“Reflections”

by

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The pilgrimage of a Baptist Minister

1907 – 1994

CHAPTERS

SUPERPOWER — Does it work?

Chapter 1

Early Years 1907—1918

Many people who live ordinary lives in ordinary circumstances and situations feel helpless in the face of all that happen in the world today. This is the story of such a man. I often wanted to be someone important, sometimes for my own sake and sometimes so that I might do more to make the world a better place. But I have been shown that if you want to put the world right, there is one place to begin - yourself. You don't have to be somebody else or somewhere else. You can start where you are and as you are, but you need a power that is not your own.

I was born on 9th September 1907, in a house in Catford, South East London. The house was bombed during the Second World War as was another house we lived in later, but that must have been a coincidence, for I cannot imagine that my family was a target for the Luftwaffe for we were an inconspicuous family.

My parents when they married moved to Catford from Bermondsey where they had both grown up. Both these places were quite different from what they are today. Bermondsey was an inner suburb of London within easy reach of the City. It was only a short walk for people in those days over London Bridge to the office. Catford was on the outskirts of London. New estates were being built and the trams reached their terminus in Rushey Green, where Lewisham Town Hall now stands. Later the train track was extended along the Bromley Road, which had ditches on each side to the country at Southend Ponds. Further afield was Bromley, a respectable market town, and still further were places like Farnborough and distant Sevenoaks for those who wished to travel.

Rushey Green, the main thoroughfare, was a quiet shopping area. There was Tutt's the fishmonger, and Best's the butcher, with Marks & Spencer's the penny bazaar, and Sainsbury's with its marble—topped counters, where groceries were served by an assistant who gave personal service. Cheese was cut carefully with a wire, and butter was taken from a large block (not a butter mountain) and shaped with butter pats, either

in a round quarter pound, or an oblong half a pound, so skillfully wrapped in greaseproof paper.

When we crossed Rushey Green, we were told to “look both ways in case there is something coming”. Along by Sainsbury’s was Thomas Tilling’s Bus Garage; the open topped buses used to come by Brownhill Road and Sandhurst Road. It was a slight rise to Hither Green and on the side of the buses was inscribed “Thomas Tilling Ltd.”, and underneath “Maximum speed 12 mph”. When I was a boy of about ten I can remember waiting at the bus stop at the top of Sandhurst Road with my brother, to meet my mother or a visitor. We would see the top of the bus appear slowly over the brow of the hill as it approached at less than its maximum speed.

My earliest recollection is that of being taken by my father to stay with my grandparents at Bermondsey. I think it was by horse tram and we had to change at New Cross Gate. I must have been just over two years old for when I returned home, there was a younger brother named George. I faintly remember being left with my grandparents and becoming suspicious when my father departed. I announced as if I had appointments “I must go home tonight”. This continued at intervals until I was put to bed, when it became a tearful refrain in the candlelight.

Another time, when I was about three, I can remember walking a little way along the road with my hand on the collar of our collie dog. My mother gave strict instructions to the dog to look after me and not to go too far. The dog obeyed orders but I am sure my mother watched us every step of the way, for she was at the gate when we returned after a very short walk.

It must have been about the same time that I sat under the dining room table with a pair of scissors. Between meal times the table was adorned with a fancy red tablecloth fringed with small red balls, which we called “bobbles”. I had often admired those red woollen balls from where I played on the floor, so having equipped myself with a pair of scissors, I took up my position under the table and set to work cutting off the bobbles and proudly showed them to my mother. She was not impressed and precautions were taken so that I did not repeat this activity.

When I was four years old I started school at Brownhill Road Infants School. I was taken along by my mother for enrolment, but when we reached the school gate and crossed the playground I became terrified of

leaving her and tugged at her hand beseeching her to postpone this event, suggesting that another day would be more convenient. I did not like the prospect of being left alone in a strange world. However we made our way to the classroom and were met by a kind motherly teacher who pacified me and explained that I would be returning home for dinner at midday. She went to a cupboard and took out a sweet which must have done the trick.

Our lives as children were sheltered, much more than is often the case today. If Mother didn't meet us from school, she was always at home to greet us when we returned. She did her best to keep us neat and tidy, clothed in short knickerbockers and a knitted jersey. She often crocheted the lace collars pinned round our necks but there was an occasion when mine had rough handling by another boy and I arrived home with it in tatters. So we ceased wearing lace collars!

Another form of attire was a sailor suit minus the cap, but the collar of that was not always treated with respect. It came under fire and so the collar was discarded. But my general impression of those days is of being secure and contented. Toys were simple and left much to the imagination. The acme of a Christmas present was a tin bus and a few lead soldiers acting as passengers. It was easier to walk them up the stairs of the bus to the open deck than to put them inside where it was difficult to manipulate them. A clockwork train set was an even greater treat. It was difficult with a small engine and three coaches revolving round a small circular track to prevent the coaches from falling off the rails, especially when the engine was fully wound.

My father and mother had met in a Methodist Church where my father was Sunday School Superintendent and my mother a Sunday school teacher. We were taught the simple truths of the Christian faith and the difference between right and wrong. We were taught to say our prayers when we went to bed. I am afraid they were not very meaningful. One we used to say was "Gentle Jesus meek and mild, Look upon a little child". I always wondered where the mice came in in the next line, "Pity my simplicity"! Then there followed the usual blessings, "Bless mother, bless dad, and a selected list of relations, Amen".

My brother George and I grew up together as great companions. We played together and went out in the semi-rural surroundings. It was not far to walk to the open fields and lanes. Where a Council Estate now

stands there were the “seven fields”. We were never quite sure which of the fields were the seven, but it was quite rural. Whitefoot Lane ran alongside the fields. There was a farm and a pond where tadpoles were to be found. George and I once took jam jars in which to put our catch, but George fell into the pond, so that was the end of such excursions.

I am afraid I tended to boss George around. I, as the elder brother dictated the games we should play. When we were still quite young I wanted to play “Churches”. This must have been after we had been taken to Morning Service at Brownhill Road Baptist Church. I had seen the Minister ascend into the pulpit and noticed what went on, even if I did not take much notice of what was said. So George and I, at my instigation, used to play at being in church. I would be the Minister and climb on to a chair and pretend to be in the pulpit; George was usually the captive congregation. He fulfilled various roles, sideman, organist, choirmaster and congregation. He pretended to take the offertory on a kitchen plate and presented it to me. He would go through the motions of conducting the anthem by an unseen choir with a stick of firewood. I would announce the hymn and “preach” a sermon, but often the Service would be cut short by George’s protests that it was too long.

For several years we went to Yarmouth for our summer holidays, which in those days seemed a very long journey, and stayed with a lady called Mrs Bacon. George and I made great play on her name because she gave us eggs and bacon for breakfast. She was a good natured woman who laughed with us at our childish jokes. I once got lost on the sands and was taken to the “lost property” tent. The man there amused me by showing me the wooden boat he was carving. Eventually my mother arrived in a state of panic and in tears. In later years we also went to Margate and patronised “Dreamland”.

During the First World War, we went to Stokenchurch, a small village on the Chilterns. We would be met at West Wycombe by Mrs Hodges with her pony and four wheeler trap (wagonette) for the five mile journey to Stokenchurch which took about an hour. There was Dashwood Hill to negotiate. At the foot of the hill, all passengers except mother alighted and some of us pretended to help push the wagonette up the hill. Stokenchurch in those days was a quiet place with its village green and manor house, but there were a few workshops and saw mills where chairs were made for the larger firms in High Wycombe where we sometimes travelled in Mrs Hodges’ trap.

Just before the outbreak of the war in 1914, my father had a serious illness and was on the danger list for several days. He was taken to St John's Hospital, Lewisham. We were taken to see him once or twice, but he recovered to live to the age of 87. He spent time after hospital treatment in a Convalescent Home on the seafront at Rustington, which I remember visiting with my mother and George. I sometimes pass it today.

My father, who was very patriotic, wanted to enlist when the First World War came but was disappointed to be rejected from active service due to his recent illness, but eventually he was accepted for the Army Pay Corps and travelled daily to Charlton where he was stationed until the end of the war.

Dad, was a gentle, kindly man, not easily ruffled. I can never remember his bearing a grudge against anyone. He loved children and they loved him. He had a great way when he told a story, enacting dramatic parts or illustrating what he told with pencil sketches as he went along. He had a real gift for drawing all kinds of things and people. He had left school at an early age but he did all he could to compensate for the lack of formal education. He was an avid reader and made himself extremely well informed. There was a short period when he read the Bible to us after breakfast. I can remember one occasion - it must have been Good Friday - when he read the account of the Crucifixion in a trembling voice which nearly brought my mother to tears. It was so graphic.

My father was patient with us all, even when he appeared to be annoyed. I am afraid we never took him seriously. Once he was roused when George moved the pedals of an upturned bicycle and Ron, our younger brother, caught his fingers in the spokes of the revolving wheel. No serious damage was done, but Ron cried out. Dad arrived on the scene and grabbed a brass stair rod and applied it to a tender spot at the rear of George, but even then it was only a token tap, for I seem to remember that George saw the funny side, and so did I. He was cool headed in a crisis. I remember the day when he drove us up Cudham Hill in Kent - gradient one in five - in an Austin Seven, with my mother in front and three of us boys in the back. The car would not take it. He calmly let off the brake, the car rolled backwards, and he steered it to a bank, which he had noticed previously, where there was a sheer drop on one side. He was not flustered but my mother nearly fainted, and we

were all shaken.

However, temperamentally, he was too easy-going. While much in his character can be ascribed to his Christian faith, for he had a real trust in God, there was at times conflict in the home, especially regarding money matters. He sometimes got into debt. This troubled my mother who would never live on credit but always saved up for anything she wanted to buy and would gladly go without what she could not afford. It always distressed her when she realised that Dad had over-spent or owed money. This led to a lack of understanding and a certain amount of friction between my parents.

My mother was a strong character. She set high standards for herself and for all of us. I suppose we would call it “Victorian morals” nowadays. I remember how one day when someone called at the house my brother George and I were left in the dining room. The sugar basin was before us and we had the opportunity of tasting the sugar. Unfortunately for us the clink of the spoon in the dish was heard by my mother in the next room and when the visitor had gone we were severely reprimanded and told of the evils of stealing.

In the meantime George and I were still at Brownhill Road Elementary School. I had progressed through the Junior Department to the Senior Department where we all stood in awe of the Headmaster, who was a remote figure who conducted morning prayers, but who was not as severe as I anticipated. We were prepared for the London County Council Scholarship Examination which consisted of a paper in Arithmetic and one in English. It was taken at the age of eleven. The top five to ten were offered a place at Christ’s Hospital or Bancroft Schools. The next thousand or so went to various Grammar Schools of their parents’ choice, and the rest went to what was called a Central School and left school at fourteen. Around the School Hall were “Honours Boards” suitably inscribed with the names of those who had been successful in gaining a place at Christ’s Hospital or a Secondary (Grammar) School.

In 1917 a boy named Michael Stewart won a Scholarship to Christ’s Hospital. As it was one of *5* to 10 out of some 27,000 it was a great achievement and an honour to the school. His essay for the examination was read out to the whole school at Morning Assembly. It was a brilliant piece of writing for a boy of eleven years of age. I knew Michael for he lived in our road, a few doors away. On one occasion my brother George

and I were invited to tea with him and his sisters, and he came to tea with us. I was to enter for the scholarship the following year and it was my ambition to win a Christ's Hospital scholarship in 1918.

Arithmetic was never a problem for me and on checking my answers after the scholarship exam it was quite evident that I had scored 100%, but I was not quite so good at English. Coincidentally, or providentially, on the night before the examination I read from Shakespeare's "As You Like It":

> "All the world's a stage
> And all the men: and women merely players.
> They have their exits and their entrances
> And one man in his time plays many parts
> His acts being seven stages."

And so I read through the "Seven stages". In the morning the title for the essay was, "would you like to be like Peter Pan and never grow up, or would you like to become an adult?" I chose to grow up and become an adult, and the "Seven stages" came in, very useful. I am not certain how well I quoted from "Seven Stages" but I must have remembered much of it and impressed the examiners, and it determined my future. I gained one of the five scholarships to Christ's Hospital.

Chapter 2

Christ ‘s Hospital 1918-1926

So I went to Christ’s Hospital, a boarding school for 860 boys, which had once stood on the site of the GPO in London and had moved in 1902 to West Horsham amid the quiet countryside of Sussex. As I travelled down to the school by train with my parents, I again felt very reluctant to be parted from them as I had been when taken by my mother to my Primary School.

On arrival at the school I was rigged out with the distinctive school uniform yellow stockings and a dark blue ankle—length coat with brass buttons bearing the insignia of Edward VI the founder the school in 1552, and white bands at the neck. The vastness of the school overawed me. Left alone in strange surroundings and among strangers, like so many small boys before and since, I was homesick and miserable. I often found it difficult to return to school at the end of the holidays, although as time went on it was not so bad.

During the first term my parents came down for a Saturday afternoon. When the time came for them to leave, we sat on the station platform waiting for the train and I pleaded with them to take me back home, which greatly distressed my mother. In fact she wept for two or three days and nights afterwards. My father then said to her, “We cannot have this. If you wish, I will write and have the boy taken away from the school, but remember that he may regret it for the rest of his life.” My mother stopped weeping and I remained at school. I have lived to be grateful to my father for this. It is a hard lesson to learn that problems are not solved by running away from them.

At first I did not find it easy to adjust to the rough and tumble of a boys’ boarding school. Little boys, and bigger ones too, can be very cruel at times, and a certain amount of bullying went on in those days. Life was made very unpleasant for juniors, or “new kids” as we were called. Compulsory games, cross country runs, morning exercises sometimes out-of-doors, did not add to my enjoyment. The honour and privilege of winning a scholarship to a famous Public School, which I had wanted and worked so hard to achieve, did not turn out to be quite what it had

appeared in my dreams. I had been blind to some of the hardships I would encounter.

As a result my work was affected. My reports during the early period were not good. There was a time when everything seemed to go wrong and I got into trouble all round. When I started at the school I was put on the Classical Side, presumably because I was regarded as a bright boy, having won a scholarship, but my results in Latin did not come up to expectation, so I was transferred to the Modern Side.

History was not my strong subject. In fact I was usually bottom of the class, but one term because a boy spent most of his time in the school infirmary, I came next to bottom. The comment on my report was “Has improved” which gave me some encouragements.

The master who taught us had a strange method of conducting his classes. He shot questions at us. If one answered correctly you were told to “go up, boy”, and you moved several places along the row. If the answer was incorrect, you moved down. Being small boys we did not move from desk to desk quietly and so there was general chaos. Understandably we didn’t learn much — it was more like a glorified game of musical chairs. At the end of the lesson each boy reported how many places he had advanced or retreated. I must have lost more ground than I gained. To add to the general confusion, I am ashamed to say that we took advantage of the fact that the master in question had a glass eye. When he addressed one boy, another would answer. When he pointed with a stick, two boys would stand up?

Under other masters I made greater progress and was able to restore lost ground. When I taught in a Grammar School many years later, I was invited to teach some history. I might add that I did not use the methods by which I was taught.

Art was not my favourite subject either, for I could not draw and I have discovered that my sense of colour is defective. The master who taught us was a good artist himself. During our art lessons some pupils did clay modelling in another room. When the master wasn’t looking, boys would throw wet clay at the blackboard and sometimes at one another. The slang word for clay modelling was “mud-slinging”. This I did not know when my friends suggested that I might ask the master if I could join the “mud-slinging”, and in all innocence I went to the master and said, “Please Sir, may I do mud-slinging instead of painting this

morning"? I came dangerously near to having my ears boxed. The master was livid but he controlled himself and said, shaking with anger, "Go to your place". I was saved from disaster by my obvious innocence.

There were, however, some subjects that I enjoyed. My natural aptitude for mathematics made life easier in these lessons. Music was another. The school has always had a very high reputation for its teaching of music. The band was reputed to be the best school band in the country and the orchestra the second best school orchestra. I played the French horn, and I never fail to be stirred by the haunting notes of the horn when played well, even though the notes I produced may not have been enchanting. Every weekday to this day the band plays for the Dinner Parade when all the school marches to the Dining Hall by houses. It was always a proud moment when the orchestra played on Speech Day when the Lord Mayor of London and some of the Sheriffs visited the school as a recognition of its connections with the City of London. My love of music was kindled by what was in those days an innovation — classes on "Music Appreciation", for which I once gained a prize as well as for mathematics and scripture.

I did not distinguish myself at games, but there was one moment of glory during a game of cricket when I was day dreaming and far away. I was fielding at "point"; the commentators today would call it "silly point" for I was only two yards from the bat. Suddenly I was awakened from my reverie by unexpected applause for the ball hit me sharply on the chest and landed in my hands which were clasped before me.

There were, however, attempts to demonstrate that I could distinguish myself in exploits other than games, whether useful or not. It was the duty of the Headmaster's Orderly to ring the school bell for getting up in the mornings at 7 a.m. and far mealtimes, chapel and lessons. Sometimes he was away for a few days and asked one of the boys to take on the duty of ringing the bell which was heard in all parts of the school. Once he entrusted this duty to another boy and myself. Not being experienced bellringers we had to learn the art of pulling the cord at a moderate speed, normally about 60 a minute. My friend and I discovered that we could increase this and were able to work up a striking rate of 120 plus. The result was it sounded more like a fire-bell through the school. We received many comments, not all of them complimentary! This kind of activity was to prove something to myself and others. If I could not attain prowess on the playing fields, I could at least ring the bell faster than

anyone else.

In the early days at Christ's Hospital two of the teachers of my former school came down and took Michael Stewart and myself out to tea and a walk. While we were out I lost my leather girdle, which had a real silver buckle. It cost 7/6d, which was a lot of money in those days. On returning home the teachers sent me a postal order for 7/6d with which I bought a new buckle but I didn't acknowledge the receipt of the money. Soon afterwards I received a strong letter from my mother to say that the teachers had wondered whether I had received the money, and I had a lecture on never receiving money without acknowledging it, a lesson I have never forgotten.

When I was about 15, my brother George wrote to tell me that he had decided to be baptised and suggested that we both took this step together. We had been taught that being baptised was a way of indicating publicly that we confessed allegiance to Christ and His way of life. Consequently during my next holidays we were baptised together. I returned to school with a new attitude, determined to put into practice what I had promised to do. I am afraid it was with varying success but it gave me purpose and an anchorage. My work at school improved, and I even began to enjoy games and other activities. Some of us determined that as senior boys we would not have bullying in our House, and I believe we made life more pleasant for juniors than it had been for some of us in our early days.

At about that time there was a general election and the school held a mock election. One of our candidates who stood for Labour was Michael Stewart, the boy who had been a pupil at my previous school. He conducted his election campaign with a touch of ingenuity. I forget the result but there was no doubt that Stewart knew what he was about. In future years our paths in life diverged. He became a Member of Parliament, Foreign Secretary in the Wilson Government and now sits in the House of Lords as Lord Stewart of Fulham.

As in other Public Schools, we often had lectures given by distinguished people and some of these stand out. One was by the Headmaster's brother who was Editor of the "Daily Express", on "How a Newspaper is Made", and he must have appealed to those who in after years became journalists. There was another lecture by the school doctor who gave us hints on health and hygiene and the care of our teeth

We enjoyed performances of many of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas and at the end of Christmas Term the master, their wives and daughters delighted us with a play or some form of entertainment. In our separate houses we produced a play at the end of other terms. I performed in G.K. Chesterton's "Magic", a fantasy in which a conjurer' s power to make an electric lamp which is normally red, turn blue, is ascribed to magic. I took the part of the skeptical doctor, and at one point my line was, "…. as my friend Huxley says…..'. The Headmaster who was our special guest came out with a loud chuckle, which I did not understand at the time, but it must have been his amusement at the idea of my being a friend of Huxley's.

We all had a very high regard for the Headmaster, William Hamilton Fyfe (later Sir William), who was one of the great Heads of our time. This has been shown in a recent issue of the school magazine "The Blue" where he was described as "the greatest and best loved headmaster ……His humaneness, his width and nobility made him unique". This would represent the feelings of many Old Boys. He went to Canada to become Principal of Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, and later to Aberdeen as Vice Chancellor.

During my last year at school I began to think about my future. I had set my heart on becoming a Chartered Accountant, as mathematics was my best subject. In those days a premium had to be paid to a firm to be accepted as an Articled Clerk and I knew my parents could not afford this. However, the Headmaster had been approached by an Old Blue Chartered Accountant who offered a boy leaving school free Articles in his office on condition that he had the necessary exemption from the Preliminary exam. London Matriculation gave this exemption but unfortunately I failed it in French. I thought at the time that my world had collapsed.

While I was miserable at times at Christ's Hospital, there was another side to it, and I am grateful for what the school did for me. I have a great love for it now and was loath to leave when the time came.

For all of us the Leavers' Service was a memorable and moving occasion. Every part of the Service was poignant and many of us had to choke back tears.

We sang:

"For all the joys which thou has deigned to share,
For all the pains which thou has helped to bear,

For all our friends, in life and death the same,
We thank thee, Lord, and praise thy glorious name.
If we have learnt to feel our neighbour's need,
To fight for truth in thought and word and deed,
If these be lessons which the years have taught,
Then stablish, Lord, what thou in us has wrought."

Then the reading from Philippians IV:

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

Particularly memorable to me is the Charge to leaving boys said by the Headmaster, as he presented each one of us with a beautiful hardback Bible, embossed with the School crest and including the Apocrypha:-

"I charge you never to forget the great benefits that you have received in this place and in turn to give according to your means, to do all you can to enable others to enjoy the same advantage. Remember that you carry with you, wherever you go, the good name of Christ's Hospital. May God mightily bless you in all your ways and keep you in the knowledge of his love, now and forever."

After tea that evening I went along to the Headmaster's house and asked him if he would write in my Leaver's Bible the words of the Charge. The Bible at the moment is in a tattered state through years of use, but I still treasure the words of the Charge written in the Headmaster's handwriting dated 28th July, 1924, and signed W.H.Fyfe.

NOTE:

Since writing the above, I have received a letter from an old school friend who, also, has a great admiration for William Hamilton Fyfe. He tells how once when the bell cable was temptingly near at hand, he gave it a little tug, not expecting the bell to ring, but it did. In due course he was summoned to the Headmaster's study. All kinds of fears filled his mind as he knocked tentatively at the door. There came from within a kindly and welcoming "Come in, come in." What exactly either of them said is beyond recall except that the boy received an extremely friendly admonishment. The outcome was that a minor punishment was prescribed. My friend concludes, "It served to cement the very high regard I have always had for a truly great gentleman."

Chapter 3

Preparation 1926-33

After I left school I applied for jobs in the City and the first one that opened up was in a Solicitors' office as a junior clerk, i.e. office boy. Because I had been to a good school like Christ's Hospital, I did not continue for long in this capacity, but was given more responsible and interesting work to do. A Barrister who pleaded our cases in Court would need an assistant, and I was given the simple task of attending with him. I visited most of the County Courts in the London area during my time in the office. This opened my eyes to a different side of life from the one in which I had grown up. Domestic disputes, neighbours' wrangles, the seamy side of life and serious offences were as good as any thriller for a lad of eighteen. I became friendly with one young Barrister, and the way he conducted our cases intrigued me. On one occasion our client, the defendant, contradicted himself in the witness box and it appeared to me that our case had been lost. During the tea break, our Counsel paced up and down with cup of tea and biscuit in hand, remarking that we had been let down. I was then surprised at how he used the evidence when we returned to Court and in a few moments we had won our case.

