

THE SACREDNESS OF THE PERSON.

I.

By H. E. Wix.

POSSIBLY there are moments with all of us when we become depressed and feel we are working along lines which were once very excellent and did most splendid pioneer work. But we wonder in these moments of depression, not as we ought to do, "What is it that we are doing wrong?" but whether perhaps after all the P.N.E.U. may not be as out-of-date as some of our detractors say it is. Ought we not to be using more modern text books? Ought we not to be aiming less high? Ought not our first thoughts to be efficiency and accuracy? Is it not better to learn a little and let that little be thoroughly known? Are we not continuously engaged in the hopeless task of "biting off more than we can chew?" Are we not perhaps following a will o' the wisp? Are Miss Mason's ideas of education out of touch with the living ideas of the age we are in and which our pupils have to grow up in?

What are the living ideas of this age? What are the fundamental ideas which give life to all P.N.E.U. thought and teaching? Are they still trustworthy guides?

When Miss Mason published *School Education* in 1905, she

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said there were "three great ideas by which the world was just then being educated"—the Sacredness of the Person, the Evolution of the Individual, and the Solidarity of the Race. She did not suggest that there would never be any change in these ideas, in fact, her expression "just now being educated" rather hints at the opposite. The test, which Miss Mason herself suggested is: do these ideas touch at all points the living thoughts of the age; that is: are they appreciated and understood to be true by the ordinary man in the street and not merely by the specialised "educationalists?"

It was an excellent suggestion that we should spend three sessions of this Conference discussing these three great ideas—so that we might try to decide whether any one of them had increased in importance or retreated into the background of thought—also, whether any other great ideas have arisen and if so, whether P.N.E.U. thought is still in touch with them.

It has fallen to our lot to introduce the discussion on the Sacredness of the Person.

Our text is to be found in the Synopsis—Miss Mason having stated that the two instruments of education are to be found in the principles of authority on the one hand, and docility on the other, continues: "These principles are limited by the respect due to the personality of children which may not be encroached upon, whether by the direct use of fear or love, suggestion or influence, or by undue play on any one natural desire."

At first sight it seems that never has the personality of the individual been more fully realised than to-day. In the *Times* of last Monday, a speaker at an Educational Conference is reported to have said that the two characteristics of the modern educational spirit were reverence for the pupil's individuality, and a belief that the individual grows best in an atmosphere of freedom. In every type of school there is a clear leaning towards individual methods; no longer is it the aim of the teacher to turn out all children alike; no longer are "class methods" in common use, but individual tastes are considered and individual progress catered for. Discipline of the kind that the word itself conjures up, is now so much changed as to be barely recognisable. Children, even when very young, draw up their own rules, elect their own

officers, even make out their own time tables, and then perhaps fancy they are greater than the laws they themselves have made!

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Yet, though this is a recognition of the rights of the individual it does not fulfil our meaning of the "Sacredness of the Person." It seems almost as if Miss Mason had taught the misunderstanding world that a child is a person, not a mere lump of potter's clay, and that educationists having but half understood had thence evolved such schemes as the Dalton plan, the Montessori system, differentiation in curricula for older children, and even specialisation in a favourite subject—all of which are at fault, as we think, because they give freedom only to some one part of the person, instead of to the whole.

If we turn to some of the special manifestations of this modern spirit we find first, self-expression and psychoanalysis. Of the latter it is probably best to say nothing, as we all agreed that if used at all it is only for the specialist. But "self-expression" is interesting in that it is so often talked about and so frequently means very little. Sometimes "self-expression" is the name given to the plasticene modelling done by children when they are told to "make what they like." Or it may be used in composition, when such subjects are set as "What I would do if I had £5," "What I will be when I grow up," "What I would do if I were Queen," and so on; always about me and mine, and what I like or do not like. Self-expression focusses the attention on self and therefore must lead to a certain amount of introspection. That is fatal to all progress, for true education is "a continuous going forth" of mind; the mind grows only in so far as it is interested in many, many lovely things which are outside itself. Socrates truly said "Know Thyself" but only so that through one's knowledge of self one might become a student of common human nature, and so learn to understand something of mankind.

