

Experiments I have made.

The Collegium.

THE objective in view on the formation of "The Collegium" was to provide an attraction for boys and girls of the *teen* age where physical activities might be exercised usefully, and both sexes could work and play together in an organisation over which the Church had complete control. There was a felt need for the development of a sense of *esprit de corps* in a society where youth could be learning by activity, and by playing together, in an atmosphere that would foster the conception of the Church as their home. Clubs with handicraft classes, the House system, organised games and proficiency courses, Guilds of study and service, were all considered; and the best of each was adopted in a new organisation that set out to meet the peculiar needs of the local situation, there being nothing else for young people in the Church at that time but a devotional meeting.

The plan agreed upon was to start a movement amongst boys and girls of thirteen years and over where arts and crafts could be taught for part of the time and games played for the remainder, with family worship to close each session. The House System was to operate, Church Parades to be arranged, a badge to be worn, and a subscription paid of a penny a week.

Then arose the question of a name. Club, Guild, Institute, &c., were all discussed, and felt to be too definitive. Young people are very easily attracted or deterred by a name and its associations, and it was felt dangerous to prejudice the venture at the start by suggesting it was like some "club" or "guild" that they knew and disliked. The name *Collegium* had appeared some years ago in connection with a magazine, but it seemed more appropriate for a society, and expressed the idea of a college without frightening anybody with the thought of too much study. Its very mystery and novelty (to them) was an advantage, as every boy and girls delights to be in a society with a new name. Somewhat to my surprise the committee accepted "The Collegium" at once, and it has never been criticised. It may be worth while relating that two years later, when T. R. Glover's book, *Christ and the Ancient World*, appeared, I found the name "Collegium" was used by Pliny, who asked Trojan for permission to form a *collegium* of firemen, and the correspondence

suggests that it was a society gathered together for some practical purpose like a club but incorporating something more active and useful. Nothing, therefore, could be said against the name by reason of its past associations.

The advertisement of its formation in the Church Magazine was stated as follows :

“ The Collegium is to meet on Thursdays from 7 to 9, assembling in the Upper Hall, and then dispersing into groups which will gather in the various rooms of the building for interesting occupation—pleasant and useful—re-assembling for the last half-hour in a family circle. The Collegium aims at making a comradeship of helpfulness in ways that will be explained to those who join its circle and become initiated into its mysteries.” The general plan which we follow is that we commence with opening devotions, the singing master conducting the whole company in practising glees or special hymns, e.g. Jerusalem, The Pilgrim’s Song, Hunting Song, &c., for about fifteen minutes. The members then disperse to their various Houses, when the weekly pennies are collected and any necessary House business transacted. From 7.30 to 8.30 Handicraft classes are at work, and then all re-assemble for games, mostly team games between the Houses. The last ten minutes are devoted to Family Worship, the minister or a deacon leading.

We have just commenced the fifth year with classes for leather work, pewter work, rush-mats, raffia work, shell flowers, fancy embroidery, basketry, sea-grass seats for stools, carpentry, making bowls, &c., out of old gramophone records. During the last four years we have also had classes in suede-leather work, needle-work, barbola work, fret-work, stencil work, sealing-wax work, pastel painting, first-aid, electricity, physical culture, French and shorthand. Some were found not popular, and others dropped out for lack of instructors, but in many instances the seniors who have become proficient are now instructors in charge of classes.

There has generally been no difficulty in selling the goods made. An Open night is held at the end of the Session, and, like an Eastern bazaar, the goods are shown in process of making, completed goods are offered for sale, and orders taken. In this way, during the four years, after recovering the outlay on tools and materials, £120 has been raised for various objects. Among the grants have been £30 to Church Funds, £20 to the Playing Fields, £10 to the Superannuation Fund, and £14 to Medical Missions.

Most of the work can be done at ordinary tressle tables. A disused back room is furnished with a carpenter’s bench, and access to water and gas fires is needed for some of the classes,

and cupboards for storing materials and goods. Our premises are by no means ideal, but a little ingenuity and accommodation overcome most disadvantages.

The House System safeguards the Collegium from becoming just a night-school. All the members belong more to their particular House than to the class, and all officers, leaders, and members of any age, unite in the games through their Houses. Thus an attempt is made to develop the team spirit and a sense of *noblesse oblige*. Captains, Vice-Captains, Registrars and Wardens are elected by each House. Marks are given for attendance at Church, attendance at family worship and top place in games. The House that leads each week displays its banner. Heroes and heroines have been chosen by the members, and changes are made if desired at the commencement of a new session. At one time or another, House names have included: Carey, Spurgeon, Grace Darling, Florence Nightingale, Livingstone, Stanley, Wellington, and Galahad. Special badges supplied to order and sold at twopence each are worn, showing the House colour surmounting a C. It is understood and stated from time to time that C stands not only for Collegium, but also for Constructive Activity, Comradeship in Service, Character Building, Christ and His Church. Every member is expected to be at Church service, and on the first Sunday in each month, when all sit together at Church Parade, the Young People's talk is generally directed to them.

Family Worship after games is always taken seriously. All stand in a ring whilst a hymn is sung, Scripture read and Prayer offered. The opportunity is there afforded of pressing home some appeal but it is not the custom for the leader to give an address.

The Collegium night provides a good nucleus on the occasion of special meetings. During the last two years' experiences of Young Life Week, the best results have been from the Collegium.

In the Summer, games are arranged on Thursday evenings at the playing fields, and Family Worship is conducted there. Rambles are held occasionally, but weather and holidays make a continuous programme for the whole summer difficult.

Now, at the beginning of the fifth session, when it may well be agreed that the novelty has worn off, we have sixty-three on the roll in regular attendance. The majority of the young people joining the Church in these years have been members of the Collegium. They might have come apart from this, but the fact remains that very few join the Church who have not been at the Collegium; and my experience everywhere goes to show that very few young people ever do come into the Church who do not belong to some week-day organisation. The Collegium has at least held these for the Church, in spite of the constant drain of

the night-schools and the excessive home-work of the secondary schools, in addition to the lighter counter-attractions.

Some have been led through the Collegium to the Young People's Society, a purely devotional meeting; and some are workers at a branch of Young Ropeholders for younger children, where the plan followed approximates somewhat to the Collegium.

The Collegium has been an experiment that has fully justified itself and has in its scope for still further development on many sides.

W. H. SHIPLEY.

"The Collegium" is the first of a series of articles by different writers under the general title "Experiments I Have Made." In the April issue of the *Quarterly*, the Rev. Alex. Collie, of Leicester, will write on "Experiments in Evangelism."