us were conscious of the bitterness and division and lack of purpose in our own country.

We talked about the people we knew in all these places, and of what ordinary, and extraordinary, men and women could do to tackle the deep-rooted causes of hunger, poverty, injustice, violence and exploitation.

This was not idle speculation. These men meant business. They believed in the power of Almighty God to change men's lives, aims, motives, ways of thinking and impulse to action.

I found myself speaking of the interesting men and women with whom I had lived and worked in the forty-five years of my ministry in London, northern cities and country parishes. They were steelworkers, coalminers, shopkeepers, farmers, housewives, industrialists, doctors, teachers, nurses, students, Cockneys and country folk. They had found that God not only cared for them as individuals, but was equally concerned for their families, friends, factories, cities, their country and the world.

Most of them were not particularly interested in piety for its own sake — though they knew, or quickly discovered, that any effective Christian action must spring from a personal relationship with God. They wanted a faith which made a difference to their own lives and to the world they lived in.

When they found it, it transformed those around them as well as themselves.

Some of them had been life-long Christians and churchmen, and were learning to apply their faith to the issues of the day. Others were just discovering God and growing in faith and effectiveness as they put into practice what they knew.

As we talked, the inevitable happened. Someone said, "This is what discouraged and perplexed people want to hear today. You must write these stories in a book. They would bring hope to those in despair, faith to the cynical and new insights to any who may wonder what ordinary people can do in a time of crisis."

So here is the book. It is a book about people. At the risk of making it appear like a "Book of Records" I have,wherever appropriate, given their names, described their circumstances and — as accurately as memory allows — quoted their words.

It is the record of the quest of a life-time, and the story of it must begin at the beginning.

COUNTRY ROOTS

Family and Faith

Both my parents knew and loved God. Despite their vastly different backgrounds and the many difficulties which beset them, they made a happy home for my brother and me in our friendly old farmhouse in the rich milk-producing West Country.

Father claimed that his family came from Gypsy stock. Buckland is a not uncommon Romany name. Several of his forebears became farmers and auctioneers, but he spent his boyhood and early years in London. He started work at the Royal Victoria Docks where he earned ten shillings a week as a tally clerk. Those were the days of Ben Tillett and Tom Mann and the fight for "the docker's tanner". There was a constant struggle with unemployment and insecurity; and there in the docks he found a respect and affection for the working man which remained with him for the rest of his life.

In order to contribute to the home and save for the future he walked several miles to work each day. Eventually he managed to amass twenty-five pounds. He borrowed twenty-five more and started a small business in the City selling cloth to tailors and wadding to furniture makers. For years it was doubtful whether he would survive; and it was during that time that he discovered what real friendship is. Being hard pressed for cash, he was tempted to resort to a deal which he knew was sharp practice — if not downright dishonest. Where it would have led him none can say.

Providentially his friend Frank Newsom got to hear of it. "Will," he said, "I have a hundred pounds in the bank. If it will help you to go straight and not do this deal, it is yours." That decided it. You cannot betray that kind of friendship.

All this time he had dreamed of getting into the country where he felt he belonged. He had spent happy holidays as a boy in the pleasant Berkshire village of Bucklebury and on Mr. Morse's farm near Wootton Bassett in Wiltshire. John Morse was a distant relation, and it was he who helped my father to buy his first small farm. It had the romantic name of "Foxhangers". It was situated on the Kennet and Avon Canal, just below the famous flight of twenty-nine locks which carried the barges up to Devizes, on to the wool town of Newbury, and thence to the Thames at Reading and the docks at London and Tilbury.

He was short of money, short of experience and had only one man to help him, but again he was lucky in his friends and neighbours. One sultry summer evening with a storm brewing and the sky black, he was out in the hayfield

trying to get in the last few loads before the clouds burst. Presently he heard the pounding of hooves in the lane, and two wagons swung in through the gate. It was Mr. Grist, the farmer from down the road, who had had to leave "Foxhangers" when my father bought it the year before. With him were two men, and they all worked with a will until the last load was carried and stacked in the yard. When the job was done they went into the farmhouse and sat down to cheese and apple pie and cider. Outside rain deluged the field where the hay had been.

My father tried to express his gratitude, and added, "I am sorry about your having to get out of the farm last year, but you see I had to think of the family, and with the boys growing up it seemed the chance of a life-time."

"Forget it," said farmer Grist at once, "I understand and, anyway, I'm all right. By a lucky chance the next farm became vacant and I'm comfortably settled in there. I have no boys of my own, so if either of your young men is looking for a place later on, he can have first refusal of mine. So, don't worry, neighbour, and good luck to you." We have had a chance in our family to learn what real friendship is.

And true parenthood, too. My mother's background was totally different from my father's. She claimed kinship with the Sackvilles of Knole. Her father was chief cashier of the Westminster Bank. They had a fine house at Mountnessing in Essex and kept a carriage. Mother was sent to one of the first public schools for girls and later to a finishing school in the South of France. She hated that and, being a young woman of considerable spirit, she ran away, first to Paris and then home.

Like my father, she had a profound faith in God, and together they made the kind of home which was never dull and where the reality of God was taken for granted. Mother told us stories from the Bible when we went to bed. Father got the pony-trap out on Sundays and drove us to church. It was all as natural as eating our supper at night or putting on our trousers in the morning. It formed an unconscious but very real background to everything else in our lives.

Those were happy years. My brother and I went to school in the neighbouring town of Devizes. In summer we walked there along the canal tow-path. In the winter we rode in the milk-float, each perched on the top of a churn. Our exteriors were well wrapped up against the weather, and our interiors lined with porridge, fried eggs and bread-and-butter and treacle. When we got home at night there was steaming hot soup and a newly-baked fruit cake.

Father insisted on the principle: "Work first and play after." So, when the table was cleared, we tackled our homework. Being a good classical scholar, mother helped with the Latin. There was usually time then for an hour by the

fire with a book or stamp album or a game of Ludo. In the summer evenings we played cricket in the field or explored the canal or hedges for wildlife.

For my parents I know those were anxious days. I remember my mother's long and painful illness, the doctor's visits and the selfless way in which my father nursed her and eased her pain.

Soon came also the bad farming years which followed the first world war. Cheap eggs, butter and bacon poured in from the continent. There were no guaranteed prices and it was a struggle to carry on. Farmers were going bankrupt all round us. One day while we were storing apples in the loft my father told me how worried he was. That created a new bond between us. I knew then that I could always go to him with my own worries and troubles and be sure of a real understanding.

It was this rich experience of the goodness of God which set the course for my life. A first-class grammar school and a lively church played their part; but it was home which more than anything else shaped my life and made me want to use it to secure for everybody what meant so much to me.

Cynics may dismiss this as schoolboy idealism; but although I failed often and dismally both then and later to live up to it, at least I had learnt to respect the truth, to love beautiful things and to long for goodness to prevail in the earth.

I learnt, too, that for this to happen there had to be an honest and resolute grappling with what was false and evil. For as long as I can remember I have been aware of the clash between right and wrong in my own consciousness and in the world around and in the history of the human race. This is the central theme of the Bible, and I found it enthralling. It is the essence of nearly all great literature, and the common experience of man. The only difference today is in the intensity of the conflict and the dire consequences for us all.

Even as a boy I wondered what the outcome would be, and how I should fare in the contest. I liked to think that I should be on the side of goodness and truth and, being of a belligerent nature, even strike a blow or two in their defence.

Perhaps this was the first faint impulse towards the ministry which became a more definite call at the time of my confirmation. The decision to serve God with my life was a real one.

I know now that there are many other ways of serving God, but the obvious one which presented itself to my mind at the time was in the ordained ministry of the Church.

So, encouraged by my parents and by a friendly vicar who helped me to find the finance, I entered the University of Oxford with high hopes and some trepidation to prepare for the task.

BEGINNING OF WISDOM

Dominus Illuminatio Mea

Oxford has been cynically derided as "the home of lost causes". In fact it is the opposite. Oxford has not only taught philosophy. It has made history. It has been at the heart of national events and world affairs. It has brought forth and fostered creative, sometimes revolutionary, ideas. It has stood for freedom of conscience and the full development of the human spirit against tyranny and oppression.

Magna Carta was enforced by the Provisions of Oxford. Simon de Montfort held his first parliament there. City and university played a major part in the civil war. It was the spiritual home and base of operations of John Wycliffe and John Wesley. It nurtured the Reformation in England and the renewal of the Church under Keble and Pusey.

In the late twenties and early thirties of the present century it was an exhilarating place to be.

St. Peter's Hall was the first new college to be founded since Keble, sixty years earlier. Through the friendly interest and help of Christopher Chavasse, son of the founder and himself the first Master, I had the good fortune to be first to be enrolled as a student.

I was quickly carried away by the temptations of that new world of freedom and opportunity. Lectures and tutorials were interesting, but social and sporting activities were absorbing, and I found myself struggling to keep up with everybody going in all directions at once. Not surprisingly, my life with God suffered. I never lost my faith in Him, but I wondered whether I could go on with ordination.

The crisis came when I tried to help a friend who was also finding the temptations of Oxford more than he could handle. He was a big, handsome man, a brilliant scholar and considerable athlete. He had won the school Greek Prize three years in succession and took his place effortlessly in the college boat club's first Eight. He appeared to have everything. Yet his studies were so badly neglected that he was slipping towards certain disaster. As a Christian I believed that God could help him, and tried to persuade him so. But the attempt was a miserable failure, and after that first year we never saw him in Oxford again.

I felt desperate. This was the work to which I was hoping to give the rest of my life, and it had begun with devastating failure. I seriously thought of writing to the bishop to say that ordination was out of the question.

But something new was happening in Oxford again. The postwar mood of

wilful irresponsibility was passing, and men were looking for some revolutionary philosophy which would make sense of life, reshape society and offer practical hope for the future. We know now — what we only dimly suspected at the time — that Soviet agents, taking advantage of this restless, questing mood, were making subtle but powerful attempts in both the ancient universities to recruit the best minds for their brand of materialist and godless revolution. Many who were drawn to it then have since been bitterly disillusioned. But there were some whose lack of a living faith blunted their moral judgments, and not a few of them were ensnared for life.

Just at this time, there was growing up in Oxford a group of men and women who were convinced that the only hope for men and nations was the rediscovery of God as a revolutionary force in human life and affairs. They believed that, when taken seriously and applied drastically, the Christian faith and experience would transform men's lives and the world in which they lived. In the outside world they became known, reasonably enough, as the Oxford Group (later, as Moral Re-Armament, or MRA).

These people said that if you wanted to see change in the world, there had to be change in people, and that the place to begin was with yourself. What that would involve you could find out by testing your life by the uncompromising standards of Jesus Christ. These could be summarised as absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. Furthermore, if you gave your life unreservedly to Him, the Holy Spirit would guide you and show you what to do and how to do it.

All this I knew already. It was irrefutable Christian truth. I had read it in the Bible. But I had never wholeheartedly put it into practice. It was altogether too uncompromising; and I looked round for some other way which might be a little less demanding.

I was encouraged in this cowardly attitude by the criticisms of the Oxford Group made by some who did not understand it and others who did understand it but did not like it. They said that there was too much emphasis on sin, too little theology — and, anyway, it came from America!

This was a reference to Frank Buchman, an American of Swiss ancestry who had spent years of his life learning how to make the truths of the Gospel a living experience to students and statesmen in his own country and then in India and China. It was he and his men who had brought what the Principal of Mansfield College called "this new illumination" to Oxford.

Meanwhile, I continued my search for an easier way. There were many religious societies in the university — the Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union, the Devotional Union, the Student Christian Movement, Pusey House — I tried them all. They all gave me something, but none of them made me face the root of the problem in myself.

In the end, after three wasted years, I turned again to the men of the

Oxford Group, who I knew would deal faithfully and lovingly with me.

Two of these were John Thompson of St. Catherine's and Edward Goulding of St. John's College. John was the son of a clergyman. He had left home to seek adventure and spent his substance on riotous living. Then he came to himself, and to God, and started all over again. I wanted to do that.

John and Edward suggested that I should be businesslike and make a sort of feasibility study of what would be required to put things right. So one cold foggy February morning in 1931 I got out of bed very early and on my knees gave my life to God again — this time without reservation. Then, sitting wrapped in thick sweater and warm dressing-gown, I asked God to tell me what to do with the dishonesties, conceit, jealousies and indulgences which had been dehumanising me. It was a long list, but I knew I was forgiven — and I knew what to do. I put right what I could, and trusted God for the rest. Now I was free, and ready for anything — even ordination, though I did not at that time realise all that that would mean. Fifty years later I am still discovering.

Those years in Oxford were an education in more than academic subjects. They made theology an experience of God as well as a theory about Him.

My first tutor, before all this happened, was Ralph Houghton. I had let him down badly and spent more time pulling an oar than reading my books. Later I had to apologise humbly for wasting his time as well as my own. We are good friends now, but I much regret treating so badly a man who could have helped me so much.

My second tutor was Julian Thornton-Duesbery, a brilliant scholar, the son of a bishop. In addition to lectures and tutorials, he held informal gatherings every Sunday evening in his rooms in Corpus Christi College, where he was chaplain, to which we could bring our godless friends to be introduced to a faith that works.

One evening the "Carburettor Club" turned up. These were wild young men who were in Oxford simply to have a good time. One of them was heard to remark with a tinge of remorse, as final examinations drew near, "If only we'd done a steady half-hour's work a week, we shouldn't be in this awful predicament now." Normally the club spent their Sunday evenings in the Turf Tavern or the Lamb and Flag, planning their noisy and illegal motor-bike races through the peaceful countryside.

But here they were tonight in the chaplain's rooms. They sat rather ostentatiously at the back, and we expected a lively time. But they were interested as they listened to the boxing Blue and the atheist whose lives had been changed. Eventually at least three of them began a new life in Christ. One was set free from the power of the bottle. Another, Chip, was later

ordained; and a third, Reggie, has been doing full-time Christian work without pay ever since. The garage mechanic who looked after their motor-bikes also came under their influence.

Julian, in fact, had the gift of winning the most unlikely characters, and making them into life-changers themselves.

Kit Prescott, for instance. He was an irreligious young businessman, who boasted that the hole in the brim of his hat had been made by the bullet of a jealous husband. (In fact, it was a cigarette burn). He was introduced to Julian by his sister, Dorothy, whose life had been changed.

Kit gave his life to Christ, and decided that if he were to serve Him effectively, he needed to learn all he could about Him. So, without any money, but trusting God to provide, he came to study theology in Oxford. There, in Worcester College, he made friends with Garth Lean, poet and historian, who describes in his book, "Good God—It Works!", how his life was changed through his friendship with Kit.

Garth, in turn, won over to faith the agnostic Fleet Street journalist, Peter Howard, who had been England's rugger captain while still at college. Howard became one of the great Christian leaders of the day.

It was a remarkable succession of spiritual descendants — children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. But we were beginning to think of this as normal living for Christians.

Numbers grew. Old hands and new recruits had to be built up in the Christian life. They needed food, air and exercise — Bible study, prayer and witness. So, after our morning lectures, we bolted our lunch and gathered in the library of the University Church to pray and think and plan how to win the most difficult men in our colleges. Often there were a hundred or more of us meeting there before we hurried off to row or play rugger or to engage in more cultural pursuits.

They were a strangely assorted group — the intellectuals, the musclemen, the aesthetes. With particular gratitude I remember Frank Bygott, classical scholar, oarsman and poet. He coached our Eight on the river. Under his vigorous training we learned much, not only about rowing but about the discipline of Christian living.

"Rowing," he used to say, "is a way of life. To win you have to go all-out. When every muscle in your body cries out to stop, you redouble your efforts. You row each stroke to the finish and immediately get poised for the next. Teamwork is of the essence. Each of you is responsible for steadying the boat and making it go. If it rocks or falters, it is no use blaming anyone else. If someone comes to the end of his resources, you take the strain until he recovers. It's each for all and all for each. You need the discipline of regular hours, the early morning run, strict diet, no smoking, no womanising. It is tough but invigorating. There is nothing quite like a racing eight going really

well — eight strong men putting every ounce into it and moving together as one. That is teamwork. It doesn't always happen, but when it does the satisfaction is enormous." That year we won all our races.

Frank became a life-long friend, and appears again in this chronicle — always selflessly giving the same challenging but encouraging friendship to all he met.

By nature shy and sensitive, he refused to let this come between him and those he believed God wanted him to win. He took seriously the challenge to change the most difficult men in his college. As captain of the boat club, his great rival was the rumbustious rugger captain, Peter Howard, who became captain of the England XV. Frank's attempt to win him for Christ seemed at first to meet with little success. When he spoke to Howard about his own decision to serve God with his life, Howard took him to a chemist's shop and ordered a dose to cure Frank of his hangover. But Frank persisted, and played no small part in Peter's eventual transformation.

After he left the university Frank gave the same quality of friendship to the unemployed workers of East London, the miners of Wales and the Midlands, and to the young men who in those days faced a future as uncertain as it is today. To multitudes he brought the power of God to change their lives and create the leadership which has grown and developed over nearly half a century.

When he died of leukaemia at a comparatively early age, he spent part of his last evening dictating a letter to the President of the Oxford University Boat Club, suggesting ways in which their long succession of defeats might be ended. A year or two later it was. That typified the hope he had for the country he loved so much.

Much of this was still in the future, but it typifies the spirit of the men and women who went out from Oxford in those years.

They included Harry Addison, who found a revolutionary faith in Jesus Christ; Basil Yates, philosopher with a Jewish background but now a convinced Christian; Francis Goulding (brother of Edward), linguist and archaeologist; Paul Petrocokino, musician and composer; Charis Waddy, the first woman to read Arabic and now an authority on Islamic culture and pioneer of the Christian approach to the Moslem world; scholarly Roland Wilson; athletic Ian Sciortino; R. C. Mowat, converted by a sermon in Hertford College chapel and now a professor of history; and Kenneth Belden, who has devoted many years of his life to the development of Christian theatre.

Time would fail to tell of all who went out with resolution and faith as schoolmasters, ministers of the Church, farmers, soldiers and administrators, to bring the illumination of faith to the complexities of the modern world.

Naturally there was opposition from those who did not like their uncom-

promising stand for Christian standards and total commitment. This added zest to life and prepared them for greater struggles later.

The most persistent opponent was one Tom Driberg, whose particularly unsavoury self-revelations in his autobiography, "Ruling Passions", published shortly after he died, sufficiently explain his dislike of the Oxford Group.

Others made the foolish excuse to Frank Buchman, "We are all right. Why don't you go and change Hitler?" Then, when he made a valiant attempt to do so (risking his reputation in the process), they never forgave him and tried to use this failure to destory the rest of his work.

They did not succeed. His faithfulness and courage bore fruit after the war in the friendship of Adenauer and Schuman, which laid the foundation of the European Community, and in the new trust and co-operation between two old enemies which has astonished the modern world.