In the office we took a personal interest in many of our cases. There was the young man who had been charged with manslaughter. He had run into an old lady on his motor-cycle and she had died. All the evidence that we read in the documents made us feel sympathetic towards the defendant and his widowed mother. But sympathy does not win a case in a Court of Law. It was decided to go for the best King's Counsel obtainable. Marshall Hall, Curtis Bennett, and Sir John Simon were approached. We were staggered by the high fees charged merely to read the brief. But one was engaged and there was great rejoicing when our client was found not guilty of manslaughter. This involvement with people was useful experience for my future but I still had much to learn.

One day I was given an urgent message for the senior partner who was a stout man with a florid complexion and a short temper. I burst into his private office, and on my return to the outer office was told that all the odds were on my being sacked as no-one ever dared to enter his

office while his secretary was with him. I learned later what this meant, but fortunately nothing happened to me.

Another of my duties was to serve a writ or subpoena on someone summoned to appear in Court. I had to deliver the document in person which was not always easy. However, as I received half a crown (2/6d) for every one I served I usually found a way of doing so. Sometimes I met them at their place of employment where I would be asked to meet them apart from their colleagues in the waiting room or works' yard. At other times I called at their homes. Again this was useful experience in learning how to approach people.

On one occasion I had to go to a Harley Street specialist who was to be witness in a certain case. I approached the door of his consulting rooms with apprehension, where I was met by his receptionist. She asked my name which I gave but with no further particulars. She was puzzled but after a few moments the consultant received me and to his surprise received his subpoena. I felt sorry for him because he said that he was to have gone to the funeral of a great friend on that day. But at that time half a crown was half a crown to me.

I worked in the Solicitors' office for six months. While I found the work interesting I began to feel that there might be some other way in which I should use my life. I began to have a growing conviction that I should offer myself for the Christian ministry, and as I was a member of a Baptist Church, that it should be for the Baptist ministry. I did not say anything to anybody about this, but one Sunday evening I stayed behind after the Service and went to the Minister's vestry and told him that this was what I felt I should do. He was encouraging, and to my surprise he advised me to apply to Regent's Park College which had a good academic record but in those days was regarded as rather liberal in its theological outlook.

When I arrived home later than usual, my parents asked me what had delayed me and I tentatively told them what I had done. My mother rejoiced greatly but my father had his reservations, because of the financial side. This was understandable as George and I were the only ones earning besides my father, and by that time we had another brother, Arthur, who was only five years old, while Ron was nine.

On the next Monday morning, the Junior Partner of the firm of Solicitors called me into his office and offered me free Articles, and I told

him of my decision. I said to him, “I decided only yesterday to enter the Ministry.” I then began to look around for a more financially rewarding job because things were tight at home. At one point my father was unemployed and I drew out my meagre savings to help over the crisis. So I applied to all the clearing banks for a job. The first one to reply offering an interview was Williams Deacons. I worked at the Head Office in Birchin Lane for eighteen months, while I studied for the college entrance examination.

This again was an interesting job. I started in the correspondence department which meant dealing with inward and outward mail in the morning and packing up bank notes for other branches at night. Then I was put on what was called “walks” which meant calling at the non-clearing banks delivering their cheques in the morning and collecting their remittances in the afternoons. At first it was round the City and later the West End.

We used to carry a little leather bag chained to our wrist or round our waist. If we collected a bank note of over £50 we had to tear it in half and put half in the case and half in our trouser pocket and when we arrived back at the bank, we stuck it together and put the bank stamp on it. This was our security which would certainly be regarded as primitive by modern standards. When I was promoted to deal with the West End area, I would take my sandwiches on the Serpentine for the lunch hour. I used to like that, as it gave me time to study.

There was a lot of ground to make up. As I have said, when I first started at Christ’s Hospital, I had learnt a little Latin. I had come to the conclusion that I was no good at languages after my indifferent performance at school, but now I was to study Latin and Greek for my entrance examination to Theological College, and later Hebrew - all these to degree standard. The prospect was daunting, but the conviction that I was on the right course was a great incentive.

I travelled up to London each morning on the Workman’s train, leaving Hither Green well before 8 a.m. . and often I had to stand in a crowded compartment until we reached London Bridge. I devised a scheme whereby I could test myself on Latin verbs and vocabulary, and was able to do some of the reading for the entrance exam.

During this time also a friend coached me in the evenings in Latin and Greek, and made me write a sermon. Before I entered college, I was

required to conduct a service and preach a trial sermon on a week-night before my own church members. Before I went to that Service, my father, on the one occasion, which he did, so, said to the family: “Let us pray for the boy” and we all knelt down and prayed. It was a great thing for him to do; we were very reserved about our religious feelings in those days. The text I took was Galatians 2.20 “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth within me”. I am sure I did not realise the full significance of these words at the time, but I was sincere. I have taken a long time to grasp that Christ does not live in me unless self is eliminated, and that it means I “pour contempt on all my pride”, which is a very difficult thing to do. I preached a very long sermon thinking the congregation should have good measure but they must have been long-sufferlng as they recommended me to the college.

There followed an interview with Revd Dr Wheeler Robinson, the Principal, and then the entrance exam. In those days only half the number of candidates was accepted. We stayed for two days at the college and on the second day we had to appear one by one before the Selection Committee when we were invited to read a passage of scripture and say why we felt we should enter the Ministry, quite an ordeal for young men, most of us very nervous.

I entered Regent’s Park College in 1926 with high ideals and a great sense of expectancy. Here I was set on the path, which was to lead me to the work I believed I was meant to do. The fellowship with men with similar aims and ideals, most of whom had made similar sacrifices, was a rich one for me. It was the most satisfying experience of my life to that point.

We lived a communal life together in a large building in Regent’s Park. The building was an impressive one. It had been an old mansion and was divided into two; part was occupied by an actress and part was the college quarters. We were quite near the Zoo and on occasion there were those who mistook our drive for the entrance to the Zoo. This was a source of amusement and many wisecracks, as can be imagined, and a number of apocryphal stories were circulated.

We started the day with what we called “prayers”. This was a short devotional period consisting of a hymn, a reading from the Bible and prayers. These sessions were conducted by each of us students in turn and sometimes by the Principal who was always present. After breakfast

we walked up Avenue Road to lectures at New College which was a building at the junction of Belsize Park and Finchley Road, where today there is a block of flats.

Students from Hackney Congregational College joined us for lectures, coming from their college. Some of us followed a course for the London B.D. degree and others for a Diploma in Theology. Some of our lecturers were outstanding and some, in my opinion, were not.

Our Principal, the Revd Dr Wheeler Robinson, was a scholar of international repute and a great teacher. His knowledge of the Old Testament and his teaching of Hebrew were outstanding. As students we had a good grounding in Old Testament studies and were expected to be able to read our Hebrew Old Testament, although few of us were able to do so like our distinguished Principal. Dr. Robinson was staying with one of my college friends on one occasion in after years. While my friend was out in the morning his wife heard strange noises coming from the room where she had installed their guest for quiet preparation for the evening service, which he was to conduct. When she investigated from the passageway, she realised that Wheeler Robinson was reading his Hebrew Bible aloud.

Like some other Biblical scholars, he was an avid reader of detective stories. It was said that Wheeler Robinson would read a detective story at bedtime each evening. One day he was in a library finding it difficult to discover one he had not read. The young librarian offered assistance, and after several suggestions she turned and said, “Sir, why don’t you try something more serious?” He used to tell this story with great glee.

His dogged character, which at times verged on obstinacy, was demonstrated by another story, apocryphal or otherwise. He arrived at a church where he was to conduct services and was asked by the officials whether he was going to wear his doctorate gown and hood. His reply was “If I may, I will; if I must, I won’t”. Not all our teachers captured our imagination like Dr Robinson. One lecturer used the same notes year after year for his lectures and a typewritten copy, which a past student had made, was surreptitiously available. On one occasion when the learned professor was unable to read his own writing and hesitated, the student who possessed these notes prompted him. With a “thank you”, he continued dictating. It gave point to our definition of a lecture as “a process by which the notes in the lecturer’s notebook are transferred to

the notebook of the student without passing through the mind of either".

Lectures were from Tuesday to Friday as at weekends many of us were preaching at churches in the neighbourhood or further afield. We were trained to speak in public and to use our voices at elocution lessons, which I am afraid we did not always take seriously enough. A funny little man came in and made us sing and some of us were not singers. One man was tone-deaf and when told to go up the scale, he sometimes went down and made a terrible noise, much to our amusement.

The great ordeal for us was the "Sermon Class", which was held once a week. The man whose turn it was that week, was required to produce a written sermon and deliver it to the class. The previous week he had announced his text, so that the rest of the class could look up the commentaries and the background material. Everyone took notes and at the end each member of the class was called upon to make comments, after which the Principal would sum up, giving his assessment of the comments and the sermon. The comments of the students were not always complimentary. One of these brought the house down when he said, "Mr. Jones fell between two stools without making any definite impression". We all waited for the Principal's assessment, which was often different from that of the students.

College training was a useful preparation for our work ahead, but, as with many professional courses, there was much that was not used after taking exams. We learned how to construct a sermon or at least we were taught how to do so. We discussed theology and ethical problems with youthful enthusiasm All very good. We had lectures in psychology and what was called "pastoral theology", which in layman's terms is how to conduct affairs in our churches, what are the duties of a Minister and what is the gospel. All these were valuable and I am sure most of us can be grateful for all that was given to us during our time at college. I for one owe much to those days. Especially helpful were the weekly Communion Services at which the Principal gave a devotional address.

When we reached the penultimate year of our course, we were expected to take what was called a student pastorate. This meant that we visited a small country church once a month for a weekend. We were expected to visit some of the members, to preach at both services on the Sunday and usually conduct a church business meeting on the Monday.

One thing that was impressed upon us was the need to be disciplined

in our personal and public lives and not sloppy. Time-keeping was to be observed. When later I was Minister of a church, I learned how necessary this is. We always endeavoured to start our services and meetings precisely on time. Often week-night meetings tended to start late. I always felt that this was unfair to those who made the effort to come at the right time, so I made a point of always starting on time, however few were present, and the others soon got the message.

During the time I was at Regent's Park College, plans were being made to transfer the college to Oxford, as the lease of the building in Regent's Park was due to expire. Thus, when my four year course was completed in London, I was invited with a few other students to continue our studies for another two years at Oxford. Again the Congregational College came to our help and offered Regent's Park College men membership of Mansfield College and this happy arrangement continued until Regent's Park College was established as a part of the University of Oxford.

It was at this point that I met someone who told me about something called The Oxford Group.

Chapter 4

Something New

While I was at Regent's Park College in London, I spent the month of August each year conducting "Sand Services" at Herne Bay. In 1930 a Presbyterian Minister from Dulwich attended the services with his family, and when he returned home, he invited me to tea to meet a friend of his, a Mr Wilson. Roly Wilson was a young man about my own age who had read Greats at Oriel College, Oxford, and was entering Mansfield College to prepare for the Congregational Ministry at the same time as I was. Over tea he told me stories of people who had met the Oxford Group and found a faith, and how he himself had faced four absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, which I recognised as a summary of the Sermon on the Mount. As he talked, I began to feel very angry. I had spent four years studying the great doctrines of the Christian faith, "God", "Man", Sin and Grace", "The Atonement", and "The Holy Spirit". I said to myself, "What right has this man who has not studied theology to talk as if he knew more about it than I do?" Yet somehow I was intrigued by what I had heard.

He then invited me to accompany him to a meeting in a Baptist Church in Camberwell, South London, where he and some of his friends were speaking. What impressed me about the speakers was that they had been able to pass on their own experience to others. They talked about seeking guidance from God for big things and small. At the end of the meeting there was a time of silence and all I could think about was what I might say if called upon to speak or close the meeting with a prayer, for as a Baptist theological student I expected to be asked to take some part, but nothing happened so I went home. My parents were interested to hear what I had to tell them and we all agreed that it was encouraging to hear of such good work being done among undergraduates.

When I went up to Oxford in the following October, I was at first eager to find out more about this Oxford Group and attended some meetings which were held in the rooms of Julian Thornton Duesbery, an Oxford Don. But soon I lost interest for there were many other good things to enjoy and all kinds of societies to join. Also there was something about these people that made me uncomfortable, so I decided not to have too

much to do with them. In fact I had quite a number of criticisms. For instance, I could not go along with what was said about "guidance". I did not see how I could be guided in everything, and was not sure that I wanted to be, for hadn't I been given free will?

I was cycling along the Woodstock Road one day when I saw my friend Wilson on his bike a little way ahead. I thought to myself, "Now he thinks he is being guided every time he puts his feet down on the pedals". I wondered what he would be guided to do if I caught up with him; so I kept my distance. Previously I had been cycling to the Boat Club and inadvertently bumped into the back of a policeman on point duty at Carfax. I didn't think this could have been guidance, and the policeman certainly did not! It was only my profuse apologies that saved me from trouble.

Also much was said about Quiet Times and getting up earlier in the mornings to listen to God for guidance. I tried it and did not get any lofty thoughts. The four absolute moral standards seemed to be taking things too far. I was beginning to enjoy life at Oxford. I was meeting some nice girls who invited some of us to dances at the women's college, Lady Margaret Hall. We sometimes hired a punt and spent pleasant afternoons on the river. I did not want anything to interfere with these activities. Neither did I wish to appear a prude but tried to show that a theological student could be "normal" like other people. This applied also at the Boat Club.

When it came to religious matters I did not like the informal way meetings were conducted. I had been accustomed to prayers being addressed to the Almighty in dignified language and in a reverent voice. These people in the Oxford Group talked to God as if they knew Him. Someone had said to me that the Oxford Group was "psychological rather than religious" so I added that criticism to my list.

After I had been at Oxford for fifteen months, there were three meetings of the Oxford Group in the ballroom of the Randolph Hotel. I dodged the first two having been invited by some of my friends, but was persuaded to go to the third. Somebody said to me, "You are a fair-minded person, Ben, so you will surely take another look", so to prove that I was fair-minded, I went. The ballroom was full of people and there were some interesting speakers, including Dorothy Round, the Wimbledon tennis player, Reggie Holme of Hell Fire Club fame who told how he had

found something more exciting than racing motorcycles. There was an American named Ken Twitchell, who spoke about people he had met in Europe and the Balkans, and how the “Polish Corridor” was causing international concern as a disputed stretch of land, and that the only hope was that something happened in the hearts of people.

I lost all sense of time and everything that was said seemed to apply to my longings and me. The last speaker was the Rev. Dr. L.W. Grensted, the Oxford Professor of Philosophy of the Christian Religion. I had attended his course of lectures on the Psychology of Religion and had been much helped by them. One sentence he used hit me between the eyes: “If you want to do big things, take care of the small things”, referring to these absolute moral standards. I said to myself, “Yes, I will do that.” I went away from that meeting feeling very different and with a strong desire to have what these people had talked about. I realised how wrong I had been.

Some of my friends were standing around the door as we left and if they had asked me how I had got on I would have said something negative, because my pride was such that I would not let them know it had been such a deep experience in my heart. I went back to my “digs” and I knelt down and said to God, “I will do anything you tell me to do”, and I thought to myself “as long as you don’t tell me to do so-and-so, so-and-so, and so-and-so…….” I also said, “I will go to the meeting which Roly Wilson has in his rooms at 7.30 tomorrow morning, if I wake, thinking that I wouldn’t.

Wonder of wonders, next morning I awoke to get to the meeting at 7.30. There were about six to eight of us in that room and Roly Wilson asked us all to share what had come to us in the morning time of quiet. As it came to my turn I went through the usual “Shall I, shan’t I?” process and all I said was that I had decided to give this thing a try, thinking it would be for about three weeks. Incidentally I am still trying it at the age of eighty?

Roly invited me to lunch and over lunch he told me a few things about himself and I told him a few things, a very few, about myself. He then invited me to go to a meeting which was held in the room in St. Mary’s Church, where Wesley used to hold the meetings of his “Holy Club”. I was surprised to find about 80 to 100 undergraduates present. To my horror at one point Roly said, “Ben, will you tell us what you said at the meeting

this morning?" I was even shy to say my own name in public, but I said, "My name is Ben Baxter and I have decided to try this thing for a little while", and sat down, and the chair collapsed? How symbolic.

So I tried it. One of the thoughts that came to me was to tell my mother exactly what sort of person I was like. She always said that I was an open book, but I took good care that she saw the right page. Various other matters had to be settled.

One was that I had been dishonest at a number of points with my College Principal, Dr Wheeler Robinson, whom I respected and feared. I made a list of these and made an appointment to go to his study after Dinner one evening. Roly Wilson said to me as I went that he would be praying for me, and I felt I needed it

As I entered, Dr Robinson sat at his desk and I felt his penetrating eyes upon me. He was a disciplined man himself and expected high standards from his students. I said, "I have one or two things to tell you, Sir." I then read through my list. One point was that I had pretended to do more work than I had. I told him how I had wasted time on some of my distractions. There were other matters on my list also. He listened in silence and merely said at the end, "Thank you, Mr Baxter, for being so honest." That was the beginning of my experimenting with a new way of life.

When I went home next vacation, I took a day or two to pluck up courage to tell my mother all about myself, of some of which I was ashamed. She listened in silence and said, "I had a sense that something was wrong. Thank you." She was poking the fire at the time.

I continued trying these quiet times, and a morning or two later I had the thought, "Go down and apologise to dad for the way you have treated him." My brother, George, and I had often taken the mickey out on him. We used to laugh at him and imitate him. He was so good-natured that he took it all. I knew that he always went down to make a cup of tea for my mother, so I joined him in the kitchen. But then I lost courage and talked about the weather and incidentals. I went back to my room and found I couldn't get any more thoughts from God. So the thought came, "Go down and have another try", thinking that he would not be there. But he was and I said, falteringly, "Dad I am sorry for the way I have treated you, and I hope you will forgive me."

To which he replied, “I would like to go to that meeting you talked about. Where is it to be held?” There was to be a public meeting of the Oxford Group that evening, so I told him and he went on his own, and was very impressed and came home and talked about it and we began to have times of quiet together in the mornings, and one of his decisions was to give up smoking, which he did. Later at a time of crisis, when Peter, my little brother of six died suddenly and we thought mother was dying, father and I were able to hold the situation together and bring comfort and direction to the family, and incidentally, my mother lived for another six years (but more about that later).

During the Easter vacation of 1932, Roly invited me to join a campaign in Norwich based at Princes Street Congregational Church, a large church where he knew the Minister. I told him I hadn’t got the money to go and that I ought to be studying, but he said that God would look after that if I felt I should go. He reminded me of St Paul’s journeys and what they had done for the world. Actually he offered to take me in his car. It was a great experience for me because I began to see how to pass on one’s faith to others. You didn’t have to preach at people, but to be honest about yourself.

When we were theological students we had sometimes conducted campaigns in a town or village based at the local church. During the day we called on people, distributing leaflets announcing our evening meetings. We decided who would address each meeting, sometimes held in the open air, where we encountered hecklers. Our aim had been to win the argument and present a convincing case for Christianity, all a very useful exercise.

But on this visit to Norwich our purpose was to meet the deep needs of people by letting God meet our own needs. We gathered together in the mornings and pooled the thoughts which had come in our early morning quiet times. Sometimes we apologised for jealousy or competitiveness. We were honest about where we had failed. Then we planned for the day - people to meet, what should be said at our meeting that day and who should speak. There was a sense of being used together as a team rather than individual efforts. We were not interested in winning arguments but winning people. I came away with no sense of how well I had done, but thankful for what God had done through such a motley crowd of people.

During the next term I had my first experience of bringing another person to Christ. I had borrowed a book, and returned it one evening to a man in another college. Somehow I found we were talking about things deepest on our hearts and he told me things he had never told anyone before, and as the evening drew on and the shadows lengthened, we knelt down and he committed himself to God and the direction of his life was changed and later he became a Baptist Minister.

Not long afterwards, I remembered that I had on my bookshelf some books which belonged to Christ's Hospital. I told myself that the school could do without them and thought they would not be missed, but the uncomfortable thought came that I should send them back to the school with a letter telling why I was doing it. I also felt that I owed some confession to my old Headmaster, Hamilton Fyfe. There were some things of which I was ashamed during my time at "Housey" (Christ's Hospital), and so I wrote to him telling him about the books I had returned and other things I had done wrong. I also sent him a copy of the book "For Sinners Only".

He was at this time Principal of Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. I started my letter by saying I wondered whether he would remember me, for there were 860 boys at the school and another generation had passed through by then. I received a warm and friendly reply saying that of course he remembered me and thanking me for my letter and the book, which he had read with great interest. He said there was a "Group" in Canada and he hoped they would come to Kingston, and that he had heard much about the work from other Old Boys. He was happy to hear of the steps I had taken and thanked me for letting him know.

My mother was never very strong and in 1932 she underwent an internal operation from which she was not expected to recover. She was confined to bed and the family all took their part in carrying the burden of the household chores.

I went away in October to a House Party (conference) at Southport where a team of men and women were to leave for America with Frank Buchman, the founder of the Oxford Group. I would have liked to go with them to America but there was nothing to indicate that I should. There was a Commissioning Service on the last Sunday in Liverpool Cathedral, which was then in the process of construction. On the Monday morning we were all leaving for home. Just as I was preparing to leave for the

station there was a 'phone message from the House Party office. My friend, Basil Yates, said, "Ben, I have bad news for you". I immediately thought that my mother had died. He then went on to say, "Your brother Peter has died suddenly". He was only six years old. It was a great shock. On the train to London I met Brigadier David Forster who gave me comfort and we were quiet to learn what there was in this experience for me. I don't remember what was said between us, but I know I was reinforced to face the situation I might find at home.

When I arrived home my mother was in a very bad condition, but my father was serene and sought to comfort my mother. The fact that he had begun to listen for God's direction each morning gave him inner peace and poise. He told me the story of how on the previous night Peter had suddenly been taken ill and that he, my father, had taken him to hospital where he had died soon after arrival. The diagnosis was either a hemorrhage on the brain or a tumour. Did he want a post mortem? He had not wished for this, as the cause was only academic.

This was one of those times when God's presence and his assurance were abundantly real to us. We sat at mother's bed and listened to God together. All I remember is that the last verse of a hymn we had often sung in church came vividly to my mind:

"Thy touch has still its ancient power
No word from Thee can fruitless fall.
Hear in this solemn evening hour
And in Thy mercy heal us all". *(" At even e'er the sun was set")*

We then prayed together - which was not something we often did but it meant a lot to us all.

Throughout the coming days my mother's life hung in the balance. The doctor who signed the death certificate for Peter turned to me and said, "I am afraid this is not the only one you will have." I often sat at my mother's bedside just waiting for what God had to say to us all. friends rallied round.

I had to conduct Services on the following Sunday in Hertfordshire, and we all thought I should go. It was a day when I was upheld. I was in the train feeling sad when the thought came to me, "You will not be sad if you think for others".

Just before the Evening Service I was quietly looking over my sermon

notes when the clear thought came, “Your mother will get better”. It was like the story in the Gospels of the official who came to Jesus asking that his son, who was about to die, might be healed, and Jesus said to him “Go, your son will live.” When the man arrived home he asked when it was that his son got better, and when he was told he realised that it was at that very hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” I returned home, and like the official found that my mother had taken a turn for the better, and on enquiring when “it was at the same hour” that the assurance had come to me. She lived for another six years.

Chapter 5

An Important Interlude

On leaving college, and whilst waiting to be ordained, I spent the summer working with the Oxford Group in Oxford and later with a small team which went to Sheffield, Manchester and Darlington at the invitation of residents to pass on the new way of life which we ourselves were discovering, hoping to do this sort of thing for the rest of my life. But it did not work out that way for me. While it has been the destiny of many others to give their lives working fulltime without salary to this work, mine was to be a different path.