If we look through history for the Golden Ages, when men were giants, we find them in that wonderful fifth century B.C., and in the Renaissance. The great men were great because they touched life at so many points. We all know Leonardo, the super-man, who was engineer, inventor, sculptor, poet, painter, and perhaps much else besides. Even our own Sir Walter Raleigh was mariner, discoverer, coloniser (though unsuccessful), poet, courtier, and historian. A great man in the sense of a great person is fully developed; no part of him atrophied nor over-trained. In this sense, no mere specialist

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can be a person; Miss Mason says, "It is perilous for us to remain too long in any one field of thought." We all know how absorbing the small affairs of daily life become to some men and women and how their outlook grows correspondingly narrow. We should beware of allowing "shop" to limit our interests.

Still, educationists like Lord Eustace Percy are discovering that a child is "greater than his use to society and that his education must be based solely on his capacity and his needs. . . ." It is interesting to notice how few scholarship men achieve greatness; Sir Robert Bridges was a "second-class man"!

Perhaps only second-class men have time or strength to become "persons" in our sense of the word; the others are too busy working one side of their brains to get the one-sided scholarship!

Suggestion is another modern idea, more in vogue perhaps some years ago than now. It was the favourite instrument of the really able teacher, who by its means made her children

become exactly what she wanted. She played on this or that feeling or desire and so developed the personality or character. We believe this to be wrong, because it is weakening to the child's will and because the child should grow up to be himself and not a reflection of someone else. Also we have our Lord's command that we are to become as little children—the clever teachers who use suggestion are rather trying to make the children into little grown-ups. We are to be single-minded, simple; not always “grinding axes.”

Another though perhaps trivial modern idea in use as a means of education is that known as the team spirit, the latest form of the competitive spur. The children are trained to work hard for their side, their house or their team, so that it may beat the other houses or teams. There are people who believe this to be a valuable instrument of education because the results are striking and it is undoubtedly good that children should work for the sake of others. But to rely on the team spirit is merely to play upon the desire of emulation, the desire to be first, to get praise. If we use this means we are therefore in danger of offending against the Sacredness of the Person. Every child must shoulder his own responsibilities, and we must not use artificial means to prevent him from realising these responsibilities.

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II.

THE TEACHER'S POINT OF VIEW.

By K. MASTERMAN.

Miss Mason tells us that Personality is the sacred birth-right of every child. One of the reasons why a person is a mystery is because by the word personality we mean that part of us which goes on into the next life.

We are perhaps sometimes apt to be too negative in our ideas about personality. We know that we must not impress our personality on the children and we bear this in mind, but do we give enough thought to the ways in which we can help the personalities of the children to flourish, remembering that the more a person a child is, the better he is fitted for life? Because personality is sacred we must see that it has scope to flourish. It is obvious that personality cannot flourish in any artificial atmosphere or in “cotton-wool” surroundings. The most natural surroundings for a child are the family circle and he derives great benefit from having to adapt himself to circumstances, and he gains experience by the way in which he deals with the little daily happenings which make up life.

One of the most important parts of the school-day is the time given to unsupervised play. Everyone knows the importance and value of organised games, but unsupervised playtime is invaluable for the opportunities it gives for personality to flourish freely. With small children of course, it is necessary to have a teacher in the room always, but during the time set apart for unsupervised play she should practise “masterly inactivity.” There is perhaps a danger of children tending to lose their individuality at school; for example there is nearly always a school craze to which practically all the children succumb; also there is that feeling of “must be the same as the others.” One remedy for this can be found in opportunities for discussion and the free expression of opinions, with the teacher in the background ready to give any necessary help. In this connection we should remember not to probe the children's feelings; sometimes we may hear a remark like this, “Oh, I do love that birch tree,” or “That bluebell is so beautiful”; it spoils and shatters the child's feeling for beauty if we ask blunderingly, “Why?”

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Another way in which we can foster the flourishing of personality is to give the children opportunities for choosing between ideas; this is valuable in aiding the development of a person. A Liberal Education gives chances for this and will present living ideas.

Neither a Utilitarian nor a Sensory Education takes personality into consideration; the first trains children to be efficient and the second teaches without presenting ideas.