Meanwhile, men of vision in the university encouraged with their learning and experience those of the new generation who were committing their lives to revolutionary Christianity.

Professor Grensted gave an evening a week to instruct them in prayer and worship and in the Christian life. Dr. G.F. Graham Brown, Principal of Wycliffe Hall (the largest theological college in the Church of England), offered Loudon Hamilton a bed and three meals a day if he would stay on and continue what had been begun. Alan Thornhill, Chaplain of Hertford College, travelled with them on their journeys to South Africa and Canada. Howard Rose of the Oxford Pastorate gave them every possible support. Canon B.H. Streeter, New Testament scholar and Bampton Lecturer, after watching for a while, announced at a great meeting in the Town Hall that he had decided to "get into the boat and take an oar himself".

With this encouragement, and with a new sense of purpose and discipline and teamwork, studies went better, races were won and life was full of interest.

And the way forward to ordination now seemed clear.

There was, however, one other matter which had first to be resolved. In my last year at the university I had fallen in love with a dark-eyed maiden, and wanted her for my very own. She seemed to be sympathetic to the idea. But, try as I might, I could not convince myself that God took the same view — rather the reverse. He seemed to be saying, "I have other plans for both of you."

I had determined that I would follow whatever His plan for my life might be, and I believed V. had done the same. So there was only one course open.

There were no broken hearts. I found that I was not the only pebble on the beach, and it was not very long before she married someone else. I hope they have been happy.

For a time I was desolate and continued to write. But I soon realised that there was no future in that, and when I fully gave my emptiness to God He filled my life anew.

NEW PATTERNS EMERGING

Apprenticeship in Yorkshire

The city of dreaming spires was one thing. Smoky, industrial Leeds was another. It was a chance for the green young curate to see how the discoveries he had made in Oxford would work out in the tough world of a Yorkshire city.

I had a kindly vicar, who with his wife welcomed me as a son. He gave me good training in leading the worship in church, teaching in the Sunday School and generally organising a parish.

But the man who showed me how to put theory into practice was a rugged Yorkshire businessman. Farrar Vickers was the head of a prosperous family firm which manufactured special kinds of oils. One was used in processing wool, another for underwater marine lubrication. He had a square jaw and a warm smile. His eyes twinkled and penetrated at the same time. He used to spread mustard instead of butter on his bread roll.

He was a staunch churchman, and worshipped at Roscoe Methodist Chapel, just across the road from St. Clement's where I was.

He was also President of the Leeds Battalion of the Boys' Brigade. So, on the first evening after my arrival, while I was having my initiation into the ways of the Brigade, he came with his wife, Doris, and two fine sons, John and David, to make me feel among friends.

They invited me to spend my days off in their beautiful home in the country near Wetherby, and I came to know them well.

Farrar did not wear his heart on his sleeve, but bit by bit he told me about some of the crisis points in his life. Success in business had brought him no satisfaction. It had made him hard, arrogant and tyrannical. He felt only a "great emptiness of spirit".

He was enough of a Christian to know that something was badly wrong; and, one day, at a friend's suggestion he decided to ask God about it. One thought came insistently into his mind, "Go to the works with your eyes and heart open."

When he next went to the factory he did that.

"The place was a mess. Oil and cinders were everywhere. A man was trying to wash his oily hands under a cold water tap in the yard. The men had nowhere to eat their meals, or even to sit down."

These were simple things to put right, but once having got through, God went on talking — about holidays with pay (unheard of then), about fair wages and fair prices, about provision for illness and a pension scheme, about new attitudes to customers and competitors, about profit-sharing and decision-making. There seemed to be no end to it; but Farrar had made up his

mind to do what God told him, and he got on with it — and trusted God for the outcome. Hard-headed businessmen might think it naive, but it worked.

He took on men when they did not seem to be needed, simply because they needed work and he had learned to care for such men. This was not the same as "overmanning". He had the imagination to make sure that their work was productive. For instance, after a man had been set to clean up the works, Farrar reported, "This so transformed the place that it was unthinkable to go back to the old regime, and cleaning became a permanent part of our efficiency drive."

Such a policy often involved risking capital. To give another man work, Farrar invested in an extra lorry, and business increased more than enough to support it. "Edgar (the lorry-driver) represents us well to our customers." He stayed with the firm for thirty-five years.

Farrar would be the last to claim that he had perfected what today would be called "industrial democrcy", but the leader of London's unemployed, after a careful study of the results, told him, "You have done voluntarily more than any extreme government could make you do by force." Further than that, he arranged informal conferences in the firm's time in which "chances of shaping the future of their own industry are offered to the workers. Management and workers are trying to hammer out their ideas on what they believe should be done."

During the war he combined with his competitors to produce what was needed to service the mine-sweepers which kept our sea-lanes open. After the war he devoted his energies to working out with the men of the trades unions a new way of partnership for all men, and travelled to Europe and America to do it.

Years later when I was rector of a busy industrial parish, Farrar wrote an article for my church magazine which was read by the miners, potters and steel men of Stoke-on-Trent. In it he wrote:

> Industry in which employer and employee, capital, labour and management learn to move together like the fingers of a hand could operate for the benefit of all and the exploitation of none. It could reinforce the great traditional creators of character — the home, the school, the church.
>
> In my business life, dealing with design, manufacture, costing, contracting and competition at home and overseas, I have proved that when men listen to God (by whatever name He may be called) His will can be known. There is in each of us an inbuilt listening ability. If we use it, it will not only show the cause and cure of personal difficulties, but can set and achieve new patterns for a family or a nation which we all long to see.

Farrar's son, John, is now Managing Director of Vickers' Oils. He, too, is a pioneer. In his view:

The most important industrial issue is to find a new motive, so that we really care for the deepest needs of all men of all kinds. Our firm serves an industry which is still in severe recession, but we have made no one redundant. This is the alternative to the sterility of class war and the quickest way to put right what is wrong and build a new society.

In the midst of these events in Yorkshire, word came that an assistant was needed in the South London parish of Penge. The people of Christ Church had just carried through a very big evangelistic campaign in which men and women of the Oxford Group had come from far and wide to help. They had been commissioned by Bishop Woods of Croydon, and the response had been astonishing. But now these visitors had had to return to their regular avocations, and the Vicar needed help in the vitally important work of following up what had been started. He asked me to join him on the staff, and I went.

Among the many who had given their lives to Christ through the campaign was Norah Rudd. She was a young woman of many talents and an enterprising nature. She had blue eyes, pink cheeks and chestnut hair. Her father had a paper mill in Yorkshire, but the family home was in Beckenham, surrounded by sports and social clubs. Norah was a good tennis player. Partnered by her athletic brother, Russell, she won many matches. She gave dancing lessons, attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, taught in a kindergarten school. After an unhappy love affair she went to Egypt as a governess to a family of French archaeologists and to Amman with the R.A.F. Now she was back in London as secretary in a City firm. In that job she showed much resource. When, as sometimes happened, the boss came back from lunch the worse for drink, she pushed him through the door marked "Gentlemen" and interviewed his clients herself.

Life was fun, but not fulfilling.

Then came the Penge campaign. At a friend's invitation she came to a meeting expecting to be bored. She was not. Here were people with a purpose — something she lacked. Before the week was out she had committed her life and future into God's hands. She found herself working harder for Him for nothing than she had ever done for her employers for pay.

She and I found ourselves much drawn to one another. We had both been "in love" before — or thought we had — but after painful experiences of one kind or another, had concluded that neither of these episodes was leading to the "marriage made in heaven". After all, being in love does not necessarily mean you ought to be married. There has to be some other indication; so we declared our affection for one another and prayed that God would show us whether this was what He really intended or not. Finally we decided that it was. With all our differences, we were unshakeably united on the basic things of life — what we believed in and what we were living for. So I posed the question, and we were married on August 21, 1937.

We found that our different temperaments, experiences and interests, although they have sometimes caused misunderstandings and occasionally anger, have greatly enriched our lives. Each has brought far more to the partnership than would have been possible if we had both been exactly alike.

There have been fights because we are both pig-headed and self-willed; but we have learned to ask forgiveness and humbly start again with God. Quite often our disagreements have forced us to look beyond our petty self-centred ideas to the splendour of God's horizons for our friends, our country and the world.

In this continuing venture we made our first home together in St. Peter's Vicarage in the historic South London Borough of Battersea — between the railway sidings and the riverside wharves and factories. That was a change indeed.

FAITH IN THE AGE OF IDEOLOGY

Penge was a comfortable suburb under the shadow of the Crystal Palace. Electric trains carried well-dressed, sophisticated men and women to the City or West End every morning and brought them back in the evening. They were cultured, intelligent people, who read their newspapers as they journeyed to the office. At the weekends they took part in musical, dramatic, literary, sporting and social activities. On Sunday they went to church and entertained their friends. They had their problems, but on the whole it was a carefree society.

Battersea was different. There the luxury flats surrounding the park were cheek by jowl with the rows of terraced houses and tenement flats, where the struggle with unemployment and poverty bore heavily on even the bravest spirits. Cockney humour helped to make it bearable, but for people who cared it was well-nigh intolerable.

Each Sunday — each day, in fact — we prayed that God's kingdom would come and His will be done. This would be a mighty change from the way we were all living at the moment. If that prayer were answered, it would revolutionise our lives and begin to pattern a new shape for the future. Buchman had already described this as "the greatest revolution of all time, whereby the Cross of Christ will transform the world."

The practical question was: could the Oxford experience of change in people and the Leeds experience of changed attitudes in business be extended and expanded to encompass the whole spectrum of human life and activity? Could there be a revolution of the human heart drastic enough and far-reaching enough to change both the spirit and fabric of society?

A shaft of light was thrown on our speculations one Sunday evening. It was the sixteenth of April, 1938. I give the date because it was a turning point in our understanding of our task.

Evensong was drawing to a close. We had sung our final hymn. As we resumed our seats, a burly figure rose to his feet, walked to the front and faced the congregation. He said he had asked the vicar's permission to make an apology. He did not look like a man in the habit of making apologies. He was of wide girth and determined appearance, with sandy hair, blue eyes, firm voice and broad Yorkshire accent. He was the Treasurer of the local Communist Party and leader of the unemployed.

Some of those present probably recognised him and remembered with mixed feelings the Christmas Eve when midnight Communion had been rudely interrupted by an angry body of unemployed men, led by this same George King. They had marched into the church with much stamping of feet,

singing the Internationale and shouting "Fair play for the unemployed".

Now George was saying, "I want to apologise to you for the scene we made here seven years ago. I had just come out of prison. I was angry and bitter. But I have since seen the futility of all that. God has changed my life, and I have found a better way of solving our problems — through the only revolution which can have lasting effect. That is Christ's revolution which changes human nature and is the only hope of peace and fair play. So I've come here tonight to ask you to forgive me and to tell you that I want to engage in this revolution with you."

That lifted us into a whole new orbit in our thinking and living.

The circumstances which led to this remarkable occasion are described by the Rev. Maurice Hodder in the chapter which follows.

GOD'S REVOLUTIONARY

George King

(Told by Maurice Hodder)

My first meeting with George brought me no joy, but much foreboding. He had come to London, like so many others, when he lost his job in Sheffield. He had been an engineer tradesman at Sopwith's, but by 1932 he had been unemployed for four years.

The pitifully few shillings he received each week as dole were spent long before the next allocation was due. Even this pittance was stopped when his son, Kenneth, got his first job. There was nothing for it but for Kenneth to leave home so that his father could claim the tiny sum which must keep himself and the rest of the family.

With no prospect of work, his family broken up and his home denuded of any kind of comfort, George was a bitter, angry man. Politics and protest seemed to be futile. Action and violence were the only way. He joined the growing number of men who, like himself, had nothing to do and nowhere to go. They congregated outside the Labour Exchange and in the cafes around my church, and seized on every chance to create a disturbance.

What could we church people do to help? We offered our hall and classrooms as a social centre, and invited all the unemployed men to a meeting to discuss the matter.

To our surprise and dismay, it was an angry, noisy meeting. A well-meaning Labour party official who came to advise us was greeted with shouts of "Traitor", "Scab", "Imperialist stooge". The church was derided as "a tool of the capitalists". "You just want to keep us quiet."

Gradually things calmed down and a thick-set, determined looking Yorkshireman beckoned me over for a quiet word. It transpired later that he and his comrades had seen how our desire to help might be used to forward their aims. My ten years of training in theology had left me an ideological innocent, and I was totally blind to what was afoot.

George said that we needed a committee. This was put to the meeting, and at the end of the evening we had a committee of nine — myself and eight trained Marxists. George was Chairman. The secretary was Harry Launder, a dark, diminutive, shifty character whom I instantly disliked and feared. There was also Paddy Collard, an Irishman who was held in considerable awe because of the number of times he had been to prison "for the cause".

The committee soon got to work. They arranged socials, meetings for

discussion and a workshop where they could repair their boots or bits of furniture. There was also a plan for some of the men to sell from door to door goods which had been supplied at reduced rates from sympathetic local firms. This plan had to be abandoned when two of the salesmen disappeared with their cases full of goods.

Other matters also engaged their attention and energies. The eviction of workers from their homes when they failed to pay their rent added fuel to the bitterness, and provided opportunities for action. Notified one afternoon of trouble in one of the back streets, I went to see what was going on. George and his henchmen had barricaded themselves in a tenement building and defied the police outside to evict them. The police broke in and arrested the leaders. George got three months in Brixton prison.

I went to see him there. In the visitors' room and in the company of a warder we talked. At least, George talked. I was more or less tongue-tied. After all, what do you say to a man in these circumstances — "Read your Bible"? "Pray"? "Have patience"? "Forgive your enemies"? I could at least promise that I would go and see his wife, Lilian, and keep an eye on her and the family.

There was much to think about. The system was cruel in the way it operated. There was desperate need of change. But was violence and the overthrow of law and order the way to do it?

When George came out of prison he was a hero. He and Paddy focussed the hates and hopes of desperate men and women. This was the time when Battersea elected Mr. Saklatvala, the first Communist to sit in the British Parliament.

All was not going well in George's home. The strain was beginning to tell. About eleven o'clock one night I was notified that there was trouble. I went to try to help. Everything was a shambles. Lilian was sitting on a chair in a corner, with one eye blackened, weeping silently; George slumped on a box, his attitude one of misery. Things had got too much for them at last. Lilian had been worried by George's conflicts with the police, by the printing press kept secretly in the house, and by his prison sentences. She could stand no more and hopelessness had broken into violence. She was at heart still loyal to her husband, and this violent row was the last. But it marked a turning point in my own life as well as in theirs.

I had always believed that Jesus Christ was the answer to every man's problems, and I still do. But somehow it was not being mediated through me. I came to a particular week when I, too, could go on no longer.

That very week I received an invitation from a fellow minister, the Rev. James Binns, to attend some meetings of the Oxford Group in Westminster Central Hall. The message was simple. If you want to change the world, the place to begin is with yourself. Men just like me — some deadly serious, and some excruciatingly funny — told us how they had changed and of their

conviction that God has a plan for His world and everybody in it. If you listened to Him, He would tell you what it is.

This confirmed the decision already forming in my mind. I told God that I wanted Him to change me — and the process has been going on ever since.

After taking the first step of putting things right as far as I was able with my family and colleagues, I went again to see George who was once more in prison. Already there was a difference. Usually George did all the talking. This time he listened.

I said, "Yes, the world desperately needs to change, but it has to start with a change in human nature," and I told him how it was beginning with me and added, "We can all have a part in creating a new kind of world. It is possible because there is a supernatural power available. If God can change me and bring unity into my marriage and family, then He can do it for everyone and anyone." I could see that this caught George's interest.

He was silent for a long time. Then he said: "You know, Maurice, this reminds me of when I was a boy. What you've just told me is just like the stories we used to hear in the Sunday School class."

The warden said that time was up, and I rose to go. George shook me warmly by the hand and smiled. As I made my way home on the tram I knew that God had begun to do something to him as well as to me.

That was George's last time in prison. It would be foolish to suggest that he immediately became a perfect saint or a trained Christian revolutionary, but he was on the way.

The effect in George's home was profound. Lilian, deeply moved by his apology for his callous disregard for her feelings, found a new unity with him and a peace of mind she had not known for a long time. Kenneth embraced his father's philosophy and was soon put to the test. One of his jobs in the butcher's shop was to write the cards for the window: "Sausages — 70% beef, 15% pork, 10% suet, 5% liver.' Kenneth knew that this was not the truth, and in his enthusiasm for absolute honesty, took the matter up with the boss. He was sacked immediately. But now the family knew what to do. They sat quietly and listened to what God had to say. Kenneth returned to his parents' home, and soon found a much more satisfying job as a baker's roundsman in High Wycombe.

George told his old associates what had happened to him. He said, "We have to have a revolution which includes everyone and is based on what is right for everybody. It can only come from God. Without it no political programme, Conservative, Socialist or Communist, can possibly succeed."

Harry Launder, whom I had so feared and disliked, decided to join George. Jack Mills, another unemployed man with ten children, who had

suffered much through ill-health and injustice, did the same. It was the same with other key men in the Battersea Communist Party. Mr. Saklatvala lost his seat at the next election.

George got a job near his son in High Wycombe, and the whole family moved there. It was a new start altogether for them, but before he left Battersea he had given a new direction and impulse to the borough which has always been a pioneer of new ways.

OUT TO THE COMMUNITY

Tim Rignall

George's new kind of revolution had many advantages over the old style. For one thing it worked — for the benefit of all. It was not sectarian, but for everyone. It drew together people of every class and status. It was motivated by concern for all men and hatred of none. No one was to be liquidated. All were offered a part in making it work — Socialists and Tories, bosses and workers, churchmen and well-wishers, even former rebels. Its aim was the new world for which Christ gave His life. Its builders and participants were those ready to begin with reconstruction in their own lives.

It made news. Nearly all the South London newspapers reported it. The "Wandsworth Borough News" carried articles week by week about such people as Dr. David Sturdy, grandson of Wilson Carlile who founded the Church Army; John Thompson, Warden of Caius College Mission; Bob Riddell, working in the Borough Treasurer's Department; and a growing number of men and women in all walks of life who were beginning to find or rediscover the power of God to direct their lives, and to apply their faith to their work and circumstances.

The Mayor was Councillor W. J. McIver, Like many other Mayors of Battersea both before and after him, he was a railwayman and worked as a plater on the line. His concern was how the citizens of the borough were to be equipped in mind and spirit for the coming onslaught of Hitler's bombers, and how to get the whole community working together to meet the demands which the war effort would make on factories, homes and public services.

He gathered together a group of his leading citizens to consider what could be done. In this he had the backing of two Members of Parliament, Sir Harry Selley of Battersea South, and Colonel Doland of Wandsworth Central, and of Mrs. C. S. Ganley, J. P., the Labour candidate.