The year 1933 was to be an interlude, an important waiting period. I often spent time at Brown's Hotel in Dover Street where Frank Buchman, the initiator of the Oxford Group (Moral Re-Armament) had been given a small suite of rooms at a greatly reduced rate for use as a base for his work in Britain. The sitting—room was used as an office, storeroom, meeting place for callers and general purposes. A few of us helped with the packing of books and literature, requests for which were coming from all parts of the country. It was a mere trickle compared with today's demands, which come from all over the world, but interest in the Oxford Group was growing and there was

Also correspondence was dealt with and requests came for help at meetings and with groups in homes from all around London and elsewhere. A request was received for someone to visit my old college, Regent's Park College, to tell them about the Oxford Group, for some of the students still studied in London. It was decided that I should go and I took with me some clergy friends. In thinking what to say, I had the uncomfortable thought that I had overcharged expenses when I had been secretary of one of the college societies and that I should repay the amount involved, which I did. Among the students present that day was a man named William Jaeger who later was invited by Frank Buchman to work in East London on as basis of "faith and prayer". He has been doing so in all parts of the world ever since, becoming the trusted friend and counsellor of Labour leaders in many countries.

On another occasion I was taking part in a lunch—time meeting of' businessmen who met in the office of a partner in the Kensington store of Derry and Tome. A man who had been brought along by a business friend recognised my Christ 's Hospital Bible, and at the end of the meeting he came up to me and said, "I remember you at Christ Hospital". His name was Frank Ledwith, who had been a contemporary of mine at the school. He progressed from office boy to being second senior partner in a large firm in the city. We have both been part of the battle for a new kind of world ever since. Our roles have been different, but that day brought us together in a new way.

Something similar to the pattern, which had developed in Oxford among undergraduates, was coming about in London and elsewhere. In Oxford there had been the daily meetings in the upper room at St. Mary's, the University Church, the smaller groups in colleges, people getting up earlier for morning quiet times and sharing with someone else the thoughts that had come. It was not organized - it just happened. It became the foundation upon which the work was built.

Where I lived in South London a few of us met once a week at 7.30 a.m. in the Minister's vestry at Brownhill Road Baptist Church, until our numbers grew, when we moved to one of the church halls. One morning we were joined by Hugh Redwood, the Editor of the News Chronicle, on his way to or from his office in Fleet Street. His book "God in the Slums" had recently caused quite a stir for its story of what had been happening in the last End of London, and the work of the Salvation Army there. At other times we met in pairs or smaller groups in homes. I used to meet with a bank clerk either in his home or mine before he left for his train to the City. We would share with each other the thoughts we believed God had given us that morning in our times of quiet. For me those days marked the formation of the life long habit of spending the first hour of each day in quiet. I have found this as worthwhile as eating my breakfast each morning.

Some Church leaders began to see the significance of what was taking place. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Cosmo Lang, made diligent enquiries about the work. I was one of a party he received at Lambeth Palace when he was given first hand evidence of its wide outreach and growing influence. Later at his Diocesan Conference he told his clergy, "The Oxford Group" is certainly doing what the Church of

Christ exists everywhere to do. It is changing human lives, giving them a new joy and a new ardour to communicate to their fellow creatures what God has given to thou".

It was during this time in South London that something of great importance happened in my life. I met a young lady of about my own age. We were thrown together in the work of the Oxford Group. Often we met at the same meetings and she would give me a lift home in her father's car. Her name was Gwen Causer. Gradually I began to feel that we might be meant for one another and I hoped that she felt the same.

How does one decide such matters and how can one discover what is the right step to take? Like many young men I was shy and awkward in the presence of girls. I had been the eldest of five boys, with no sisters. For six years I had been at a boys' boarding school where the sight of someone in a skirt in the road by our Houses was of general interest. I didn't quite know what "falling in love" meant for I could count a number of girls who came into this category. My roommate in Oxford called me "Heinz, 57 varieties" (printed on Heinz labels in those days). I might have picked the wrong one from the 57! Marriage was depicted as a romance which ended in "living happily ever after", just as today sex seems to be the all-important thing. Neither of these would appear to be the sure basis for lasting happiness and satisfaction.

I had found people I could trust, who would help me be honest with myself, so I confided in two of my friends. They listened to me and agreed that this might well be God's plan for my life and Gwen's. They put to me three questions to consider. Do you love her? Do you believe that this is God's plan? Will you be more useful together than you would be apart? They also suggested that I might wait until I had been invited to a church.

When I was invited to a church and had been there for a few months, I felt the time had come to take further steps and Gwen and I became engaged in April 1934. We thought that we would have to wait for two years before getting married as I had very little money. But some of our friends suggested that we might consider being married by the end of that year and trust in God for our needs. We were married the following September and all the furnishings for our home came as wedding presents, and so we have always regarded our home as given by God and to be used by Him.

We had five parsons to marry us (to make certain the job was done well!), two Baptist, two Methodist and an Anglican. It was more unusual in those days for clergy of different denominations to take part in the same service than it would be today. Of the 250 guests present, 23 were clergy and ministers.

It is interesting that Owen and I found a new experience and direct ion for our lives at about the same time, and I cannot doubt that our marriage and what we could do together were part of God's plan.

Gwen's Story

Right from quite young, probably at my mother's instigation, I used to pray that I might marry the right man, and later on I used to look at every man that came along and wonder if he was the right one. I used to have "pashes" on people; when I was at school I had a pash on another girl. My father thought I was not interested in young men. He had sisters who had never married and he didn't want us children to be in that state, so he suggested that one of the members of the church choir was a nice fellow, and then I got a pash on that fellow, and thought if I married him I would be happy, and if I didn't marry him that I would be unhappy. He got engaged to somebody else and I was terribly upset.

Then there was another young man, Clifford, and my father was keen that I might marry him. Clifford, himself, was very keen and kept on turning up at home or at the office to see me, and my father encouraged it. Clifford was a gifted musician and fine organist and he was clever, but he had hair that stood up on end and I couldn't stand it, and I told my father, who said, "We will tell him to get it out." I liked the young man very much, except for his hair! I remembered all the time that I had prayed that I would marry the right man and so one night I prayed, "Oh God, I want to do your will. If you want me to marry Clifford, will you make it quite clear, and will you make me love him". From that day to this I have never seen him again.

Later I got engaged to a Methodist theological student, Henry, of whom my father approved. Then I met the Oxford Group through a friend who had met it while on holiday in South Africa. She kept inviting me to

house parties where I would get to know more about it, but I told her I already had a faith and didn't need anything more. There were reasons why I didn't want to go. Firstly it was expensive to go and stay for a weekend. Secondly I worked on Saturday mornings as people did in those days. I was employed in my father's office.

But I felt uncomfortable at refusing. So I said at breakfast very casually, "What shall I do about this invitation from Kathleen?" My mother replied, "You will go, won't you darling?" and my father said, "If it is money you are worrying about, I will pay for you." So I said, "But I couldn't go, I have to work." He said, "You can have the time off". So I felt God wanted me there.

At the house party, the Sermon on the Mount was presented to me as four absolute moral standards — honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, and though I had always prayed, listening to God first thing in the morning was a new idea. I came home and decided to try listening, and have been doing so ever since. One of the first thoughts I had was to break off my engagement because it was not honest. I didn't love the fellow and if God wanted me to marry he would tell me. Up till that point, marriage had meant everything to me. After that it didn't matter to me whether I got married or not; God would show me what he wanted me to do.

Actually there were many nice looking young men in the Oxford Group who met in South London in those days but I didn't have any thoughts about any of them, but Ben and I got thrown together. I drove my father's oar and I used to take people home from meetings and Ben was always the last one as he lived near, and so we saw quite a bit of each other. So I began to think a lot about him, and went to a friend and asked her to pray that I would stop thinking about him, but she said it might be right. Than I went to other women whom I trusted and they thought it might be right too.

One day in the car, Ben spoke to me about our relationship, and I was overjoyed. Then one day I had the thought, "So live into the lives of other people that you could face any challenge that God likes to put to you," and I immediately asked myself what would be the biggest challenge, and I knew it would be to give up the thought of marrying Ben. That evening Ben came to me and said: "I have talked over our possible marriage with some friends who I felt would help me to see what

is right." They felt it might well be right but to wait for the time being, which we did. So we stopped seeing so much of each other. Both our families thought we were mad.

We were not clear cut enough. We were thrown together at meetings or going home and I found it a strain. I felt we should make it clean out, to break it off. I told Ben and he said, "Today I have been invited to a church", so then we gathered together our friends. After this meeting I felt our marriage was right and so did our families.

Over the years the thing I have felt I had to give to Ben through marriage was home building and purity in relationships. When we got married, though I didn't realise it, I always put Ben first and felt everything that he did was right, and if we thought differently, then his thinking was right. If he wanted anything, I went all out to get it for him. I see now that this was not purity.

Instead of being controlled by my father, I was being controlled by Ben. I have since realised that I have to be controlled by God and all other relation— ships spring from that. In my commitment as a minister's wife, my duty was to Ben first, then to our two boys, and then to the church. I have learned through the years that it is people who matter, love for people, that everyone is needed. Our home has always been open for people.

Chapter 6

My First Church – Tyndale 1934 – 1938

In the autumn of 1933 I was invited to a church in Reading. I had certain ideas regarding the kind of church I wanted. After all, I had spent six years in theological college, four in London and two in Oxford, and the usual course was for only four years. I thought that a church would feel itself fortunate to have me as its minister. In my youthful enthusiasm I wanted to get on in the Baptist Church and make a mark for myself. This would include being a "good" preacher. I envisaged large congregations appreciating my efforts each Sunday. In most people's mind a "successful" church is one where large numbers attend and where there are many activities and organisations and I wanted to be a success.

In December I commenced my ministry in a small church on the outskirts of Reading. It was called Tyndale Free Church, which meant that it would receive into membership members of every Free Church besides those from Baptist Churches. It was not exactly what I had envisaged as the church for me. There was no permanent building. The services were held in a small hall where everything happened during the week, a women's meeting, Sunday school with two sessions on a Sunday, Boys' Brigade and everything else. The Organist played a harmonium seated on a mall stool. My brother George used to say he had to pedal so fast to keep his balance. There were only thirty to forty members when I went to the church, which hardly compared with what I had hoped for in my dreams.

A friend said to me before I went, "You can have 30 or more "radio sets" tuned in to God every day. I was soon to learn that what happens in people and how they affect the situation around them is more important than success. For example, Will Hey was a loyal member in his early forties and an ardent and active church worker, just the kind of man that any minister would welcome and find useful. He lived with his wife Lyd and his mother-in-law, which he did not always find easy. He was intensely interested and dedicated to his work as a laboratory assistant at the National Institute for Research in Dairying. But he was a sick man, often unwell and didn't expect to live to an old age.

One Sunday I had preached and at the end of the service felt uncomfortable. During the following week I had the persistent thought "You should apologise to the congregation for preaching beyond your own experience. You have been holding up high standards, which you are not living up to yourself. You were compromising and so what you said was not real". To apologise seemed an outrageous thing to do, and something I had not been taught at my theological college, and besides, I had been trying my best to build up my reputation.

However, on the following Sunday, I had a struggle with myself but just before I commenced my sermon, I made a faltering apology to the congregation and asked for their prayers that I would be more faithful in the future. There was no noticeable reaction, but at the end of the service, Will Hoy stood beside me and said, "What you said at the beginning of your sermon interested me a great deal. Can I come and talk with you sometime?" When we met the following Tuesday evening, I told him how I had learnt to face myself, so we were honest about ourselves together in the light of those four absolute standards, and we knelt down and asked God's forgiveness, and dedicated ourselves afresh to his service. After that we used to meet regularly and shared the thoughts we felt God Will had given us found a personal faith, which he was able to pass on to others. He got a fresh vision for his work and was able to bring harmony into his home and his health improved. In fact he lived till his ninetieth year.

Will came to me one evening and said, "Can you come with me to the home of a man with whom I work? We have been visiting farms together and testing their milk production for some time, but we have never really got to know each other. Today I started telling him about myself and what has happened to me, and he told me that his marriage is on the rocks." We went to this man's home and after some time together we listened to God and he was shown some initial steps, which could be taken to repair his marriage. Will stood by his friend thereafter.

Will's neighbour, Jennings, with whom he talked when gardening, professed to be an atheist He had a great fear of death. Will introduced me to him and we made friends. Gradually Mr Jennings found a faith in God. Later it was discovered that he had cancer. One afternoon Will and I went to see him in hospital. As soon as we arrived he said, "I know there is no hope of recovery and that I am near the end of my life, but I am not afraid. Will you both pray with me before I pass over to a better life?" Will

and I knelt down by his bed and each one of us prayed to God just as if we were asking for a safe journey, and then we left him. Will went to his laboratory and I made some calls and went home to tea. That evening the telephone rang and it was a message from the hospital to say that Mr Jennings had just died very peacefully. Will was discovering that religion is more than being a good church worker. He was getting a contagious faith that he could pass on.

The next decisive step was when Will went to an Oxford Group house party at Malvern where he met people from every walk of life who were applying the idea of getting God's mind on their jobs. I can remember the sparkle in his eye when he returned from Malvern. His job was to analyse and to advise on the purity of milk on farms and dairies. One of his assignments was with a large depot where considerable quantities of milk were pasteurised and distributed. Will was having problems here as the purity count was disappointingly low, people's milk going sour on their doorsteps.

He began to think of the manager in his quiet times and consequently told him of how he had put his own life under new management. At first the manager was not having anything to do with belief in God, but it was not very long before he began the experiment of listening to God and soon some of the employees met in the manager's office to do the same. They put up a motto in the office "Clean milk through clean men". As a result some workers caught the point and the men who did the bottle washing admitted that they had not been doing their job thoroughly. When they put it right, the purity of the milk output improved considerably and a large part of Reading was supplied with more wholesome milk.

Alongside all this was his other battleground - his home and his relationship with Lyd, who did not always understand this new outreach, and she sometimes made it quite difficult for Will. Also there was Mrs Stokes, his mother-in-law, who often took sides with her daughter against Will. It was not always easy but he held firm to his new—found faith and the golden thread of guidance. In later years we continued to have touch with him, when we became increasingly aware of a greater freedom coming into his home as Lyd and her mother began to back Will. It was good news to hear that he had been awarded the M.B.E. for his work in the milk industry.

A few years ago when his wife, Lyd, was very ill, his friends at the church told him that they were praying for her. He said to them, “Don’t pray that she will get better, but pray that God’s will may be done.” Lyd died on the morning of the funeral. Will was sitting in his chair having his quiet time, and opposite was the chair in which Lyd had previously sat. The morning sun was shining and cast the shadow of the window pane on her chair, forming the outline of a Cross just where Lyd used to be. Will said that the vivid thought came to him like a voice speaking to him: “Lyd knows and understands all now”. This gave him a great sense of forgiveness for mistakes and harsh words of the past and a deep inner peace, and so he lived with no regrets.

Much later, after Lyd had died, he was not very active and his neighbours were glad to do shopping and various jobs for him. He helped to break down barriers between an Irish Catholic family and some extreme Protestants who lived a few doors from him at a time of great tension. These two families were at loggerheads for a while, but Will gave much thought as to how to bring peace between them. Not long before he died, Will went down with a bad attack of influenza, and he told me on the telephone that he thought his time had come to die, but that he was glad to have recovered because it was a young Catholic girl who had come to help who had passed on the infection to him, and he felt that she would have been upset to have been responsible for the consequences.

Stanley Barnes, an old friend and fellow fighter in the milk industry, wrote a book called “200 Million Hungry Children”. He visited Will when there was a launching of the book at the National Institute Research in Dairying. A short time before he died, Will got one of his helpers to type a letter to his Member of Parliament, the Minister of Health, enclosing Stanley Barnes’ book. He was delighted to tell of the warm reply, which he had received.

Another man who was put in touch with me in the early days in Reading was David Freeman, who was born into a Jewish family and had been brought up as a Jew, but having made the experiment of trying to listen to God, found that Jesus Christ was becoming real to him. He wanted to learn more.

A few of us often met in the mornings to share together the thoughts which God had given us and then we would go our separate ways - a

young journalist to the “Reading Standard”, the milk expert to his laboratory, David to his branch of Clement Clarke’s, the dispensing opticians, I to my study and ministerial duties. As the weeks went by it became increasingly clear that David was experiencing the vital touch of the living Christ upon his life. After several months, he decided to join the Christian Church and asked me to baptise him. Along with our mutual friend Will Hoy, and the journalist, he made public witness to the fact that he had given his life to Christ. It is true to say that ever since those days David has been a living witness to what Jesus Christ can do for one who puts his trust in Him. There was an unmistakable pattern running through his life.

This was apparent in his job as a dispensing optician. He performed the practical skills of his profession with meticulous care. He treated you as a person, not merely as a customer or case to be dealt with as quickly as possible. He regarded his work as a vocation. This was clearly shown when he was asked to give the daily “Thought for the Day” on Radio Medway. On the first morning he talked about dispensing a prescription and how he needed a prescription for his life. I quote from what he said:

“.... the word “prescription” as laid down in the dictionary is ‘authoritative direction’. My own life underwent a new direction when it was put to me that God had a plan for the world and each person in it. All I had to do was to try and listen to God by being quiet and seeing if He would say anything to me. It began as an experiment and it showed me that God was real and that I could obey Him. This prescription helped me to see clearly where I needed to change and become different.”

On subsequent mornings he drew out the simple lessons of his job and how they related to his Christian faith and the fight for a better world. For many years and until her death, his mother-in-law lived with the family. This is rarely an easy situation and there is no ready-made answer to the mother-in-law problem, but David and Dorothy his wife worked at it and with honesty and forbearance all round, they lived an answer which many fail to find. I know that Dorothy’s mother was grateful to have a good son-in-law who cared and fought - not her! - but for what was right.

There were others who began to see a new way to live, and some of their stories follow. In those early days I learnt that building faith in people was the corner-stone of building the Church, and that more

important than my success was that Christ had His way in our lives.

Chapter 7

The Tyndale Adventure

When Gwen joined me in September 1934, a new adventure began. I now had a home as well as a study as a base. On the first Sunday after our return from honeymoon, I went round to the church for morning service and to my surprise found no-one there. We had forgotten to put back our clocks!

Gwen received a warm welcome into the small church community, for some of the members had been present at our wedding, and she soon made friends with the women. She became involved in some of the church activities, especially the Women's Meeting, for we were on the edge of a Council Estate and many women were glad to spend a Monday afternoon in the church hall which at a squeeze could accommodate 120 people. She soon learnt that the spotlight falls on a Minister s wife and that much is expected of her, but she was not deterred.

She also had to learn to house-keep on a small income. In the early days she went into a butcher's shop and asked for "Some meat please". The butcher was non plus but found her "some meat", and told her how to cook it! From that point on he was very helpful.

We both were mindful that our home had been given to us by God and that we were meant to be stewards rather than possessive of it. How was it to be used?

We got to know some undergraduates at the University of Beading, so we invited them to bring some of their friends into our home. We put aside a regular afternoon for what we called "Student Squashes", which in our lounge sometimes turned out to be just that. Over a cup of tea we talked about all kinds of things and told them about ourselves. Some of them began to try the Quiet Time. One student who was reading Agriculture announced that his thought was to do his "practical" in our garden, which was a quarter of an acre of uncultivated field. This certainly seemed to be an inspired thought for I am no gardener, so as a result we were provided with fresh vegetables and flowers.

Later, at an evening service one or two of these students spoke with

others of their new experience and what was happening in their lives.

One of our church members was a lorry driver. He had been present at our wedding, and Gwen's father had casually remarked to him, "Look after these young people for me". He never forgot those words and took them literally. He told us that his conviction was to care for us in a practical way and do jobs around the house, which I could not do. He often appeared with produce from his allotment at times when it was most welcome. As a result of finding something new in his own life he brought along his nephew whose life-style had been a bit wild. Through the change he saw in his uncle, the nephew began to live differently and spoke about his new found faith at an evening service.

Will Hoy had a thought to buy a car and let us use it, and we found this a great boon. We never had much money but something always seemed to happen at the right time to meet our need. At one time we were without coal. We were the only ones who knew this. Out of the blue Gwen received a letter from her father telling her to order a ton of coal and send the account to him. He had never done this before, or since.

Our small church was not a wealthy one and sometimes I had to remind the Treasurer that my salary was due. In the summer of 1935, with little money for our holiday of four weeks, Gwen decided to stay with her parents in London while I went to a house party at Oxford run by the Oxford Group, and would stay until my finance ran out.

One of the members from our church came over to the house party for a day to attend the meetings. Her name was Hilda Castle, the senior buyer for a large store in Reading. As one who was trying to get her instructions from God in the mornings, she said to me when I met her, "I had a very strange thought this morning in my quiet time. I hope you won't be offended. It was that I should give you a pound." My money was running out and this enabled me to stay for two more days.

On the second day after this, I was having tea with a fellow Minister, Bill Bowie, and there had been no mention of finance, but we sat in quiet thinking about other matters, when he said, "My thought is to pay for you for the rest of the house party", and this meant I could stay for the whole time. I then went to London to Gwen's home for the final few days of our holiday. As we left for home, Gwen's mother packed up some eggs and bacon for the next morning, as we had nothing in the house at home. In the train Gwen and I found that we had got about 3/lOd in the bag

between us. It was only two or three weeks before our first child, Cohn, was to be born and my thought was that Gwen was not in a condition to get a bus from the station for our two mile journey home, but that we should take a taxi! In those days this cost 2/6d including the tip. Next day we had our breakfast of bacon and eggs provided by Gwen's mother but had not enough money to buy lunch. Mid-morning we knelt down and prayed to be shown what to do, and while we were on our knees, the postman arrived and when we went to the door, on the mat there was a letter enclosing a pound.

I used to meet with a businessman some mornings. One Monday morning it seemed right that I should go to London to attend some meetings each day of that week. He drove me to the station and was about to leave me as I joined the queue at the booking office. I became aware that I had not got enough money for the fare. He turned as he was going out of the booking office and said, "How are you placed for money?" I said that as a matter of fact I had not got the fare, and he said, "I will buy you a weekly season," which seemed to be an answer to prayer.

Many people can tell of how they have put their trust in God for their needs and have not been let down. The story of George Muller of Bristol, who ran an orphanage on this basis, is one. He never asked anyone for money, but he prayed for what he needed, and his needs were met although his faith was stretched at times. Those who work full—time in MRA without salary live on this basis. There is no millionaire to supply funds, but they trust God for what they need. Frank Buchman used to say that "Where God guides, He provides", and he often put it to the test. We found this to be true, but it does not mean regarding God as a super Santa Claus who gives presents from his sack of gold or as a super human benefactor who dispenses largesse to all who apply.

Neither does it mean copying other people. Gwen tells a cautionary tale of how when she was working in London she heard someone say that she had put all her money in the collection plate, and had been provided for until she received her next week's wages by being invited out to lunch each day. Gwen thought she would do the same and put all her money in the collection plate - but she went without lunches for the rest of the week. One lesson we have learnt is that you don't live on other people's faith, but your own. You pay your bills on time and you don't buy things you can't pay for.

During those days in Reading we discovered that these truths worked in the ordinary ways of life. A master-printer sometimes joined us in morning times of quiet. He offered to print a small bulletin, free of charge, telling of some of the things that were happening in and around our church. Three or four issues of this small booklet were published. We called it “The Tyndale Adventure”. Copies were sent to various parts of this country and some went to Canada and America, from where we received replies saying that quotations had appeared in their magazines.

It was while we were in Reading that our first boy, Colin, was born on 19 August 1935. He was a very good baby and gave us no trouble. He co-operated in every way. We had good nights and when we left him with others, he was contented and happy. Gwen bought books on how to bring up a baby - there were no post-natal clinics in those days. She followed meticulously the instructions given and sometimes I asked her what page she had reached. Gwen never has done things by halves.