An atmosphere that is pervaded by the teacher's overwhelming and emotional personality is death to the personality of the child. But the teacher may show her personality in intellectual matters, she can show her enthusiasm for and interest in a poem or book or picture.

There are one or two dangers of the effect on children of a teacher's overwhelming personality which are sometimes apt to be forgotten. First the children become exhausted. They are so responsive that the continual effort leads to nervous pressure and they suffer physically and mentally. Secondly, personal magnetism is not allowed as a tool and is not necessary to secure attention. The effort must be made by the children themselves and from the first. We must not use personal magnetism as a means for securing obedience; this is an easy pitfall but we must remember that the end does not justify the means. We have to discipline ourselves to prevent using the wrong way, which is sometimes the easiest way, of gaining our end. This will be easier when we realise the immense benefit it is to children to be able to use self-discipline and make themselves obey of their own free will. This power is one which they will find more valuable the older they grow.

Next we come to personal influence as one of the tools which are sometimes used against the sacredness of personality. We can divide influence into (1) our influence over children (2) children's influence over each other. First of all there is the power of unconscious influence brought to bear by our thoughts and actions. People realise to-day more than they ever have done before how great is the power of thought. A great many of our thoughts are unconscious and when we feel frightened by this let us remember that if we have the right attitude of mind our unconscious thoughts are more likely to be of the right kind. We can deal with our conscious thoughts by the power of thought-turning. Realising the power of unconscious influence we can see how potent conscious personal

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influence must be and how it would swamp personality. Our attitude towards children must be bracing: anything like favouritism or the wrong use of sympathy has an enervating effect. We all of us know grown-ups who have "supporting" friends on whom they depend for advice and moral support. This shows how disastrous and how lasting is the weakening effect produced by personal influence. The right course for us teachers is to be quite natural with children, and to realise when we are using personal influence and to pull ourselves up and stop.

Children are more susceptible to influence than older people, as they have less experience of life. They are often more affected by contemporary influence than by that of grown-ups. We have to be able to deal with the type of child who is the ring-leader of a clique; we have to find out the best way of preventing the dangers to personality incurred by children who slavishly follow this leader. The two ways open to us are either to separate the clique by arbitrary means or to let the members learn by experience what a weakening effect a dominating influence has on them.

Another tool used against the Sacredness of Person is that of suggestion; this is one of the most insidious ways of undermining character. It is much easier to use it with young children because older ones have greater powers of resistance. The use of suggestion denies children the discipline of failure.

The Zeitgeist at the time when Miss Mason wrote the *Home Education* series was "The Sacredness of the Person." It is the same to-day, and alongside we have the modern Zeitgeist of self-expression. Miss Mason tells us that a child cannot express anything that he has not assimilated at some time or another, but he tinges it with his individuality when giving it back. We must give opportunities for the expression of originality, we can do so in Handicrafts, Gardening, Musical Composition, and all forms of creative work.

Self-expression becomes dangerous when the individual forgets that he is a member of a community and only a unit of society. Self-control must go alongside. The kind of self-expression which gives vent to the feelings is likely to be harmful. We must show children that we cannot always live our lives to the full and that the best way to do it is in service to others. The right kind of discipline used from the start of a child's life should prevent that feeling of revolt

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against authority that often comes at the age of seventeen or eighteen. Another danger of self-expression is the danger of eccentricity if the child is allowed to develop one talent to the exclusion of other things.

Physical offences against the child's person are of a different sort now-a-days from the time of our grandparents. We offend chiefly in this respect if we create an atmosphere of fuss, worry or hurry; this gives a feeling of physical unrest as well as mental disturbance.

Psychology and psycho-analysis are two more currents of thought which bear upon the subject of personality. Miss Mason tells us in the *Essay* that it is indecent to probe the thoughts of the unconscious mind, and here is a warning to us that psycho-analysis should not be used except in very extreme and abnormal cases and then of course always by an expert. We can see that otherwise it would be an attack on personality. Professor James is comforting about psychology, he says, "a teacher's attitude towards a child is concrete and ethical and a psychologist's is abstract and analytical."

If we remember that every child is born with mind complete as well as body and that he only lacks experience and is not a different kind of being from ourselves we shall treat him with the respect due to the Sacredness of his Person and personality.

III.