They recalled the pioneering traditions of Battersea in the past, and how it had led the way for others to follow. It might do so again. The famous Battersea power-station supplied electricity to the national grid, lighting cities and powering industrial plant throughout the length and breadth of Britain. They called on their people to make Battersea also a "spiritual power-house for the nation".

They invited those who were interested to a meeting in the Town Hall to think out how to do it, and asked George to be one of the speakers.

They were gratified by the response from civic leaders of both major parties, clergy, doctors, educationists and industrialists. Prominent among

them was Alderman A.A. (Tim) Rignall, a member of the Boilermakers' Union and the youngest alderman in the London area.

Tim had been brought up in poverty. His father came from East Anglia, where his grandfather earned a living as a thatcher. His father started life as an agricultural labourer near Huntingdon, but after serving in the army in the First World War he got a job on the railway and moved to London.

Tim loved and respected his father, who worked hard but had one tragic weakness. Much of his hard-earned wages went on drink. His wife, Tim's mother, was a frail little woman who suffered much from ill health. She struggled to care for the family, but it was difficult. They often lived for days on bread and dripping. Tim used to take a pillow-case and walk across the bridge to Chelsea to buy stale loaves cheaply from the bakers' vans returning from their rounds. A few twopenny pieces of meat made a stew.

His mother made his clothes, cut down from older boys' cast-offs. His only good suit was often at the pawnshop. When that happened he had to stay indoors on Sundays, having nothing respectable to wear.

At St. Georges School, Nine Elms, he worked hard and did well. Each morning before school he delivered a paper round, and at the age of nine he earned one shilling and sixpence every Saturday at a laundry.

When he was fourteen he left school and started his first full-time job.

His father was a regular reader of "The Railway Review", and from this journal Tim got his first insight into the workers' struggle for a fair wage. The railwaymen's motto was "Strike for need — not for greed". He was determined to play his part — not in the bitter and suicidal class-war, but in the constructive fight for a better deal for everyone.

His great heroes were the Tolpuddle Martyrs, those stout-hearted Dorset farm-workers who stirred the conscience of Britain in their day and suffered imprisonment and deportation "to preserve themselves, their wives and families from degradation and starvation". Like them, he believed that any change must grow out of Christian faith and character in people.

But how to achieve it? He went regularly to his local church and became superintendent of the Sunday School. He was convinced that in the teachings of Jesus was the best hope of a more just society.

Being a young man of ability and initiative he became a skilled craftsman in Dorman Long's steelworks, world-famous for their bridges, and an active member of the Society of Boilermakers, Shipwrights, Blacksmiths and Structural Workers. He recalls with pride their articles of association:

> "We are united together not to set class against class, but to teach one another that all are brothers, our greatest desire being to cultivate a close and lasting relationship between all those we have to deal with in undertaking our daily work."

Tim worked hard for the union. Before long he became a shop steward, representing the men in their negotiations with the management, and finally convenor of shop stewards. He was also Secretary of the Trades and Labour Council.

He took part in local politics, canvassed for the Labour Party and became an alderman of the borough at the early age of twenty-five.

All this reads like a success story. Skill and hard work had got him a good job. Drive and initiative had brought position and influence in the world of industry and local government. He had a charming wife and daughter and a home close to Clapham Common, within sight of the church where William Wilberforce worshipped and planned with the vicar and the Clapham Sect to free the slaves and work for "the moral and spiritual regeneration of Britain".

It was this latter element which Tim was finding difficult. Despite his early training in the faith, he felt growing frustration in his attempts to put it into practice in the factory and in his civic work.

In 1939 two visitors called at his home in Grandison Road. They were not quite like his usual visitors. The Rev. the Hon. St. Maur Forester had been a pioneer of motor racing and then a missionary in China. He was now vicar of Battersea. His companion Frank Ledwith, was a young executive in a firm of shipping insurers in the City.

Tim was out when they called, and his wife Lilian answered the door. The fact that they mistook her for the alderman's daughter made them all the more welcome. They said that they brought an invitation from the Mayor and briefly explained what it was about. Because the vicar had troubled to call, Tim decided to go to the first part of the evening with Lilian.

On the night Tim was immediately interested. The gathering included several of his fellow aldermen and councillors, the Rural Dean and clergy of other denominations, servicemen, businessmen, trades union men and women, students and housewives. George King was there, accompanied by fellow agitator-revolutionary Tod Sloan from the dockland of East London. They spoke of their decision to let God guide their lives and work together to create a new society at home and abroad.

What happened next is best described in Tim's own words:

"Mayor McIver asked me to take one of the speakers, Alderman Fred Welch of East Ham, with me to a meeting I had to go to. I did that and formed a close friendship with Fred. When we got to know each other well, Fred asked in friendly interest what my home was like. 'Like hell,' I said. So he just said 'Peace in the world has to start with peace in the home.' And that is where I had to start. The first things God said to me when I honestly listened to Him were:

'Be honest with your wife' (I knew what that referred to).
'Apologise to Capt. Abbott' (He was leader of the opposition in the Council. I didn't like him, because I was jealous of him).
'Make it up with the fellow on the next bench at work' (I had put twenty tons of steel on his bench in retaliation for the way he had hampered me. This apology made it possible for us to work together, and output in the factory was raised).

"Then there was our small daughter, Ann, aged four. I went into her room one evening to say goodnight. She had my hat and gloves on and my attaché case in her hand. 'Too busy,' she said, 'I've got a committee meeting!' That really set me thinking about the family and the home — how little time I had had for them, and the money I spent on smoking which ought to have gone into the home."

Tim gave up smoking to pay for a telephone. His family life was transformed. Lilian blossomed into a gracious hostess. Together they helped their daughter to grow in faith and find a purpose for her life. A year later they accepted an invitation to share the home in the vicarage in Plough Road.

Tim was now free to think clearly and creatively about the steelworks and the men who had elected him to lead them.

He had a habit of getting up at 5.15 each morning so as to have plenty of time for prayer and quiet before going to work at 7.00. He read both the Bible and the daily newspaper because he believed that God wanted him to be interested in who was doing what in the world of today, as well as in what had happened two thousand years ago. Then in the silence of the early morning he asked God to show him what to do about the people and the problems he would meet that day, and how to plan intelligently for the future.

Despite many difficulties and some disappointments, he built up in the factory a model of industrial teamwork. His allies were Jim Robinson a fellow shop steward, George Hobyn in charge of the power-house, Mr. Just the foreman, and many more. Together they kept the work going forward. This secured a livelihood for the men and their families and, when the country was at war, turned out the materials for the war effort.

This included the construction of vital components of the Mulberry Harbour which was used to land the supplies for the allied armies on the Normandy coast. It had to be made in sections, transported to isolated bays and inlets until the time for it to be towed across the Channel and assembled under gunfire and in a possibly choppy sea on the French coast. This called for work of the highest quality, a hundred percent precision, complete secrecy and non-stop effort.

Later they made the Bailey Bridges to carry the British and American armies of liberation across the rivers of France and Belgium into the heart of Nazi-occupied Europe. Failure in either of these assignments could have cost

many lives and put the whole enterprise in jeopardy. Both jobs were completed on time.

Incredible as it may seem, even at this time of dire peril wreckers and disrupters were travelling round to stir up trouble. To counter their activities, Tim and his men were called upon for help in creating a new spirit in docks, shipyards, mines and engineering works.

Ten years after the war, a similar request came from America. Tim went for a fortnight, but stayed for two years — so great was the need for what he could do.

As might be expected, he had his trials and tribulations. On his return from America, he found that he had been deprived of his place on the London district committee of the Boilermakers' union, on which he had served for twenty years.

Worse still, there were some in the Trades and Labour Council who did not like what he stood for. They probably thought that it interfered with their own class-war revolution. So they plotted and schemed to dislodge him from the chairmanship of that body. During an illness, he learned to his rage and chagrin that an old friend and colleague had been induced to supplant him. Furious as he was, he turned to God for help and advice. God said, "What does it matter, except to your pride, who is in the chair? You go and talk to Horace. Tell him you are sorry for your attitude, and promise to help him all you can. He will be just as good a chairman as you have been."

Horace Harling was a veteran pioneer of the Socialist movement. He had had to leave his native Rochdale, birthplace of the Co-operative Movement, because he was blacklisted by the employers for organising labour. He came south to look for work and now lived in Grandison Road, round the corner from the Rignalls., Life had often been a struggle for him, but now Tim's decision to support him led to the fulfilment of many of his hopes and longings. The two worked together for many fruitful years.

In 1966 disaster struck. Dorman Long decided to close their Battersea works, and all four hundred men were made redundant. There was wild talk of industrial action. Tim says, "God told me that it was my responsibility as shop steward to get busy and find every man another job." It seemed impossible, but by now he was getting to expect miracles, and he went to work. In two months all the men were again in employment — some in better jobs than they had had at Dorman's. The only man without a job was Tim.

He left Battersea and went to live on Merseyside. There he became postal messenger in Cammel Laird's shipyard, and the trusted friend and confidant of responsible men in the shipbuilding industry and repair yards. Some of them were enabled to meet and speak with one another and with their workers and competitors with honesty, openness and trust.

Approaching his eightieth year, he wrote with arthritic fingers, "We need to develop and carry forward our Christian heritage." Someone sent him this poem, which struck him so much that he sent it to many of his friends:

IF GOD WENT ON STRIKE

It is a good thing God above
Has never gone on strike;
Because He wasn't treated fair —
Or for things He didn't like.

If He had ever just sat down
And said, "That's it, I'm through,
I've had enough of those on earth
So this is what I'll do —

I'll give my orders to the sun,
'Cut off your heat supply';
And to the moongirl, 'No more light',
And run the oceans dry.

Then just to make it really tough
And put the pressure on,
Turn off the air and oxygen
Till every breath is gone."

You know He would be justified
If fairness was the game,
For no one has been more abused
Or treated with disdain.

Men say they want a better deal
And so "On strike" they go;
And what a deal we've given God
To whom all things we owe.

We don't care whom we hurt or harm
To gain the things we like;
But what a mess we'd all be in
If God should go on strike.

CHURCH MILITANT

One Hundred Million Listening

Tim believed in the Church and expected it to play a full part in the life of the community and its leaders. He encouraged his vicar to arrange services and meetings for civic, industrial and professional people to which he could bring his friends and colleagues. He helped to think out what needed to be said to the men of commerce and local government — knowing that the next day he would be with them in the factory, and probably also in the union meeting, council chamber or committee room in the evening, helping them to wrestle with their problems in the light of what they had heard.

But more was needed. To make an impact on the whole borough there would have to be a concerted effort. We needed a clear aim, a practical plan and a dedicated body of people to carry it through.

The aim was simple. In wartime London, nerves were often strained to the limit. Battersea was in the front line of attack from the air. Night after night Clapham Junction, the huge power-station, the riverside factories and the homes of the people were blasted by bombs. People everywhere wondered what the future would be for themselves and their country — and what they could do to make it secure.

The plan began to emerge. The growing co-operation between the churches and the civic leaders led to a proposal that the Mayor should commission a team of men and women to visit every home in the constituency with a message of faith in God's power to guide and sustain us all.

The new Mayor was Councillor Booth, another railwayman. He and his committee decided that their message could best be given in a small pamphlet, "One Hundred Million Listening". This was the reprint of a talk originally broadcast by Frank Buchman and then published with a foreword by the Earl of Athlone, the King's uncle. It said:

> "There is still a Supreme Source from which all can draw new power, new hope, new illumination. God speaks directly to the heart of every man and woman who is ready to listen and obey. A hundred million people listening to God can give the answer to war in the home and war in the world."

Tim and his friends wanted the people of Battersea to be among that hundred million. So, commissioned by the Mayor, a small but growing army of men and women went out "on the knocker" every evening and at the week-ends to deliver the message and to give what help they could in its practical application. Besides local residents and church members on the spot, many came from other parts of London and farther afield to take part in the campaign. Some temporarily made their homes in the borough.

In character and experience they were as diverse as it would be possible to imagine, but they worked together and became a considerable force.

Each day after work and an evening meal, they gathered in one of the church halls or a vicarage to pray and plan the evening's visits. Later they reported back and discussed what follow-up would be needed. On Saturdays and Sundays there were longer training sessions — on how to present the message acceptably, how to make friends and gain people's interest, how to help them with their doubts and difficulties, how to build them up in the faith and in the art of winning their friends.

Some found renewal in the sacraments of the Church. For those to whom these were still strange, there were Bible studies and the opportunity to pray and listen. For all there was the chance of a new start with God, a growing commitment to His will, and a deepening experience of His forgiveness and love.

Among the leaders of the campaign were naturally the clergy of five neighbouring parishes and ministers of the Free Churches.

The Rural Dean was the Rev. D. F. Kennedy-Bell. He said, "Anyone who is trying to get a hundred million people to listen to God has my fullest support." The Bishop of Kingston, the Right Rev. F. O. T. Hawkes, had been an amateur boxing champion, and packed a punch. He came to observe and stayed to encourage.

Veterans of the first world war joined in. Bert Green was churchwarden of St. Peter's. He had been seriously wounded in the 1914-1918 campaign in France, and still had a steel plate inserted in the side of his head. He wanted all church people, men, women and children, to be soldiers of Christ. More especially, his aim was "a chain of churchwardens" linking the spiritual life of the church with its administration.

Another old soldier was Douglas Baggs, the organist. He took immense trouble to ensure that the choir both understood and lived what they were singing about, and often told them what it had cost him to change over from being a dictator to a team-builder. He and his wife, Florence, and their daughter, Alfreda, were all killed on the first night of the blitz when a bomb fell on their flat. Until then all three had taken part in the house-to-house visiting. One women said of them, "It was through the practicability of their Christian living that I was led to a fuller surrender of my life to Christ's service."

Some of the younger men were awaiting their call-up into the armed forces. They used the time until that happened to get experience in Battersea. They slept in what they believed to be the safety of the cellar below the school — until an architect friend pointed out that a water-main, a gas-main and a sewer ran through the cellar, and that the ceiling was only one brick thick. Sensing that they were in danger of being drowned, gassed, and crushed, they

hastily looked round for other accommodation.

One of these was Frank Romer. He had been an avowed pagan. But now, having come to faith in God, he wanted to be trained in Christian life and action. Frank was a great one for selling books. He opened a stall in a big department store at Clapham Junction, and later took a supply with him into the army. He joined the Tank Corps and fought through the Italian campaign.

Bob Riddell was the leading spirit in all this. He had lived all his life in the neighbouring borough of Wandsworth and worked in the Treasurer's department at the Town Hall. When the army claimed him he was posted to the War Office in London, and so was able to stay with us in Battersea when he was off duty. He was both a soldier and a peacemaker. When the vicar's wife was heard to remark that her home was becoming more and more like a barracks, Bob appeared next day with a bunch of her favourite flowers, and sweetness and light were restored.

Life in the vicarage is described by Elisabeth Rhodes, who looked after our two lively children, Peter and Michael. In addition to that, she shared responsibility for the working of the household. She writes, "The vicarage was alive with people ;— some who lived there, some who came to talk, some who came to plan the work in parish and borough. Some came for a meal, others to stay and work.

"I remember a specially busy day. It was Monday and wash-day. In the evening many guests would arrive, several from overseas, for a party. Mrs. Botten, the cleaning lady, came as usual at 9.30 a.m. but it was evident that all was not well with her. She was upset, and whatever she touched seemed to fall to the floor. We decided to make a cup of tea and have a chat. Then it came out that her daughter was in bed with 'flu, and she was worried about leaving her on her own at home. What should we do on this busy day? We prayed together and asked God to show us. The same thought came to us all: "Mrs. Botten must go home to her daughter.' We gave her a lemon, precious in those days of rationing, and away she went, relieved and grateful.

"Norah Buckland and I stood together and prayed again, giving our fears to God. We believed that 'Where God guides He provides', but we did not see how He was going to do it this time. We tackled the washing, setting ourselves a deadline to finish it in time to get lunch. We made that, and felt happier. Then help came. The curate offered to clean the kitchen floor and get out the china for the evening. Two parishioners knocked on the door at 2 p.m. 'We've come to see if you need any help,' they said. They were welcomed with open arms and put to preparing the salad. As they did so, they told us that they did not know we had a party, but just had the thought to come. 'A miracle,' we said as we polished the silver and ironed the cloths. When his

day's work was done, another friend appeared and set to work peeling potatoes. Others came and laid the tables. When the guests arrived all was ready."

Another frequent visitor to the vicarage was David Sturdy. He and Bob became trusted friends of the civic leaders and of the editors of the two local newspapers.

David was a young doctor. His father was a much-loved general practitioner who had devoted his life to the people of Wandsworth and Battersea. David was following in his footsteps. He believed that two of the best medicines were faith and hope and, being of a practical disposition, he made sure that both the newspapers most widely read were supplied each week with the news which would lift the hearts and strengthen the resolve of their readers. The editors became firm friends and week by week published articles, letters, interviews and reports so that their readers could know what Tim, George, the Mayor, Members of Parliament and others like themselves were doing in all parts of the country, and have the chance to do something themselves.

On many a Sunday, after a full day of services, meetings and visiting, a small group, kept awake by relays of strong coffee, sat up late writing and typing news items and articles for the next week's editions.

Pat Hamilton was also a doctor. She was Assistant Medical Officer of Health, and a specialist in the care of mothers and children. She said, "Much ill health is caused by moral problems or wrong relationships in the homes. In every case where a real friendship has been built up by one of the campaigners, the result has been a new moral discipline, new cleanliness, new caring for the home and, above all, new attention to the upbringing of the children on the part of both parents. One man at least has had more to spend on the home since he gave up the drink."

George Walker was debarred from military service for health reasons; he was at a loss to know where or how he could make his contribution. He believed that God had a plan for his life, and hoped that in time He would reveal it. Meanwhile, he came to work with us in Battersea. There God called him to work in industry, and to build the teamwork so much needed there. He went for special training and then took a job in the giant Philips Electrical Company. There he was so effective in getting people to work together that he decided to make what he had learnt available on a wider scale by means of a news-sheet in which news and ideas might be exchanged. He made the acquaintance of a docker and an aircraft worker, and together they later launched what was to become "The Industrial Pioneer", which is read eagerly by all sections of industry and by Members of Parliament of all parties.

Dermot McKay had only one lung, but a large heart. He had nearly died of tuberculosis, but in a Norwegian sanatorium he had found God. Faith grew

and health improved, and Dermot was looking for ways of bringing his experience to others. He was one of the most enthusiastic of the hundred-million-listening campaigners. Being something of a poet and visionary, he had a remarkable insight into what goes on in the human heart, and each man's possibilities. He believes in the freedom of the Spirit and wants everyone to realise his full potential under God. Largely through Norwegian contacts, he has since the war made friends with many of those who have become disillusioned with life in the godless totalitarian states. With his scientist brother, Alwyn, he has translated Victor Sparre's book "The Flame in the Darkness", which tells the story of Alexander Solzhenitsyn and the "otherwise thinkers" who are turning with hope to the Christian West. He believes that out of their experiences of suffering and courage they may have much to give us.