When Colin was about a year old he was brought into church for the Harvest Festival Service. As I stood up to announce the first hymn, appearing from behind the decorated pulpit, there was an enthusiastic shout from a small boy who pointed to me, “There’s my daddy, there’s my daddy”. He was whisked out by the girl who was looking after him. Times have changed since then.

It was about this time Gwen’s sister, Gladys, came to stay with us with her third child, Angela, who was two months older than Colin. Gwen and her sister were at a meeting in the church and the two babies were left in their prams side by side in adjourning room. During the meeting shrieks of laughter were heard. Gladys went to investigate and found the two babies tickling each other’s toes. This was not a formal proposal, but Colin and Angela were married in 1961. Together they have built a happy home and recently celebrated their silver wedding anniversary.

When I had been at the church for three years, I was due to meet certain committees of the Baptist Union in order that my name should be transferred from what was called the Probationers’ List to the list of Accredited Ministers. During one’s probationary period a young minister was expected to follow a course of study prescribed by his college Principal, and generally to fulfil his duties in a disciplined way (This is similar in some respects to a Deacon in the Church of England becoming a Priest). My Principal, Dr Wheeler Robinson, suggested that I might

follow a further course of study on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit together with some psychological studies. This I did. So in due course I was called to appear before a local committee, which would report to the Ministerial Recognition Committee of the Baptist Union. I expected the usual questions concerning my study course, and such questions as "What time do you get up in the mornings?" "How long do you spend in your study?" "How do you use your time?" "How are things going in the church?"

But none of these questions was asked, but the point raised was concerning my association with the Oxford Group. It gave me the opportunity of telling of some of the things that were happening. Doubts were expressed as to the soundness of its doctrine. I was warned that it was a distraction from the work I was expected to be doing. The Area Superintendent (equivalent to the Moderator in some denominations, and in some respects to a Bishop in the Church of England) and the Minister of the "Mother Church", Kings Road, of Tyndale seemed to question me in an unfriendly way. I was young and proud and got on the defensive. I was told that the committee could not recommended that my name be transferred from the Probationers' List. This hit me very hard, and I went away feeling angry and resentful. It came as a surprise to encounter resistance and opposition to something, which I felt, was making my ministry more effective.

A few weeks later I was invited to meet with the Ministerial Recognition Committee of the Baptist Union in the Council Chamber of the Baptist Church House. I was one among other candidates of that year. I knew that the report of the local committee had been submitted to them. I was determined not to get on the defensive this time, nor was I going to get aggressive. After some preliminary discussion, there came various questions concerning my association with the Oxford Group. I was told that they had received good reports of my work and suitability as a Minister. It was pointed out that I was a young man full of enthusiasm and with high ideals. If I were to dissociate myself from the Oxford Group my name would be transferred to the Accredited List of Ministers. This I could not do and told them so, much as I wanted to make my way in the Baptist Church. As I stood up to leave the Council Chamber and was walking to the door one man, Dr. Percy Evans, Principal of Spurgeon' s Theological College, left his seat and came forward and gripped me by the hand - an eloquent gesture.

I then received a letter stating that I was to remain a Probationer. The following year the same procedure was followed with the same decision. As a result of this second setback, three senior ministers made such a strong protest that I received a letter from the Secretary of the Baptist Union, Dr M.E. Aubrey, to say that I would not be required to appear before any more committees as my name would be transferred automatically without question the following year. Had this not happened, I could not have become an accredited Baptist Minister.

I subsequently wrote two letters of apology for my resentment, one to the Area Superintendent and the other to my senior colleague at Kings Road Baptist Church. I met the Area Superintendent at a meeting later and he went out of his way to thank me for my letter and shook me warmly by the hand. I never heard from my senior colleague.

Some people misunderstood because they regarded MRA as another organisation perhaps in competition with the churches. This is not so. It is not an organization; it only had to become a legal entity because someone left money to the Oxford Group and there was no such beneficiary. Thus for charitable status there had to be some recognised body. The truth is, “You can’t join, you can’t resign. You are in or out by the quality of life you live.” This quality of life is surely what the churches should stand for. Others have been misled by false reports and unfortunately some of these people believed what they heard.

Chapter 8

Redditch

Building Morale — 1938—1944

I had been invited to Tyndale for an initial period of four years, at the end of which the question as to whether I should stay or leave would arise. The church members were very much in favour of my being invited to remain as their minister, but we were dependent on the mother church for much of our financial support, and this they threatened to cut off if I did not dissociate myself from the Oxford Group. In view of this choice, I tendered my resignation. We learnt later that one of the prime movers in the opposition was a man very generous to the denomination, but who made his money from questionable sources, so it was not surprising that he did not like the challenge of absolute moral standards.

There was no immediate opening for us so we were without a church for three months. During this time we received an invitation to a church in Redditch, Worcestershire. Neither Gwen nor I were attracted to the town or the church. The main industries of the town were needle-making, fishing tackle and springs. A small needle-making factory produced one million needles a week. Fishing tackle in all sizes was manufactured. Terry's Springs had grown from a small family business to a large concern. Later it became well known for Angle poise lamps. The town seemed to have little character and was really an overgrown village, with small industries that had grown up through the years.

I consulted my friend, Bill Jaeger. I arranged to meet him at one of the London railway termini. We sat with the noise of the trains and porters around us and listened to God to see what I should do about this church at Redditch. Bill's thought was, "If Ben goes to Redditch and listens to God, the town will listen to him". How true this turned out to be. We did go and as well as, my duties as a minister of the church, we began to reach out into the life of the town.

It was early in January 1938, when we travelled from Reading to Redditch. When we arrived where we were to stay for the night, our host was concerned that he had not been at the station to meet us, but he

was even more concerned because news had come over the radio that Hitler had moved his forces into Austria.

The Revd Dr F Townley Lord conducted my Induction Service a few days later. Townley Lord, an impressive figure in all senses of the word, large of stature and one who held high office in the Baptist Union. He was Minister of Bloomsbury Baptist Church and he had also been President of the Baptist Union and later President of the Baptist World Alliance representing many millions of people. It was an honour to have him at my induction. One young man who was inducted to a church by Townley Lord was so overawed that at the tea table after the Service, he called upon the assembled company to sing Grace and instead of "Be present at our table, Lord", he announced it as "Be present at our Townley Lord?"

In 1938 when war clouds were gathering fast and the nations were re-arming for conflict, Frank Buchman launched a campaign for moral and spiritual rearmament. He saw that the underlying conflict was between right and wrong, good and evil - the eternal struggle that runs through the heart of every man and woman. Thus a moral and spiritual offensive was launched which was known as Moral Re-Armament (MRA).

Events moved rapidly to a crisis through 1938 culminating in the autumn of 1939. On the 3rd September 1939, at 11 a.m. just as our morning service began, the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, broadcast to the nation that Britain was at war with Germany. I had left two deacons in my vestry to listen to the radio and report what happened, but as war seemed inevitable, I scrapped my prepared sermon and spoke from my heart from a few headings I jotted down on a piece of paper: God is. He has a plan. Find it. Follow it.

After the service we went to our homes to hear on the radio that an air raid warning had been sounded in London, but that it was a false alarm. Through the following months many people were lulled into a false sense of security. We called it the "phoney war", and I for one was confused and uncertain as to what attitude to adopt. I found it difficult to reconcile my Christian beliefs with armed conflict and had sympathy for those who declared themselves pacifists. As a Christian Minister, I was exempt from National Service, so I was not personally affected, but I made it quite clear that I would support those who were conscientious objectors by accompanying them to tribunals.

At about that time two friends came to stay with us. I told them of a

family whose son had been called up who resented my attitude to conscientious objectors and were refusing to come to church. As we talked together I began to see that the very freedom of conscience we enjoyed would be swept away unless we withstood the evil ideas of Nazism. I thought I might owe the family whose son had been called up an apology for not giving them the understanding they needed, so I decided to go round and apologise and tell them why I had come. I didn't relish this but felt it had to be done.

I went round to the back gate and the husband was at the window of the scullery washing up, and I heard him say to his wife, "It's Baxter". This was not a promising introduction, and when I entered the living room I said, "I have come to make an apology." "About time too", said the wife. Then I told them of what I had come to realise and that I was sorry I had not given them the comfort and support that they needed. They didn't seem to take my apology in the way I hoped. When I got back to my friends I said, "They didn't change their attitude very much." To which they replied, "Your thought was not to change them but to apologise to them." The husband and wife began coming to church again and a week or so afterwards, their son who was in the forces, was killed by driving into the back of a van in the blackout. I was able to give to this family at the funeral the comfort they needed. I am quite certain that they would not have had the funeral at our church had I not been round to see them, nor would we have established the good relationship we enjoyed.

In 1940 when the bombing started in London, Gwen's sister, Gladys, and her three daughters appeared on our doorstep having been bombed out of their home in Hither Green. They were a pathetic sight as they arrived, the three young girls, Betty aged 13, Pamela 9, and Angela 5, clutching their dolls and teddy bears. Angela, the youngest, had fallen off the platform between the train and railway track when they changed trains at Birmingham. They settled in with us for a while and during the time they were with us a book by Daphne du Maurier "Come Wind, Come Weather" was published. It gave the stories of several Servicemen with a faith in God who had come through telling experiences in the face of danger. The film "Rebecca" from the book by Daphne du Maurier was being shown at a local cinema in Redditch. I suggested that we might be able to get permission from the cinema manager to set up a stall in the foyer and sell "Come Wind, Come Weather". Gladys enthusiastically agreed to come and help. She worked valliantly in this operation and

many of the audiences brought copies of this morale building book as they left the theatre.

The caretaker of our church was an interesting character who could hardly be called religious, but he was a loyal and faithful friend to Gwen and myself. He would hear nothing against us. He was never seen in the services except behind the scenes at weddings, funerals and for cleaning the church premises. He was supposed to get the boiler going on a Sunday morning to warm the church for the 11 o'clock service. There were complaints about the low temperature in the church that was often cold. I suspected he did not get up early enough and I could make a fair guess where he spent his Saturday evenings. One Sunday, when I arrived at the church well before the service, I found that he had put a thermometer on the radiator before banging it on the wall, so as to register well above 60°, but the church was still cold, and we had a good laugh about it. Mr Pinfield (I never knew his Christian name) was like a personal bodyguard to me, guarding me against interruptions and I am afraid he painted a rose-coloured picture of our family. He was what could be called a likeable rogue.

On Saturday, 20 April 1940, rather late in the evening, Gwen was taken to a nursing home and our younger son was born early on Sunday morning. I received a 'phone call before I went to the service to say that we had another boy, whom we called Roger. When I visited Gwen immediately after the morning service she told me that Mr Penfield had called to see her and the baby. The Matron had protested that only the husband was allowed in, but Mr Penfield stated emphatically that he was a very close friend of the family and so was admitted and beat me to it?

When Roger was old enough to be taken to the Morning Service, he soon began to show his life-long love of music. He used to join in the singing of the hymns with great gusto - not necessarily to the same tune or words as the rest of the congregation, but he provided a kind of descant . Often he overshot the end of a verse, finding himself stranded as a soloist, when he would bring his contribution to a sudden halt, starting up again half—way through the next verse. He was not whisked out as Colin had been on his first appearance. His performance caused some distraction, and amusement, but it made for a family spirit in the Service.

In the early days of the war, some of the industries that contributed to

the war effort were moved to Redditch. About this time I received an invitation to become an Industrial Chaplain, which I accepted. This was a new appointment and very little had been done in this field at that time. What was I to do? Perhaps what was expected was that I should go into factories and conduct religious services, with a few hymns, bible readings and prayers, but I felt that this was not what was needed or would be acceptable. Something different must be tried, so I began to ponder what should be done.

The first thought that came was to approach the town's Welfare Officer (again a new appointment) and ask for introductions. I went to the office and found a young lady who seemed very timid and as much at a loss what to do as I was. I took with me a publication called "The Rising Tide", a pictorial of the outreach of the work of MRA throughout the world. The young lady immediately recognised one of the people in the pictorial, Major Stephen Foot, and said, "My husband has met him" and she became very interested. As a result she was ready to introduce me to some of the factories in Redditch. The first to respond was Enfield Cycles, where I was invited to visit their canteen in a lunch-time. I had a friend who was a Church of England vicar. We didn't always find it easy to get along together, but I asked him to accompany me.

We both turned up minus "dog-collars" to find that as we went to the canteen, a mass of people were going in the opposite direction. We learnt later that they had heard that two parsons were coming into the canteen? When we entered the hail, a young woman Welfare Officer and about half a dozen people were there to greet us. The young lady said she had laryngitis and could not introduce us, so we had to do it ourselves . We stood on a rickety platform with a Union Jack upside down behind us, and my friend and I introduced ourselves and told of some of the difficulties we found in getting along together. We then sang some songs from a revue entitled "Giant Otherfellow" which depicted how everything that went wrong was blamed on someone else, and eventually when one looked in the mirror one could see who Giant Otherfellow was.

Neither of us could sing very well but gradually the hall began to fill, as people were curious, not hearing hymns, until at the end there was quite a number in the canteen. The lady Welfare Officer found her voice to thank us and gave us a warm welcome to come again, which we did. We began to realise that the purpose of Industrial Chaplains was to build the morale of people in war time.

Another factory we visited was the B.S.A., a much larger assignment. We decided to take more people with us. These included my wife, another vicar besides my friend from the previous occasion, and their wives, also two doctors, two nurses and an evacuee and his wife who were living in our home. He played the accordion and was a great asset. Then another two were a fruiterer and his wife, Walter and Florrie Farmer. He had a good singing voice and had acted a bit.

We decided to write some sketches from our own experience of how to get on with others, how to be honest and how to keep up our morale in war tine. We also had some songs again. In the middle of some of the songs, the audience started banging on the tables with their cutlery and we wondered whether this was disapproval. We were told later that it was approval and also that ENSA had been booed off the stage the previous week.

One of the stories included in the sketches happened to our evacuee lodgers. They were a bright young couple with two children and they enjoyed life. When Gwen and I got married we had been given a lot of valuable cut glass that was kept in a china pantry on the top shelf. One day I found a lot of the cut glass on the floor all broken. Our evacuee said she thought it must be due to the vibration of the trains, which ran nearby, which had made it come off the shelf. One day the husband asked Gwen why we got up so early in the morning and Gwen told him about quiet times. The long and short of it was that they decided to have quiet times too, and with us. She came to me later and said, “I told you a lie. I was swishing a duster in the air and broke all that glass”. I was grateful that she had been honest and it made a closer relationship between us.

We were then invited to the night shift of B.S.A. that was a greater challenge still. We took the same people with us. It meant going in at midnight and after our programme we had a meal with the management. We were told that we had lifted the morale considerably. “They have gone back to their work whistling some of your songs and the morale before had been very low. We have a vital consignment to be flown out to Tobruk in the morning and we were doubtful if we would meet the deadline.” Next morning we ‘phoned to ask whether they had managed to get the material on the flight and they said, “Yes, we did.”

Chapter 9

Our Finest Hour

Redditch (continued)

In the months that followed Dunkirk and into 1941 the nation was facing what Winston Churchill described as our “finest hour”.

I began to feel that I could do more to help the war effort by becoming a padre in the forces. I knew someone in the Air Ministry, so I wrote to him for advice. He replied saying that he would enquire whether there was need for Free Church chaplains, and I subsequently received a letter from the Baptist Union offering me a chaplaincy in the RAF

Soon afterwards I heard that my friend Cecil Pugh, who was a Senior Chaplain in the RAF, had been posted to South Africa. I had worked with him previously when he was Minister of a Congregational Church in Friern Barnet, North London. I wrote to him asking whether he would apply to take me as his Assistant Chaplain, but he never received my letter. I learnt afterwards that the ship on which he sailed was torpedoed off the coast of Africa. Cecil had courageously insisted that he should be lowered into one of the holds of the ship where there was panic among the men caught there. He gave his life helping others to safety and comforting those who were trapped in the rapidly rising water. After the war he was awarded the George Cross posthumously for his bravery. I might have been with him, but it was not to be.

I talked over whether I should accept the chaplaincy with my friend Major Stephen Foot, D.S.O., who had been an officer in the First World War. I thought that he would encourage me to accept. I told him how the invitation had come about and that I had written to our mutual friend Cecil Pugh. After listening to what I had to say he said, “What are your motives?” I gave, as I thought, some good ones - to serve the country, others had joined up, my three brothers were in the forces, was I not in a backwater?” He said, “Do you fancy yourself in the uniform?” “As a matter of fact, I do”, I replied. “Would it mean more money?” “Certainly”. So we listened to God together. Stephen’s thought was “Ben is doing as much for the country by his work in the factories and in the town as he

would do in the forces." My thought was to stay in Redditch, so I wrote to the Secretary of the Baptist Union telling what was happening through my industrial chaplaincy and that I had decided to remain where I was.

There was a Government Order that year that all factories should work though the August Bank Holiday. A minor crisis came about which could have threatened the war effort in the town when the management of the factory making springs decided to give their employees the Bank Holiday Monday off. This created great discontent in the other factories, which were obliged to work over the holiday, and at one of them there was a "round robin" to go on strike. The Chairman of the Urban District Council called me to his office and asked what we should do. We decided to approach the Managing Director of the firm in question. All three of us were members of the Redditch Christian Council of Churches, so we had common ground.

We went to the Managing Director's office and told him of what had come to our notice and the disaffection it was causing in the town. We were quiet for a few moments and the Managing Director then said, "The problem is that we have not got enough material to justify working over the Bank Holiday but we will give an undertaking to work an extra day later on when the materials are available." As a result the other factories were informed and the proposed strike was called off.

Together with the Chairman of the U.D.C., some of us were able to distribute a leaflet throughout the town entitled, "A Call to our Citizens", which showed how people on the Home Front could play their part by honest dealings about rations, not gossiping, by thinking and speaking positively and not grumbling and grousing. At a Council Meeting the leaflet was taken by the Chairman of the U.D.C. and put on the table before each Councillor's place. At the same time he made certain that the Press was invited. The next issue of the "Redditch Indicator" carried a report of the Council Meeting with the "Call to our Citizens".

Later a Morale Card was distributed to many homes in Redditch. By 1941 many men and women of MRA were in the forces. We entertained in our home some of them who were stationed nearby. One was Michael. Sitwell who was killed on the beaches of Normandy during the Allied landings in 1944. Eleven men remained to keep the work of MRA going in Britain. These were classed as "lay evangelists" and as such were exempt from military service. Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour, announced that he

was going to call up the MRA men. People opposed to Moral Re-Armament had urged him to take this step. As a result, many Christian people in Britain, including the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and leaders of the Free Churches protested, but eventually it came to a debate in the House of Commons on Tuesday, 7th October, 1941.

When the debate took place, clergy and ministers of all denominations, realising the essential contribution of MRA to national morale, demonstrated as a body at the House of Commons to show their support. The debate came under the heading "Wilson v Ministry of Labour" as my friend Roly Wilson was then the Secretary of MRA in Britain. The Chamber of the House was crowded and there was no room in the Strangers Gallery and one or two of us could not get into the debate and were left in the Lobby. Wilson had been found a seat at the left of Mr. Speaker's Chair and sent a message out to us that there were one or two places beside him, so for the only time in my life, I had a seat on the floor of the House.

Among the Church leaders who understood and saw the significance of what MRA was doing, both for the nation and the Christian cause, was the Rev. Dr. S.W. Hughes (affectionately called "Sammy Hughes") - a Baptist Minister who for some years was the Secretary of the Free Church Federal Council. He suggested that someone should speak at the Annual Assembly about MRA and what it was doing, and that he would endeavour to make room for a contribution in an already overcrowded programme of speakers. The only way this might be possible would be for someone to rise from the floor of the Hall. There was to be a morning session given to a discussion on what the churches could do in wartime. Some of my friends suggested that I might tell 1 about what I was doing in the factories at Redditch. Two of us went along to the Federal Council Meeting in Buckingham Gate Congregational Church. The church, which seats about 2,000 people, was nearly full of the delegates from all over the country. I did not relish the prospect of rising from my seat to address such an audience.

The discussion was opened formally and many wished to speak. Various ideas were aired - help in canteens for war-workers and men and women in the forces, the formation ion of Christian groups in factories for prayer and Bible study, the distribution of Christian literature, evangelism, and so on. As I sat in the pew with my friend a lively discussion took place, and I saw little opportunity to make my contribution as time was

running out. My friend whispered, “Go now”, so I made my Way down the aisle and joined the queue on the steps leading to the rostrum. I told my story, which emphasised that besides the practical activities, and conventional religious approach there was the need to bring about a change of attitude and determination in the language the ordinary man coul understand and would accept. I was the last speaker. I had a sense of having been led despite my fears and reluctance.

There are times ‘when everything seems to go wrong and we do not know what to do. There was such a week when this happened to me and it became apparent that there were places where I needed change. There was also criticism from some members of my church. I was discouraged and cast down. Before the Evening Service I went into the Church and knelt down by the Communion Table rail and prayed, “Oh God, if you want to show me something, keep me miserable until I see it, but if not, show me what to do and I will do it.” Nothing dramatic happened, no blinding light or voice, but after that evening Service several people commented that it had meant a great deal to them. All I can say am I went into that church in utter despair and turned to God, and came out with peace in my heart. I saw that I had to leave everything in God’s hands, to step on and do the next thing, and to forget myself.

Chapter 10

My Brother Ron

My three brothers joined the forces in the early days of the war. George volunteered in 1939 and became an officer in the RAF. After his training at camps in England he was sent to Canada where he became Adjutant to an air station at Medicine Hat. Consequently we saw little of him during the war years, but I was glad to conduct his marriage service in 1940. Their first daughter was born a short while before he went to Canada but was too young to know her father. Margaret tells his wife, how when George returned home in 1945 he expected the same unquestioning obedience from his wife and small daughter, Diana, as he had been used to in the RAF. Margaret and Diana thought otherwise. The little girl formed an unfavourable opinion of her father and one day she said to her mother, "I don't like that man". Everything has changed since then.

Arthur on leaving school worked in a stockbroker's office for a few years. On his twentieth birthday in May 1940 he volunteered for service and was attached to a Scottish regiment as Personnel Selection Officer and remained in England for the duration of the war, and I was happy to conduct his marriage service in 1941.

My brother Ron joined up as a Private in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and after training in Scotland was posted to Singapore in 1941. He was a gentle and kindly man of 25. He had not enjoyed robust health, for in his 'teens TB had been diagnosed and for a short time he was in a sanatorium at Bexhill-on-Sea. When he was given a clean bill of health he did all he could to prove to himself and others that he was quite fit. Consequently he was delighted to be accepted for service in the forces. It was largely due to his Christian faith and upbringing that he overcame his disability and faced the future with courage.

From Singapore he began to write some interesting letters. In one he told how an officer who was on the Board of Censors noticed that one of the boys was writing what Ron described as "Christian letters". The officer had sought out this boy and started getting together a small group every evening for a short Bible study. The numbers grew daily and the

men found these times together more real than the compulsory church parades. I sent Ron a copy of Daphne du Maurier' s book "Come Wind, Come Weather" which we had found so helpful on the Home front with its true stories of people facing the rigours of wartime at home and in the forces.

In a letter dated 4th April he told how he had attended a Presbyterian Church where the services had meant a great deal to him. After the services, refreshments were provided for the troops and one of the helpers must have had something more than refreshments to offer. He continued, "I talked to a lady and gentleman who come from Durham. The lady is a teacher at a local Chinese girls' school and her husband was down for the weekend from his business, which is some hundreds of miles up-country.

"I had a letter from this lady, Mrs. Geake, a few days ago asking me to go to tea with her and to take along two other friends who had been coming to the church with me. We had a very nice tea in her pleasant little flat in the school grounds - about two miles from our barracks. After tea, we went over the school and then sat down to talk. I found out that she was very much attached to the Oxford Group, and she told us her story.

