

OUR PRINCIPLES.

MISS MASON.

The PARENTS' REVIEW has been in existence for thirty years and more, and so has the Parents' Union School. Our principles are like leaven and have been spreading all this time. You, dear people are torch-bearers, bearing the light. It is not because we are clever, not because we know more, but because it has been our good fortune that a philosophy of Education has come our way, our vocation has led us. We have received a call and are working on principles not worked on before. There is no cause for vanity on our part. If you picked up a bracelet lying by the way it would be no credit to you. It is precisely the case with us. These principles are picked up, found, a find which is no one's property, they belong to all who have wit enough to take them. Mr. Household writes that there is no longer need to invite the masters and mistresses in Gloucestershire to join the P.U.S., they rush in of their own accord. The society's principles spread so widely and are so impressive that it is a veritable P.N.E.U. conflagration. No other principles are so universally applicable. We recognise the Holy Ghost as the supreme educator of mankind. On us lies the serious duty of preserving it intact, of acting on it ourselves, and of spreading it. Reading and narrating—it sounds absurdly easy. Other methods may use the reading but they do not make the same use of narration. They have not understood the principles under which it is carried out. It is applicable to children of all ages, of all classes; it leaves out no subject, class, or caste. Other people read—no narration comes.

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To summarise briefly the principles underlying the method. We believe the child is a person. From the first he shows his mind and individuality. He learns a language. A child, with one parent English, the other German, missionaries in Northern Africa, could speak three languages at the age of three, and he could discriminate, never speaking anything but Arabic to his nurse, English to his English parent, and German to the other. A child learns more in the first two or three years of life than in any equal period later on. The quantity of knowledge he amasses is amazing. His affections, sense of love and justice, are there from the beginning, and the fact that a baby can blush when reprovved shows the moral sense of a person. Enormous provision is made in every child for the individuality of a person.

All analogy is very imperfect, but bearing this in mind the analogy of the physical body and mind holds good. The body requires regular meals, daily food; so does the mind; as in the body the complete processes of assimilation and digestion go on without our knowledge, so do the similar processes of the mind work. If we think about our food and decide to live on tablets, we soon become poor things. We need to take food regularly and not think about it afterwards. A power the mind possesses and on it everything depends. Just as the body has the mouth for receiving food, the mind has attention, therefore to talk of training the attention is rubbish, it does not need encouragement, it can be left alone. Attention, judgment, reason; the so-called faculties of mind, work as unconsciously as the digestion of the body. Mind cannot live without food.

It is an error to suppose that the mind lives on exercise. The body cannot live on exercise. Does a boy get no education by hoeing turnips? you ask, and no one has the courage to answer: "No." Does a boy get no education by attending to the intricacies of watch-making? you ask, and no one has the courage to answer: "No." Exercise is not food. Mathematical

Science is only open to those who have natural gifts; what may be called Literary Science, of which there is little in English, but such as the work of Flammarion and Fabre in French, is open to everybody. As regards the Humanities, all persons can enjoy History, Literature, Travel. It is a mistake to give gymnastics instead of food. A mind cannot live on Grammar, Mathematics and Science. On such a diet it will perish (everlastingly). We know that power not used will go. A limb not used atrophies. A mind which has no nourishment will atrophy, fed on a fashion rag or sporting paper this is the result. Mind wants knowledge as the body want [sic] food. Therefore we must read books. Desultory reading is very interesting and very delightful, but it is not enough. We must read and narrate, if necessary narrate to ourselves, but people will be willing to listen if we can reproduce definitely and accurately, not vaguely and generally.

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Returning to the analogy of Mind and Body. As the mouth opens to receive food, the mind opens to receive intellectual food. Before food enters the mouth, the palate must be titillated and appealed to, to set the juices flowing, the food must smell pleasant and have an agreeable taste. All test books and cram books and extracts fail in this respect and do not feed the mind. A book of General Knowledge is given to a boy for the holidays, he manages to acquire some of the information and commits it to memory. I do not know what it is, a sort of spurious power of the mind. That is not the way the mind is reached. As Ruskin said:

“They cram to pass and not to know,
They do pass and they don’t know.”

There is a want of countenance in the look of persons who devote themselves to out-door pursuits, a want of culture, for they have let it all go.

People are often surprised to find that slum children are able to reproduce what they have heard. They have been born complete. They read to know, and tell what they have read. We need not trouble memory, mind does the work. There is no need to ask questions, it is better not, they do not induce truthfulness, for the child tries to tell you what he thinks you want to hear. They will know what they have narrated for months to come.

(Here a P.U.S. girl, Form V., was asked to open an envelope which contained Form V. Easter Examination questions, and was asked to read one on Utopia and to answer it on the spot, which she did, also one on the disguises adopted by animals as safeguards and this she also answered, standing by Miss Mason in front of the Conference.)

The reading in this instance had been done at least two or three months previously. Narration is natural and not tiring like cramming. It is natural to children not to lose attention; they do not need to pick it up.

The educational effect of reading and narration is a lever to raise the whole world. Quantity, not small rations are needed for the body. So for the mind too. We give the children many subjects, and they keep them all distinct, enjoying all. “The questions were glorious” the children of the Practising School declared of their examination at the end of the Spring term, though some of them had been in bed nearly half the term.

We must be careful to keep the spring undefiled. At one time we heard of Herbart’s explanation of ideas struggling for admittance. Nowadays the various educational writers all believe in the spiritual power of man. This is a welcome reaction against the belief that man

was only matter. Very great issues are at stake. All our education depends on the power of the will.

We must give knowledge interesting in itself, we must give that or the mind cannot be fed. The fact that knowledge of this

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kind is assimilated is shown by the tales, marvellous in their beauty, told by elementary school children. Quantity, quality and variety are the three things to bear in mind as to the food for the mind. We have a great charge to keep. We are missionaries and pioneers. Those who want to advance a cause must get a firm conviction and stick to it. There is no difference between a missionary of religion and a missionary of education. Education is the handmaid of religion. "Do ye not understand?" said our Lord. He appealed to the History, Law and Poetry of a nation.

In discussion afterwards it was asked whether it would have been better in the lesson to Class I. on Æsop's Fables to have read the whole fable before asking children to narrate, than to have taken a paragraph or two at a time. Miss Mason said this was a question to be left to the judgment of the mistress. For little children a paragraph or two may be enough, but power comes with practice, and for older children as much as a chapter may be read before asking for a narration.