Violet Ellis was an attractive redhead who lived close by the church and sang in the choir. She was engaged to a fine young sailor named Ted, and they were to be married as soon as he next came on leave. But at the critical moment Ted's ship was sent to the China station, and Ted went with it. Violet was nearly in despair. The war went on. Months became years, and her patience was sorely tried. There were other young men who would have liked to marry her, and her warm-hearted, impulsive nature nearly led her into disaster. What advice could her vicar offer? You can't organise other people's lives, yet this was a vital decision. He could at least encourage her to listen to God rather than to her own tumultuous emotions, and at a moment of acute crisis she was persuaded to delay a decision for six months, or until she was sure that she knew what God intended for her. In the next few weeks, He spoke clearly, "You are committed to Ted. He is the man for you. Keep faith with him, and you will be happy together." She knew that was right. After the war they were married and emigrated to Australia, where Ted built their house with his own hands.

Elsie Knebel was an artist — intellectual, free-thinking, Bohemian. She shared lodgings in Plough Road with Myra Treacher whose background was entirely different — respectable and rather proper — and whose father was a shopkeeper. The two young women found life together quite difficult, but they were honest about their reactions to one another, became firm friends, and were used to help other ill-assorted pairs to appreciate one another.

On Good Friday, 1972, when she was dying of cancer, Elsie wrote:

> "The Christian life is one joy after another, it seems to me. There I was — full of energy, never ill, hardly a cold in winter. Then suddenly — cancer, dependence on others, death not far away. But there has been joy round every corner.
>
> "There has been the marvel of God's provision, and a welcome to the homes of friends with care beyond belief.

"There is the joy of sins forgiven and relationships healed. Above all is the joy of having faith and hope to give to those who come to see me and to know that, when I am too weak to give anything, Jesus can give the most.

"Death is one more step in faith, and faith has always been an adventure."

Myra was doing her bit in the Auxiliary Fire Service. Not by nature an aggressive type, she had nevertheless declared war on evil in all its forms after reading a book lent to her by her brother. "For Sinners Only" was about how to deal with sin in ourselves and others, and she gave her life to God to be used in the struggle. After the war she married Henry Macnicol, a Scottish journalist and playwright. With him she travelled to Ghana, Nigeria, the United States and Switzerland. She became a skilled secretary and a gifted hostess. Some of the men who have done most for Africa were guests in the home she made in Lagos.

There were all sorts and conditions of men and women enlisted in the work.

Mervyn Young, full of restless energy and thirst for adventure, became a Spitfire pilot, and miraculously survived many a dog-fight with the Messerschmitts over south-east England and the Channel.

Michael Crowdy was a thoughful, studious young man who has since become a Roman Catholic priest.

And there were many more. Time — and space — would fail me to tell of Jack Hargreaves and George Humphries, the first to be called to the armed forces; Arthur Reynolds of the R.A.F.; Leslie Harrison, London cabby; Dr. Marguerite Stewart; Marion Reeves, teacher of domestic science; Bill Beet of the Fire Service and his wife Lily; Bernie Cocks who converted his boss's secretary, who then converted their boss; Algy Hankey, sidesman, who emigrated to Canada; Joyce Harris who succeeded Douglas Baggs as organist; and senior ladies like Lilian Tilby, Hilda Large, Helen Riddell and Nellie Nutt.

They were as different as beavers and bulldogs, but they had certain things in common. They had committed their lives and futures to God — their time, their talents, their possessions, their wills and imaginations to do God's will, whatever that might be and wherever it might take them. They worked to a strategy which they believed God had given them for reaching the heart of the community and making it into a power-house of the Spirit. They worked together and went all-out. Those who did not want to do that quietly slipped away and found other spheres of service; but those who came, and stayed, steadily grew in numbers and in faith and character and in the knowledge and love of God and of one another.

By the time the blitz put a stop to the visiting, they had called on 12,000 homes. Those who were interested were invited to small or large gatherings at which they were instructed in the Christian life, and to which they could bring their friends to be enlisted and trained.

The two men who gave most help with the planning and training were Kit Prescott and Michael Sitwell, old friends of Oxford days. Both of them spent their whole life and energy, without salary, in this work.

As a student, Michael had caught the vision of what God might do in the world through men and women wholly given to Him. Particularly he thought of the sportsmen who made the headlines. They could give a lead to the nation in the way of discipline, dare and dedication. Along with "Bunny" Austin, who with Fred Perry had won the Davis Cup for Britain (the last to do so!), and John Guise, the Middlesex cricketer, he made it possible for them to speak of their ideals through the press and on the radio. Once, by arrangement with the manager, they addressed the huge crowd over the loud-speaker system in the Arsenal Football Club stadium. It was largely Michael's inspiration which led so many of them to seek training in spiritual warfare before they were called to the war of arms.

Besides the young people, Michael won the respect and friendship of veteran trades unionists, experienced businessmen and civic leaders. They began to give a quality of leadership which astonished both their associates and themselves.

After two years in Battersea, Michael's turn came to be called up. He got a commission in the army, but was killed on the crossing to Normandy in the spearhead of the invasion forces. Ironically, he was in charge of one of the sections of the Mulberry Harbour which had been constructed by Tim and his men at Dorman Long's yard. In his last letter to Frank Romer he had written, "It is our task to build everywhere the character and faith which will carry this country through the troublous times after the war as well as during it, and to spread the sound ideas which will conquer the false ones which have wrecked Europe."

When the nightly bombing made evening visiting impossible in the homes, the air-raid shelters were visited instead. In the larger shelters, there were songs and talks and films in the lull between the crash and bang outside.

An energetic lead in this was given by Fred Garner. Everybody just naturally turned to him for help and advice. He was the local Solomon and dispenser of rough and ready justice. There was an occasion when a dispute broke out between two largish families over the right to one small shelter. Fred thought for a moment. Then he said, "All of you get in it, and the ones that can stick it the longest can 'ave it." This drastic suggestion at least made them face facts, and led to an amicable solution.

It was Fred, too, who organised a party for the men who were repairing windows and roofs shattered by the bombs. Theirs was a difficult job, and there were many complaints of favouritism and neglect. It was not easy to be fair to all. Fred decided that trust and appreciation were needed, and persuaded the housewives to invite the repair men to an evening meal and entertainment in a local hall. It was a huge success. Many of the men were far from home and family. They felt lonely as well as unfairly criticised. Now they were among friends, and roofs were put back on as fast as they were blown off.

John Sergeant was the curate of St. Peter's. In order to meet as many people as possible he decided to have one meal a day at the war-time Londoners' Meal Service restaurant. Most of the customers, with true British reserve, ate their meal in silence, but John made up his mind to introduce himself to one other man each time he went.

One of these new friends was Charles Neal. Charles was not in a happy state. He had lost a leg in a car accident, and his wife had left him. Rejected by the army he stumped round on his steel leg organising National Savings — though he had never saved a penny himself. Drink and women made far too heavy demands on his resources. When he met John he was ready for something new, and decided to be one of the hundred million. He gave his life to God, gave up boozing and womanising, and became a campaigner. The change in her husband was enough to make his wife, Jane, believe that it might be safe to come back to him after their six years of separation, but she watched warily at first. It was some years more before they at last got together again, but they remade their marriage. After the war they moved to America, where Jane belonged, and Charles became a minister of the Gospel. He soon had a congregation of a thousand.

Meanwhile, and before this happy outcome, there was the question of suitable lodgings for Charles — with Christian fellowship and away from temptation. John, who had by then become vicar of a neighbouring parish, and Ian Miller, who had succeeded John as curate of St. Peter's, invited him to join with them in the garden annexe of Old Battersea House. This had been built by Sir Christopher Wren in grounds which once ran down to the river. It was now something of a museum of Pre-Raphaelite art. The room in which they slept was dominated by a picture of an angel with the point of his sword resting on the naked back of a prostrate figure on the ground. He was irreverently christened by Charles, whose endless fund of wit was a source of refreshment, "Charlie Backscratcher".

The fourth member of the Old Battersea House community was Bill Stallybrass, a Captain in the Intelligence Corps and on General Eisenhower's headquarters staff (SHAEF). He had come to join in the work in Battersea because he knew that more than military victory would be

needed to secure the peace. Even in his own office, the British and Americans were finding it difficult. The English typists in their woollen khaki stockings were jealous of the smart American girls in their sheer silk hose. There was also his own attitude to people of a different social class from his. He says, "For me, with my bourgeois and officer background, it was an interesting experience to get to know Tim the steelworker and his wife Lilian." Above all there were his feelings about the French, whom he would be one of the first to meet when the liberation army landed on their coast. He had never liked the French. Miraculously the answers came to all these problems as he joined with the others who listened. The typists worked together. Bill and Tim became fast friends. God said, "You will learn to love France and the French." He did.

Gradually the air raids became fewer. There was better news from the fighting fronts, and we began to prepare for the peace. Ian Miller describes the night when victory was announced :

> The day began at 12.15 a.m., when 'Smiler' Monger, one of the Newcomen Road fireguards knocked us up with the news and offered to ring the church bell. I hastily put on trousers, sweater and jacket, and we groped our way up the tower in the dark, found the bell and informed the neighbourhood. When we came down, people were already trickling into the church. Soon nearly a hundred had assembled in various states of dress and undress. Led by the curate in pyjamas and jersey, we sang, 'Now thank we all our God.' Then we knelt and prayed and ended with 'God save the King.' By this time another forty or so had appeared, so we sang and prayed again with them. Two other smaller parties arrived. There was a young airman on leave with his wife and friends, and Nellie Nutt with her friend Mrs. Brown and her two bright-eyed daughters. It was 2 a.m. before we could turn out the lights. By that time there was a large bonfire blazing on the site where the Shakespeare pub had been until it was bombed to bits, and a piano-accordion was in operation.
>
> Next day we went up the Mall to the Palace. The crowd was immense. There must have been a thousand people swarming over the Victoria Memorial alone — rich and poor from every part of London. It was just a family occasion, and everyone loved it.
>
> What an explosion of goodwill there might be if we liberate this force in the hearts of the British people.

That was to be the task in the years ahead. Though the war of arms was over, the moral and spiritual struggle with evil would go on. We had to find a way to unite in a common endeavour to build a world where all would care for each and each for all.

We learned that if you are trying to do anything worthwhile, cheers and jeers are both going to be your lot. Both are potentially dangerous and we have to know how to handle them. "Woe unto you when all men speak well of

you" is a wholesome and necessary warning. Jesus encountered the criticism of the religious leaders and the hostility of those who wished to be left in peace and quiet.

I recall with shame how often I have recoiled from this prospect. What will the parish say if I urge stewardship upon them? What will the churchwardens do if I appear to spend more of my time with the lost sheep than with the ninety and nine? What will some of my colleagues think if I uphold the absolute standards of Christ against the landslide of the permissive society or the materialism which invades the Church? What might the bishop conclude if he gets critical reports from any of these people? Most wounding of all, what will my closest and most valued friends think of what I do — or do not do?

Fears like these have pressed upon me and sometimes made me a coward. One such occasion was during the war when we were trying to bring faith and courage to the families in the air-raid shelters. There were those who tried to stop us by making out that we were political. Some, perhaps because of what had happened to George King, called us Communists. Others, for no apparent reason except that fear makes men vicious and cruel, said we were Fascists. Others again said that we were neglecting the faithful few who came to church. And, anyway, who were these "outsiders" who came in the evenings and at weekends to help — and be helped?

It was unpleasant, and I had to go on my knees and confess my fears and tell God that, whatever anyone else were to say or think or do, I would with His help do what He asked of me as I listened in prayer day by day. This was a gigantic liberation of spirit, but it was a decision which had to be renewed again and again — and still does.

At this point names have to be withheld. It can, however, be recorded that I was most of all helped by a young man who had courageously faced a crisis in his own life. By nature a pacifist, he had become convinced that, to prevent an even more ghastly holocaust, Hitler had to be stopped — if necessary by force. So he withdrew his application for exemption from military service and applied for a commission in the army. This meant a painful break with family and friends who thought he was betraying their cause and pleaded with him to change his mind again. Daily he had to renew his commitment to God — and taught us all to do the same.

RECONSTRUCTION

The Earl and the Communist

In 1947 came a change of scene. As a farmer's son, I had always hoped for the chance to work for a spell in the country. Now, after the gruelling years in London and with the war at last over, the time for a move seemed to have come. A wealthy landowner made me a tentative offer of a living in the middle of rural England, and I agreed to meet him to discuss it.

We got along famously at the interview until I told him, among other things, of my association with the Oxford Group. At that point he hurriedly withdrew his offer. We parted amicably, but it was a shock.

As far as I was concerned, however, all was not lost. Quite unexpectedly, the Earl of Harrowby invited me to be vicar of the parish of Sandon, of which he was patron, in the green agricultural belt of Staffordshire. This time it was a different story. Frank Buchman had been a guest in his home years ago, and he had followed his work with keen interest ever since. "No one is doing more to bring people together and unite the nation," he told me. When the living became vacant, he had written to the Principal of Wycliffe Hall Theological College, saying that a vicar was needed for Sandon and, "If possible I should like one of Dr. Buchman's men."

My wife and I went to our new home and work in Sandon with eager anticipation — and many questionings. This quiet countryside with its farms and cottages and green fields was as different as could be from the crowded streets and busy factories of London's South Bank. There the men in industry, in the trade unions, in local and national government, in workshops and offices had begun to live relevantly to the crisis of the war years. Would what we had learned with them there be equally valid and relevant here in time of peace?

What could this tiny rural community do? These farmers and country gentry were the direct descendants of the yeomen who had been the backbone of England for centuries. Could their spiritual inheritance become again a leavening in fluence which would halt and reverse the drift to materialism in the towns and cities? There could never be any going back to the old ways. Change must come, but could it be the change of God's choice?

As these questions turned into prayer, the first glimpse of an answer began to appear.

John Ryder was the fifth Earl of Harrowby. He was an old man now, but still alert and erect. For twenty-one years he had been Lord Lieutenant of

Staffordshire. He came of a long line of statesmen who had sat for eight generations in the House of Commons or the Lords. One of them had been Foreign Minister to the younger Pitt. Another was Lord Chancellor. All had been loyal churchmen.

Lady Harrowby had been born in the same year as Queen Mary. She and her husband had just celebrated their Golden Wedding. A service of thankgiving in the beautiful old thirteenth century church had been followed by the planting of an oak in the park. In the evening illustrious ancestors looked down from their oil paintings on the walls of the candle-lit dining-room, as dinner was served on the silver plates which the first Baron Harrowby had used when entertaining diplomats and statesmen in the chancelleries of Europe.

Perhaps it was the memory of the past which made the old gentleman think anxiously about the future.

One gloriously mellow October afternoon, the Earl and the new vicar strolled through the grounds of Sandon Hall and talked about these things.

The typically English countryside stretched away on all sides, but only a few miles to the north were the smoky chimneys of the potteries and the coalmines. The Black Country was about the same distance to the south.

Out of a long experience of life the Earl began to recall the men and moments which had given him hope. He had recollections of kings and princes and statesmen of many countries and several generations. He said, "I have been thinking about what is needed in the world today. My time may be short. I want to do what I can before I go. I should like to have the Oxford Group people out here for an afternoon, or if possible for a weekend, to meet with some of the leaders of industry and discuss with them how to get all our people working together to build a future better for all."

So it was arranged. The Earl sent invitations to the industrialists, trades union leaders, clergy and professional men and the County. A surprising number came — titled people, the heads of the largest firms in the Midlands, workers in factories and mines.

In the evening the Earl took his guests to a performance of the industrial drama, "The Forgotten Factor". This was performed on an improvised stage in the canteen of Dorman's Engineering Works, a large firm making marine engines in Stafford. The play shows how the toughest human problems, in the home and at the factory, can be solved when men change and are guided by God. Those who saw it were emphatic that it must be taken to the coalfields and the Black Country.

It is probable that the Earl did not realise quite what he was setting in motion or how wide would be the repercussions of what he did. But he said later, "This play must go to Birmingham and the huge industrial complex

surrounding Britain's second city." Nobody could see how that was to be done. But undoubtedly God had spoken and was already working it out. One of the guests at the Sandon weekend was Sir Geoffrey Mander. He took the Town Hall in Wolverhampton for two nights and invited the leadership of the neighbouring towns. Among them was Roy Pinsent, a well-known industrial lawyer. He was so impressed with what he saw and heard that he found a way to bring the play to Birmingham for a fortnight during the British Industries Fair. The miners also insisted that it must tour the coalfields. They booked the Queen's Hall in Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent, for a week and arranged for it to tour the West Midlands. So the God-given but humanly impossible vision came to pass.

The results were startling. As men found new faith, old animosities disappeared. Trust was born between miners and managers. Responsible leadership began to show itself on all sides. The President of the Midlands Miners Federation said, "When MRA comes in, Communism goes out, absenteeism goes down and production goes up."

He had been a churchman all his life, but had begun to despair of creating anything approaching a Christian spirit in his delegate conferences. Now he saw hope.

That hope was further strengthened when two years later there was a crisis in the National Union of Mineworkers. The Communists already had their party man as General Secretary. Another Communist with powerful backing was regarded as a certainty for the Vice-Presidency. He would be President within months and they would have this vital industry in their grip. It was not to be. Thanks to the inspired, resolute leadership of the men in the Midlands, trained to understand the moral and ideological and spiritual issues at stake, a man of Christian conviction became head of that powerful organisation.

Many of the men who have given their lives to the Marxist revolution and the class-war have done so because they despaired of ever finding any other way of putting right injustices and ending oppression and exploitation. Here was a better way being offered to them, and not a few were ready for it.

One of them was Frank Newman. He literally bore the scars of twenty years' campaigning in the "working-class struggle". Fighting in the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, he was nearly buried alive in a tank trap and suffered crippling wounds. For sixteen years he was on the Midlands Executive of the Communist Party. A Birmingham professor went to him for instruction in Marxist theory. He led marches to London and twice went to prison for his activities.

As a boy and young man, the poverty in his home had made him savagely bitter. To keep the family, his mother took in washing, and young Frank had to take it round to their better-off neighbours, hating them as he did it. He

greatly resented that his mother, whom he truly loved, should have to do this while others appeared to live in luxury and ease. The only way that he could see of changing things was to liquidate the boss class altogether and for the workers to take over.