"We heard of many more incidents and miracles, and the other men who were with me (one of whom I had expected to be thoroughly bored according to the views he has always given me to understand he holds), were absolutely enthralled and talked about it all the way home. I offered to lend Mrs. Geake Daphne du Maurier's 'Come Wind, Come Weather', but she thanked me very much and told me that she had helped Daphne to put it together!

"Altogether we had a very enjoyable evening, and I felt awfully grateful to Mrs. Geake and have written to thank her for her kindness. You can imagine the contrast it was to army life, but I can honestly say that it has made me feel a lot better today. I had been feeling a bit homesick lately, and it has given me renewed strength to carry on being cheerful to have had such an uplifting evening.…

"If you have the time, I should be pleased if you would write to Mrs Geake, her address is 16, Cairn Hill Road (then the town which you know, but which I am not allowed to mention), Malaya. It will take a long time, but she would be awfully pleased if you could drop a line".

I wrote to Mrs. Geake, and her reply came much later, although dated 12 December 1941. Letters took up to four months to get out or back. Her reply was a very interesting one, together with a report of some of the meetings they had been having in Singapore.

After receiving Ron's letter, I remembered an incident in the past relating to him, which I had never put right. I would have been about thirteen at the time and Ron six. One day he and I were walking home together when we saw the girl who lived next door standing at her gate. We disliked her so I said to Ron, "Give her a clout as we go by", which he did. The girl screamed, but unfortunately my mother came to our front door at that moment and said, "Ron, what are you doing?" To which he replied, "Ben told me to do it." Mother said to me, "Did you?" and I said "No". So I wrote to Ron (it was on 30th June) reminding him of the incident and saying how sorry I was for getting him into trouble by the lie I had told, even though he might have forgotten all about it. I also sent him a copy of the book "Innocent Men" by Peter Howard which had just been published. Before I received a reply, the Japanese had invaded Malaya and we heard in December that Ron had been killed in action.

I was to have three more letters from him and the one that meant most to me was to say that he had received my letter of apology. He also said in that letter, "I find that an evening service at the Presbyterian Church and my prayers keep things right in a way which I have never experienced at home."

In his letter of 27th October which I received in early 1942, he wrote, "During our last week in S— , I took a friend along to Mrs Geake again, when she had quite a large party. One was an elderly gentleman, who used to manage a large theatre in London and has travelled all over the world. He met the Oxford Group about eight years ago and has had many thrilling experiences... Another, was a younger chap who has been to several house parties in in England, and is now quite a 'big-wig' in the S——— government office.

"Also there, were two young RAF lads who have only been out as he arrived, wrote for an address out here of one of the fellowship, and was given Mrs. Geake's. He is a fine lad, about my own age. To complete the party were three Chinese who had some tremendous stories to tell of their own lives. These made the greatest impression on me, as it seems very wonderful to hear of these people's experiences, some of whom

have completely changed their ways, and even their time old religions....

"By the way, Mrs. Geake was awfully glad to hear from you; your letter to her arrived about three weeks later than the one you wrote to me. She told me that I must have given you a far too glowing account of her.... It sets me up again for a week after I have seen her, so you can probably imagine what a blessing she is to a place like S

In the last letter I received in about February dated 10th December 1941, which must have been about two or three weeks before he was killed, he wrote:

"Thank you so much for your Christmas present. It was very acceptable. I have not finished reading 'For Sinners Only', but I am enjoying it very much....

"I hope you have not worried too much; I am perfectly fit and have complete confidence in my faith. I think Mrs. Geake was sent along to prepare me for this and I am hoping to see her tomorrow. Apart from that, I have been far too busy to worry about anything and this is the first time I have had to reply to any of my letters lately....

"Don't worry about me. I am quite sure that I have been given a better job to do on this earth than I have done up to the present, so you have no cause for anxiety. I gain a tremendous amount of support from your prayers and I remember all of you in mine." In another letter Eon referred to Jessie Geake's home as a "Lighthouse in the darkness of Asia".

I wrote to Mrs. Geake for any further news and in her reply she told how Ron had helped them during his last days in Singapore. She wrote: "He passed on his copy of 'Innocent Men', and it has been greatly used.... At present things seem strange, but we know in whom we have believed. Please pray for us all here, as we pray for you... and especially those in Hong Kong."

She included a report of what was happening in Singapore. Quoting from it she said: "Some time ago a soldier was heard to say, 'I'd believe in this if I saw a sergeant getting changed. Why don't you change the sergeants?' We hope he will one day meet the sergeants who are helping us to develop into a true fellowship with the Master. A letter from Ben Baxter, who is in charge of a church in Redditch, has come recently

thanking us for taking responsibility for his brother and his brother's friends. He says, 'It was great news for us and we had a real sense of God's boundless love working out at the other side of the world through our prayers and your guidance'."

Later we wrote again to Mrs. Geake asking her for any further news of Ron and his colleagues and she wrote us a letter saying that he had helped them at their meetings and the two sergeants who were quoted in a newspaper report, which she included, were Ron and his friend.

I have always felt that I came closer to God at this time than even during our early days together, and that there is no separation, even in death.

Chapter 11

Birmingham 1944 - 1959

Hamstead Road Baptist Church

In 1943 we had been in Redditch for six years, and Gwen and I felt it was time for us to make a move. We received an invitation to Hamstead Road Baptist Church, Handsworth and I commenced my ministry there in January 1944.

Birmingham had been hit hard during the blitz. One of the buildings in the centre of the city was the Market Hall, about which there had been much controversy before the war, some wanting to demolish it and others wanting it to remain. When it was bombed to the ground in the days when the whereabouts of places were disguised, one newspaper reported, “A hall was destroyed last night in a city ‘somewhere in England’ where the City Council had been divided regarding its future. Last night a decision was taken in Berlin and the Luftwaffe carried out its demolition.” Many other buildings in the city had been destroyed, and much of the surrounding area was a shambles.

Handsworth, where we came to live, was a pleasant suburb of Birmingham with its large Victorian family houses and shopping centre that was still called “The Village”. Men, who had built up their businesses from small beginnings, had come to live there at the turn of the century. It was only two miles from the city centre and within easy reach of the Black Country and its industries.

Hamstead Road Baptist Church had flourished in the past and had been served by a succession of able ministers, most notable of whom was the Reverend F. C. Spurr, who was a distinguished preacher of national repute who had attracted large congregations.

The building was unlike most free Churches. It had a tall steeple and impressive interior, with stained glass windows, a chancel, a Cross on the Communion Table and. a centre aisle. There was a gallery at the rear and altogether it seated 750 people. It was more like an Anglican Church than a typical Baptist one.

I used to tell my Anglican friends that it was just like a “proper” church. But the members of the church were not so “proper” because they were deeply divided. My immediate predecessor had left under a cloud and some of the members had been for him and some against. One of our first tasks was to bring unity to this community. We were fortunate to have among our members our friends Walter and Florrie Farmer, who had worked with us in the factories in Redditch.

Walter was a deacon and Sunday School Superintendent who was greatly respected and trusted; Florrie had gained the confidence and affection of many of the ladies in the church. They had begun to bring a new spirit of co-operation and in the following days we were able to demonstrate the kind of teamwork we had forged together between our families.

One lady, who had been a loyal supporter of my predecessor, said quite bluntly to me soon after we arrived, “I didn’t vote for you, but I will be loyal to you” and she became one of our staunchest friends.

Before my first Sunday Service, Walter and Florrie came along before breakfast to go through my sermons I wanted them to help me give what I had to say in a relevant way to the congregation which they knew better than I did. This they did for several Sundays. Later Walter encouraged me to talk to the congregation instead of reading my sermon. Sometimes I spoke without a note, having prepared beforehand. It reminded me of an occasion previously when I visited a church in Yorkshire. In the morning I used my notes for the sermon and in the evening none. One good old Yorkshireman came to the door to me in the evening and said, “Lad, you preach much better without your notes”

From the beginning we made it clear that we had come to minister as a family and that our home was as much part of the church as were the church buildings. My monthly contributions to the News Letter were entitled “From the Minister’s Home”.

When hostilities in Europe came to an end in May 1945, one of the first wartime restrictions to be relaxed was the blackout. There was great rejoicing, for the previous five and a half years had been dark in every sense. How could we express our relief and gratitude? Some of the men in the church approached me and asked if they might be allowed to construct a large wooden cross, attaching to it electric light bulbs connected to the main supply and hoist it up the steeple. It seemed to be

an inspired way of celebrating the end of the blackout, so in a very short time a large Cross lit up the neighbourhood, a silent reminder of our faith, symbolising what we felt deepest in our hearts. Either by design or coincidence the street lights in Hamstead Road were not switched on during the time the Cross was on the steeple and it made it all the more impressive.

We were to witness the effect upon many of the passers—by. Some offered contributions towards its cost. One man, perhaps after celebrating in a different way, stopped and doffed his cap, standing still for a moment of reverent silence and was heard to say, “That says a lot”.

Once a month we held Youth Services. There was nothing unusual about that for most churches plan services for members of the youth organisations. What was encouraging was that some of the young men and women suggested that they might plan with me the content and presentation of these services. Some of them had begun to have morning quiet times and it soon became apparent that God was giving creative ideas to those who listened to Him. We met once a month in our home when we pooled our ideas and planned for the ensuing service. Again I was to learn that teamwork under the Holy Spirit is more effective than individual effort, as I had discovered in the factories in Redditch. As then, we presented what we ourselves were learning.

Especially at Christmas time we were able to convey the wonder and challenge of the Christmas story. Some of the carols became more meaningful to us as we enacted them a “Silent Night” with a torch—lit procession around the church; “Good King Wenceslas” and his page (coming down the aisle) singing alternate verses; “O Little Town of Bethlehem” sung by a young girl from her pew with the lights subdued. We had the advantage of having an expert on stage-lighting who insisted on high standards, and an organist who always co-operated. The climax of the Service was when some members of the congregation were given the opportunity to come and kneel before the crib, which was placed in the chancel in front of the Cross. They represented their profession or occupation - a lawyer, teacher, pupil, medical student, worker, shopkeeper, housewife and the minister. We silently committed ourselves anew.

But more important than the services we presented was what we ourselves learnt together and the lasting effect upon our lives. One

summer all those who had been regular members of our Youth Services Committee took some of their friends to the International MRA Conference at Caux in Switzerland where they met with others from other nations who were letting God guide their lives, and saw with them how to apply their faith more relevantly. Some have contributed much to their local communities and others in different parts of the world.

There was a young, Gwen Hearnshaw, leaving school, having passed O and A levels. She has since made a mark in the field of education, having become a senior lecturer in a college of education after teaching in this country and Nigeria. Muriel Upton gave up her secretarial post in the Civil Service to work full-time with Moral Re-Armament as a secretary. Having worked in different countries, she married a farm manager and lives in Lavenham, Suffolk. Jean Farmer, the daughter of Walter and Florrie Farmer, also married a farmer and lives in Swanage. She is a gifted artist. Paul Hooper, a young medical student, became a G.P.

We had living with us at the time Laurie, a post-graduate student, Laurie Vogel, who was completing research for the Ph.D. degree in Metallurgy. It was the teamwork we forged together that was the secret behind much that happened in the lives of these youth and others. He brought a wider vision to us all with his passion to bring a new spirit into industry. On being awarded his doctorate, he was offered one or two lucrative, posts in industry but at the same time he was invited to work with MRA without salary. He accepted this invitation and for most of the last forty years he has worked in Brazil and Latin America where he with others has been instrumental in bringing unity and understanding to men and management in the docks and industry, and has become the trusted friend of many leaders in public life.

But at Hamstead Road we had our problems like everybody else. There was the wife of one of the church officials who was always grumbling. She berated me whenever I visited her, told me what I did wrong and what I had not done, and compared me with my predecessors. She never came to church, for she suffered from rheumatism. I had pity on her at first, but there came a time when enough was enough. Gwen and I considered together what should be done. We decided that we would visit her together and stand up to her. To our surprise she received us with great warmth and her attitude was quite different. I never had any more trouble. We felt that God had spoken to her more clearly than we could have done, and that He works at both ends.

More serious was when we heard that a rumour was being spread that I was using part of a benevolent fund, which I administered, to buy petrol for my own use. As I received a petrol allowance for my car this accusation was manifestly untrue. But this hit my vulnerable point - my pride and my reputation. We discovered that the rumour originated from and was spread by a few discontents and “gossips” and emanated from one couple in particular. It was even suggested to me that I might take legal action, but this was unthinkable. One Sunday I used the opportunity in a sermon to hit out at those concerned, the perpetrators of the rumour sitting in their pew before me. Of course it was done with “righteous indignation” - with more indignation than righteousness - but many knew to whom I referred. I felt better for it after I had spoken out. Or did I?

One or two church friends pointed out to me that I had abused my privilege from the pulpit and perhaps I had overstepped the mark. I pondered the matter and felt that I owed an apology to the couple concerned for what I had done because I was resentful. After wrestling with the idea, I called at their home and simply apologised to them. They were very moved and told me that a thoughtless remark by their daughter—in—law had started the trouble. They said to me, “We came home from church last Sunday and vowed that we would never enter the church again - but now you will see us next Sunday.” We shook hands and they were as good as their word. They remained loyal supporters and good friends, and I learnt a useful lesson.

The wife was responsible for catering when there were special church events. She would not tolerate anything slap—dash or second best from her helpers. When she was on duty she would have the crusts cut off the sandwiches and insisted that meals and refreshments should be presented attractively: Gwen and I were grateful for four standards this lady sets for not everybody does. It has sometimes come as a surprise how unbusiness-like successful businessmen can be when it comes to church matters. We were blessed with a number of people who saw the value of doing things well.

One of our church members was a dentist who must have been one of the best in Birmingham. He was highly qualified and lectured in the University on his special field of research. He had a busy and lucrative private practice, patients coming from all over the Midlands and further afield. All the time we were in Birmingham Gwen and I and our two boys received free treatment from him. One day Gwen was in the dentist’s

chair when he was dealing with a particularly difficult tooth. With meticulous care he spared no trouble in doing a perfect job. When he had finished, Gwen said, “Thank you, Frank, for all the trouble you have taken”. He replied, “There is only one way of doing a job” - words which often come back to me.

No-one could have had a more co-operative organist than I had during my time at Hamstead Road. A professional musician who taught at the Midland Institute, he made an outstanding contribution to the services. On one occasion something went wrong during a verse of a hymn and he was most apologetic afterwards. Walter Farmer, who was standing by, commented, ‘don’t worry, Billy, we have not counted the number of right notes you have played.” The relationship between the Minister and the organist is very important for the smooth conduct of the services. Especially is this so on occasions such as weddings when sometimes something can go wrong or nearly wrong.

There was the time when we had a new caretaker who was not very intelligent. His instructions were to press a button in the church porch when the bride arrived. This was to indicate by a light for the organist to play the wedding march, for the congregation to rise, and for me to come out of the vestry into the chancel. On this occasion the organist struck up the wedding march rather early. The caretaker had pressed the button too soon. The congregation rose. I came from my vestry and the bridegroom and best man stepped forward and to my dismay, I saw the bride’s mother come down the aisle. The organist realised what had happened, and continued with “Here comes the bride” several times and to my relief the bride appeared.

One evening I received a telephone call asking me to conduct a marriage service at a local Baptist Church, which was without a minister. I made an appointment for the couple to come to our house for an interview. When the doorbell rang, I asked Roger who was about twelve to answer the door and to show the wedding couple into our lounge. He came to me and said, “They are rather old,” expecting a young bride and bridegroom. They were both in their seventies.

I went through the order of service with them. He was a widower and she a widow, so they had both been through it before. I asked them what hymns they wanted. “Fight the good fight” and “Onward Christian soldiers” (which continues “Marching as to war”). Fortunately I kept a

straight face and entered the numbers the hymns on the form. When I arrived at the church, which was nearly full with their respective children, grand—children and great-grand-children, I was met by the organist who said that the hymns had been changed to “Oh God our help in ages past” and “Guide me Oh thou great Jehovah” (which continues “Pilgrim through this barren land”)! I thought these were slightly more appropriate. Then when we came to the part “Wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife”? - there was a slight hesitation and the bride jogged the bridegroom’s arm vigorously and in a loud voice prompted him “I will”. From then on all went smoothly.

We also had among us people who caused smiles. There was the deacon who when he had something unpleasant to say always prefaced his remarks with “Speaking quite frankly among friends” and we had braced ourselves for what was coming.

Then there was the man nearly stone-deaf who often arrived late for the service and would be shown to his special pew where he could connect his hearing- aid box to the amplifying system. This operation, which created some disturbance, usually took the duration of at least one hymn. But he found it difficult to hear the sermon, either intentionally or not. One Sunday he managed to tune in for the sermon, but throughout there was the whining from his instrument like a boat leaving Liverpool Docks. At the end of the service he came to me and exclaimed jubilantly, “I heard every word”. Our leading soprano was standing by and remarked “You were the only one”! I don’t think he heard that.

The Minister has his hiccups, too. It was my custom to welcome publicly those who had been elected or re-elected as deacons. To one man who had been re-elected I inadvertently said, “We are all glad that you, Harold, are to do another stretch”. Some comments were made later.

We had our surprises also. There was Frank, a shy, timid and reserved man who shunned the limelight. He found it difficult to speak in the presence of others and often would not say a word during a meeting or in company. He would go unnoticed in most circles. Without saying much about it he began to try having quiet times. There came a time when the Church Secretary resigned and no-one was available or willing to take on the office. One day Frank came to me and said that he had the conviction to offer himself for appointment, what did I think? I did not

know what to think for it came as a complete surprise, but eventually, he was appointed. At first it seemed that he had taken on a job beyond his ability, but he had a wife who stood behind him to help and encourage, and gradually he grew in stature and authority.

One summer Frank joined a party of clergy and ministers and church officials who went to the World Assembly of Moral Re-Armament at Caux, Switzerland. . It was such an event for him to travel by plane that he asked me to witness his signature to his will before we left - something, which he ought to have done long before. Frank caught the spirit of the Assembly and saw the wider application of his Christian faith as he met people from other nations.

He was one in whom I could confide and whose shrewd judgment I could trust. He was one who never betrayed a confidence. In his quiet way he made friends with visitors to the church, especially the West Indian immigrants who were beginning to settle in Handsworth at that time. They regarded him as a personal friend and greeted him in the road as he passed by. Through such touches I was able to visit many West Indians in their homes. A number came to our services and some became members of the Church and one was elected as a deacon.

A few years after Frank was appointed Church Secretary, he asked me to administer the Ordinance of Believers' Baptism by total immersion as he wished to make a public confession of his total commitment to Christ's way of life. For a Church officer to take this step was a courageous thing to do, but Frank was one who was a living witness to the miracle-working power of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 12

Birmingham — The Church in Action

Soon after we came to Birmingham I learnt that a man who had been contemporary with me during college days in London was the West Midland Organiser for the Labour Party. Harry and I renewed acquaintance and I sometimes visited him in his office where there was always something interesting happening, especially in the days of the run—up to the 1945 General Election. During the election campaign he took me to visit some of his constituencies when we met several of the Labour candidates, many of whom were elected to Parliament. We took with us a book which Peter Howard, journalist of the "Daily Express", had written which gave some positive guidelines to the political debate at that time. We presented or sold copies to some of the candidates and agents who received us readily, for Harry had a friendly and cheerful approach to them all. When I visited Harry in his office after the election there were times when I waited while he spoke on the 'phone to a Cabinet Minister and on one occasion to Clement Attlee, the Prime Minister, whom he addressed as "Clem".

Gwen and I became friends with Harry and his wife Mabel. In 1946 we invited them to accompany us to the first International MRA Conference at Caux, Switzerland. We flew from Blackbushe in a small 'plane taking six passengers, an Admiral and his wife Molly, Harry, the Labour Party official and his wife, Gwen and myself. Before we started, Gwen was concerned that there was little fresh air but was assured by the pilot that this would be remedied when we took off. The admiral began pointing out sights to "port" and "starboard". It took three hours to reach Geneva where we were met by oar and taken to the Conference Centre high up on the Roche de Naye overlooking the Lake of Geneva.

Harry was introduced to men and women from many countries who were able to come together in those early days after the war. He was a little mystified by the "quiet times" people talked about but one day he saw that it was his pride and desire to have control over his own life and affairs which prevented him from listening to God, so he made the experiment. When we returned to Birmingham, we often met with him and his wife and their family. During the next year he was invited to go to

Europe with others to invite some of his Labour friends to the Conference at Caux in 1947. On his return he told me of some of the visits they had made, including one to the French Socialist, Mme Irene Laure, who later played a vital part in the healing of wounds inflicted by the war between France and Germany. A little while later Frank Buchman invited Harry to join a party to America. It was at the time when America was suspicious of a Socialist Government in Britain and Harry with others was able to interpret to the leadership in Washington and elsewhere the spiritual root. of the Labour Party.

During those years we were able to meet personally some of the West Midlands Members of Parliament and Councillors. One in particular was Jim Simmonds and his wife Beatrice (Bee). He became a Junior Minister in Attlee's Government. He was becoming disillusioned by the way some of his colleagues wore forgetting the ideals from which their brotherhood had sprung and were seeking power for themselves and neglecting the needs of those who had put them into office. Jim did what he could to maintain the true spirit of the Labour Party; Bee was a City Councillor and she introduced us to Bert Bradbeer, the Labour Lord Mayor of Birmingham. He and his wife Molly came to a Civic Service at our Church and after taking the salute of our youth organisations in Hamstead Road, came to lunch with us.

One day we took him and Molly to London with Harry and Mabel to meet Frank Buchman. Everyone was eager that the Lord Mayor of Birmingham should hear everything Frank Buchman said as we sat around for morning coffee on our arrival. Bert was not going to be pushed and sat a little apart. Someone said, "Come up closer, Bert", to which Frank replied, "Let the fellow sit where he like.. What I am concerned about is that Ben has not got his 'coffee'." This was typical of our touches with Frank. I was sometimes fearful of him because I thought he might see through me, which he probably did. There were other occasions when Frank's care was shown to Gwen and myself, of which more later.

In 1948 a musical revue "The Good Road" came to the Theatre Royal, Birmingham. It dramatised the spiritual heritage of the West, tracing its roots back through history. It played to packed houses wherever it went. Consequently there was a great demand for tickets and when it was performed in Birmingham many were disappointed. We invited people from our church, for whom we obtained tickets. There was one family

which had never been sympathetic to MRA or to what we did, and so we thought they would not be interested in “The Good Road”, so we didn’t invite them. One morning the mother of the family concerned appeared on our doorstep and demanded to know why she had not received an invitation. We soon put this right and, like so many, the family was deeply affected and one of the sons came to me afterwards and expressed how much it had meant to him personally.

One morning while “The Good Road” was on at the Theatre Royal, my friend Walter Farmer was at the front of the stage arranging flowers which he had supplied from his shop. A run through of one of the scenes was in progress. The man who was to take the part of the Roadmender, a key part, was unable to be on stage that evening. In the empty auditorium Frank Buchman was sitting making comments from time to time. There was some discussion as to who would take the part of the Roadmender. Suddenly Frank pointed to Walter and said, “Let that fellow have a try”.

Unknown to Frank, Walter had had some experience on the stage and as I have said, he and his wife Florrie had helped in the factory campaign in Redditch. Walter “stood in” that evening doing the part of the Road mender. For several years after that Walter was called upon to act in plays and stage productions at the Westminster Theatre, and at Caux. Frank Buchman also invited him to be part of a force which toured India and the East presenting plays and stage productions which gave answers to some of the problems facing people and nations. Walter had to leave his business in the bands of his manager on these occasions, which meant great faith on his part. Those of us who saw him play another key part in Peter Howard’ s “Through the Garden Wall” can never forget the performance he gave. He seemed to live the part he took.

