

P.N.E.U. PRINCIPLES,

FROM AN ORDINARY MOTHER'S VIEW POINT.¹

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WHEN I consented to speak at this meeting, I understood that it would be composed of young mothers, who knew little or nothing of the P.N.E.U. or Miss Mason, and I certainly would not undertake a discourse to members of the P.N.E.U., so will members please note that I am not speaking to them.

Miss Mason's books were written for the purpose of helping young mothers to have some method in the upbringing of their children. We all know the difference between a house that is managed with method and one that is run in a happy-go-lucky, haphazard manner. We think ourselves very unfortunate if we have a maid who is lazy, selfish and thoughtless. We expect the people who teach our children to be keen and whole-hearted in their work. But what kind of a mother are we presenting to our children? One who puts her own ease and pleasure first, who is more enthusiastic over her bridge, who gives more earnest consideration to her appearance than to the upbringing of her child, or one who is putting her whole heart and soul into her vocation? For could anything be more important than the fitting of the men and women of the future generation to take their place in the world? Many and varied are the mistaken ideas regarding P.N.E.U. My own mother said, "I had none of these grand theories regarding the upbringing of children and yet you turned out all right." I am deeply conscious of many defects of character that might have been eradicated in my youth instead of being left to hamper and harass, and besides, to turn out all right, is not my ideal for my children. I am ambitious that my children should live life to the full, physically, mentally and spiritually—in the Bible language, "Receive the Crown of Life," as far as it is possible in this world. I regard those children who have been both educated and trained on P.N.E.U. lines as the most fortunate of human beings.

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I shall endeavour to give you a faint idea of the principles laid down by Miss Mason, who has brought all her profound knowledge of philosophy, psychology and metaphysics to bear upon the problems which continually confront a mother, and boils them all down to sound common sense. It is not from the standpoint of the educationist that I view her method, but from that of an ordinary average mother.

Miss Mason declares that by far the greater part of a child's education is done by the mother in the home and begins at birth, and that education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life.

A child's education begins the first year of its life, and the first educational influence brought to bear upon it is the atmosphere of the home, and that is created by the mother. If she is nervy, irritable, discontented she will contaminate the home atmosphere which should be cheerful, genial, tranquil. In

these days of strain and stress we need to conserve our energies for the really essential things, and it is well worth while for a mother to give earnest consideration to the question "what shall I do, what leave undone, that I may make my home the abode of peace and joy that it should be?" Many mothers suppose that if they provide their children with expensive toys, parties, etc., they will make them happy. But the joy of these things is very transitory, and often gives place to discontent. But a joyous, tranquil atmosphere is beneficial to a child morally, mentally and even physically. I would not have anyone go away with the idea that I have reached this ideal, but it is the mark towards which I press.

Miss Mason says, "Education is a discipline." What a wonderful asset it is for a child to start life a disciplined character. It will save him many a heart ache, many a jar. It is as oil to make the wheels of life run smoothly. It is in the formation of habits that the path of discipline lies. If a mother can form twelve good habits in her child it will be worth more than a fortune to him, and it is within her power if she begins from birth and is patient, persistent and consistent. We are all creatures of habit, we think and act as we are accustomed to think and act. It requires much patience and perseverance and sometimes a little hard-heartedness to form a habit, and when it is formed it is most essential that there should be no lapses, for that habit is making an impression upon the substance of the brain similar to that made across a field when it is used as a right-of-way. If it ceases to be used

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the grass grows again. This forming of habits is the essence of discipline. Miss Mason tells us that the word discipline is akin to disciple, so if we would be true disciplinarians we must win the child as a disciple, win the will of the child over on to our side. This pre-supposes that the mother is herself under authority to law, that she owns obedience to a Higher and Divine law. This will prevent her from being autocratic and tend towards that meek and quiet spirit which denotes strength, rather than weakness. Obedience is the first and most important habit to form. The mother must begin to teach it in infancy, and if she is firm and not vacillating the habit will be formed by the time the child is three or before. The child will be saved that exhausting effort of decision for which it is quite unfitted, and the mother will be saved an enormous amount of stress and strain. Why is it that children very strictly brought up often kick over the traces? Because they have never been trained in the habit of obedience, but simply bullied into submission.

Many a girl will resent submitting her will to the whims or wilfulness of another even if that other be her mother who would cheerfully submit if won over to the point of view, "Children obey your parents for this is right." Another sound apostolic injunction in the same chapter is, "Fathers provoke not your children," or, "Mothers don't irritate your children," a very necessary piece of advice to many of us.

Let us consider the last clause. Miss Mason deals most adequately with the threefold life of the child,—the physical, mental and spiritual. She declares that the mind of the child is a living organism nourished or starved according to the quality of ideas presented for its nourishment. How often we hear mothers say, "Oh, I get so weary of his endless questions." This is the hungry little mind demanding to be fed—a magnificent opportunity for the mother. "Oh, I am too busy," exclaims the bustling mother

intent upon a hundred tasks, not one half so important as the satisfying of that hungry mind and none of them will repay her efforts half so well. Prepare the food in your own mind and then deal it out as opportunity offers. Domestic duties are such that they admit of two things being done at the same time. One can tell a story or recite a poem while washing dishes or dusting a room, but let these poems and stories be the works of great minds, lest we spoil the mental palate of our child. Reared upon the best

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they will always demand the best. We often hear it said that the chief aim of education is the formation of character, but the bases of character must be knowledge (not necessarily erudition), otherwise the character is likely to be as a ship without a rudder blown about by every wind of influence.

In conclusion, as Kipling says, gardens are not made by saying, "Oh, how beautiful, and sitting in the shade," neither are children properly trained without much labour and self-sacrifice. A price has to be paid for anything worth having. Nor is this all. There must be the inspiration of example. Such thoughts make us exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things." We humbly answer, "Our sufficiency is of God."

¹ An address given to the Melbourne Branch (Australia) of the P.N.E.U.