By the time he was forty he was hard and bitter and miserably unhappy. He was already becoming disillusioned with the methods and policies of the Communist Party. He believed that they were callously exploiting the people's sufferings for their own advantage. But he retained his Marxist theories and his enthusiasm for the class-war.

That is, until he met Bill Ingles. Bill worked in a shoe factory and attended the same union meetings as Frank. But he was a churchman, and saw his Christianity as a more thorough-going revolution than Marxism because it changes people and so can change everything.

At a regular union meeting, the advertised speaker had failed to turn up. So Frank, like any good Communist, had stepped in and put over the party line with his usual passion and vigour. When he had finished it looked as though he had effectively silenced any possible opposition — as he had so often done before. Then Bill, somewhat nervously, rose to his feet and said that there was another possible solution to the problem they were discussing. It was based on a factor which is often forgotten — or disregarded. That was the power of God to change people. People were more likely to change their ways through being inspired than by being bullied. His speech was received with murmurs of approval from many who thought the same way but were too timid to say so. Newman was surprised and shocked that anyone should have the temerity to answer him. But, being a fair-minded man, he went up to Bill at the end of the proceedings and congratulated him on his courage.

They struck up a friendship and Bill lent him books. Soon Frank was intensely interested. At the next union meeting he suggested that they should have a speaker on what was till then a quite new idea to most of them, and it was agreed to invite one of the miners who had been at Lord Harrowby's reception at Sandon Hall. A miner from Glebe Colliery told them how a workmate in his pit had been so greatly changed that industrial relations had been revolutionised and their colliery, which had been threatened with closure because of continual disputes, had been able to continue working and even raised its output target.

After that things moved rapidly. Frank met more people, asked more questions, read more books.

Finally he made his decision. He called his family together one evening, and told them he was going to make a new start. He said he was sorry for the rotten kind of husband and father he had been. (He had left them twice). Then he said, "You all know far more about God than I do, so I shall need your help. I can't do it without." Then they knelt by the fire and prayed, asking

God to take them and keep them and use them.

It was the start of a new life for them all as a family. They had all been afraid of Frank before. His elder boy, young Frankie, said that father's presence had been like a dark cloud in the house, which lifted when he went out and descended upon them again when he came in. Now they all trusted each other because they got honest about things. Frank told his wife that the extra two shillings and sixpence which always appeared on the bill when he paid it really went on cigarettes; and Madge told him that many a five shillings which his mother had given her for him she had kept for herself.

Frank had always thought in terms of changing the world, and he was now even more determined. This time he would do it in God's way, and he knew he had to start with those nearest to him.

That meant Madge's parents. He had been at odds with them from the start. They had not approved of their daughter's marriage to him. That was hardly surprising because at the time of their wedding Frank had been so ill that he had to be brought to the church in an ambulance. Moreover, they belonged to a class against which he had declared ruthless war. He had once, in a rage, knocked his father-in-law down. So putting things right with them was a tough proposition. But he did it. And that Christmas Madge's mother came into their home for the first time in the sixteen years of their married life.

Then there was his brother. George had publicly denounced him as a traitor to the working class and disclaimed him as a brother. He came at Christmas with the gift of a goose.

Frank now felt free to do what he had always wanted to do and reach out to the people who must build the new world. He talked to his old comrades in the Party. He introduced speakers at the Trades Council, and addressed large gatherings of dockers in Liverpool and influential businessmen in London. Summoning his slender resources of strength he travelled to an international assembly in Switzerland and spoke with workers and statesmen from many parts of the world.

Frank was never one for half-measures. He said, "I want to do this properly, and I seem to remember that there is a thing called 'baptism'. I should like to know about that." The vicar said, "Yes, and at your age it ought to go along with confirmation. If you are really serious, will you come for a course of instruction?" "I should like that," said Frank.

He had an eager enquiring mind. He wanted to be told:

The basic truths about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit;
how to deepen and develop his life with God, and become more like Christ;
how to read the Bible intelligently, and study God's way of dealing with men;

what to do with temptation;
how to be forgiven — and to forgive;
how to change difficult people;
how to meet opposition from friend or foe;
what to do when things go wrong. Being a hundred-per-center himself, he was keenly appreciative of the help which absolute standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love can give in getting to the root of the trouble. He was not interested in half-truths or part cure. He wanted things right;
how to win others to the way of life which really satisfies and will influence the way the world goes.

After a twelve-week course Frank came with his wife and three children to the beautiful old church at Sandon and was received and commissioned in the full fellowship of the militant Church. Three of his colleagues in the Labour Party and several of his miner friends came to be with him. The young fellow who in the previous twelve months had stuck to him closer than a brother, living in his home and helping him to fight his battles, was his sponsor. Frank chose the hymn, "When I survey the wondrous Cross". It was not perhaps one of those most frequently sung at a baptism, but it put into words what he wanted to express.

Shortly afterwards the Bishop of Lichfield, the Right Rev. E.S. Woods, came to confirm him. The Earl was there, too, to assure him of his friendship and support.

Frank continued to give himself unsparingly, but his physical frame was worn out and in the week before Easter he died. He had suffered much, but his new-found faith upheld him. When he had to go to hospital his first request was for the Holy Communion to be brought to him. Just before he lost consciousness he asked his wife, who was watching by his bed, to say the Lord's prayer, and then to sing the hymn he had chosen for his baptism. At last he murmured, "I must go now. The door is open." A few minutes later he had gone. It was the passing of a man who had found fulfilment.

HEART OF BRITISH INDUSTRY

Miners and Potters of Stoke-on-Trent

Others besides the Earl were convinced that a healthy industrial climate was vital for the regeneration of Britain. The Rev. John Burden, formerly minister of Hilltop Methodist Church, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent, writes:

During the war I had served as chaplain to the army in India and returned home by way of America. While I was there, Hiroshima was bombed and Japan surrendered. The great world war was over, but who was going to construct a lasting peace, and how was it to be done?

I came back to Europe in 1945 with these questions in my mind, and I reflected on what I had seen and heard.

Part of my stay in the United States had been spent at the Moral Re-Armament conference centre at Mackinac Island, where they were also thinking about these things. Many believed that the future would be won or lost largely in the world of industry; and Alan Thornhill had written and produced a play to be presented in theatres, civic halls and works canteens to be a tactical weapon in the struggle to restore God's authority in that vital salient. He called it "The Forgotten Factor".

Back at home I met a fellow minister who had the same idea. Norman Baker had charge of a church in the heart of the North Staffordshire coalfield and the centre of the British pottery industry. He asked me to join him on the staff of the Burslem circuit, and I gladly agreed.

We prayed to be shown how to set about making the forgotten factor of God a practical reality to the 20,000 who worked in the area. In the war of arms we had seen the overriding need of a strategy for our military operations. Now we assumed that the Holy Spirit must have a strategy for the spiritual warfare in which He called us to engage, and little by little we began to glimpse what it might be.

The Midland mining fraternity was deeply imbued with the traditions of Methodism. Wesley himself had preached to huge crowds at the famous Mow Cop and in the open spaces between the collieries. In contrast with the continental trades unions, which are mainly Marxist in ideology, the British Labour movement had its roots in Christian faith and principles. Many of the men in the mines and potteries still cherish these ideals.

So, for a start, we went to see the manager of the pit nearest to where Norman Baker lived. This was George Sanders, a hardworking, jovial man who welcomed us into his office at the Sneyd Colliery.

We told him about Thornhill's play, and he decided to take a party of miners and their wives to one of its first performances in London.

They came back full of what they had seen on the stage and learned from meeting and talking with the cast afterwards. "It is a wonderful play," they said. "It shows what is needed and what can be done." Everyone was enthusiastic, but Norman's next suggestion took my breath away. "Why not parties from every pit in the coalfield to see 'The Forgotten Factor'?" Why not, indeed — but how?

The National Union of Mineworkers had their area office just round the corner from George's colliery. Their leaders were Arthur Baddeley, President (a Methodist lay preacher) and Harold Lockett (a keen Anglican) who had recently succeeded Hughie Leese as Secretary and Agent. These three men were already familiar with the ideas we wanted to promote, through their friendship with another Staffordshire man, Frank Bygott. Frank was the son of a country vicar. He had been one of the group who had helped to bring the "new illumination" to Oxford in the early thirties, and was determined to do all he could to bring it to the work-a-day world. With little money and no official status, he rode round the country on his bicycle calling on people whose names were suggested to him in his early morning time of prayer. Few of them refused to see him when he telephoned for an appointment. It was he who first talked to the Earl of Harrowby on the subject — pedalling up the driveway to Sandon Hall in the uniform of the National Fire Service and informing the footman that he had an appointment with his Lordship. Similarly he had presented himself at the offices of the Coal Board area manager, Mr. I.W. Cumberbatch, and of the miners' union.

So Baddeley, Leese and Lockett were ready for us. They made arrangements for Norman and me to address the N.U.M. Council at one of their monthly meetings.

It was the first time that either of us had ever done such a thing or met such a group of officials. We had to wait until their regular business had been concluded, and were then introduced and invited to speak. We found that under a somewhat rugged exterior they were a warm-hearted lot and listened attentively. We told them about "The Forgotten Factor" and what it had done for the people of Sneyd Colliery, and offered two tickets for the play in London to each of the delegates.

Baddeley and Lockett wrote a joint letter to the branch secretaries of all the collieries, urging them to make good use of this opportunity to create the new spirit which would be needed when nationalisation came into effect, as it was shortly to do. Somewhat to our consternation, they also asked Norman and me if we would visit every pit in the area ourselves to make sure that they all understood what was being offered.

We had our church work to do, but we reckoned that this was all part of it. So we set out through the snow and ice of that bitter winter of 1947 and talked to them all.

Parkhall Colliery was a typical example of the response. Their delegate was Albert Bentley. He was one of the first to take action. At their branch meeting they discussed what to do about the tickets he had been given. Albert said, "Well, it's got the blessing of Mr. Leese and the Council. I think we should go and investigate, and I am willing to be one to do so."

Altogether seventeen pits sent representatives. They were deeply moved by what they saw and heard. Many of the men found that their attitudes to their workmates and families were challenged and changed. Among them were Aaron Colclough of the Glebe Colliery, Joe Conway of Great Fenton, Tom Smith of Berryhill, Ted Dutton of Norton, Percy Wright of Hem Heath and many more.

On one occasion they had to arrange for a special train to take all who wanted to make the journey to the Westminster Theatre in London, where "The Forgotten Factor" was playing to full houses.

Albert Bentley spent a whole week in London, speaking each evening from the stage, introducing the play before the curtain rose. He said, "Give us this new spirit not only in our hearts, but also in our homes and industry, and we will get all the coal Britain needs from the pits."

Finally someone said, "Everybody ought to see this play. Why not get it to come to North Staffs?" Harold Lockett formed a committee, and Alderman Kemp, the Deputy Lord Mayor, agreed to be its chairman. They booked the Queen's Hall, Burslem (seating 2,000), for three nights and one afternoon. Tickets were printed and offered to the men as they came off work.

The miners and their wives poured into each performance.

Mr. Tom Collier, Coal Board Labour Officer, spoke of a desire already sown in the hearts of both men and management to put this new spirit into operation.

Mr. Roland Bennett, the new Area General Manager, said, "During these weeks the production chart in my office has gone steadily upwards — and stayed up." In fact, the flags which were flown from the pitheads when their weekly target was reached, were seen blowing in the wind week after week, in spite of the fact that those targets were regularly being raised higher. Bill Yates, N.U.M. President at the Victoria Colliery, reported that the original target there had been 8,000 tons. This was raised first to 9,000 tons and then to 10,000. This had been exceeded nineteen times, and in two consecutive weeks output had been over 11,000 tons. Aaron Colclough reported similar increases at the Glebe Colliery and Ted Dutton at Norton. Lockett and Baddeley gave it as their considered opinion that "This spirit in every

coalfield would ensure national recovery. It has brought to the hearts of many the new incentive our industry needs."

Before long, the North Staffordshire men were receiving requests to take their experience to the coalfields of Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Yorkshire and South Wales.

And abroad. After the collapse of one totalitarian tyranny in Europe and under threat of another, governments and peoples were asking where the qualities could be found which would make industrial democracy work. In particular, Dr. Buchman was asked by the leaders of Western Germany to go there with the men and women who could fill the ideological vacuum after the war and turn back the tide of materialism. The men from the mines were clearly the men for the job. So, with some two hundred others, they toured the industrial cities of the Ruhr, speaking at great meetings, conferring with works councils, living with the workers and their families in their homes. With the backing of their managers, but often at the cost of lost wages, Aaron Colclough went to Germany and Sweden; Will Macneal, under-manager of Parkhall Colliery, travelled to Holland; Jim Lymer to France; Bill Yates to America.

Chancellor Adenauer and Foreign Minister Schuman had not yet announced their plan for a European Coal and Steel Community, but it was already clear that industrial co-operation would be vital to the future.

Such co-operation is the practical result of the moral and spiritual struggle for the soul of a nation — and enables it to secure its freedom and serve others. The manager of a German colliery explained, "In my mine, Nordstern, where the men had elected 90% Communist representatives, and which had become notorious for its messages of support to Communist countries, the men and the atmosphere have so changed that people come from many countries to find the answer here. The Indian Minister of Labour and Planning, Mr. G.L. Nanda, has just told me that he has learnt more in two days with us than in the rest of his European tour put together."

Encouraged by this, Harold Lockett and others with equal foresight and statesmanship decided to hold a European Miners' Rally, at which they could plan with the heads of the industry and their workers in France, Germany, Holland and other countries. At their invitation 2,000 people gathered in the Victoria Hall, Hanley, on 20th June 1948.

It can be said that, though the struggle still goes on, the leadership which these men gave has lasted more than a quarter of a century; and there are signs of a new stirring of the spirit today.

ALL CHANGE BASED ON PERSONAL CHANGE

The Devil at the Coal-face

Aaron was a miner — gnarled, rugged, tough as they come. For thirty years he had spent his days a thousand yards deep in the rocky earth hacking out coal — and quarrelling with the management. His chest was filled with grit dust and his heart with bitterness. He was drunk two or three nights a week (Saturdays for sure) and his family lived in terror of him. So did others. Mr. Cashmore, the under-manager of the colliery, said that he would rather meet the devil at the coal-face than Aaron Colclough. Cashmore was a staunch churchman. He sang in the choir every Sunday, but he could do nothing about Aaron. He was not pleased when Aaron was elected to be the men's representative in their dealings with the management.

The theatre was not ordinarily any part of Aaron's scene, but he found himself one evening sitting in the Queen's Hall, Burslem, spellbound by "The Forgotten Factor" to which he and other men from the collieries had been invited by their union leaders.

He recognised it as real life. It was about the kind of people he lived and worked with every day. There was the union leader with a chip on both shoulders and the boss with rubble where his heart should be — and their suffering families.

Aaron chuckled as he watched their quarrels and fights, but he was thoughtful, too. Those families had ended up by actually making friends and working together.

He would have been astonished if he had known that this down-to-earth play had been written by an Oxford don and clergyman. The Rev. Alan Thornhill says himself that he had lived far from the gritty world of factories and coalmines. He moved in such a rarefied atmosphere of scholarship and pedantry that a split infinitive sent a shudder through his nervous system — until he accepted the calling of God to think and live for the ordinary man and learn to speak his language. This play was one of the results. He says it wrote itself.

It enthralled Aaron. This was his family and his coalmine. And this was the factor which (or Whom), in spite of his Methodist upbringing, he had forgotten or disregarded. In the past he had been preached at, argued with, threatened and cursed — all with disappointing results. Now, for the first time his spirit was moved. He saw what he had become and what he was doing to those about him. "I knew I had to change," he said, "or give up all idea of

leading the men." He was thinking of the men for whom he was responsible as Branch Secretary of the Mineworkers' Union at the Glebe Colliery.

So next day he called at the manager's office, determined to make a new start with him. He apologised for his past behaviour and said he wanted to co-operate with the authorities for the welfare of the men and the smooth running of the pit. This was received somewhat coolly and with a scepticism which a few days later appeared to be all too well-founded.

During a heated argument at the Consultative Committee, Aaron again lost his temper and called the manager names. This was a return to the old form. Aaron used to call this deliberative body the "Insultative Committee" because of the insults which flew like explosive darts across the table. It was where he had often enjoyed himself most. This time he was stricken with remorse. But, being by long association versed in the ways of the devil, he recognised his tactics now and determined not to be beaten. He sought out the manager again to express his regret, but was curtly dismissed. Now, however, his natural cussedness came to the rescue. He followed Mr. Cashmore down the mine and at the bottom of the shaft repeated his apology. The manager looked at him for a moment, and then held out his hand. "I think you really mean it," he said.

Looking back on the incident, Aaron explained, "That was the beginning of my real faith in God. I had never been an out-and-out atheist, but I had not been much of a Christian either. When I started to live the way I knew I should, I knew God was real. When the apology to Mr. Cashmore was done, I was given the courage to go on and do more."

What he did was to tell the men roundly that he would fight hard for what is right, but not just to make trouble for the management. In his words, "I got far better agreements for my members than I ever did by bullying and bluster, and the men knew it. They re-elected me because they trusted me. So did the management. In fact we got everyone thinking for everybody and the colliery became a family.

"That is what saved the pit from closure on at least four separate occasions, and saved our jobs with it.

"Mind you, the difficulties were not all due to human nature — though most of them were. But there were geological faults as well, which at one time made it look as though further work would have to be abandoned. Everyone was worried.

"By this time I was beginning to pray each day about these problems in people and in the pit. One morning as I did so, I had an idea how our development plan could be revised to overcome a real nasty fault in the seam where we were working. I took this suggestion to the manager, and after doing some calculations of his own, he put my plan into operation. That was an unheard of thing, but it worked, and our colliery went on with increased production

and with a still greater spirit of trust and friendship."

Speaking to a somewhat sceptical friend, Aaron said, "You know, Ernie, there is no doubt about it, nationalisation would never have worked any better than the old private ownership if it hadn't been for fellows like you and me finding a better way of living."

That better way was a simple one. Aaron simply said, "Whatever God tells me to do I will do", only partly realising at the time what he was letting himself in for.

He soon found out. He and his friends discovered that God was concerned with more than just an adequate supply of coal to keep the home fires burning and the wheels of industry turning, or with reunited families and right relations between people, but with the fate of whole nations and the healing of the desperate divisions between classes and races which can be exploited to tear countries apart.

One such country was Sweden. With all its wealth and welfare and tradition of neutrality, Sweden was now under pressure in the strategy of the cold war. Its very affluence and apparent immunity had brought their own problems and perils. Someone had the idea that what was happening in the Midlands of England was exactly what was needed there, and that Aaron was the man to be the ambassador of the idea.

There were serious difficulties. Aaron's wife was ill, and he did not want to leave her. But she was a courageous woman. She knew that something remarkable had happened to the old reprobate who was her husband. If God was asking him to do this thing, he must do it. So, after they had prayed together, she said, "Aaron must go. I shall be all right." And she was. Aaron went to Sweden with a free spirit and was back with her to support and sustain her in the last few weeks before she died.