This was the last time he acted in a play, for he consulted a doctor and was told that he had cancer, which he faced with great courage and disregard of his own suffering in caring for others until he died in 1978. He left a great gap in the lives of Gwen and myself. He was our faithful friend. His sense of humour and his love of a joke were a great tonic. He had an unending fund of funny stories and jokes; but I can never remember his telling a joke or story, which was not fit for any company. There was so much to laugh about, including ourselves, that there was no need for anything questionable or in bad taste.

At the end of the war, there was an acute coal shortage and the extreme winter of 1946/47 made the situation worse. Industry and the economy suffered, household coal was at a premium. Several factors contributed to the crisis but perhaps among others was a shortage of the right spirit. Morale was low, disruptive forces exploited grievances, legitimate and otherwise. There was disagreement and disaffection among men and management, the story of unrest that has often repeated itself.

The nations of Europe were facing the threat of complete economic ruin. Had it not been for Marshall Aid and the generous help of our friends in America it is doubtful whether Britain would have been able to recover from the ravages of war. As one of the sources of wealth was coal, Ernest Bevin, who was Foreign Secretary at the time, appealed for more coal. Be said, “Give me coal and I will give you a foreign policy.”

Many of us in the Midlands and across the country had seen the industrial drama “The Forgotton Factor” which depicted two families, an industrialist’s and a labour leader’s, in both of which there was strife and there was a threatened strike in the works. The missing factor was shown to be a change of attitude all round and it began in one member of one of the families. For me it always meant the forgotten Factor was God and His way of doing things, but it doesn’t matter what you call it. Our friends in industry called it “Not who is right, but what is right”. We had been told of some of the effects that this play had had wherever it was shown. It had been seen in many parts of America with remarkable results and we heard many stories of how family problems and industrial crises had been resolved. Would it not be a move in the right direction to invite workers and management in industry and especially the coalfields to see this play? Many of us across the country decided to plan for this play to be seen by as many as possible. Some of us in Birmingham set about to get to know people in the coal industry. It came about in various ways. Two vicars of parishes in Birmingham and myself began to think and plan especially for the coalfields in North Staffordshire, which were about forty miles away. We were given introductions to some trade union leaders in the N.U.M. and some managers of collieries around Stoke-on-Trent. We arranged to take our free days simultaneously, on which we travelled to the North Staffordshire area. We were not always able to travel in comfort for petrol was still rationed and the railway stations still displayed the notice “Is your journey really necessary?” On several occasions we had to “thumb a lift”. Once we travelled part of the way on a timber lorry,

one of us in the driver's cabin and two on the tail. Sometimes we travelled by train because in our minds, our journey was really necessary.

A friend who was serving in the National Fire Service in the area, used to make appointments to see various representatives of the coal industry, so we joined him where possible. This man, Frank Bygott, was one of the most self- effacing and rock-like characters one could know. Two of my clergy friends tell how once when a lorry stopped to give them and Frank a lift, there was room for only two in the driver's cabin. While they were deliberating about who would be unselfish and sit on the tailboard in the cold, Frank had already taken up his seat there. Another Anglican vicar of a country parish on the edge of the coal-fields and the potteries had miners and managers in his parish.

Similarly there was a Methodist minister at Burslem, one of the six towns of Stoke-on-Trent, who also had miners in his church. We also got to know the Lord Mayor of Stoke-on-Trent, who was a member of a Baptist Church. On one occasion he gave a small reception in the Lord Mayor's Parlour for a few from management in the collieries and potteries to meet us. On another occasion it was arranged for a party of us to go down a pit. I was not entirely accustomed to such an outing. As we reached the coal face we had to crawl along a short tunnel about a yard or metre high and as I am not very agile, I was making heavy going of it. One of the miners remarked, "We haven't seen you down here lately, mate".

It was not always easy to approach those whom we had come to see. On one occasion I was with Frank Bygott who knew a Branch Secretary of the N.U.M. This man did not always welcome Frank, so the man's secretary would meet him at the door to say he was out or engaged. So we devised another route to his door, along by a hedge where he couldn't see us approaching. When we met, he was pleased to hear what we had to tell him and was ready to co—operate inviting miners to see "The Forgotten Factor" which was being shown in parts of the Midlands.

From the friendships we made, we were able to invite a number of miners and their friends to see the play. Consequently the play was seen by many from the North Staffordshire area and other parts of the country, and those who came were also able to hear first—hand reports of it. effect on family and industrial problems in other places where the 'Forgotten Factor' been applied. Later a special train took men from

management and the work force from collieries and potteries with their wives, families and friends, to London to see the play at the Westminster Theatre. Whatever the contributory causes, coal production. went up, absenteeism went down and we were told that the North Staffordshire coal-fields repeatedly hit their production targets. The “Birmingham Post” 12 May 1947 reported, “Five Day week brings more coal in Four Areas N. Staffs Pit lead the Coalfields”. The practical results of this united action were valuable - increased wages for miners and lessening the hardship for the country at large. But the real aim was to do what the churches exist to do - bring changed attitude in the hearts of men and their families.

Among my close friends in Birmingham were a company director, a bank manager, a hospital consultant, two G.Ps, and Laurie, the research student who lived in our home. For a time we met regularly for breakfast in the bank manager’s home where we pooled the thoughts we felt God had given us. We made friends with men and women on both sides of industry in and around Birmingham.

One of these was a man named Bert who was a shop-steward in one of the factories. He was a tall, burly, likeable man who had been a London cabby (taxi driver) before coming to Birmingham to work in industry. He fought hard for just conditions and wages for his work-mates. He also fought management and sometimes he fought his wife. He came to see the play “The Forgotten Factor” and together with some of his colleagues he began to apply a new approach at work. He had much to tell. He said that he no longer entered the manager’s office with the idea that he was confronting an enemy. But his wife did not believe that the change in him was real or that it would last.

One Sunday at lunchtime Bert arrived home on time for Sunday lunch instead of spending time with his colleagues elsewhere. His wife was so surprised that in joy she threw into the air some butter, which she was carrying into the kitchen, and it made a grease mark on the ceiling. She believed that the change in her husband was real, and the mark remained on the ceiling for a long time. When we visited the home we were shown this grease spot which was left there as a reminder until the room was redecorated. Bert was a number of such men who became our friends.

One afternoon in the winter of 1948 - 49, when I was thinking of having a quiet evening at home, I received a ‘phone call at about 3 p.m.

to ask if I would help drive some of the shop-stewards to a meeting in London that next evening. I did not want to go for I have never enjoyed driving in the dark. But Gwen and I both felt that I should. When our friends had finished their shifts, a party of us set off in three cars at about 4 o'clock, just as it was getting dark. We arrived in London a little before 8 p.m. (There was no motorway then so we travelled on the road which took us through the towns). Lord and Lady Hardinge of Penshurst were giving a Reception in the Hyde Park Hotel for Frank Buchman and friends.

During the evening a number of people told of how they had applied new attitudes to difficult situations in industry, home and the nation. Speakers included Lord and Lady Hardinge, a film director, men from both sides of industry, some from overseas. After the meeting Dr. Buchman wanted to talk with the shop-stewards. He gathered them around. They were a mixed lot of workers, most of whom were due at work early next morning. But they were eager to stay. Frank opened their eyes to some of the forces at work in industry and the country at that time, and how a positive ideology was at work answering a negative one. He **also** talked to them, and they to him, about their homes, families and lives. They were all deeply affected by their touch with Frank. Consequently we did not set off for Birmingham till after 11 p.m. - the three cars in convoy. London was reasonably quiet at that time of the evening and we travelled through Mill Hill, Hendon and the Watford Way through Tring, Aylesbury and on. A little before we reached Bicester, one of the cars had a puncture and we drew into a lay-by. We all got out and reviewed the situation, but there was no spare tyre. While we were conferring the blue light of a police oar appeared and drew into the lay-by. "Good evening, Sir, are you in trouble?" We explained what had happened, and with a few more searching questions, we decided to leave the oar for the night and contact a garage next morning. The police left us apparently satisfied. However, the party of thirteen was now distributed into the two cars. With the five already in my car, we were now seven, and big fellows at that, so we crawled gingerly on our journey for we realised the hazards of so much weight on our tyres. We passed through Bicester without any further trouble, but passing through a village called Aynho, between Banbury and Bicester, one of the rear tyres on my car went flat. We all climbed out into the middle of the road. No police oar arrived this time (now about 3 a.m.) so we made short work of changing the wheel and were soon on our way again, very conscious that we were without a spare tyre for the rest of the journey.

We managed to get as far as Solihull, about ten miles south of Birmingham, when another tyre went! Fortunately we were not far from a garage, so we crawled into its forecourt, and as it was now early morning, we were able to get help. Another “fortunate” fact was that our friend Steve Lester - a hospital Consultant - lived near and we telephoned for help. Those of our friends due in at work were ferried to their factories and some of us were given breakfast by Steve and Mary, joined by their young family including small son John.

Some of the men who came on that journey to London became true statesmen in industry. They did not cease to work for the best interests of the men and women they represented. Nor did they always find it easy or without opposition. But they worked for a spirit of unity instead of confrontation; or what is right and not who is right. They began to see their conflicts in the perspective of world needs. Many found a new unity at home and their families began to back thin. Wives ceased to complain that they were “trade union widows”. They saw that how they lived at home was as important as what they worked for in the factory. Some travelled with their wives to the MRA Conferences in Switzerland where they met with people from both sides of industry, together with men and women from other nations and backgrounds, where the common aim was to put right what is wrong instead of fighting each other. A one—time trouble-maker named Tod Sloan once put the same idea another way; “I’m not agin’ anything now but sin”. This, not from a theologian, but from a man who once had been “agin’’ everything and everybody. The idea is the same however we express it.

Chapter 13

Opposition

In 1950 we entertained a large party of Japanese in Birmingham. A special 'plane-load of 76, the most representative group to leave Japan since the war, had been invited to Caux for the summer conference and en route to America were to visit Birmingham and other cities in Britain. The party included the Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, leaders of industry and the railways, finance and labour, and some members of the Diet (the Japanese Parliament). It was a great privilege to receive them. They had been apprehensive about how they would be received by people in the West.

When they arrived at the Caux conference they were far from being united among themselves. The Chief of Police of Osaka and a Trade Unionist hated each other so much that they would not speak to one another on the 'plane. During their stay at Caux they became reconciled and made apologies to each other. Many other notable things happened.

While they were in Birmingham I was particularly interested to be one of the party who welcomed thin, in view of my brother Ron's death in Singapore at the hands of the Japanese. I felt we had to build for the future and every step, which led to reconciliation, was significant. I was able to talk with some of the delegation personally. We held a reception for thin and afterwards I accompanied one of the members of the Diet to the hotel where he was staying. As we entered the hotel I asked if he had had a meal and he said that he was ready for something to eat. I had heard how Frank Buchman had provided Japanese food for the delegation at Caux, perfectly cooked and according to their special tastes$_1$ so I said to my companion "Is there any special diet we can order?" And finding a little difficulty with our language he replied, "I am in the Diet!" I explained what I meant. He explained that their Parliament was called the Diet. We laughed and became friends. When this Japanese party reached Washington that July, they were the first Japanese in history to address the two Houses of Congress. Their spokesman made sincere and moving apologies to the American people for what their people had done during the war.

On a later visit to Caux, Gwen and I had a meal with a Japanese who had committed atrocities during the war and had told his story to the Assembly. When I told him the story of my brother he came near to tears. He told Gwen and me that he felt he could never make full restitution for what he had done, but that he was doing all he could at the conference by getting up in the middle of the night and finding what jobs needed to be done around the Centre, like washing up and cleaning, because he wanted to serve those he had wronged. We were able to show him that we all needed forgiveness and could have it. To our embarrassment, and in spite of our protests, on the morning of our departure he insisted on getting up and carrying our luggage to the station. All this made us feel very humble. There was a great sense of God's Spirit at work in all this. We witnessed old enemies becoming reconciled, conflict in industry being resolved, homes and marriages remade and a renewal of faith coming in place of despair. This happened all the time at the Caux assemblies where we u were privileged to meet with people from other nations and different backgrounds from our own, and when, in those post-war days, it was possible for larger groups to move across the world. But as with St. Paul of old, wherever the effects of a movement of the Spirit were to be found, there was opposition and attack. Many unfriendly voices were raised, but not for the first time. The materialistic ideologies of the East and West recognised the work of Moral Re-Armament as a threat, especially during the war when both the Gestapo and the Communist Party tried by every means to suppress it. In 1953-54 there were renewed and intensified attacks. Dr. Buchman had taken an international force to India where "Pravda" attacked him and the Overseas Service of Moscow Radio beamed on India and Pakistan. In Europe the fire came from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions meeting in Stockholm, which passed a resolution condemning MRA.

In Britain the newly founded Social and Industrial Council of the Church of England decided to publish a report on the work of Moral Re-Armament that was hostile. It is true to say that many of those appointed to prepare the report were long—term critics of NRA and while the report was being prepared, hostile letters from some of them appeared in the Press. I met some Free Church leaders who were friends of mine. They were dismayed at what was happening and joined with the Moderator of the Church of Scotland in signing a strong statement in support of MRA that appeared in the "Daily Telegraph" (15.1.54). I was in Church House when the report was presented to the General Assembly of the Church of

England. There was a determined attempt to get the Report adopted, but voices were raised in strong protest in the debate, with the result that it was decided to "note" the report instead of adopting it.

But the damage had been done, for a small minority had succeeded in suggesting that MRA was not a Christian force. It made many people wary of MRA as something to be avoided. There have always been those who, for reasons of their own, have been unfriendly. Some have repeated something they have heard, or read somewhere, not knowing the source from which false statements or smears came.

There is little doubt that one man who persistently attacked Frank Buchman and his work was behind this clever move with the report. Tom Driberg, who in his autobiography confesses that he was a life-long compulsive pervert, was also a churchwarden and member of the Finance Committee of the Church of England. He also had, according to the Editor-in-Chief of Reuters, KGB connections and it is possible he was a double agent.

During this same period, the BBC was unfriendly and ready to use speakers and material hostile to MRA while rejecting anything supportive. Several approaches were made at this time that a programme might be devoted to Moral Re-Armament by someone who could give facts and personal experience of its work and outreach. These were all refused. There seemed to be a conspiracy of silence.

In 1954 I was asked by a colleague who had contact with the BBC if I would like my name to be put forward with a view to being included on a panel of ministers and clergy who would be prepared to broadcast a Sunday Service at intervals. I was flattered and readily agreed. I quite fancied myself as a broadcaster, and just think what good I could do! I went to the Midland studios for an audition and within a short time was invited to conduct a broadcast Sermon from Hamstead Road. In my sermon I referred to a speech made at Caux by Dr. Douglas Cornell of the American National Academy of Sciences who said that we needed guided missiles but more than that we needed God-guided men. All went well, but I was never invited again.

In January 1954, we had been at Hamstead Road Church for ten years. The church gave us a worthy celebration with representatives of neighbouring churches joining in. Gwen and I received suitable presentations and many nice things were said about us but we both felt

that the time had come to consider moving on.

We therefore intimated to the Area Superintendent of the West Midlands that we would like to have a move, and he took the necessary steps to introduce us to vacant churches. I was invited to conduct services and preach at a number of churches over a period of six years in all. From time to time discreet enquiries were made as to whether I was still associated with MRA, and I would hear no more. In the meantime, in 1957, the Revd A. J. Klaiber, the Area Superintendent of the West Midlands died and nominations for a new appointment were sought. I had in the meantime been elected Chairman of the Birmingham District of Baptist Churches, a member of the Baptist Union Council and some of its committees, and was a candidate for the appointment in the minds of many. When it came to a vote the choice was between another Minister in the area and myself. I was told later that I had had overwhelming support from the local churches, but that there had been opposition from other quarters and so there was hesitation in appointing me. In the event, someone from outside was appointed who knew little of the Midlands area. At the time I was disappointed for I was attracted to the idea of becoming an Area Superintendent. It carried with it prestige in the Baptist denomination - at least in those days. It was like being a bishop who cared for the ministers and churches in his area. Also I had already waited for three years to receive an invitation to another church.

One morning soon after the announcement of the appointment of the Area Superintendent I had the clear thought “You can either be jealous of this fellow, or help him into the saddle.” I began to see how I could help him. I could give him the benefit of my knowledge and experience of the churches of the West Midlands. I could prepare carefully for all committee meetings under his chairmanship so that they ran smoothly. He once said to me, “I am so grateful the way you do your homework before meetings - I must take a leaf out of your book”. As a result we became firm friends and he confided in me about all kinds of matters. He was puzzled that no church had invited me to be its minister. He became aware of the suspicion about MRA that had been sown in the minds of some of the officials and churches. Eventually he suggested that if I wanted to move, I might apply for a teaching post. The idea had occurred to me so I began to explore the possibilities.

Before I made a final decision I consulted Dr. Ernest Payne, the General Secretary of the Baptist Union. I told him how I had been seeking

a move for six years. This came as a great surprise to him and he offered to do all he could t. help, but to no avail. I told him that I would accept a teaching appointment only with the blessing of the Baptist Union and on condition that I remained an accredited Baptist Minister. When I received the offer of a post at Lincoln I wrote and told him of my intention to accept. On the following Friday morning there were three letters on our mat; one from Dr Ernest Payne and two others from friends I had consulted. They all encouraged me to take this step.

It had not been an easy decision to make, and when the time came to depart I was torn between staying and leaving. I had come to love the church building and its dignity of worship. The pipe organ had been modernised and reconstructed and had been opened with a recital by the well—known organist, Lady Susi Jeans, the widow of Sir James Jeans the scientist. One day I was standing with a friend admiring the church saying that it would be hard to leave. He said to me, "You can't worship a building". This is true. I had enjoyed the prestige of my position. Also like other ministers and clergy I had built very close relationships during nearly sixteen years with people whose sorrows and joys I had shared.

On the other hand there was the pressure of committee work and meetings that sometimes made one question the value of it all. So much time is spent keeping the machinery of church work going. There was the tendency to get booked up and have a full diary. It is easy to fool oneself and feel that the more active you are the more effective you are. There is a story of a Bishop who when asked to attend a certain function in September replied "Which year?" It had not come to that.

Colin and Roger had spent their formative years in Birmingham. In 1959 Colin was 24 and had graduated at Sheffield University in Mathematics and Physics and was doing research in fluid dynamics. Roger was about to leave Handsworth Grammar School. When the time came for us to leave, Colin and Roger took charge of the removal as Gwen and I were to go to Switzerland and. They were returning from Caux as we passed through Heathrow and we had just a few minutes between 'planes to give them final instructions. Gwen and I left our home in a church manse in Birmingham and came back at the end of August to our new home in Lincoln. It was the first time we had had a house of our own. We returned to Birmingham for farewell services on the first Sunday in September when there were large congregations. On the Monday morning we collected some oddments and the four of us drove to Lincoln

with our cat, Malvolio, who did not appreciate the journey. It was the beginning of a new chapter, a new life-style and a new opportunity.

Chapter 14

Lincoln — Teaching

Everything was new and seemed strange at first. It was like starting a new career. Birmingham was the metropolis of the Midlands and claimed to be Britain's second city. Lincoln was a small city with interesting historical roots. As Lindum Colonia it had been a Roman camp and the rename of the old wall dates from the first century. I used to stand by it and wonder whether any of the soldiers who built it were grandsons of the Roman soldiers and Centurions of the time of Jesus and Paul. Lincoln has one of the finest cathedrals in the country. Around Birmingham there were factories. Around Lincoln there were farms. Prom a great industrial centre we came to live where there is some of the richest farmland in the country. Nearby were the RAF airfields and training bases.

It was from the villages, farms and air bases that the children came to the school where I was to teach. A fleet of buses transported them each day. I had been appointed Head of Department of Religious Instruction at a large bi-lateral co-educational school of about 1,000 pupils in North Hykeham, about two miles south of Lincoln. I was to be responsible with a few assistants for the teaching of the subject throughout the school. It was not the most popular subject, nor was it what the Headmaster called a "bread and butter" subject. No longer was I free to plan my own timetable. This was allotted to me and I was responsible to the Headmaster. He was a kindly man whose first concern was. The interest' and well-being of his staff. He gave me great encouragement from the start and recognised the importance of the part I could play in the school.

The prospect of facing classes of children aged from 11-19 was daunting. When I had been Minister of a church I had never found it easy to give talks to children in church services, and had left the work with children largely to the leaders of children's organisations.

I was particularly apprehensive about teaching fourth, fifth and mirth forms. The prefects were young men and women and had their own ideas and points of view. I had to depend upon a wisdom beyond my own. Some were preparing for O and A levels in small groups. This teaching was rewarding and I had to do some hard work preparing for

these classes.

Life was a constant adventure and an education for me in those early days at the school. I had no recent experience of teaching so I had no notes to which to refer. My training had been in what I had learnt through the years of dealing with people and youth. Also my inspiration came from listening to God. He was my best Tutor.

When I came home at nights Gwen and Roger, who was at home at the time, would ask me what had happened at school that day. I saw as my underlying task the building of character and the implanting of positive ideas by which the children could steer their lives. Some of the stories of people I knew and of my own experience were always to the point. Especial interest was always shown in my misdemeanors and downfalls and what I had done about them. “Tell us more, Sir”, was the usual response. I learnt that it was important to say what I meant and to do what I said. Empty threats and shouting get nowhere, for youth know when the teacher is bluffing or means what he says. I have no doubt that I made many mistakes, but it came clear to me that as well as teaching a subject, my task was to develop the character of the pupils.

As we got to know the older pupils, we invited some of then into our home. Several good films were available, and in the atmosphere of the home we could discuss and talk more freely. Some of the youth had strange ideas about religion and God - very different from the God I knew. After the film showings we were able to have useful times together. Roger, who was now at Sheffield University, came over with another undergraduate and a Senior Lecturer in Dentistry to help us with these parties.

It was not long before I discovered that a class of teenagers was different from a church congregation. They didn’t sit quietly and listen to all I said. They answered back, they asked questions, they fidgetted. They were more boisterous than those who sat in the pews, or should I say more lively? I soon realised that eight lessons a day did not mean eight sermons a day, nor was I to give lectures. I was not there to propagate my own views but to open their minds and to lead them to truth and set them to work. I soon saw how much I was out of touch with modern youth. My interests had not been theirs.

One day at morning assembly the Headmaster announced that the desks had been defaced and that some pupils had written their names on

the desks. There was to be a cleaning session and form-time that morning was to be devoted to sand— papering and rubbing off the offending marks. My form were busy obeying orders when one boy called out, "Please Sir, what shall I do? It says on this desk 'Elvis'." I replied amid hoots of laughter, "Which form is he in?" This made for a warmer relationship with the form as education was beginning to be two-way. Since that day I have heard quite a lot about Elvis Presley.

One day a boy in a third form announced to the class that he had received through his letter-box a document, which had interested him, called "Ideology and Co-existence". Other pupils also remembered that they had received a copy in their homes. The boy had been so affected by it that he asked if we might discuss it in our lesson as it mentioned the importance of moral standards and some stories of people who had applied them. It showed how disruptive forces were at work undermining the moral fibre of the nation's life. We had a lively discussion and I was surprised by the interest and valuable contributions of these youth aged about 14. At the end of the lesson two girls stood by my desk. "Please Sir," one of them began, and her face went redder than her auburn hair, "I told you a lie. It was something she had told me about her friend to do with skipping homework. This girl became a great friend and Gwen and I visited her family.

In one of my fifth form classes there was a boy named Tack who made it quite clear that he was not interested in my lessons. He would slouch into the classroom talking to other pupils with little regard to my presence, and I heard him say such things as "This boring stuff". "What is the use of it?" He had evidently persuaded others to think the same. He asked awkward questions. He didn't believe in God and the Bible was "trash". He became generally disruptive. I happened to mention this to the Deputy Head one morning when he commented, "Jack ————, he would not be a help. You are likely to find that he is not interested in your lessons. His parents are Communists. His mother is a Governor and on the County Council and makes her presence felt. This explained a great deal and made life quite challenging.

