

SOUTH INDIA.

PAPER READ BY MRS. SENIOR.

I have been asked to tell you a little about the P.U. School from the parents' point of view—our opinion of it, and its usefulness to parents out here. I am intensely keen on it, and feel greatly its possibilities for children, so, thought I may be quite incompetent to speak to you about it, I have jotted down a few thoughts. I am speaking mainly from the point of view of a mother who for various reasons is obliged to teach her children herself. But I think I should say here that if it is at all possible I should strongly urge mothers to obtain the help of a trained teacher from Ambleside, only then, I think, can the full benefits of the school be obtained. However, that is not by any means always possible, especially out here. So may I just speak of a few of the advantages which I think an untrained teacher gets from the School, and of its usefulness to mother and children.

(a) **Regular Time Table.**—Not always possible to keep exactly to it, but it is a great incentive to regular work to have it printed, in front of one each day. Otherwise one is apt to give holidays, or to take them oftener than should be.

(b) **Regular Syllabus.**—And the same thing applies to the Regular Syllabus. Each term a certain amount of work is planned out, and unless you can keep up with that you miss a great deal of the benefit of the School. In some cases the work is almost more than can be accomplished comfortably, at any rate by a busy mother, and in a tropical climate. For I do think the climate tells to some extent on the children's working powers. Still, "a man's reach should exceed his grasp," and so it is a great stimulus to have a full programme of work to get through.

(c) **The Examination.**—At the end of each term examination papers are sent to the members of the P.U.S., and the answers to two of the three examinations of the year are marked and criticised by examiners in England. The repetition, reading, handicrafts, etc., are examined by the teacher, or some outside friend, and a scale of marks is given and an average obtained. It is a great help to know by these examinations how your children compare with others of their age in England and the Examiners give marks which indicate this.

(d) **The advantage of getting the most up-to-date educational books.**—I have compared our children's books with several others

[p 304]

in schools and otherwise, and it always seems to me that with scarcely an exception the P.U. School books are by far the best that could be got for each subject.

(e) Lastly, **The intellectual stimulus to oneself.**—We are most of us apt to get intellectually slack in the enervating climates of the plains, and it braces one up tremendously to see the children's books, and the subjects, and to keep in touch with their work. If they are reading Shakespeare's plays, how it revives one's own interest! English History lives again in one's imagination as one reads Arnold Forster's delightful books. The same with the French History, Natural History, Citizenship, or Picture Study of the best Works of Art.. I feel so glad to think I have two little daughters waiting to start lessons on the same lines so that one can still keep in touch with the School.

Advantages to the Children.

(a) **The Wide Curriculum** creating an interest in so many directions. These are some of the subjects for children of ten years old—Natural History (including elementary Science).

Citizenship (the children have read the lives of Roman and Greek citizens such as Brutus, Julius Cæsar, Coriolanus, Alexander the Great, besides parts of A. Forster's Citizen Reader.)

English History (suggestions are made as to general reading, such as Scott's works, to correspond with the period studied, besides a book on the British Museum, which helps both this subject and Citizenship.

French History (corresponding period, and a book of Centuries by which the events of English and French History are seen to dove-tail into each other).

Geography, Arithmetic, Grammar, French, German, Latin, and Picture talk (six pictures from great artists studied each term, such as Watts, Corot, Millet, Memline, Titian, Holman Hunt, and Burne Jones, and many others).

Singing, Physical Drill, Recitation of good poetry (also Corresponding with the Historical period studied), Handicrafts, and most interesting of all, Old and New Testament.

(b) **Benefit of daily study of the Bible with the best books of Commentary.**—I hardly know whether this is of more benefit to the children than to the mother or teacher! We all want to do our best for them in this way, and to get the most modern aspect of the Bible, so that when they go out into life to meet with the inevitable scepticism of modern days their faith will not be shaken, but, on the contrary, they will be able easily to meet

[p 305]

objections and criticisms, because they have wisely and thoughtfully been led already to face up to them by one who while using much that modern investigation has to give, has yet a deep living faith in God. The books I refer to are those of Dr. Paterson Smyth. The P.N.E.U. plan is to read to the children straight from the Bible, getting them afterwards to narrate, and then Dr. Smyth's books give the simplest, clearest, and yet most thoughtful commentary that could be used for children, and which have been helpful to many "grown-ups" too. Dr. W. How's Commentaries are also used. We have been right through the Old Testament (including the prophetic books, which are fitted into the historical period to which they belong), and a great part of the New Testament.