The following year he was a guest in the homes of the workers of Germany. Under his granite exterior he had a warm heart and felt deeply about the ruins and want which were the aftermath of war. He had learned to forgive old enemies, and he wanted to help them rebuild.

There was much need, too, for rebuilding in his own family. After his wife's death, he married Minnie who also had a family of her own. She was a good wife to him, but the two families found life difficult together. Aaron made a start by putting right what he could with one of his sons-in-law. That brought hope to the rest.

Aaron died in the sanatorium. The pneumoconiosis, caused by years of breathing gritty dust into his lungs, got him in the end. When I last saw him, he was telling the men in his ward how God had changed his life, and of the miracles of God he had seen on his travels.

SALT, LIGHT, LEAVEN

The Church in the Community

In 1957 we moved from country to city.

At Longton, one of the Five Towns, the men and women who gathered Sunday by Sunday, and occasionally on week-days as well, to worship God and seek His guidance and grace for their lives and their work sometimes seemed to be a small company compared with the crowds outside. But their influence was, or could be, out of all proportion to their numbers. They were part of the pulsing life of the great city in which they lived and worked. There was hardly a single section of the city's life in which one or more of them was not to be found.

Being predominantly a mining area, most of the men — like Harry Steele and his six brothers — worked in the pits until all too frequently they suffered injuries which forced them to seek other employment. Their difficult and dangerous work binds them together into a fraternity of responsible men. Their links with the Scottish, Welsh and Yorkshire coalfields and their clubs and male voice choirs give them a cultural sense of corporateness which makes them a force to be reckoned with.

The other major industry is the pottery for which Stoke-on-Trent is famous. Our men and women were there, too. Raymond Burgess has his own small family potbank, but others work in the huge combines which produce thousands of dozens of tea sets or dinner sets a week. Raymond Elkes is sales manager at one of them. For the most part, the men do the making and the women the decorating — and an exquisitely beautiful job they make of it.

Its products go to the ends of the earth, earning dollars but also very often carrying a message of goodwill in commemorative mugs, medallions, plaques. Josiah Wedgwood was a friend of William Wilberforce, and produced a special dinner service for the wealthy merchants of Bristol and London. As their soup was consumed there appeared on the bottom of the plate a picture of a black man in chains with the legend, "I too am a brother". But the industry as a whole has also set a pattern of industrial co-operation for our own country.

In the other trades and businesses, Bill Hurst is an electrician; Bill Maddock, Norman Meaken and Ron Scadden are in the building trade; Arthur Baynham and Raymond Leese work for the City Council. Frank Lockett is an engineer. Fred Cliffe, Frank Meadows and Hilda Banks are, or were, in the civil service. George King and Arthur Roberts are in the

wholesale and distributive trade. Tom Latham drives a coach. George Britten and Michael Beardmore are also concerned with transport. Harry Tunnicliffe is in insurance. Alan Evans is a police officer.

Links with the professions were equally close. Charles Healey, old soldier and rugger player, was Honorary Physician at the North Staffs Royal Infirmary. Fred Clark was President of his branch of the British Optical Association, and of the Longton Rotary Club. His wife, Enid, was Chairman of the Inner Wheel. Beatrice Banks had been a hospital matron. Harry Powell worked at the Stallington Mental Hospital, and Mr. Salt was on the committee. Helen Crookes was a doctor's receptionist.

In the world of education there was Kathleen Moseley (headmistress), and Raymond Colclough (head of biology department). Tom Grainger was caretaker at a large comprehensive school. Joan Ashford taught for a year in Sierra Leone.

All these were God's men and women out in the world where decisions are made. Many of them had close friendships with members of the City Council, business associations and professional bodies of all kinds. Together with the many other churches and chapels and religious groups in the city they had many opportunities of making their voices heard and their influence felt.

Guy Cornwall-Jones was assistant curate at the parish church. In addition to leading the worship in the two churches and instructing young and old in the faith, he met students from many countries, particularly those of West Africa, who were in Britain to study ceramics, mining and management. One of them, we were told later, was using the opportunity to smuggle explosives out of the country. He ended by blowing himself up in an attempt to assassinate members of his own government while they were meeting in their parliament building. But there were others who were eager to know how to build their emerging societies on moral foundations.

Raymond Simpson, who succeeded Guy, conducted a course on Current Affairs at the College of Further Education. There he made friends with Geoff Thorley. Geoff was Student President, and a young man with ambitions. Instead of pursuing selfish ends, he set out to find a job which would truly serve the community.

Raymond's great passion was the Bible, and the need to get it out to the far parts of the earth. He got many people working with him on this and financed a new edition for the Kalenje peoples of East Africa.

But the clergy regarded it as their main task to help the lay people to win their friends and to become the leaven in the community, changing its character and quality.

Garth Lean writes in "Rebirth of a Nation?":

"The real Christian revolution is one that begins by transforming the self-centred motives of the individual and goes on to change his relationships with everyone. It is the overflowing of God's love into every corner and structure of society. It is, in fact, the operation of the power which raised Jesus from the dead, bringing the full dimension of change — social, national and international change, all based on personal change." (P.36).

Often we were oppressed by the enormity of the problems confronting us. Even life-long churchmen asked, "What can any of us do?" It was all too easy to take refuge in moans and groans and grumbles, which quickly turn to criticism, blame and anger. They are the fuel of violence.

We decided that our dissatisfaction with things as they were should be a spring-board to action. The Saviour of the world must have a plan for putting right what is wrong, and we determined to find it. Our motto was, "Anybody who feels something, DO something", and those who were ready to take responsibility for what they believed to be wrong, and to take the problem to God in prayer, were often told what to do about it. When they stood up to be counted — not with a mere protest, but with a plan — they may have found themselves with a fight on their hands, but there was often a surprising amount of support as well. At least they were doing something positive. This encouraged the faint-hearted and frequently succeeded in its objective.

At times they had at first to stand alone, and that takes courage. One man said to me, "You have no idea what it takes to stand up in a mass meeting and say that you do not think that a particular strike action is justified, to say, 'It would be disastrous to our industry, our families, the general public and the country. So, let's get on with the work.' It takes more guts than I have."

Often, however, they found strength in numbers. That is why the Church has to be an army as well as a fellowship. Even then, however, one or two usually have to find the courage to begin.

My wife, Norah, had parents coming to her because they were more and more worried and angry at what their children were being taught through television. This took place not in the special children's programmes as much as in the ordinary course of their watching and listening. The general assumption that faith in God, loyalty to one another and purity in personal life were no longer part of normal life in this self-sufficient generation, and the assiduous promotion of the permissive society, seemed to them to be damaging, if not criminal. So, what could be done about it?

Norah had a friend who was a senior teacher in a comprehensive school in Wolverhampton. Mary Whitehouse had found that her pupils were being seriously misled by the amoral and sometimes immoral philosophy they were seeing on TV. Promiscuity? Everybody does it. Fidelity? Nobody cares. Patriotism? Positively dangerous. Authority? Just an excuse for self-assertion and bullying. God? All right as long as He doesn't interfere.

So Norah Buckland and Mary Whitehouse got together to pray and to seek from God a plan of action.

After interviews with the press and a number of smallish meetings, they took the Town Hall in Birmingham for a public demonstration. The cynics expected an audience of a hundred or so old ladies. In fact, more than 2,000 of all ages packed the huge hall. "The Times" reporter told me afterwards that he had been impressed by the number and calibre of those who came and by the good sense of the speakers.

The two women then launched a manifesto setting out what the many who had spoken or written to them expected of a responsibly administered television service. Many wanted a change, and this was their chance to say so. 300,000 signed the manifesto and it was presented to the Postmaster-General at the House of Commons.

Church people and agnostics who valued Christian moral standards were finding a voice. Not all agreed with them but they had to be taken seriously.

Raymond Colclough, when head of Religious Instruction in a large comprehensive school, was alarmed by the general assumption that no one was any longer interested in religious education. He undertook detailed research into the attitudes of the general public and of the parents of his pupils. An official ATV survey showed that 84% of English people believed in God and that only 4% wanted religious teaching in schools to be abolished. Enquiry among the pupils of his school and their parents showed that when they were honest they shared this view. The trouble was that they were sometimes shy, or scared, of saying so. The ATV survey also showed that 61% (especially the young) wanted the churches to express an opinion on social issues.

So Raymond took them at their word. He brought his findings to a church meeting, got unanimous endorsement from all present, and sent their request for more and better religious instruction to the Education Minister and to the press. The following year the Church of England Men's Society devoted their annual conference to this subject.

There were other areas of public concern in which church men and women could act together. To make sure that they had an intelligent, informed, forward-looking strategy they met regularly to think out what should be the guiding principles of family life, industry and responsible citizenship — and how to bring them about.

ENLISTMENT IN THE REAL WAR

The Soldier and the Nurse

There is much debate today in the Church about the role of the laity. Many now believe that theirs is the major role. They are the Church. They are God's men and women out there in the big wide world. That is their sphere of service.

They may, of their goodness, offer to help us clergy with the things we have to do, and it is wholly right that they should take a full and responsible part in the worship and liturgy. But this should be as laymen — as part of the church congregation worshipping together, and not merely as part-time assistants to overworked clergy.

We pray for "all estates of men in Thy holy Church, that every member of the same in his vocation and ministry may truly and godly serve Thee". We need men and women in the tough world of politics, business, education, the public services and in the homes of our country who will see that all these serve the purposes of God. They are needed there to leaven the lump and to speak up when decisions have to be made. Often they are the first to see what needs to be done, and to have the grace and guts to fight for it to be done.

For most people, their calling is clear. Others have to find it.

Deric Skey came from what is now called "a background of privilege". (It is also one with a sense of responsibility and a tradition of service). His great-grandfather was President of the Royal College of Surgeons. Both his grandfathers were clergymen in Somerset and Dorset where in earlier days there had been agrarian risings. His father was in command of British troops in Ceylon when Deric and his twin brother were born. Army pay was not liberal and the family was large, but a rich cousin paid for the two boys to be educated at Haileybury.

Deric was slight in build, but his wiry toughness and bulldog spirit made him a fine cross-country runner and stood him in good stead in the struggles which lay ahead. He followed his father into the army and passed out of Sandhurst with a commission in the Royal Tank Corps.

The army sent him to India, and he grew to love that great country and its peoples. He wanted to serve them with his life, and the best way he could see of doing so was to become a missionary. Accordingly he resigned his commission and came home for training at Wycliffe Hall Theological College in Oxford.

There he did some honest thinking. First he re-examined his motives. He had not been very courageous in living the Christian life in the army, and secretly hoped that it would be easier in the ministry. (I could have told him that it would not!). Secondly, he realised that what was most needed in India and elsewhere was British who lived the Gospel of Christ in their ordinary lives, civil or military.

He had met men, both in India and in Oxford, who were thinking the same way. They were working with the Oxford Group, and were much concerned at the time with the need for a new vision and purpose for the youth. "Youth led by God can remake the world," they said. "Youth can decide now the course that history will follow. We can unite to bring Britain and the world under God's control."

When war broke out, Deric was back in the army. He fought through campaigns in Africa and Italy, and rose to the rank of major. By now his faith had been greatly reinforced, and he steadfastly lived out his Christian convictions where he had been cowardly about them before.

He loved Italy as he had loved India. He was captivated by the story of St. Francis and the men who had shaped the course of history in the turbulent thirteenth century. He visited Assisi and other centres of the rebirth of Christendom after the Dark Ages, and thought about what would happen after the dark years of this war. If renaissance could happen once, why not again? But, as Churchill said, the rebuilding must begin at once. And it must start in the hearts and minds and spirits of the people. "The only sure foundations are the absolute moral standards of Christ," Deric wrote from Italy. "In a world of suspicion and fear, they are the rock on which confidence, trust and teamwork can be built."

For seventeen years Deric worked at this with the growing force of Moral Re-Armament. He travelled to Switzerland and Denmark to lecture and conduct courses on what he called "the Christian ideology to supersede the brutal, godless ideologies of materialism and tyranny." All this time he lived, as he said, "by faith and prayer", without salary or assured income — as all full-time MRA workers do.

Deric became convinced that the key to the future would be in industry. The survival of whole nations in both East and West depended on an end to the bitter class war and its replacement with trust and co-operation. If it could be freed to work at full production for the benefit of all, it could meet the needs of all the world for food, work and a full life.

He was now fifty. That was a bit late perhaps to start in a totally new field of activity, but God usually asks the impossible, thought Deric, and then shows you how to do it.

Unable at that age and through lack of experience to find a job in management, he took a low-paid job as a van driver in a small firm close to Longton

Parish Church. He joined a trade union and formed a branch in the works. The appropriate union in his case was the Transport and General Workers' Union.

Before long he became a delegate to the North Staffordshire Trades Council and for five years was on their executive committee. That meant that he had a part in policy-making with the men and women responsible for the miners, pottery workers, steelmen and other trades. He is now a life member.

After only three years he found himself, to his astonishment, a delegate to the T & GWU biennial national conference in Blackpool with a resolution to propose on behalf of the branch. This called on the union "to give a lead in an all-out drive to expand production so as to provide enough for our own needs and also for the millions across the world whose standard of living is much lower than our own".

It took courage. He says, "My wife and I knelt in our hotel room to pray that I would have the opportunity to speak to the thousand delegates. This I did, saying that we must work for other things beside our own interests. All who believe and stand for the brotherhood of man will respond to the idea of finding an answer to the chronic hunger and poverty of the peoples of Asia and Africa. It is the rightful task of Britain's strongest union to lead in this important task. This was well received, and when I got home I was elected Chairman of my branch."

Deric has joined with others in all sectors of industry to create the teamwork to make these ideas a practical reality, and to bring about the "regeneration of British industry beginning with ourselves". As so often, an MRA play and the company which travelled with it was an extremely effective ally. "Keir Hardie" told the story of the Scottish miner who grew up in the grinding poverty of the 1880's but established the Christian roots of Socialism in England. His idea was that Socialism was neither for one class or one nation. It was for all men, and included in its concern not only the British workers, but the peoples of Africa, India and South America.

Deric said that the play was a gift from God. At the request of the President of the Trades Council it was performed for his members in the Court room of Hanley Town Hall. Later it was presented in the canteen of Hem Heath Colliery for the miners and their families. It was a moving experience. The secretary of the miners' club said, "This is a strong story. Keir Hardie was a man of Christian principles. He always stuck to his guns, and all his principles were based on Jesus of Nazareth." A steelworker said, "The sooner we get this play to the great mass of people the better."

In all this Deric had the full approval and encouragement of the bishop. He said he thought that the right decision had been made about what Deric should do with his life, and licensed him as a lay reader in the parish of Long-

ton. There he and a group of church men and women spent many weeks hammering out a Christian philosophy of work, and presented it as a "Charter for Industry" in a service broadcast to the city on St. George's Day, 1967. They concluded it by saying, "Britain which was once known as the workshop of the world must now show how all the workshops of the world can serve all the peoples of the world."

Deric's closest and finest team-mate has been Florence, whom he married on a beautiful summer day in that same year, 1967, in a tiny village church among the mountains of Wales.

He recalls the event. "I am filled with wonder that, in spite of all my attempts to get married to one person after another, God has given me Florence. It has all worked out beyond my imagining and desiring. My heart is full. Before the war, when I felt that Edward VIII made a wrong decision and missed his real destiny, I decided that I would leave it to God to say whether I should marry at all and, if so, to whom it should be. Temptations over the years brought me very near to making a mistake, but that early decision to put the matter into God's hands saved me from missing the wonder of His plan."

But Florence has her own story:

"I always felt that, next to being a mother, the most satisfying job for a woman was nursing. I loved it, and I think I was a good nurse. I trained in the days before the magic of penicillin and antibiotics, when a patient's survival was often determined by the nursing care.

"One day a patient, deeply distressed about her home and family, opened her heart to me and poured out all that was going on. I was helpless. I longed to do something for her, but had no idea how. I could do a lot to help a person's physical suffering, but nothing to help this woman's mental anguish or heal the pain in her heart. This set me on a search for a personal God, because I felt He must be the one to help in such a situation.

"When war broke out I remember feeling the awful weight of suffering we were going to inflict on one another; and I had a sense of despair that all I had seen done to alleviate suffering was now to be wiped out.

"I volunteered for service anywhere and was made a sister with the rank of lieutenant and posted to a hospital ship. I am a terrible sailor, but there was so much to do that I had no time to think of myself.

"We went a number of times to St. Nazaire and on each run brought back about 650 wounded and shell-shocked men. On the night when France fell we filled the wards with wounded and the rest of the ship with any soldiers who could get aboard.

"Later we sailed round the Cape and began the evacuation of wounded from Suez, Sudan and Massawa to Mombasa, Durban, Bombay and

Karachi. There was the adventure, the uncertainty of what and where next, the friendships and the work of caring for those young men, some of whom from time to time, with a simple service, we lowered gently into the sea.

"We went into the Mediterranean and men were brought to us on lighters from the battlefields not far away. They lay on stretchers — Germans, Italians and British — laughing and somehow making themselves understood to each other, who only a few hours earlier had been trying to kill each other. It was crazy.

"Some of the wounds were appalling, When I had dressed a particularly bad case one day, I went off duty and wept in anger at all this madness and cursed the people I thought responsible for it.

"By the time we got to Durban I had begun to think deeply. God must be the answer to 'man's inhumanity to man', but how did you get Him to be real in your own life? I prayed as I had never prayed before that He would become real to me.

"In Durban He did. With the help of friends with whom I discussed it I began to see that it was the selfishness in all of us which was responsible for the war — not the remote people in control whom I had blamed. I myself was either part of the disease or part of the cure. To become part of the cure I had to change. Being a practical person I made a note of all the ways in which this had to happen. It took five days, and I felt in deep need of forgiveness. Next morning I woke up a new woman. I knew I was forgiven. What Jesus had done on the Cross had worked for me.

"I put right what I could. I sent a cheque to the matron for the things I had helped myself to in the wards. I wrote an honest letter to my father. I decided to stop smoking, drinking and gossiping.

"The things I could not put right, God took care of Himself, and began to use me to help people in the things that really mattered. I realised that God had a plan for my life. People obedient to His direction would bring about His plan for communities, nations and the world. They could bring the new world to birth amid the ruins of the old."

Now she is married to Deric and they are united in this aim.

Theirs has been a fruitful union. Because they married late in life there have been no children, but the home which they have made in Buccleuch Road, Longton, has been a place where many have found new life.

Florence is by nature warm-hearted and friendly. Far from robust, she is outgoing and unsparing of herself. Her friendships extend from the couple next door who suffer much from ill health, to the women who work in the pot-banks; and from the wives of the business and trades union men to the Lord Mayor of the city.

