

Experiments I have made. In Evangelism.

IT is with a certain amount of reluctance that I respond to the call to tell the story of some experiments I have made. My reluctance, however, is overcome by the fact that the recital of them, may, in these difficult days, be an inspiration to others. The church where these experiments were tried is situated in the midst of a great artisan population. Burdened with the thought of how to reach the people, the idea came to me to take the Sunday morning congregation on an organised visitation campaign of the neighbourhood. When the matter came before the church meeting, no great enthusiasm was shown, neither was there any opposition expressed. It was, however, decided to make the attempt. From the register of voters, it was found that in a very clearly-defined area, bounded by four main streets, with the church almost in the centre, there were nearly 1,000 houses. The plan of campaign was to visit these, through the agency of 100 workers and to do it on a Sunday morning when most people were at home, the workers as far as possible to work in pairs. The whole area was divided into 50 districts, consisting roughly of 20 houses in each. Forms were prepared giving the name and address of each householder (taken from the voters list). The questions on the form were (1) Are they attached to any place of worship? (2) Are there any children in the home? (3) If so, do they attend a Sunday School? The workers were, by discreet enquiries, to fill in the answers to these questions. After all the arrangements were made the question arose as to whether the workers would be forthcoming. No one was to be asked personally, but simply an appeal made from the pulpit for volunteers. When the great day arrived it was a delight to find that nearly 70 friends had responded to the call. A short service was held in the church for prayer and the reading of the sending forth of the 70 disciples. The right atmosphere was thus created for the work. The visitors were urged to have talks with the people about the things that matter and to distribute the literature specially prepared for the occasion. They went forth in fear and trembling, but they returned with rejoicing. When the completed forms were handed in at a crowded evening service, everyone reported how graciously they

had been welcomed and one worker stated that he would not have missed the experience for £100.

The examination of the forms showed that 945 calls had been made and 801 people had been interviewed. The visitors reported that many people were very anxious to explain that they were attached to some place of worship, but on enquiry it was found that the attachment was very slight indeed. The most definite results were seen in the fact that over 30 children joined the Sunday School, the teachers having followed up the cases of non-attendance. A very deep impression was made on the neighbourhood and the church was brought into closer contact with the needs of the people.

About twelve months after the above experience I made another experiment. A party of students from Spurgeon's College spent the last week of their summer vacation in an Open-air Campaign in the immediate vicinity of the Church.

The programme was as follows—the men met each morning in my vestry for prayer and conference, while the afternoons were devoted to door to door visitation. After tea there was a further time of prayer and preparation for the Open-air Meeting. The General Subject for the meetings was, "Christ, the Lord of all Life." The topics were as follows—

"The World Chaos and the Way Out."

"True and False Ideas about God."

"How God comes to us."

"How We get to God."

"Fellowship and Prayer."

"The Great Adventure of following Christ."

The meetings were not of the stereotyped order. There was no singing and only a short prayer at the close. Two addresses were given on the advertised subject and as a rule each speaker took thirty to forty minutes, and this was followed by a definite appeal by the leader. After each address an opportunity was given for questions and these were varied in number and value. There was no difficulty in getting a crowd, and it was very remarkable how many men would stand listening, sometimes for nearly two hours. The Sunday Services were, of course, in the Church, and were conducted by the students. They also addressed the Men's Meeting, took senior classes in the school and finished up with a largely attended after meeting. The campaign closed with a crowded meeting in the Lecture Hall and those who were present are not likely to forget it. Over 20 persons openly confessed their desire to follow Christ. It was a glorious week and the influence of it will ever remain a glad and fruitful memory. The students worked as one man, their

fellowship was delightful, their enthusiasm was intense, and their message was delivered as men who were sure.

The third experiment was made quite recently, and this time the work was done by a party of students from the Baptist Women's Training College. The programme was much the same as in the previous year, save that more time was spent in visiting and the meetings were held indoors and were specially for girls and women. The outstanding feature of this experiment was undoubtedly the visiting, and it proved the value of trained workers and the need for a church in an artisan neighbourhood to have a deaconess. The question may be asked, "Have these experiments been worth while?" My reply is an emphatic "Yes." It is true they did not achieve what I expected. The so-called "man in the street" was not influenced to the extent that he became a regular attendant at the church, but it is impossible to estimate the amount of good that came to the church itself. It brought a new life and a deeper interest in the spiritual welfare of the people at our doors.

I am convinced that the church must take her courage in both hands and make experiments. She has too long been content to remain in the old ruts and the new age demands new methods of reaching the people and the best methods can only be discovered by experiments.

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"In Evangelism" is the second of a series of articles by different writers under the general title, "Experiments I Have Made." In the July issue of the *Quarterly*, the Rev. T. Percy George, of Birmingham, will write on "The Problem of the Morning Service."