

The following matters will be of interest to members:—

1. We give our hearty good wishes to Mr. H. C. Smith of E.C.L. Bristol, on his recovery from a most serious illness and operation. Mr. Smith's help in the production and circulation of the Journal (he is not responsible for its contents!) has been invaluable, and we take this opportunity of expressing both our deep gratitude to him and our warm wishes for his future. (One or two changes of address were missed during Mr. Smith's illness—we know that members will bear with this.)
2. E.C.L. also have on sale a reprint of A. N. Groves's famous letter to J. N. Darby, in which he foresaw the mounting evils of an exclusive system of church government. The letter is still of profound importance. Copies are obtainable from 60 Park Street, Bristol, 1 at 4½d. per copy, 8d. including postage.
3. Alas, our correspondence editor records not one letter on the subject matter of the Christian and education (issue No. 7). Surely, all members did not agree with the points of view expressed! He anxiously hopes that this issue will see the dykes burst!
4. The only back numbers of the Journal now available (3/- plus postage) are numbers 2, 3, 6 and 7. These are obtainable from the Secretary at 229 Village Way, Beckenham, Kent, and *NOT* from E.C.L.
5. The next Young Men's Bible Teaching Conference at Balliol, St. Peter's and Pembroke Colleges, Oxford, takes place from 10th to 12th September, 1965. The subject is *The Bible and the Problems of Today* and covers a wide and interesting syllabus. Details from Mr. J. J. Rose, 63 Stoke Lane, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol.

WHY I LEFT THE BRETHREN

INTRODUCTION

It has been said of the composer Vivaldi that he wrote not 400 concerti, but one concerto 400 times, and reading through the contributions that follow may provoke the thought that we have here not 12 or so pieces, but successive drafts of but two essays. One is by a hungry sheep, who having looked up and not been fed has gone elsewhere, and the other by a shepherd constantly thwarted in his attempts to feed the hungry sheep.

It is certainly true that the pieces that follow are remarkably consistent. One reason, of course, is that they are all from one type of person, i.e. those who are in membership of, or contact with, CBRF. It follows that there are several types of experience not documented here, and it will not necessarily be true that, if we attempted to put right everything mentioned by our contributors, all leakage would cease. Let us spare a thought for some of these other experiences.

Many, in leaving the Brethren, renounce all Christian profession. As Christians, we re-present Christ, and if the image presented is insipid, irrelevant, or even hypocritical, it need not surprise us that some, in abandoning Brethrenism, will abandon Christ Himself. This will be particularly true of young people, and all who have special responsibility for youth should ponder over Luke 6.39-45. Then let them read a book like Diana Dewar's *Backward Christian Soldiers*, and ask themselves how much regard they pay to teaching methods. Does it still happen that a pupil may have to plod through the life of Moses in three consecutive years with three different teachers? Does the syllabus attempt to complement the local Agreed Syllabus? Is the Bible Class exposed to a 30-minute monologue every week, with no opportunity for questions or discussion?

Those who cannot stomach Diana Dewar's book should avoid at all costs *Religious Development from Childhood to Adolescence*, by R. Goldman, with its monstrous suggestion that religious education should be child-based rather than Bible-based! That is, we should pay more attention to the needs and capacities of differing age-groups than to a rigid pre-occupation with 'teaching the Bible'.

Youth which is repelled by a Pharasaical tendency to invent 'virtues which are sterile and cruel' and 'sins which are no sins at all' (Edmund Gosse's phrases), and by a pathetic inflexibility of mind towards matters raised by science and psychology, may well write off all forms of Christianity, and never realise that larger and more charitable outlooks are to be found.

Again, there are many who leave to find fellowship elsewhere without taking with them the respect and goodwill towards the Brethren evidenced by our contributors. In what follows, you will read of steps taken reluctantly, and even of the possibility of returning, should circumstances so alter. But what of those who leave in anger, bitterness, or under a cloud? To them, Brethrenism is a sick joke, a bad dream. The movement that started in a spirit of free enquiry with particular reference to the unity of Christians is now apparently satisfied with its findings, and refuses to hear further evidence. Afraid of fresh 'soundings', it has 'cast four (at least) anchors out of the stern', and wishes for the Day (Acts 27.29).

We may, perhaps, indulge in a little typology, and identify these anchors which so effectively impede progress. There is our canonisation of the Authorised (King James) Version of the scriptures. Like the medieval church, we have elevated an inaccurate and unvernacular translation, and justified it on the grounds of common usage. Modern attempts, which seem to delight in perverting proof texts for our cherished ideas, are anathema.