According to the syllabus we were to study the Gospel of John with this form, which was not the easiest to deal with in a mixed class of fifteen year olds. As the pupils arrived I had a pile of copies of St John's Gospel on the desk and each person picked up one and went to his or her desk. Jack and some of his friends sometimes pretended not to see them,

so one morning as I was distributing the mall booklets entitled “The Gospel according to St John”, I handed one to Jack and quite spontaneously made the remark, “Here you are, Jack, have some subversive literature.” He had a good sense of humour and responded to this. He then began to take a little more interest in what I taught and we began to have a healthy respect for each other. He was particularly interested when I told him a few things about myself. He continued to ask question, but was becoming less belligerent and more co-operative.

On one occasion when he was in the upper sixth, the boys’ class was discussing marriage and divorce. Some were making light of the break-up of marriages and unfaithfulness in marriage. Jack turned round on them with,“How would you feel if you didn’t know your mum or dad?”

It was the custom of Jack’s mother and father to invite members of staff and their wives or husbands to their farmhouse to supper. Owen and I were invited in due course. Gwen’s thought in the morning was, “Tell the story of Irene Laure this evening.” We went with a sense of expectancy and apprehension.

We arrived at the appointed time and were received graciously and cordially. The wife took Gwen to the kitchen and showed her around and the husband took me on his farm and showed me his prime herd of Jersey cows. A young woman who was staying with the family and who was a Ph.D. from Prague joined us. Everything was done to make us welcome and at home. We all gathered for supper and then adjourned to the lounge. During the evening Jack returned from a visit to the cinema. He and I were on very good terms by now. He started to talk about some of our experiences at school and religion came into the conversation. Then father turned to the young lady from Prague and said, “You are a Catholic. You don’t see eye to eye with the Protestants.” He went on to other divisive points and then Gwen came in with her story of Irene Laure and how she had been instrumental in bridging the colossal gap between Prance and Germany after the war by facing her own resentment at tremendous cost. Jack sat on the edge of the settee enthralled. At the end of the story father snapped at the boy, “Jack it is time that you were in bed. Get along.” (He was seventeen). We were hustled out of the room and given our coats (very politely) and sent on our way. I don’t think I have ever been so summarily dismissed from so pleasant an evenings Gwen and I were not invited again.

Jack remained a good friend until he left school to enter Keele University, after which we lest touch. The pressures upon him were too great. I heard that he joined the Young Communist League, made a mess of his life, married the wrong girl and had a breakdown. Perhaps I didn't fight hard enough for him though the influence of his family was always a controlling factor in his life. His mother had two brothers who were MPs of different parties. She often in conversation with me referred to "your moral disarmament" which I corrected but didn't voice the thought that moral disarmament might more likely belong to her. Jack at one time told me that he and his family used to look with great interest for my comments on his school report.

In 1960, Gwen, Roger and I spent Christmas at the MRA Conference at Caux. We travelled with our friend the Reverend Harold (Hal) Tayler, who had been Headmaster of Cheam School where he had taught some distinguished pupils. After flying by air car ferry from Lydd to Le Touquet we drove across Prance and Switzerland on freezing snow and ice, reaching the Conference Centre on Christmas Eve. We stopped halfway up the Roche de Naye at Glion for a cup of tea, but could not get started again on the upward slope, but some German youth pushed until the tyres gripped and ours was the last car to negotiate the hairpin bends before Christmas. It was a memorable time for many reasons. Members of the revolutionary Japanese youth organisation, the Zengakuren, were present. Their demonstration in Tokyo in the spring of 1960 had prevented President Eisenhower's visit to Japan. They had been invited to Caux by Dr. Buchman where they found a new direction for their revolutionary activities and wrote a play "The Tiger" which toured Europe and was performed in Britain. Owen and I were grateful to be able to eat our Christmas dinner with some of the Japanese. It was just about that time (Christmas) nearly twenty years before, that my brother Ron had been killed by the Japanese forces. This gave us another opportunity to rebuild for the kind of world men like Ron and others had given their lives. It was in the spirit of "Peace on Earth, Goodwill among men" that we enjoyed our meal together.

Early on Christmas morning Dr Buchman met with us in the large assembly hall and received the children on the platform. They gathered around him eagerly as he asked them what Santa had left them in their stockings. They clamored to tell him chatting with him as to a father, completely oblivious of the 800 people in the hall. Frank Buchman then turned to Peter Howard who was standing nearby and said, "What did

Santa leave for you, Peter?" I don't know what Peter replied, but he was never at a loss to say something appropriate. The morning session was followed by a stage presentation of the "Cowboy Christmas", a moving short play by Cecil Broadhurst with its carol: -

"There'll be a new world beginnin' from t'night!
There'll be a new world beginnin' from t'night!
When I climb up to my saddle Gonna take Him to my heart!
There'll be a new world beginnin' from t'night!

Eight across the prairie, Clear across the valley,
Straight across the heart of ev'ry man,
There'll be a right new brand of livin'
That'll sweep like lightnin' fire
And take away the hate in ev'ry land...."

Frank Buchman was increasingly confined to bed at that time and was pushed around in a wheel chair, although his mind was active and he was always thinking for other people and the world. But he was not to be with us for much longer. This was the last occasion on which Gwen and I saw him. There are many others who knew him more intimately than we did but whenever we had close touch with him, it was like a benediction. He cared for us as he did for so many ordinary people.

I can remember several such occasions. Years ago I arrived in London just as a party was about to leave for St. Paul's Cathedral for the Thanksgiving Service on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of George *V* and Queen Mary. Frank Buchman had obtained tickets for his friends for he was always eager to be present on national occasions and included as many as could join him. He asked me if I was going and I told him I had not got a ticket. He turned and said, "What, you a Clergyman and you haven't got an invitation to Saint Paul's?" (He always emphasised the "Saint").

A few days later, I was present at a morning meeting and as it ended frank came locking for someone and asked me -to come to his room. When I entered he said, "You didn't get an invitation to Saint Paul's." He told me that Dudley Leacock, Governor of Barbados, was giving a dinner at the Dorchester Hotel for him and his friends; would my wife and I like to go? I did not hesitate to accept and he asked his secretary, Lawson

Wood, to make out an invitation for us both. It was a memorable evening with speakers from around the world telling of God's miracles.

There was the occasion Gwen and I were sitting in the Oxford Union during an interval between meetings and Frank came to sit in the row behind us, all alone. It was just before Gwen's sister Vera's wedding. Gwen whispered to me, "Shall I ask Frank if he would accept an invitation to Vera's wedding, if invited?" I was hesitant but Gwen turned round and asked Frank if he would come, thinking that her father would like to have him present. His reply was simple: "If I am wanted". This was precisely what was not the case. When we approached Gwen's father, he said to our surprise, "Anyone but Frank Buchman." Perhaps he was afraid that Frank would talk religion to his friends; or perhaps there was some other reason.

These touches we had with Frank are typical of his regard for every person he met. He used to say that everyone was a royal soul. He did not draw people to himself but to a way of living. He did not invent the absolute moral standards, nor living by obedience to God. He inspired me to live that way and to believe that others could do the same. He believed that this was the way to bring about God's will on earth. There is nothing new about all this. It is what Jesus taught and what I had heard preached in church. What is new for me every day is to apply it in my own life. Much good work is done on the assumption that human nature cannot change. Frank Buchman believed that it can. It is what I had been taught about the redeeming power of the Cross of Christ.

One day I was standing with some of my clergy friends when Frank Buchman said, "You clergy will have to face the Cross". He knew what this meant himself, and I am constantly challenged by it.

Chapter 15

Lincoln – Ministry there

In the 1960 there was a rapid moral decline in our national life. The idea of a permissive society became fashionable. A distinguished Minister of the Crown made the pronouncement that the permissive society was the civilised society. Many people were glad to think that they were becoming civilised. Liberty became license, traditional faith was debunked or shaken, and ideas about the sanctity of sex, marriage and family life were discredited. Not everybody thought like this. Many felt that something was wrong, but did not know what to do about it.

In 1961, the Trustees of the Westminster Theatre decided “to make an attempt to bring new trends into the theatre and a new thinking to the public”. In the words of the Chairman of the Trustees, “The aim was to present a series of plays which would give people new courage and purpose and a new will to tackle the problems in the contemporary world.” The plays that followed varied in many ways but had the same purpose and aim.

One dramatised the answer to race conflict and colour in Africa. Another dealt with corruption, power-seeking and ambition in public life and the relation between private character and public life. These and other relevant themes were portrayed in the succeeding years. At one point the “Daily Telegraph” carried the comment, “At the Westminster it is always wholesome morality... It is Christianity pure and simple and it certainly makes a change.”

How could ordinary people take part in this positive move? A few of us, headed by a retired local government official, decided to invite civic leaders to see these plays and to give them the opportunity of meeting others who had been affected by them. The Westminster Theatre is just round the corner from Buckingham Palace, so it was decided among other things to invite Mayors and Chairmen of Local Councils to a reception followed by an evening performance of the current play on the occasion of their visit to the Royal Garden Parties. This continued for several years. As many as possible were given a personal invitation. Owen and I decided to visit Mayors and Civic Heads in Lincolnshire, to

inform them of what was proposed.

"Lincolnshire" as it was called in those days, was the second largest county in England, second in size only to Yorkshire. We obtained a list of the Civic Heads and called at their homes during several weekends. I don't know how many miles we covered. We set out after breakfast on Saturday and Sunday mornings, usually with a packed lunch. On more than one occasion Owen met me from school on the Friday afternoon when we visited during the evening. We were received warmly by these men and women, often meeting their wives or husbands. We found that many were concerned about what was happening in society. Some were interested in how I tackled the teaching of my subject in a school. We were struck by the number of public-spirited people there are in out of the way places.

I was struck by the attitude of one Chairman of a Council who told me that his daughter was an airhostess. It was the time when hijacking on 'planes was beginning to happen. He said that he could never agree to ransom being paid even though his daughter whom he loved might be involved.

Another man whose family we visited had been a Methodist Lay Preacher. He was discouraged and felt helpless to bring about the kind of society he longed for. He accompanied us to London one week—end. It was his first visit and we took him into Westminster Central Hall where he was thrilled to stand on the rostrum where some of his heroes had preached. He came to a large meeting at the Westminster Theatre and spoke with fire and conviction and returned to his native Lincolnshire with new hope.

Many of these men and women in local government were concerned about what was happening in the schools. Education was becoming a political football. I myself had started teaching in a hi—lateral school, which meant that there were two streams, one of "Grammar School, children and the other "Secondary Modern". After a year the Grammar School children and staff were taken to a new building across the road and the others left behind in the Secondary Modern School. After a few years both schools became comprehensive, the Grammar School being enlarged to double its size. Inevitably this caused disruption and some members of staff became disgruntled. Unfortunately it is often the troublemakers who catch the headlines. But the majority quietly and

conscientiously get on with their job. Some of my colleagues were first-class teachers dedicated to their calling.

One day a visitor from Australia was having lunch with the Head of Geography. In the course of conversation my colleague began to describe certain scenes in Australia. “When were you in Australia?” enquired the visitor. “I have never been there”, was the reply. He had made such a study of the country that it seemed he had been there. It is not surprising that the school had excellent results in GCE at O and A levels.

The music master was a gifted pianist and was a regular performer on the radio, playing duets with his brother who was a lecturer at the Manchester College of Music. He was a self—effacing man and often he would be working long after school hours rehearsing for a concert or some other event. He gave unreservedly of his time and his talents as many others do. He and I often had a laugh when he came to me to ask which tune I would like for the hymn at Morning Assembly. I would sometimes hum a tune, and he would say, “I don’t know that one. This is the one I know” and give a perfect rendering of the same tunes as I have said before, singing is not my strong suit.

The Second Mistress used to keep us all up to scratch — teachers and pupils alike. She had high professional standards and for two terms of office she was National President of her Teachers’ Union.

I once heard the Headmaster say about the Head of Department of Domestic Science that he would give his right hand to keep her in the school. She was constantly planning for some function besides her teaching duties. We all enjoyed the results. These are typical of many teachers in our schools, unheralded, unknown, but who are the quiet army of faithful men and women dedicated to their task, who are responsible for the successful results of education in this country. They are men and women of character and discipline in their own lives and the backbone of our education system. I learnt a great deal working with such people.

There were, however, some disquieting influences at work. The Head of English was a radical humanist and I often felt his influence on pupils as they arrived in the upper forms of the school. Although he and I were on good terms personally, I am sure he was not working for the same ends as I was.

One evening we had a 'phone call from a parent asking if there was anything I could do, as Head of R.I., about his daughter aged 13. She was distressed by some homework she had been set. She had been asked to write comments on an obscene passage from a book. She had been embarrassed and ashamed to show it to her mother. The only action I could take was to report the fact to the Headmaster who sent for the Head of English and ensured that the book be withdrawn from the reading list. Similarly there was an attempt to get "Lady Chatterly' s Lover" on the 0 level syllabus which some of us blocked.

Young teachers from college came with liberal ideas that the children should not be frustrated or halted in their tracks. I once heard a great commotion on in the next class—room that was connected to mine with a door with glass panels. The children were leaving their desks and the young lady in charge was sitting helpless, now and again shouting though with little response. I glared through the glass panel and some of the pupils saw me. They sat in their places and nudged others and some sort of order began to be restored. As they came through my room at the end of the lesson, I told, them to sit down or stand before passing through. I then spoke to them quite severely and then dismissed them. Some stayed behind and very earnestly thanked me for intervening. Later I tested a class with the question, "Do you prefer the teachers who discipline you or the teachers who let you do what you like?" Some of the naughty boys replied as expected, but the majority told me they preferred teachers who disciplined them, as they knew where they stood. There was more security. Children are quick to sense what the teacher is like.

Strange ideas seemed to be taught in the training colleges at that point, of which we are reaping the fruit in the present education upheaval. I was talking to the Deputy Head one day about the lax use of grammar. A young teacher just out of college turned to us and said, "Usage makes grammar". From some of the usage I had experienced, one could not discover much grammar. There is a school of thought that advocates this dictum. It has come into the present debate on the teaching of English in schools. But surely it depends upon whose usage. It strikes me that it is like moving the goalposts in the middle of a gene. This is the philosophy of "Everybody does it."

I was discussing playing to the rules with Sixth Formers once when the matter of foul play in Rugby football came up. One boy who was a good player and good character stated categorically that he had no qualms

about “dirty tricks” in the serum, as long as you were not found out by the referee. He said, “Everybody does it.” I am sure the Games Master would not have agreed.

In one of my classes two girls began to resist and disagree with what I said. They argued and asked awkward questions. They both came from good homes; one was a vicar’s daughter. But both of them were quite a nuisance in lessons. One day they told me that they were to be confirmed. Owen and I attended their Confirmation Service and afterwards joined in refreshments in the Church Hall. They both thanked us for being present. I asked them what their Confirmation had meant to them. They confessed that their attitude in being anti—all that I taught had been a pose; that they had conspired together to pretend to be agnostic so as to draw from me the answers to some of the questions that they found difficult to answer.

Sometimes it was a pupil who made the most helpful contribution to a lesson. One day we were discussing whether it was right or wrong to put a member of the family into a home for the mentally retarded or handicapped. The members of the class were not lost for ideas, arguing for or against. Suddenly a boy spoke out with great feeling. “I have a brother who is mentally retarded. We all love him, he said. “We couldn’t put him into a home. He draws out our love and what is best in us all because we all want to help him. Our home would not be the same without him.”

When there is a problem or difficult pupil to deal with, most teachers are only too ready to co-operate and work out an answer together. Sometimes it is not easy to see what to do. I often felt I needed a wisdom greater than my own.

There was a particularly obstreperous boy who made a nuisance of himself in every lesson. He was always getting into trouble. It occurred to me that an attitude of antagonism between him and the staff was building up which was making him more difficult. I did not know what to do any more than anyone else. The only thought I had was to do what I could to make friends with him and to find out more about him. Somehow we discovered that the boy had a cruel father who was constantly beating him. There was little wonder that he regarded adults as his enemies. It was remarkable how his attitude changed when he felt people cared for him. He even became interested in my lessons.

I learnt this simple lesson again with the boy who pulled up the plants

in our front garden. He seemed to delight in hearing us voice our objections. I found myself getting all kinds of evil intentions. Again the thought, “Try and make friends with him”. He must have felt my changed attitude and he began to tell me all kinds of things about himself and stopped pulling up our plants. I am afraid I did not get very far with him, for one day I asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up. The immediate reply “A robber”. I did not feel I could offer much help along those lines! However, we did not have this boy in the school or I might have received help from my colleagues in befriending him.

When we became a Comprehensive School in the early seventies, we moved to new buildings. There were many new features. The Staff Room was more comfortable with a quiet room for marking homework and exam papers. The prefects had a special lounge with facilities to make coffee and hot drinks, the Domestic Science department which became the Home Economics complex had new equipment and the Science laboratories were fitted with up-to-date apparatus. I was allotted a new classroom with larger bookshelves and another "R.I" expert” was appointed as my assistant along with other members of staff who helped part-time in the department. More pupils were prepared for O and A levels in my subject. But children were the same, staff were the same, and personal relationships were the same.

In the new Science laboratories all kinds of experiments were taking place. They were testing what happened under controlled conditions and made notes of the results. Sometimes I suggested that we made an experiment in my classroom and wrote notes on the results. On one occasion a girl looked very unhappy. She wrote in her notes that she had quarrelled with her sister that morning and that she should try the experiment by apologising to her sister. She looked very much happier next morning when she told me that the experiment had worked. I discovered that these experiments can work with a family and young children. We were once visiting a couple who had three young boys, Thomas, Richard and Henry whom we will call Tom, Dick and Harry, aged seven, six and three. Like all young boys they did not always want to go to bed, and on this particular evening after they had been put to bed there was a rumpus in the bedroom with shouts and tears. Jack, their father, went up to the bedroom and “read the Riot Act”. After he had returned to the dining room, the noise started up again with crying and shouting coming from upstairs. Their mother went up to see what the trouble was and spoke in quieter but firm terms to the boys. It seemed to

be more effective but after a while there was another uproar, and I asked if I might have a try.

At first this was rejected as it was thought by all that I would “spoil them” and it would have no effect. But I was allowed to try. I entered the bedroom where the two older boys, Tom and Dick, were imitating and jeering at young Harry who was in tears. When they saw me, there was a polite silence and the eldest, Tom, said, “Hello”. I said, “What is the trouble?” To which young Harry replied amid tears, “They are laughing at me”. The others replied, “He is such a baby”. I had no clear idea what to do, but I said, “Do you know what I do when things go wrong?” “What?” one of them asked. “I listen to Jesus and ask him what to do”. (They knew what I meant by that). I told them of some of the things I had done and how God had told me what to do and they were interested. I suggested we might try listening and we were quiet for a moment.

Then I said to Tom, “What did He say to you?” “Nothing” was the sharp reply. “And what to you Dick?” “He said ‘Don’t laugh at Barry’.” Harry merely whimpered. “Shall we try it again?” said Tom - and we did. Very soon Dick said in an urgent voice, “He’s saying it again. He is saying it again”, almost as if he were in pain. I said, “What did He say?” He replied, “Don’t laugh at Harry and go to sleep”. Then I turned to Tom and said, “Did He say anything to you?” and he merely turned to Harry and said, “Sorry, Harry”. Then Harry said, still tearfully, “I feel we should go to sleep” - and they did.

On another occasion I found myself not knowing what to do. We were staying with a family where the young son, about nine years old, had complained of a bad stomach ache on several successive mornings at the time when he was due to leave for school. His parents had their suspicions but could not discover what lay behind his trouble. Each day by lunch-time he seemed to have recovered and was able to enjoy his meal. At breakfast-time on our first morning there, suddenly the boy complained that he was feeling bad. His father said quite sharply, “Go up to bed if you are not well,” at which the boy shot upstairs. His mother said to me, “Do you think there is anything you can do? He has done this every morning this week.” I did not know what to do and felt helpless. I went upstairs and found a tearful lad already in bed. I asked him where his pain was and he indicated some vague area below his chest. “Do you think we should call the doctor?” I said. He wasn’t quite sure as the pain was beginning to get better.

"How do you like your school?" I asked. "It's all right, but we have 'Smash' with our dinner and I don't like it." "Could this be the cause of your stomach trouble?" I enquired. He didn't think so. "Is there anything else you don't like at school?" "There is a French teacher who shouts at us." I told him how I did not like History and Art when I had been at school. "Is there anything else?" I asked. "I don't know," he replied. I told him about listening to Jesus when I was in trouble and letting Him show me what to do. We were quiet for a moment, then, "There is a boy who bullies some of us in the playground.' "Perhaps he is unhappy at home," I suggested. "Not everyone has a happy one like yours. Do you think you could make friends with that boy?" He said he would try. I went downstairs and his mother was standing at the foot of the stairs and we heard singing coming from the bedroom. He recovered and went to school next morning. When I saw him next he told me that he had talked to the other boy and was beginning to make friends with him, and that the boy was unhappy at home. The aches and pains had ceased, but we did not talk about them.

I sometimes forgot that I was approaching retiring age but was reminded that the time was near, not only by the Education Authority, but by small straws in the wind. One day I asked a class, "Which parables of Jesus are to be found only in the Gospel of St Luke?" Some hands went up - "The Good Samaritan", "The Prodigal Son", and a few more. A boy at the back of the class said something I didn't recognise and I replied, "No, not that one", and the whole class burst out laughing. I asked what they were laughing about, and one pupil told me, "He said 'Please Sir can I go and ring the bell'?" He was the bell boy for that week.

I went to the hospital to have a hearing test after that and was told, "If you were not about to retire, I would suggest a hearing aid, but I think you can get along without one. You are a borderline case." It was in July 1973, after 14 very happy years in Lincoln, that I retired from teaching and we went to live by the sea in Worthing.

Chapter 16

In Hospital

Early in 1973, a few mouths before I was due to retire, I was admitted to Lincoln County Hospital for a minor operation. I expected to be there for about a week but in the event my stay was extended to just over a month. Every time I made progress there were setbacks. After a while I became so frustrated and miserable that I began to chafe inwardly and rebel, and of course this did not help matters. One morning it was as if a voice spoke to me, “If you accept this 99% you will be unhappy, but if you accept it 100% you will find peace”. It made all the difference and I have often had cause to remember it since.

My surgeon was one of those who were prepared to stop and talk to his patients. He drew a sketch of what he had done during the operation on a young man in the next bed to mine. I was reminded of the story of Lord Lytton who stopped to mend the leg of a doll belonging to a mall girl who had broken her leg. The surgeon was very interested to know how I taught religious instruction in a Comprehensive school. He realised it was a tough job. Be spoke in a loud voice, so the other patients could hear what was being said and the ward became silent. I told a few stories of how I dealt with certain problems and the response I received. The man in the bed opposite to mine was particularly attentive. This man was very difficult with the nurses. He complained, swore and refused to comply with their ministrations. In the mornings a young lady used to visit him with flowers and fruit, and a bottle of something which he hid in his locker. I think the Sister must have tumbled to what was happening because she berated him for having alcohol in the ward. In the afternoons a bedraggled lady who looked very unhappy visited him. I learned that the morning visitor was his mistress and the afternoon one, his wife.

At first he was wary of me as a parson, but then he began to come over to my bed and talk to me. I was able to tell him about myself and some of the things that I had learnt. On the day he was being discharged, he gave me all his remaining fruit and soft drinks - not from the mysterious bottles - and he said to me, “I am going home to be a better husband to my wife”. We had not mentioned his wife before. I

gave him a book as a memento, which he promised to read.