Councillor Mary Bourne was Lord Mayor of Stoke-on-Trent in 1970. She is a devout churchgoer and was at one time President of the Catholic

Women of Britain. She became worried about slipping moral standards and the threat to family life — and where that might lead us as a nation. Hope came to her when her parish priest, Father Donal O'Connor, urged his people to go and learn what they could from a film called "The Crowning Experience" which was currently showing at the local Alhambra Picture House. This film told the story of a coloured American woman who pioneered education for her people and became adviser to successive Presidents. It showed how prejudices of race and class could be broken down, injustices put right and evil influences overcome. This was what the city needed. Mary Bourne was captivated. She joined with the Lord Mayors of Liverpool, Cardiff, Portsmouth, Nottingham and Sheffield and more than a thousand other civic leaders in issuing a message to their citizens. They said,

> "We need God as the directing force at the heart of our society and our politics, our schools and our factories.
>
> "The root of our problem is not economic. It is a crisis of character. If we accept the way of self-interest and expediency our children may inherit tyranny. But if we choose and live aright they will live in freedom and find a new role of greatness for our nation."

She made a special trip to London to launch this message and was gratified to know that 150 newspapers up and down the country printed it in whole or in part.

HOME FIRES BURNING

Mark and Vera

It was small wonder that Alderman Mary Bourne and her fellow civic leaders were anxious about the families who lived in the homes of their cities. A group of people decided to study the problem of divorce. Two had just been married, and two more were looking forward to their wedding. There were also a mother, a father, a grandmother and a teenager.

First they asked why life-long marriage was so important, anyway. Why should we not all be free to live with anyone we like for as long as we like, and have a change of partner whenever we like?

We heard it said that a man's personal life may have nothing to do with his public responsibilities. That must be nonsense. If his wife cannot trust him, who can? If he breaks his promise freely given to the partner of his choice at the most solemn moment of their lives, how can the rest of us be sure that he will keep faith with us when it suits him to do otherwise?

Home is where you learn commitment to people, to principle, to a task — and to keep right on without turning back whatever the temptations, allurements or difficulties

Next we asked how we can build the homes of our dreams, which will withstand the assaults of the world, the flesh and the devil, and be the sure foundations of the future.

Nobody wanted to pretend that married life is easy. After the first fine careless rapture must come the years of growth, welding together the rich diversity of personalities, gifts, insights into a deeper and more mature companionship. Ron and Pauline, not yet married, already knew that. They said, "Our love for one another has changed our lives, bringing to one of us a real understanding of God for the first time. It has been the beginning of a stronger, more enjoyable and satisfying life for both of us."

We also grow together in faith. Michael and Pauline told us, "We spent all our savings on setting up our home. Then came unemployment, but we knew from past experience that God would provide in one way or another. And He did."

Finally we talked about what to do when things go wrong. "Deal with it at once," said one old-timer, "at least before the end of the day. Let not the sun go down on your wrath. If temptation shows up, shoot from the hip. That is the point of absolute purity. To flirt with temptation is to court disaster." Asked if he and his wife had ever considered divorce, he replied, "Divorce, never. Murder, often!"

But there is more. If we fall into the pit of despair God can pull us out, pick us up, wash us down and send us on our way rejoicing, as Mark and Vera found out.

Mark and Vera Homer recently celebrated their golden wedding. Thirty years ago it appeared highly unlikely that there would be anything to celebrate. In spite of a good income, a beautiful home and three fine sons, they were rapidly drifting apart.

Mark was a keen sportsman. Their sitting room sparkled with trophies for tennis and swimming. He spent his leisure time with his sporting friends — tennis at the weekends, skittles most evenings at the pub.

Vera was not interested in any of these things. She resented her husband's outside activities, and hated his drinking. She wanted the kind of life in which they would make the family their world.

When she could stand it no longer Vera decided to leave. One thing prevented her. Each time she got to the point of walking out, she remembered the vow she had made in church before God and in the presence of her friends, "For better, for worse". "A vow is a vow," she said. "I couldn't go back on that." So they stayed together.

If that had been all it would simply have prolonged the misery. It did, however, allow time for God to prepare His miracle.

Mark was in a responsible position in a Midlands firm. Industrial relations were not good, but help came from an unexpected source. Two neighbouring vicars called at the office with an invitation to the management to send a delegation to an industrial conference which would tackle just such problems as they were wrestling with. Mark was asked to be one of the firm's representatives at the conference.

He was not enthusiastic. He had some premonition about what might be required of him. Vera, when he told her, was cautious, but saw in it a ray of hope for them both. She told her mother, "I think this might change our future." "Then you'd better encourage him to go, dear," she said.

Mark says, "When we got there, we found that the problems were not quite the ones we had expected. They began with a bit of edginess between me and my travelling companions. I put that right and then I was struck by another uncomfortable thought. Here was I talking about better relationships in industry, and my own marriage was breaking up.

"I went on my knees and prayed, 'O God, show me how to start there; and quickly the thought came, 'Go home and learn to love your wife properly. Ask her to forgive all the selfishness and failure of the past.' "

That thought must have come from God, because Vera says that when he got home he was almost unrecognisable. He seemed genuinely pleased to see her and glad to be home. That evening, instead of going as usual to the pub, he stayed in and they talked together. He said, "This is going to be a new start."

Vera was not so sure. She was delighted at the change in Mark, but it posed some problems for her. She did not want to forgive him because she knew that there was much for which he would have to forgive her.

She had been in the habit of going to church, but that had had little to do with the way she lived. She had never allowed God to have any part in the decisions she made, even the one about her marriage. She had demanded her way all along the line, and that had made her as impossible to live with as he was. She had driven him to the drink she hated, and had made him the man he had become.

Finally she admitted all this and they asked and received forgiveness from God and from one another.

Those who give up in despair at the first sign of difficulty have no idea what happiness there may be in being committed to one another through thick and thin, in sickness and health, fair weather and foul, come hell or high water, growing together in love and in having something and someone to live for together.

WORLD-WIDE FAMILY

In the Midlands we encountered the multi-racial society in a big way, black and white, brown and yellow, Africans, Arabs, Indians, Chinese. Many were Christians. Some were Muslims, Jews, Hindus, followers of Buddha or Confucius or of nobody or nothing in particular. Whatever their beliefs or unbeliefs, we welcomed them all in the family of God and invited them to take whatever part they would or could in the work and worship of the church.

Nearly next door to the church was a Chinese family. Joe Tung and his wife, Lana, sent their children to the church day-school and to our Sunday school. Three of them sang in the choir. They and their mother asked to be confirmed. Joe had been baptised while he was in the British Army, and so they became more and more part of the church family.

Others came as visitors. The Africans were picked men sent by their governments in Nigeria, Ghana or Tanzania to study ceramics, mining or business management. Nearly all were Christians, but were finding it hard to reconcile what they saw in Britain with the Christianity they had known at home. "God seems to be left out here," said one. "Nobody bothers about Him any more. When we talk about our belief we are laughed at." We were put to shame by these men, and had to admit that not everyone who calls himself a Christian lives like one.

Conversely, many who do not call themselves Christians are not far from the Kingdom. Some of the Nigerians, who were Muslims, had qualities which we Christians might covet for ourselves. If we are humble enough, we might learn much from them.

I well remember on a visit to the Holy Land being woken at 3 a.m. by the sound of the Muezzin calling the faithful to prayer. Not to be outdone, I got out of bed and prayed that I would be as faithful in my prayer life as the followers of the Prophet were in theirs. I reflected that "Islam" means total submission to the will of the one true God.

A professor of the University of Teheran stayed in our home. He was on a mission to all the Muslim students in this country to encourage them in their spiritual life. He told us that within 24 hours of their arrival in the West they had been met by sympathisers of the Communist Party, who befriended them and attempted to win them for their Marxist revolution. I wished that we Christians were as eager to offer them our friendship and welcome them as allies in our common struggle against the godless materialism of our world.

We were continually being given new insights into Jesus' way of revealing Himself to people of diverse cultures and beliefs. It was often different from what I had taken to be the traditional way of presenting the Gospel. That had been to confront them with a choice before they were ready for it and to ignore whatever revelation of Himself God might already have made to them.

Many were ready to join us in the search for ultimate truth. A Sudanese student who, with his family, had suffered severely in his country's civil war reported that he had been reading what Jesus said about forgiveness. "Until seventy times seven. That means you have to go right on. You can never stop. Now I know what the Cross means."

The great missionary societies have had to rethink their attitude to the non-Christian world. As long ago as 1957 the Church Missionary Society newsletter said of Islam, "What is being approached deserves respect and reverence. Further, there is the recognition that such awareness will issue in new discoveries for the Christian ...This is not in any way to do despite to the the Gospel or to belittle the uniqueness of Christ. Rather, it is to infer that Christ in His love and in His purpose far transcends the understanding and response of the most faithful of His disciples. It is to credit Christ with being in very fact the Lord of history. It is to believe that in ways beyond our seeing the Lord Christ has been preparing a people for Himself in the world of Islam, and that He wants His disciples who are identified with His body to go to meet them so that with them, together with Him, all may find themselves in the household of God."

Now this begins to be generally accepted, but thirty years ago we were still painfully working it out.

MEN, SOCIETY, NATIONS

Miracle in Zimbabwe

When my wife and I retired from parish work, we decided that we would use whatever remained of our lives to do what we could to make Britain "a country governed by God". But the first assignment to which we were called seemed to have little to do with that. Or did it?

Three months after settling into our pleasant little house in the country town of Newbury, a letter from Rhodesia fell on the doormat. Two old friends, Kit Prescott and Henry Macnicol, wrote asking us to help with a conference which had been planned there for the coming summer. They wrote, "The voice of the Church is much needed. Do come."

I did not at all want to go. I did not like what I knew — or thought I knew — of the whole set-up in Rhodesia. I was extremely critical of the Smith regime, and wanted to have nothing to do with it. They had only themselves to blame for the mess they were in, and they must get themselves out of it. Besides, we had also been invited to Canada, where some of the family were living, and I wanted to go there.

But I at least had the grace to pray and reflect on the matter. I read the conference leaflet again. It was headed, "Creating the New Society", and I was all in favour of that. The sub-title announced, "Africa the Answer Continent". I had heard that phrase before and half-believed that if an answer could be found in that torn and troubled continent it would certainly be good news for the rest of the world. The aim of the conference was stated to be, "To bring the change in people which alone will make political changes work", and there was a reference to bringing faith to the faithless and helping men of faith to live so compellingly that cities and nations change.

That all made sense to me, and I began to see how judging and self-righteous I had been. I was deeply ashamed. If things were wrong in Rhodesia, we British were responsible. We had allowed the situation to develop. The only honourable course was to accept the blame and do what we could to put things right.

So we went. We were accompanied by another priest, Arthur Burrell, and his wife Pat. Their son John was already there.

The conference had been arranged by a group of men and women who believed that a new approach was needed to solve the tensions in the country, and that together they might find from God what it could be. They included Sir Cyril Hatty, Minister of Finance in a former and more liberal administra-

tion, Dr. Elliott Gabellah, a Vice-President of the African National Congress, and Alec Smith, son of the Prime Minister.

Alec met us at the airport, and told us his story. He had quarrelled with his parents and left home in a mood of revolt. What he most disliked was having to be known as the Prime Minister's son. He wanted to be just himself and have a life of his own. He went to South Africa. He took to drink and drugs and failed his exams. On a visit home he was caught by the police trying to smuggle drugs through the customs. By this time he was far gone on LSD and was desperate. He knew that a few more trips would be the end of him.

At that point he met an old acquaintance from the drug scene. The man was so different as to be almost unrecognisable. He said that God had changed his life, and invited Alec to church. Alec had not been near such a place for years, but he went now. As the minister spoke, he knew he must give his life to Christ; but he dithered and prevaricated and came away without doing it.

"I spent the next two weeks in hell," he said. He feared that he had let slip the one chance he might have had of getting free. But he did pray and read the Bible. Someone had suggested St. Mark's gospel, and he was fascinated by what Jesus did for people. "Just what I need too," he thought.

A fortnight later he went back to the same church and did what he should have done before.

He told us, "I came away a free man. You have heard about the agonies of withdrawal, 'cold turkey' and all that. Well, I did not feel a thing, and I have never been back to drugs again."

He began to think that if God could do that for him, maybe he could do something for his country, which he loved very much although he had behaved badly in it.

It was at that point that he made the acquaintance of Sir Cyril Hatty and Dr. Gabellah and other like-minded people; and they arranged the conference together.

Despite a genuine sense of commission, when we arrived in that beautiful country with its huge potential and horrible tragedy, I felt more helpless and useless than ever before in my life. I did not know what to do, whom to talk to, what to say.

It would clearly be no use telling the whites how wrong they were, or commiserating with the blacks, or taking sides with either. The more I saw of the situation, the more complicated it seemed to be. I was so miserable that I had haunting nightmares and wanted to leave for home.

In desperation I asked God what was the matter with me. He simply said, "What about Burrell?" That was the trouble. Burrell was doing far better than I was. He was guest in the bishop's house. He appeared on television. He had

his son with him. He had everything. And I was plain jealous. So I had to ask forgiveness — from him, from God and from the people with whom we were working.

And forgiven I was. It was a liberating experience; and it turned out to be the key needed to cure the jealousies, rivalries, pride and animosity which bedevilled every relationship between black and white, black and black, white and white.

We first met the Rev. Arthur Kanodereka, a black Rhodesian Methodist minister, at a reception in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Samuriwo. Isaac's father had been a paramount chief with thirty-five wives. He himself had only one. She was a gracious hostess to this gathering of business and professional men.

I found myself sitting next to Kanodereka. When we were introduced I made a possibly excusable mistake and addressed him as Canon Dereka for the rest of the evening. He did not seem to mind, and we became friends.

Two days later he invited my wife and myself to visit the Harare township to meet his people. He took us to their homes and the African market, and we spent the evenings with his church leaders. They were extremely welcoming. Any suspicion which they might have felt was dispelled when my wife told them about her little black God-daughter, Norinne, named after her, whose Nigerian parents had often been in our home in England.

Arthur was responsible for two churches, and asked me to preach in one of them on the following Sunday. I was the first white man ever to be so honoured. About 600 men, women and children filled the church — all black. Besides being Methodist churchmen, many of them were deeply committed politically.

What to say to them? I spoke of their beautiful country and of the violence and injustice and suffering. I could only speak for myself and my people and our need to change. I asked for their forgiveness for our share in what was wrong; and told them that there was much bitterness and division in our own country, too. It might be that here in Africa, with their help, we might find together God's way forward for all the troubled peoples of the earth.

We had with us Yusuf Khamis, a Christian Arab living in Israel, where he has been striving for peace. He led us in the Family Prayer of all God's vast and varied human family. We said it together in Arabic, Shona or English as came naturally to each of us.

Next day Arthur, whose father like mine was a farmer, took me to meet his farming friends in the vilage of Marewrangwe. There we found Mr. Jacha, Vice-President of the African Farmers' Union. He was standing in his field of ripening cotton (some of the best in Africa), and invited us into his home where his wife made tea. Mr. Jacha had been a Member of Parliament in the days of the Federation. He said, "There are hundreds of thousands of us who

want justice for our people; but we do not want violence and killing and torture. If there is a better way, we want to know about it." He and the headmaster of the village school and other local leaders came to the great public meeting in the Harry Margolis Hall, the largest hall in Salisbury, the following week.

Everybody had told us that it would be impossible to hold a public meeting for black and white together; but on the night the great hall was packed with a thousand people. Black and white were there in about equal proportions. The Mayor of Salisbury welcomed us, and the Bishop of Mashonaland thanked us for coming on "your dangerous mission". Among them were four Cabinet Ministers and leaders of the black community.

We did not feel to be in any great danger ourselves, but it was all about us. On the day when we arrived a farmer had had his house burnt down over his head within forty miles of the capital; and the same day as I preached in Arthur's church thirteen people were killed in a riot — two of them right outside the church. The situation was tense.

Driving through the farming country which he loved so much, Arthur had begun to talk about his deepest concerns. He had been held in detention three times for suspected political activities. The last time was only a few months earlier. On mere suspicion and with no evidence against him, he had been taken from his home with a sack over his head and roughly interrogated. His wife, Gladys, was left with their six children not knowing where they were taking him, what they would do to him or whether she would ever see him again. Courageous woman as she was, she wept for a fortnight.

Eventually, when they decided that they had nothing against him, the authorities set him free. Arthur said to one of the armed guards, "I was bitter enough before. What you have done has made me ten times worse."

He told me, "As a minister of the Gospel, I have preached love from the pulpit, but I have actually taught my people to hate. Worst of all, I have taught my family to hate. I know it is wrong. People who condone violence as an instrument of social change have mostly never seen it in action. I have. When I was stationed on the North Eastern border I saw white men killed and black men killed and mutilated; and it is most often the innocent who get hurt. It sickens you. If there is another way, I want to hear about it." He talked to Gladys about the conference and they decided that he should make arrangements to come.

One of his Methodist colleagues helped him with the practicalities. This was the Rev. Fred Rea, an Irishman who had gone out to Rhodesia forty years earlier and become a kind of elder statesman of the church. He had been principal of the theological college and was now minister of the big church in the centre of the city. He and his wife, Kathleen, have devoted their lives to the people of that country, both black and white, and won the friendship and

trust of all sections of the community. They speak without fear or favour about what they believe to be right or wrong, and what they say is heeded. Fred now heard of Arthur's desire to attend the conference and persuaded one of his leading laymen to help by covering his expenses.

Arthur came for four days, and laid his bitterness at the Cross of Christ. He said, "I have always deliberately restricted my ministry to my own people. Now I want to think and care for everybody. In particular, I want to see how my people can become the sort whom the whites will feel they can trust."

The next Sunday he invited all the overseas visitors to the larger of his two churches. In the party were a black American from the New York waterfront, a former Communist worker from England, a Roman Catholic Portuguese-speaking docker from Brazil, a leader of the Women's Revolutionary Movement of South Africa. They spoke of miracles of change and God's power to guide their lives and unite them together to bring changes to society.

That was the beginning of many such Sunday evenings in Arthur's church. Black and white of all political parties met together, not to make speeches or listen to sermons, but to pray for their country and for God's guidance for themselves and their leaders.

On one occasion he asked his black congregation, "Do you really believe that a white man can change?" There was a puzzled silence. "Would you like to see one?" Real interest now. "Well, let me introduce my friend Alec Smith, son of the Prime Minister." It took great courage in both men, but when Alec had finished speaking there was a cheer in church.

Arthur next sought out some of the men of influence in the white community and said to them, "Why don't we have the courage to say what we really think in our best moments, and talk about what we truly believe should be done? Then, perhaps we might begin to see how to do it." Many of them found the courage to do this.