Secondly, we have again followed medieval practice with our crystallised interpretation of the Bible (some of us have Bibles where it is printed at the foot of the page!). God, it seems, has no further light to break out of

His holy Word. In morality, for example, we forget the mystery of the Incarnation, that, in H. A. Williams's words (*Jesus and the Resurrection*, p. 92), "He (Jesus) is every man's ideal, and every man's individuality finds in Him its perfect expression, because His manhood embraces every type of personality". Mr. Williams goes on to refer to certain Christians who 'waste a considerable amount of energy in trying to model themselves upon a type of sanctity which is not their own and which God never meant them to have. They dress themselves up in ready-made spiritual clothes which do not fit, and in consequence feel perpetually uncomfortable and ill at ease. It is even worse when, having chosen their own clothes from the peg, they look down on everybody who is not dressed according to their particular style'.

The third anchor is pre-occupation with the future. 'Ye men of Plymouth, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?' asked Spurgeon, and Edward Gibbon might have been writing prophetically of some such Brethren when he wrote of the primitive Christians: 'It was not in *this* life that they were desirous of making themselves either agreeable or useful'. The Seventy Weeks of Daniel are much more fascinating than Amos's words about social injustice or Haggai's about affluence. We are insensitive to what lies around us, so that when Monica Furlong writes 'What one longs to see is no trace of a clerical attitude towards life, but a joyful and imaginative opening towards people, towards experience, and towards art' (*With Love to the Church*, p. 67), the very people most qualified in the terms of her opening remark to display this are among its worst exponents. Again we need to see the implications of the Incarnation for the here-and-now.

Fourthly, we are weighed down by inertia or paralysis in the face of any change that may be mooted. We have not the cumbersome machinery of Convocation or Conference, but the heavy hand of traditionalism and of our brand of hero-worship is just as effective. A frank examination of the structure of our church life like the 'No Small Change' study recently undertaken by many Anglican parishes is needed. For, as was written in connection with that project, 'No other imperative better catches the life-or-death choice facing Christian congregations everywhere than All Change! If the Church is to be truly the body of Christ in this rapidly changing world situation, nothing less than a complete transformation of attitude and priorities will suffice'.

The last category of those who have left the Brethren but who are not represented in the statements that follow contains those who lack the powers of introspection, reasoning, and expression necessary to produce such a piece. Our contributors are, it will be seen, a remarkably articulate bunch, and could muster an impressive array of degrees. So their tendency to concentrate on short-comings in Biblical teaching is understandable.

But we are prone to lament the departure of gifted and trained young men, and not to heed the silent sufferings of the less gifted. Does everyone relish the prospect of systematic Bible teaching? If so, in what form is it

to be given? Is the sermon or address, delivered from a pulpit in the Bishop of Woolwich's phrase 'six feet above contradiction', an efficient teaching instrument? How far should the main teaching be given when the whole assembly is present, with its differences of age, sex and intellect? Local conditions must surely be taken into account before we rush off to organise a series of 50-minute lectures on Romans!

So to our contributors, to whom we are grateful for the trouble they have taken to express clearly and frankly their position. Let us rejoice with them in their assurance of doing the Lord's will in their present position, moved, as one of them puts it, to another sector of the battle-front. Some have asked that they remain anonymous, and in view of the personal factors often involved we have felt it right to grant this. Finally, lest this issue of the Journal should seem to some too depressing (or too persuasive!), we have included a couple of statements on *Why I Joined the Brethren*.

JOHN SOMERVILLE-MEIKLE

WHY I LEFT THE BRETHREN

(1) Harry Young

'Chapel-goers appear to run in families, like asthma' wrote George Eliot in tones of ironic comment in *The Mill on the Floss*. Her unfriendly words have some truth in them, her simile excepted, of course! In my boyhood and youth, I belonged to an assembly of the Brethren, a circumstance I look back on not with regret, but with pride and gratitude.

I no longer meet regularly with the Brethren, but I do not admit to having 'left' them. I surely belong to them still, even as I belong to the Church which is Christ's body. No theological surgery could ever separate me from any who love the Lord and manifest His Spirit.

The change came when as a young man of twenty-seven I accepted a call to the honorary ministry of a local Baptist Chapel. My wife and I needed a home, and the church which called us could provide one. But we had a much deeper need. I was a busy preacher, itinerating widely in the work of evangelism and ministry. Peripatetic preaching is an exhausting form of Christian service, and curiously unsatisfying. I had the least scope where I was best known, and found that the measure of my acceptance as a preacher seemed, strangely, to be related to the distance travelled. As a young man, I was being propelled into an itinerant ministry which was as exhausting as it was exciting. My wife had no share in my work, only rarely accompanying me, and my children were deprived of my company when they needed it most. My home assembly rarely saw me!

In almost crisis-circumstances of a personal and domestic nature, I needed an opportunity for a settled Bible ministry, with pastoral care in