I found that being in hospital has a great levelling effect. A colonel or a corporal, a manager or a manual worker, a footballer or fireside cricket enthusiast, all get the same attention. Some demand special treatment - others accept what is done for them with gratitude. All are treated according to their need rather than their demands.

There is a great opportunity to observe other people in an objective way as one lies in bed. I was particularly interested to note the different ways in which the chaplains performed their duties. Some think they have to be hale and hearty and to "cheer up the patient". This was demonstrated by one minister who went around the ward with what he considered to be a helpful, but which was a superficial manner. He came to the man in the bed next to mine, and greeted him, "How are you today? You are looking much better". To which came the reply, "I only came in this afternoon." The minister quickly turned his attention to me.

Another chaplain acted quite differently. He would talk for a few minutes and then open his book of prayers and pray, whoever might be present, and finally put his bands on the head of the patient and bless him/her. I am sure it was done with the best intent, but when this was done to a friend of curs, it frightened her for she thought the end had come and that she was receiving the Last Rites.

But not all were like this. The local parish priest, now a bishop, came to see me several times. We were very good friends. He invited me to preach in his church on various occasions and we held our School Leaver.' Service there each year. We had some useful talks when he visited me. He told me the good news of an important appointment in the Church of England which he had been offered.

On the various occasions I have been in hospital since. I have had some real experiences of God's presence. One sees people and life from a different angle. In 1978 I underwent an operation and again was kept in hospital for longer than I expected. But again, the morning time of quiet trying to discover God's perspective on the day, brought opportunities with nurses and visitors. You have to be yourself at such times; you cannot pretend to be what you are not. One cheerful male nurse saw me writing each morning and one day said, "Are you writing a love story?" To which I replied, "It could be called that". Later when he discovered that I was a parson, he was standing by my bed taking my

temperature at about 7 a.m. on a Sunday when some church bells started ringing. “Gosh,” he said, “Your firm starts up early.” This is why I feel that I have to be on duty early ready for orders.

The nurses too came to me with some of their problems. One had just lost h father and could not believe in the “after life” but wished she could as she had loved her father. The story of my brother Ron and how I felt closer to him after he was killed, was applicable and I hope it helped. It was a time when an article on sex and abortion was written in a publication for education “Polestar”. Owen brought-in a dozen copies and I offered one to one or two nurses, and soon nurses came into my room for a copy and the twelve copies vanished. A cleaner who took one came back next morning and gave me a resume of one article, which had interested her. She said, “You may not have had time to read it yet.”

One morning in 1983 I was taken by ambulance to Worthing Hospital at 6 a.m., but before treatment began I was taken into Intensive Care with a heart condition. It was midnight and Owen was alerted and brought by my brother George to the hospital. At 3 a.m. Colin and his wife Angela arrived from Northwood. They were told that there was a fifty/fifty chance as my heart was beating at 300 to the minute. I remember lying there knowing that I might die or live and it was a strange experience wondering what would happen. I remember the looks on the faces of the family and Angela kissing my forehead which was wet with sweat, and apologising to her. The family were told to go home and that they would be kept informed. During the night all kinds of intensive treatment were applied. I had a great sense of peace. At 5 a.m. the Ward Sister came to me and said, “We’ve got your heart right.” I said to her, “Will you let my wife know?” She said, “It is only five o’clock. We will ‘phone her at eight. I told her that my wife would be about. At that point three thoughts came clearly, great gratitude, please tell Gwen and how best can I use the life given back to me. I think I then must have gone to sleep.

Later I learnt that at 5 a.m. Gwen was having her quiet time. The complete assurance came to her that all was well with me. After I had been home for about a month, still very much in the convalescent stage, Gwen suffered a slight stroke - obviously due to the shock she had suffered despite her courage and faith. We were both in a sorry condition.

We have a doctor who is a committed Christian, who is a witness to his faith in the way he treats his patients and loves his work. When he attended Gwen on this occasion, as he was leaving I remarked, “I suppose we are both suffering from the incurable complaint, old age.” He stopped and turned to me and said, “Put the end is triumph”. I then told him of my experience and Gwen’s when I was in Intensive Care — and he said, “Yes, death has been conquered by our Lord Jesus Christ.” Coming from our doctor in the course of his visiting us professionally this came with great force to me, for he said it with such conviction.

The only trouble about our doctor is that so many people want to be on his list that it is not always easy to make an appointment at the surgery. As someone once remarked, “You have to forecast some of your ailments a fortnight ahead". He will never hesitate to visit in the home, however.

My most recent visit to hospital, and I hope my last, was in 1987. My operation in June was done by “epidural” injection due to my heart condition. This injection in the chest paralyses you from the waist down, a strange sensation whereby one is conscious throughout the operation - that is if you don’t pass out as I did near the end. The after effects were not pleasant.

In the event I returned to hospital in August when I was told I would be in for two nights for the doctors “to have a look at me”. But on the evening of my admission the young lady doctor told me that I was to have a general anesthetic, as there was need for further surgery. I remarked that I was rather apprehensive because of my heart condition, and she replied, “So are we!” Not altogether encouraging

That night I was filled with a sense of great disquiet and apprehension and of being cut off from God. I remember saying to myself) “I don’t want to die when I feel far from God.” I had a bad night. But in the morning I reached for the Gideon Bible and the book of prayers supplied by the friends of the hospital and a great sense of peace and assurance was given, and I had the operation and am still here.

The interesting thing is that the evening that I was feeling so dreadful, Owen and a friend were together, and Gwen suddenly said, “I have a strong feeling that all is not well with Ben, and that he is ill at ease.” “Let us pray for him,’ said the friend. The next day Gwen had a telephone call from the hospital to say that I had had my operation and that all was

well. This was the first she knew about it.

We hear a great deal about the shortcomings of the National Health Service and its lack of adequate resources, but for my part, I can only express gratitude for what I owe to it and to those who serve in it.

Chapter 17

The Family

When I told some of the pupils at the school in Lincoln that I was moving to a place called Worthing, they asked me where it was. I informed them that it was a town on the South Coast larger in size than Lincoln, but it was not until they realised that it was near Brighton that they understood where I was going to live. Of course I could not help chiding the Geography department regarding their failure to teach where important towns in this country were, but they assured me that they would do better in future.

In moving south after years in the Midlands we were grateful to be nearer to Colin and Roger and other members of the family. By the time we left Lincoln, both Colin and Roger had passed through Sheffield University (both reading Mathematics), both were teaching and both were happily married and we had five grandchildren.

While Colin was at Sheffield University, an incident happened concerning the magazine produced for the Students' Rag Week. It contained certain things that were altogether distasteful and obscene. Colin took a courageous stand, trying to get it changed. He faced great opposition from the students but stuck to his guns. The local paper took it up and many people wrote in supporting his stand, and the magazine the following year was very different.

After lecturing at other Universities, Colin became Senior Lecturer in Econometrics at the new University of Surrey, based in Guildford. He served as a member of the University Senate for five years. During his time at Surrey University, he did counselling and personal work with his students. He and Angela had joined the United Reformed Church in Guildford, where his Minister was the Free Church chaplain to the university. Colin was able to introduce him to students and worked closely with him. It was suggested that he might become an Honorary Chaplain to the University. This appealed to Colin and in 1973 he was ordained in the URC at Guildford. I had the privilege of taking part in the Service. It was a few years later that he felt the call to resign from the university and enter the full-time Ministry. He became Minister of a church in

Henley-on-Thames for five and a half years and in 1982 moved to Northwood to St. John's URC where he is at present.

Roger was home with us for our first year in Lincoln. He entered Sheffield University to read Mathematics the term after his brother left. In 1970 he was appointed a Mathematics master at Winchester College where he eventually became Under Master. In 1982 he became Headmaster of Sedbergh School, one of the leading public schools in the North of England. It has the reputation of being a tough school with a great sporting tradition. Roger upholds Christian standards in the school and aims to educate the whole person, morally and spiritually as well as academically and in sporting activities.

People often say to Gwen and me, "You must be proud of your sons". A friend of ours once had the same said to him about his family. His reply was, "Not proud, but thankful". This is what we feel. We are also grateful since retirement to have had closer touch with my two brothers, George and Arthur. Arthur lives at Petts Wood in Kent, and George, near us, at Findon. When Gwen and I have needed help, we have been able to turn to him - day or night.

In these days when family and home-life are under attack, we are glad to cherish our family.

Chapter 18

Worthing 1973 - 1984

Soon after we came to Worthing, Gwen and I went to a furniture shop to buy some items for our new home. As the shop assistant was writing our name and address on the order form he noticed that I was a “Reverend”, and asked whether I had a parish in Worthing. I told him that I had retired and come to live in the town. He looked at me for a moment and then said, “I thought your Boss never let you retire”. How right he was. I have discovered that the secret is to live each day to the ful, then life becomes a constant adventure.

I had the thought, “You can still be a pastor to the people around you.” This meant to me that I should go on caring for the people with whom I came in touch as I had tried to do for the people in my churches and the pupils in the school. It was not long before we met all kinds of people.

One morning I was walking by the sea when quite by chance I met an old friend. He asked me to join him for coffee and enquired why I had come to Worthing to live. I told him of various reasons why we felt we should come south and how doors had closed elsewhere. I admitted that I did not know precisely why it was, but I guessed I would be shown. He then told me of people in Worthing and along the South Coast who wanted to discover how to use their lives more fully. I knew I came into this category so with his help established contact with some of them.

After a few months someone suggested that we might have a conference at which we could seek together how to bring a new moral climate to the South of England. We found a conference centre in Worthing and people came from as far as Devon and Cornwall in the West and from Kent in the East. About 120 of us spent a weekend together. As a result, we decided to keep in touch with each other and see what we could do together to think and care for our community. There were doctors, teachers and other professional people, housewives, many people who had retired and some from overseas. There was no formal programme. People from all around the hall told stories of what had happened in their own lives, and where, often in the most difficult

circumstances, they felt God had guided them. We got to know each other and our backgrounds, and began to see what touches we had in the community, for example, with education, or the police.

In succeeding years, conferences have been held in several parts of the South of England - at Wickham, Hampshire, in Kent and Devon. The keynote has been that if we want to see change in others, we must start with ourselves. To some of these conferences a free-lance broadcaster came with his family. At another an Indian journalist gave a masterly exposition of his vision for Britain, ending with a challenge to us British to fulfil our true destiny.

Another time a retired ambassador who had helped produce the Brandt Report gave a constructive and challenging analysis of the needs of the developing nations. He shared from his own experience that where attitudes change and hurts are healed, co—operation and solutions can come.

People in Kent were concerned about the misunderstanding that seemed to be building up between France and Britain, and so decided to have a conference to which they invited people from France. They were honest together about what they really felt about themselves and each other and began to find a new unity.

We are not a wealthy set of people as many are pensioners, but out of sacrifice rather than surplus we clubbed together and bought a projector and screen and some faith. We bought films, which we could show in our homes or public halls. We built up a “film library” that was kept in Worthing, but was available for friends in a wider area across the South.

The film of Peter Howard’s pantomime “Give a Dog a Bone” was greatly enjoyed by children at different Christmas performances. This pantomime ran for eleven years at the Westminster Theatre in London and portrayed the magic of simple words like "please" “thank you” and “sorry”. It was also shown in a number of schools in the area. For friends from overseas there was the beautiful film “Freedom”, from a play written and presented by Africans, showing the conflicts in their continent and the way these were overcome. “Men of Brazil” gave the true story of what happened in the port of Rio de Janeiro, written and acted by the dockers themselves and showing how gangsterism, bribery and union rivalry were overcome.

To one school I took a film about a West Indian cricketer who had let God run his life. The conditions under which the film was shown were not all that could be desired. The daylight made the film look sickly, and discipline was lax and some of the pupils walked about during the showing. At the end I did not know what to say in reply to the thanks of the master in charge. I said a little about the cricketer and then told a story about myself of how I had been a naughty boy and had had to put things right. A boy lingered after the form was dismissed and wanted to talk to me. The master was amazed that this boy who had been thrown out of two schools as unmanageable, showed such interest.

We were invited to show one of our films to a form in a Sixth Form College. I was accompanied by young people$_1$ including a 'teen-age girl who spoke with candour about how she faced her personal problems in a new way, a young Local Government clerk, and a black South African who had suffered from race discrimination but who spoke without bitterness. At the end, the master in charge spoke a few words and said they were deeply moved, especially by what the South African had said.

Someone had the idea of hiring a public hall in Worthing and having a series of film showings followed by refreshments and a time of discussion. An invitation was sent to the Chief Constable who was represented by a senior police officer at each session. Later he was able to meet some of those involved with building race relations in the North East of England. Policemen in Brighton were also shown films and were grateful for encouragement with their difficult problem of dealing with the crime wave in Brighton and last Sussex.

After we had been in Worthing for five years, Gwen and I moved to a bungalow with a large lounge, which we were able to use to meet with our friends. We had many film shows and several times were able to spend a whole day together with friends from the region to think out any positive moves we could make to contribute to our community.

We had opportunity to further our contact with Japanese, with Canon Paul Sekiya, Headmaster of the Japanese School near Worthing. "Song of Asia", a revue composed and presented by a group of men and women from South East Asia was being performed at the Westminster Theatre. Paul Sekiya was approached and asked whether he would like some of his pupils to see it and to meet some of the Japanese and others from the East. We suggested that he might like to see it for himself first. Gwen and

I motored to London with him and his mother (in her nineties) and were able to introduce him to some of his fellow countrymen. We had lunch with a group of Japanese - they conducting the conversation in Japanese - and we were struck by the respect, which the old lady received from the young men and women whom they met. In Japan the old are greatly respected. Paul Sekiya then asked if some of his pupils could see "Song of Asia". We suggested a coach party, but a day or so before, he rang up to say that there would be <u>two</u> coaches. There was some difficulty in making room for them at the theatre, but all was well and some sixty Japanese went to the "Day of London Theatre". In the morning they were shown backstage, meeting some of those who worked behind the scenes. There was a talk about theatre and stage production, then a sandwich lunch as the children from the schools brought packed lunches, and in the afternoon the performance of "Song of Asia".

We noticed how polite and well-behaved the Japanese children were in comparison with some of those from British schools. We have much to learn from them.

We sometimes visited the school on special occasions when we were treated as guests of honour. Our friends John and Barbara Chidell who had been in the East accompanied Canon Sekiya to Caux where he met people from across the world and from his own country. One day he pulled a photograph from his pocket and told us that it was taken some years previously. It was of three men walking in Cambridge; Mahatma Gandhi, a mutual friend, Roger Hicks, and Paul Sekiya himself. He had kept it "under his hat" till then. We have received Christmas cards from him since his return to Tokyo where he is a Canon of the Cathedral, and we still correspond. A lecturer of the University of Tokyo, whom we met recently in Brighton, told us that Paul attends MRA meetings there.

One of the delights of the early years of our retirement was to stay in the holiday house, which our son Roger bought at Combe Martin in Devon, a county renowned for its very beautiful scenery and magnificent Northern coastline of high cliffs. We spent several holidays there with Roger and his family. After one visit, on his return home, our grandson then about six, was heard to say in his prayers one night "Our Father which art in Devon..." I don't think he was far wrong. There are some places more than others, which make us, realise God's presence, but in these days when Owen and I are less mobile, we are learning that God is where we are, whether or not it rhymes with "Heaven".

Chapter 19

Worthing 1984 -

On 22 September 1984, Gwen and I celebrated our Golden Wedding. Like many others on such occasions, we were overwhelmed by the greetings and messages of goodwill we received on the day. It made us realise how rich we were in true friendship and the love of our family.

Gwen expressed the wish that we might attend Morning Service at Colin's church at Northwood on the following day (Sunday). Colin planned the service and sermon to match the occasion. Unknown to him the Church Secretary gave us a public welcome in the presence of the large congregation. To our great joy, twenty-three members of our family travelled various distances to be able to worship with us and to give thanks to God. Roger and Dorothy had set out from Sedbergh in the early hours to arrive in time. Afterwards Colin and Angela provided a Golden Wedding feast for all twenty-three in their Manse, thanks to Angela's masterful catering. On the following day our friends from Worthing and further afield gave us a surprise party. This was a time when we were able to reaffirm the basis on which we had started our married life. I remembered the three questions put to me over fifty years before — "Do you love her? Do you believe it is God's purpose? Will you be more useful together than separately?" We both felt that the answers to these questions had been confirmed through the years in no uncertain way.

But a few months later we found our lifestyle had to change. For health reasons we could not be so active and mobile. We may not now be able to visit other people as much as we have done, but all kinds of people come to us. Frank Buchman once said, "Be glad when people beat a pathway to your door." We rejoice when this happens. We can make our home a place where people want to come, where they can find peace and a purpose for their lives. This means that we have to find peace of heart ourselves, every morning, as we are quiet before God. Through the years this time of quiet has been the source of strength, and has brought the power of the Holy Spirit into our lives. Being old does not mean we can dispense with this time alone with God before the day begins. Gwen and I have found that we need to set the alarm at the same time every morning.

Much is being done to provide for old age in these days - pensions, health care, clubs, sheltered accommodation and ether material benefits. But there are other needs to be met also - hurts to be healed, fears to be faced, relationships to be mended, faith to be restored, to feel needed and wanted. Many old people have the sense that they have served their purpose and have nothing to live for.

So what can be done to answer these needs? How can we still care for those we come into contact with - the old and the not so old?

Many people have video cassette recorders in these days. A few of us have raised a fund to buy videos, which have been described as “relating Christian experience to changes needed in the world.” So far, we have bought eleven such cassettes, which can be used, in any of our homes. They touch on many of the problems, which confront us today and demonstrate solutions, which have been tried and tested in different situations. They help people to form new attitudes to such issues as race conflict, human and family relationships, unemployment, conservation, inner cities, problems in schools and communities.

In one the true story is told of the French woman, Irene Laure, and Victor, her husband who were said by Chancellor Adenauer of Germany to have done more to build unity between the age-old enemies Germany and France after the war than any other two people. Reconciliation came as she faced her own deep bitterness. In a video of a television interview, a man who had been in the Communist Party for over twenty years tells how he found something bigger to live for.

These videos, as our film library, have been put to good use. So far in eighty showings, over four hundred people have seen these videos in our home. There is something appropriate and of interest to almost anybody or any occasion. Neighbours and other people’s neighbours have been invited or have invited themselves to join a video party. When a Church House Group met in our home, there was something to illustrate points under discussion or to demonstrate answers to problems raised.

The Mayor elect of a neighbouring town had a special interest in the life of Keir Hardie (although he himself is a Conservative Councillor). He came to see “The Man They Could Not Buy” which tells of Keir Hardie’s fight for the moral and spiritual beginnings of the Labour Movement.

We have shown “Clashpoint” twenty eight times. The story is set in an

inner city comprehensive school and depicts clash in the streets, in the school and in the family - all too familiar scenes! Its aim is to encourage a change of attitude in all levels of the multi—racial, multi-ethnic society in which we live. It is meant to educate, dispel prejudice and offer hope for inner cities. Some who have seen it immediately think of others who would like to see it.

One day Mr. S— rang up and said, "I understand you have a copy of the video 'Clashpoint'." I invited him to come and see it in our home. He said, "May I bring a young man who is making videos to counter the kind of video 'nasties' that are being produced today?" They came one morning and we had a useful discussion.

As a result of this, a few days later the 'phone went and a lady said, "I have been told by Mr. S— that you have a video 'Clashpoint' and I would like to hire it." She was a cripple and once a fortnight would have three or four showings of a positive video in her home for about twenty to thirty people. We showed her "Clashpoint" and she was so delighted that she hired it from an Agency. Later she told me what a valuable weekend it had been and that her lounge had been full to capacity for each showing.

One of our videos "Mr. Brown Comes Down the Hill" is the video version of Peter Howard's play written over twenty years ago, but its truth is as modern as electronics and the computer. The play is regarded by many as Peter Howard's greatest. It is the story of three people climbing a mountain in search of God - a black man, a prostitute, and a bishop. At the top of the hill the black man finds Mr. Brown and invites him to come down and face the modern world. It is a dramatic portrayal of God's intervention in life today. What would he say about sex, race, life and death? Is hate or love the strongest power in the world today?

Personally I see more every time I watch these videos. They spotlight the real issues and are always a challenge. They open the way for us to discover together how to face many of the problems that confront us today, and they have led us to people whom we might not have met otherwise.

One day we were standing on a developer's patch where some pleasant bungalows were being built and we wondered whether to put our names down for one. There was a glorious view and we had taken some friends, Walter and Florrie Farmer, to see the site. We extolled the prospect of living there. After a moment Walter said, "It is very pleasant

but you can't live 'with a view - it is people who matter and it is people you have to live with." What true friends Walter and Florrie Farmer were!

How true we have found this to be. It is not outward conditions and surroundings that make life worthwhile, important as these are, but people and our relationship with them. It is what goes on inside in our hearts that affects us most, freedom from self, the assurance that our lives are in good hands - I would call it "trust in God", the conviction that I am needed and can play a useful part in the world; these are what give life its meaning. We all have our part to play.

Chapter 20

What of the Future?

In conclusion, what are the things I have learnt? God must love the ordinary person. He made so many of them. We are all needed. What we are is more important than who we are, or what we possess.

What does the future hold? Many young men and women are idealistic. They care about the state of the world and want to put things right. They are disillusioned, especially by the way we, the older generation, have made such a mess of the world. Many are confused and fearful. Many problems are humanly insoluble, and there are many questions to which there is no ready answer.

I ask myself what have I learnt that gives me hope. One thing is sure. I have needed a Wisdom greater than my own. I have made many mistakes, but I am quite certain I would have made many more without a Power other than myself to guide me.

There is all the difference between knowledge and wisdom. "Where is wisdom to be found?" There is a simple secret I have found to work. When I have sought God's will first and said, "I will only do what you tell me to do", other things have followed - material needs, friends, direction, faith and peace of mind.

It was Canon B.H. Streeter, a great New Testament scholar who taught at Oxford when I was a student who put it simply - "A race that has grown up intellectually must grow up morally or perish." Most people would agree that we have made great strides intellectually, but many would not consider that we have advanced morally.

Dr. Richard Livingston, also of Oxford, expressed it aptly when he said to another old friend: "When you and I were young there were moral fences. We did not always keep to them, but we knew when we had crossed them. Today all the fences are down." Can these fences be mended? I believe they can if we listen to the inner whispers in our hearts and act on the thoughts that we get; if we are willing to live absolute moral standards, and if we will face where we are wrong first and put it right, instead of blaming the other person or the other group.

My story has been of an ordinary person who became a parson and teacher and is now a senior citizen. As a parson I learnt that it was more important to bring change to people and help them discover for themselves how God meant to use them, than to carve out a career for myself. As a teacher I learnt as much as I taught when I realised that the pupils themselves were as important as the knowledge I tried to impart. They responded to simple honesty and they seemed to know when I meant what I said. As a senior citizen I am discovering that there is still a part for me to play. My Boss never lets me retire.

I often wish I could be somewhere else, or to be able to do what others can do. But the thought constantly comes, "The important time is the present, the important place is where you are, the important person is the one you are talking to, or who is talking to you. Be yourself, forget yourself'.

It all comes back to the thought I had in hospital - "If you accept this *ninety-nine percent* you will be unhappy, but if you accept it *one hundred percent* you will find peace." It worked then and it works today.

David Livingstone, the explorer and missionary in Africa lived in danger of death every day, but his conviction was "I am immortal till God's work for me is done." I have to remind myself that it is God's work for me, not mine for Him.

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Gwen died in Worthing after a gallant fight with cancer on the 13th August 1989.

Ben died in Lancaster quite suddenly with a heart attack on the 20th November 1994.