There were those who opposed Arthur, not understanding or not liking what he was doing, and he was sacked from his position of Treasurer-General of the African National Congress. At first he was shocked and downcast, but then he recognised God's hand in it. "Now, instead of being a politician myself, I can be a friend and confidant of all the politicians," he said.

He also risked his reputation and his life to bring together the bitterly divided factions among the black leadership and to encourage the guerilla fighters to turn from killing and work for reconciliation.

He knew this was a dangerous mission, but he believed that it was the only way and that he was called by God to take it. At one stage the security forces offered him a bodyguard, but this he firmly declined. "If I accept your protection," he said, "that puts me in your camp. I am in nobody's camp but God's."

He said to a group of young men, "You can hardly make your enemy your friend if you won't meet him. If you are people who listen to God and want to strive ahead, we have got to love those who shoot us, who put landmines for us — men you know killed your father."

The same week two men of his own people called at the door of his house, wanting to talk. He drove away with them in his car, and early next morning his body was found lying on the road beside his car twenty-five miles from his home. He had been shot dead. It was seven days before Christmas, 1978.

In his book, "Now I Call Him Brother", Alec Smith has told the full story of how they built bridges together.

THE OVERCOMERS

From childhood most of us have had to grapple with the twin problems of suffering and evil. They are common to man, inescapable, insistent, perplexing, yet demanding an answer. For me, the quest began with my mother's illness, my father's anxieties, my own inadequacies. Added to this were the wicked atrocities of two world wars.

The quest for an answer can only be undertaken with God. Explanations offered by philosophers and theologians are admittedly only partial at the best. We shall never fully unravel the mystery this side of eternity. Meanwhile we can watch God at work in desperate situations, and draw faith and strength and wisdom from the study.

I select examples from a variety of times and places in the hope that they may serve as pointers to an answer.

MARGARET

There was a time when Margaret was a sad, lonely, miserable woman. She once seriously thought of ending her life. Alone in her little shop and alone, it appeared, in the world, there seemed to be no point in going on. So she put the cat and the dog out in the back yard, plugged the gaps in doors and windows, and bent down to turn on the gas.

At that moment she heard a voice saying, "Don't do it." It wasn't fear. It wasn't conscience merely. It was Someone — someone who cared enough for her to want her to find a better way.

As with Job in the Old Testament, it was at first only a glimmer of understanding, but it became a shining light of hope and faith.

Life had seemed to be so good for Margaret. She was a lively and talented girl, bright of eye and with rosy cheeks. Her Scottish parents had moved to London, and there at the Caius College Mission in Battersea she met Richard. They worshipped together and danced together and twelve years later they were married. Richard was a big, strong fellow, a cross-country runner and member of a famous athletics club. He had a good job in a factory and Margaret earned a little extra with her embroidery. She relied on him for everything.

But there were some ways in which he could not help. Margaret's first baby was stillborn, and that was a great shock to them both. Two years later she was expecting twins, but she had a miscarriage and nearly died herself.

When she recovered, she and her husband bought a small confectionery business in a populous district between Clapham Junction and the riverside wharves and factories. There their only living child was born, and happiness seemed to be theirs again. The boy was greatly loved by all and brought them much joy.

But at the age of sixteen he was struck down with leukaemia and died in St. Thomas' Hospital in a matter of weeks.

Both parents were heart-broken, but they struggled on in their little shop in war-time London. Bombs fell night and day; and Richard's low spirits affected his health. He died of a heart attack, and Margaret was left alone — her faith in God shattered and her spirit numbed. There was nobody left to live for.

Or so it seemed. Then, one day, when she was dreading another lonely, miserable Christmas, some neighbours invited her into their home for an evening of carols round the tree. Maybe she thought nostalgically of the carols she had sung years ago at the Caius Mission. At any rate, it would be company. At least somebody cared about her. So she went.

It was an evening that changed her life. As the Christmas story was re-enacted by this real family, God spoke to her again — more recognisably this time — and her closed-up heart was warmed and prised open.

It was a beginning; but if it were to be more than a sentimental memory, it had to become a practical reality in her life. By now she had accepted the idea that God was speaking to her, and might have more to say. There must be some connection between the Christmas Stable and her shop. She had let it get into a bad state of muddle, untidiness and dirt. So she tidied it up and made it clean and tidy and attractive.

On Christmas Eve passers-by were astonished to see a lighted star shining in the shop window. Below it was a model of the Stable and the figures of Mary and Joseph and the Baby and the shepherds.

There were other such reminders of Christmas in the homes and some of the shops of Battersea, but the residents of Plough Road knew that this was a sign of something new — or renewed — in Margaret. A small girl, looking in at the window wanted to know what it was all about. "Go in and ask her," said her friend. "She isn't grumpy any more. She smiles now."

Margaret's shop and the cosy sitting-room behind it became a centre of faith and friendliness and hope for those whose lives were lonely or homes unhappy. She began to sing again and joined the church choir. It was her way of thanking God for revealing Himself to her again, and of proclaiming to

others the faith she had recovered.

One of her songs was about how to create "A House With a Home Inside It." And what she sang she did. She heard of a young woman who was in need of a home. So she invited her to come and share hers. They had never met, but quickly became firm friends. She said later, "Mabel was about the same age as my first son would have been if he had lived, and I felt as though God had sent me a daughter to replace him." Mabel was a good daughter, too. She looked after the shop so that Margaret could have her first holiday in years. But she also cared for her enough to help her get rid of the last traces of the bitterness which had poisoned her life, and to make friends again with her sister-in-law, from whom she had been estranged for many years.

All this gave her a sense of purpose in life. She heard of another little old lady who, like her, had been widowed, and also like her kept a little shop. Annie Jaeger's shop had sold not sweets but hats; and in it many women found not only the hats that they needed, but new hope in their hearts, new ideas in their heads and a renewal of love in their homes.

Margaret wanted to do this, and she believed that God would show her how. By this time she knew that He would speak to her when she listened obediently. So she started each day with attentive, listening prayer — and at other times, too. She said, "You've got to be ready at any time."

One evening, while she was rearranging the jars of bulls-eyes and toffees and dusting the shelves, the thought struck her, "Margaret, there are quite a few corners in your life that need tidying up. Why not do that?" "What corners?" she wondered. "All those bits and pieces you keep under the counter for special customers, and the lies you tell the others for fear of offending them. You are just giving in to selfish, greedy people and making them more greedy and selfish. Get it all out in the open and deal honestly and fairly with everyone."

That was the secret of her life from that time on. It was the secret which her customers and now numerous friends needed in their homes and families. Hers was a forthright, cheery, outgoing friendship. People knew that she was genuinely interested in them, and came to confide in her — sometimes when they were on the point of break-up with their partners. They received from her not sentimental words of comfort, but the faith that God could guide and mend their broken lives. "I had to let God guide me," she'd say. "Why don't you let Him change you?"

The time came when Margaret could keep her shop going no longer. Wartime rationing made the confectionery business extremely unprofitable; and the end came when one Christmas Eve, while Margaret was in church at the Midnight Mass, her shop was burgled. She had invited friends in to coffee after the service, and when she got back she saw that the door had been pushed in, all the money had disappeared from the till, the shelves and

cupboards had been ransacked, and — worst of all — the ration coupons, which she would need to replenish her stock, were scattered all along the street outside.

That was the end of the shop. Margaret struggled on for a time, but there were further losses of stock and money during the air-raids and in the black-out; and finally she decided that God had other things for her to do. She knew He had a purpose for her life, and she had a shrewd idea what it might be. She sold up and spent the next few years helping other people in their homes.

It was not always easy, but she had decided to live on the give — first looking after two aged sisters in the country, and then cleaning silver in a London home where men and women were entertained who could affect the policies of governments.

Young people a quarter her age said, "She is such good fun." They wanted her at their parties, and valued her companionship because she was neither starchy nor soft with them.

Towards the end of her life she had her own home again — a tiny flatlet in Fulham where she could entertain her friends. There would be plates piled high with sandwiches and buns (doughnuts were her favourites), and bowls of peaches and cream.

She had friends on every continent. They could not all come to tea, but she thought of them, prayed for them and sent messages and generous presents for birthdays and anniversaries. There were those in Canada and Australia who always wanted news of Margaret; and she thought much for India where her engineer father died when she was only three. She prayed for its leaders and people.

She had a little book in which she noted down subjects for prayer and the thoughts she had as she prayed. On her eighty-eighth birthday she wrote:

> "Sincere and grateful thanks for the way God has filled my life with good friends, especially Mabel's deep caring.
> "Thank God for His gracious love — for the way he has brought me through sorrow and loss, and given me the chance to help others to find newness of life.
> "Very grateful for my young friends who help me to keep old age at bay.
> "I pray for all the folks in the world who are suffering, that their problems and hurts may be solved and cured.
> "And I pray for a new sense of commitment to God's will among heads of state of all countries."

Her friends remember her for her simplicity, gaiety and fun; for the absence of any barrier of age or class and for the ability to say the one thing to people which could bring hope and encouragement.

FRED

To get to see Fred Grainger you had to go to a small, rather old-fashioned terrace house in Normacot Road, in the Potteries town of Longton, Stoke-on-Trent. It was next door but one to Hudson and Middleton's factory. You could go to the front door, but real friends went down a narrow alley-way through the back yard. His sister Maud would greet you at the kitchen door and take you upstairs to where Fred was lying in bed. He had been there for upwards of forty years.

At the age of fourteen he had to go to hospital for an appendix operation. That was during the first world war at a time when doctors were called away and nursing staff was overworked. While there he picked up a germ which slowly paralysed him.

He came home after a successful operation, apparently on the way to complete recovery. But progress was slow. Then it stopped altogether, and an unaccountable weakness drained his energies. It turned out that he had sleeping sickness, and there was nothing that could be done about it. Presently he was unable to work at all. His limbs became stiff and his speech was badly affected. It became clear that he would never work or walk again.

Yet, after years of illness, he was one of the most cheerful people it was possible to meet. He used to say, "There is One that's suffered more than me." Doctors, health visitors and church workers, burdened by the sufferings and complaints of many who had far less to put up with than Fred, used to call to see him not just in the course of duty, but simply to be cheered up by him. They often came heavy-hearted, but left uplifted by his faith and courage. There were times when the rector, immersed in the affairs of a busy parish, allowed weeks to go by without a visit; but he was always received again with forgiveness and understanding.

Fred spoke little about himself. He was much more interested in you and your family and in how things were going in the big wide world outside. He could not even see it because he could no longer sit up in bed to look out of the window. In any case he was nearly blind. But he wanted to know what was going on out there and, when invited to suggest a subject for prayer, he nearly always asked for a renewal of faith and peace in the world. He wanted people to know and love God because that was the only way to fulfilment in their own lives and brotherhood among men. So he prayed for the Queen and the leaders of all nations.

He believed in miracles. At one time the twitching of his limbs produced painful bed-sores. No amount of medication seemed to put them right. So, with his next visitor he prayed both for faith for the faithless and healing for his sores. Ten days later, when the same visitor returned, he greeted him with, "Rector, we've had another miracle.' The sores were only half the size they

had been. A fortnight later they had gone.

The biggest miracle of all was on the night when there was a fire in the factory only two doors away from Fred's house. Providentially, the family with three small children who lived between Fred and the factory were away from home at the time. But the firemen came to evacuate Fred and Maud. Maud said, "It can't be done. You can't move him. You would never get him down these narrow stairs. You'll have to put the fire out." The firemen said, "We don't think we can, and the wind is blowing it this way." "Then we shall have to pray," said Fred. And he did. The flames roared and the factory blazed. And the wind dropped. The firemen got the flames under control, and the two houses were saved. Next day, Fred said, "Nothing but a miracle could have saved us."

Maud's husband, Ernie Beardmore, had been a miner at the Florence Colliery nearby. His chest and heart were badly affected by the work and conditions in the pit, and he had to retire early through ill health. When he died of a heart attack, Fred said to his sister, "I'm not much of a man, but I'll look after you." Physically he could do nothing to help, but by his spirit and faith and wisdom, he was a strength and inspiration to her and to many besides.

When people are tempted to give up, or to think about euthanasia, they ought to be told about Fred.

CHRIS

It was Christmas time in the casualty ward of a large hospital in the south of England.

We were a mixed bunch with broken legs, cracked ribs, twisted knees, cracked heads and crushed hands — the results of road accidents, drunken fights, industrial injuries or football fury. One inmate had been bashed up in a car chase, and was guarded by two policemen night and day.

In the bed next to me was Chris, a young apprentice at the Atomic Research Establishment at Aldermaston. He had just won a national award for a tool kit he had made and was doing well at the South Berkshire College of Further Education.

Then disaster struck. He was knocked off his motor bike in a head-on collision with a car passing a lorry, and nearly died as a result. His leg was broken in four places and his arm in two. He lost six pints of blood before the ambulance men could reach him with their survival equipment and rush him off to hospital. He was in a bad state.

A week or two later these same friendly ambulance men dropped into

Mortimer Ward to see how he was doing. "You gave us some problems," they said, obviously relieved to find that he was recovering.

In those weeks Chris suffered much pain and discomfort. The nurses did all they could; and we fellow-sufferers did our best to cheer each other up.

In between the dressing of wounds, bedmaking (and bedpans), we talked about motor bikes, electronics, Concorde, gardening, the places and countries we had visited or hoped to visit, and people who had interested us — and once or twice about God.

Chris said, "What has happened to me in the last few weeks has changed my life. Before it I was an unbeliever; but when I was lying on the road, not knowing whether I should live or die, there was only way to turn for help. So I prayed. And here I am. Now I have a future, and I have to decide what to do with it."

There were many options — engineering, emigration and a whole lot more. But whatever he did with his life, it would have a new quality and purpose and meaning because of the accident and Christmas.

The next week, on New Year's Eve, he was out of bed and on his feet — wobbly at first, but gathering strength all the time.

So, what can we say?

If Chris found God through his accident, what tragedy is that? If Fred's suffering brought renewed faith to others, at least good came out of it.

And Margaret? She never disguised the deep hurt in her heart, but she had experienced the power of Christ's resurrection herself in this life, and she believed that her loved ones would do so in the next.

More recently the question came even closer home when my wife, still in full vigour at the age of 65, was suddenly struck down by a paralysing stroke. She recovered her speech and can walk again with difficulty, but is still seriously disabled. What can *we* say?

First we can say that it has brought us closer to Jesus. We know "the fellowship of His sufferings".

We pray that it may make us more like Him. If we accept it as He did, there is a chance that it may do so.

Meanwhile, we trust His promise to St. Paul, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." We take that to mean that He can actually use us better when we know our weakness. Then we really learn to depend on Him for everything. An old friend wrote of the helplessness he felt after an operation for cancer of the throat which removed his voice-box and left him speechless: "How else could a self-reliant man, who could always do anything, learn to depend on God?" We pray that that will be our experience too.

All this has brought us closer to one another and to our family and friends.

It has given us a new understanding of other people and their difficulties. All of which is not to say that we do not sometimes relapse into self-pity and complaint. It does mean that we know where to turn for the answer. Christ can lift us out of ourselves and send us on our way rejoicing.

For us it has not been a matter of reading what learned or holy men have written or said on the subject, though that has helped. The Bible in particular has often "spoken to our condition". For the most part, however, it has been the quiet loving voice of God speaking in our hearts as we have turned to Him in penitence and obedience.

That must be our word to those who turn to us in perplexity or despair.

Suffering can be a means of growth; death can be the gateway to life. Or either can be a curse and desolation. The choice is ours.

We each need the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, which comes to us most clearly as we wait upon Him at the beginning of each day. He turns the searchlight on to our own lives, but also opens our eyes to new possibilities for ourselves, our friends and our country, and gives us sometimes unexpected insights into what must be done — and how. Sometimes this comes in a sudden flash, but more often through a growing conviction forming in our hearts and minds.

Little by little, we begin to see the pattern of what God is doing through people who are guided by Him. Some have called this the strategy of the Holy Spirit. Why not? It can be of small use for God to have a purpose without also having a plan for achieving it and the ability to communicate it to those who will work on it.

This plan or purpose or strategy includes everybody and everything. God has no favourites, and there is nothing beyond His interest and concern.

Here in our own country, if we were bold enough, determined enough and obedient enough, we could set ourselves half-a-dozen specific practical aims:

To recreate home and family life — not as a cosy retreat from the world, but as a spring from which to draw the resources to go out and change the world,

To change the whole mood and spirit of industry. Hate, greed and jealousy can be dealt with every time a decision has to be made; and the senseless, suicidal out-of-date class war can be replaced with a

determination that industry should serve the needs of the vast human family. It can create new relationships among the peoples of the earth.

To replace the selfish and deadly obsession with our own standard of living with practical concern for those who are starving.

To send men and women into education who will build character on faith in God and make this the educational policy of our country, to give each new generation a purpose in life which would engage their energies and imaginations to the full, and to solve the problems and seize the opportunities of today and tomorrow.

To work for a new birth of Christian culture — art, literature, music and drama which will deal with the profound questings of the human spirit. Storm Jameson once wrote, "I believe with passion and conviction that the quality of life in the emerging society will be determined by the creators, whether scientists or artists."

Britain in the last century pioneered the industrial revolution which changed the face of the earth. We need now to pioneer the revolution of character and conduct which will change the course of events away from violence and destruction and towards the fulfilment of man's best hopes and dreams.

With God and our allies, we can take heart, regain the initiative and make the space age the faith age.

God of atoms, God of power,
Come to us this needy hour.
Man so clever, man so proud
Makes his voice heard long and loud.
God of all the universe
Free us from this plague and curse.

Potters, colliers, engineers,
Politicians, priests and peers,
Teachers, doctors, writing men
Turn to God for truth again;
Making brains and heart and skill
Tools of a wise and perfect Will.

Word of God, Who made the stars,
Wisdom none can match or pass,
Jesus, on this Christmas Day,
Leave us not to man a prey.
Make us into sons of God,
Walking in the way You trod.

Teach us all to care like You;
To think for all mankind anew;
Feed and clothe and house them all;
Tear down curtains; break the wall;
Build with black and brown and white
Nations knit by love and light.

W. Basil Buckland

INDEX

BASIL BUCKLAND an Anglican priest for nearly fifty years, finished this book shortly before he died suddenly on Christmas Eve, 1985.

He writes about "the interesting men and women, with whom I had lived and worked in my ministry in London, northern cities and country parishes, steelworkers, coalminers, shopkeepers, farmers, housewives, industrialists, doctors, teachers, nurses, students. They found that God not only cared for them as individuals, but was especially concerned for their families, friends, factories, cities, their country and world. They wanted a faith which made a difference to their own lives and the world they lived in. When they found it, it transformed those around them as well as themselves."

In these pages he introduces us to some of these people and describes the transformations that followed.

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