(c) **Learning of Bible passages by heart.**—Each term a certain number of verses for Old and New Testament are set to be learnt by heart. The benefit of this is so obvious that it needs no comment.

(d) **The sequence of thought carried out in their studies.**—One example will show what I mean. Last term our boys were reading Early British History—including Cæsar's conquest of Britain, Early French History, including his conquest of Gaul. Citizenship gave us Julius Cæsar's Life by Plutarch. Our general reading set us Shakespeare's play Julius Cæsar to read. Surely there is enough here to kindle the imagination of the dullest child.

General Remarks.

And this leads me to just a few remarks as to the general effect on the children themselves.

I am, as a teacher, utterly untrained, and our boys have therefore, I feel sure, not got the full benefit they might have done from all these advantages. Had we had a trained teacher in Colombo, I should certainly have tried to send them to her, but failing that I preferred teaching them myself, for as long as circumstances would allow, because I am so keen on the P.N.E.U. course. As I said, I am untrained, and our boys very average in brain capacity, and above the average in naughtiness and high spirits, so there have been difficult times when they have not wanted to do lessons, but often I have found that the sheer interest of the subjects, as prescribed in these delightful books, especially when they could read the books for themselves, has won, and held them. Since coming here and going to school in Kodai, they have told me that they found my lessons more interesting than the school ones! Another friend, whose little [p 306]

boy has been learning with ours for the last year, told me that he never cared for lessons before, but that they are quite different now "with all those nice books"

It does give them a love of reading, and of *good* reading. Since our boys came to school here, I have been told that they are backward in writing, spelling, and arithmetic compared to American children. That is probably a great deal my fault. But I think it is also partly the difference of method. In the P.N.E.U. Time Table time is given almost every day to these important subjects, but quality rather than quantity of spelling, writing, and, I think I may say, arithmetic, is asked. So that now they have come to school they find themselves rather behind the other children. But as was kindly suggested to me the other day, had they given as much time to these subjects as is given in the school, they would probably have been further on than they are now. For the proportion of time given in the school is more than double what they gave to these things before. But that would have meant leaving out much that they have been learning, and a consequent loss which, in my estimation, could never be made up. It means a bit of uphill work now, but I don't think in the long run they will ever regret having had the opportunity they have had of getting glimpses along so many avenues of knowledge. It has been acknowledged to me that they have obviously read more than the average child at school. The P.N.E.U. scheme has, I hope, given them a taste for reading and general culture which they will never lose, and which will beautify and strengthen all their after-life. The Picture talks, too, on six works each term of great painters, with charming copies of their works, have aroused their interest in good pictures, and they often point out to me the pictures which they recognise on the walls of friends' houses.

The suggestions too, for Sunday readings have been so helpful to me, and we have read together many old favourites which one often does not read till much later, if at all. Pilgrim's Progress, Jackanapes, the Story of a Short Life, Uncle Tom's Cabin, besides lives of General Gordon, Bishop Patteson, Stanley, Joan of Arc, and others in "Told to the Children Series." They also suggest books which will help in the teaching of the Catechism, and in getting some knowledge of Church History, these last illustrated by beautiful views of our English Cathedrals.

I think I must mention too, the delightful little book called "Life and its Beginnings," by Dr. Helen Webb, which it [p 307]

seems to me is just what we mothers need to help us in telling our children about the facts of life.

I must not go on though one could mention, also, the help one so often gets from articles in the Parents' Review, on so many subjects which concern the upbringing of our children, from the physical, mental, moral, and spiritual standpoint. But I hope that these few words, ill-expressed and disjointedly put together as they are, may enable some of us to realise and prove for ourselves the enormous help that the P.N.E.U. School can be in moulding the lives and characters of our children, and in setting the average mother on the right educational lines.