THE HOME-LIFE POINT OF VIEW.

By MRS. EVAN CAMPBELL.

I have tried to express myself in the light—and alas! also in the darkness—of my own experience.

In considering Miss Mason's inspired statement on page 46 of *School Education* that Psychology is progressive and that education must touch at all points the living thought of the age, I am deeply convinced that we must study the psychology of the day, and examine its

bearings to the philosophy which we hold, in order that we may not judge without personal and constantly renewed research into the
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question. This is probably even more necessary for parents than for teachers, who stand to the children rather as guides and fellow students than as the first interpreters of life.

The smatterings of psychological knowledge which are all we can come by without real study lead us to fogs and pitfalls. The three conceptions of the age of which Miss Mason speaks—"The Sacredness of the Person," "The Evolution of the Individual," and "The Solidarity of the Race," are becoming ever more widely apprehended.

"The Sacredness of the Person" is now so generally accepted by modern educationists and parents that in some families restraint and discipline have been almost eliminated, unfortunately sweeping away with them the training in self-control. We are apt to forget that in giving liberty or allowing it we are not even yet handling the situation, compelling a child to make decisions before his will is strong enough to have the mastery over his wish of the moment—respecting, in fact, his weakness rather than his personality. This is a vast subject. We students are deeply privileged people, as we have been shown the means of setting out to study it.

We share with all parents, teachers, and child-lovers the longing to help our children, and like them are surely confronted most bitterly often with our own powerlessness. Our hope is in the knowledge that we can help to provide equipment for the work of life; ideas and habits—these being the food and garments of the soul: love and faith its light and air.

My experience as a mother has been that I have not had nearly enough faith in my children. I believe, however, that mothers frequently have greater faith than teachers, but that they err more gravely in the matter of influence.

In the second chapter of the *Essay*, which for me contains some of Miss Mason's most beautiful writing, she quotes Traherne in considering how a young child comes to possess all his fair surroundings and experiences and to know them for his own. I feel that this thought of the possessions of ideas and memory helps us in the difficult matter of personal influence. Let the idea be in our minds that in so far as children receive our influence, it shall be to them as a possession of their spirit, even if it be one that they discard in their growth. This is a very hard thing, but it has to be faced if we are to avoid the deadly encroachment of one personality upon another. We cannot but influence our children unconsciously, and perhaps
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there was never a loving mother who did not also consciously use her influence. The whole matter is thorny with snares. The first essential must be faith that the children, with their great powers of spirit, will deal with our influence and, working upon it as the mind works upon ideas, will accept, retain, or reject, according to their needs.

Teachers who, loving their pupils, identify themselves with their interests, their getting of knowledge and mental growth, have much the same difficulty here as parents.

Personally, I feel that we who aim at Masterly Inactivity must, where we love deeply, ever beware of too much mastery. We are on our guard,—but now the thought of our unconscious influence stabs us. It is one of the sharpest sorrows of a mother to see her own failings apparent in the characters of her children! I am not alluding to heredity—I may not take comfort in that direction. Influence and suggestion brought about these disasters.

Miss Mason says, I think in *Home Education*, "A mother simply cannot help working her own habits into the lives of her children." I suppose all we who are concerned with children should free ourselves from efforts to form, to instruct, to urge towards goodness, and, turning to the light, should walk in it, knowing that nothing is hidden.

There is also an oblivious influence due to ignorance or selfishness, or to what is often kindly named a forceful personality. It results in the "fixations" of which the psychologists tell us. It is a thing of darkness which spreads to the mind of a child, causing him to grope and to stumble. Fear clings about it, and superstition, and it may be long before the child affected can acquire enough light, health and knowledge to break through the fog.

If we believe in the evolution of the individual and of the race respect for the personality of children comes naturally. We shall not want to say, "You're wrong," or "I know what is best," because we are not always sure of this. Instead we know intuitively that in many instances, the ideas lit in their ardent spirits are nearer to the ideal than are our own, because the race is going forward.

Let us now consider the part played by suggestion in this matter. There will be more pitfalls, especially perhaps for the mother, because the poor thing uses it constantly, often completely unconscious that she is doing so. She thought she was

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just being cautious when she said, "Take care. You'll fall down if you run," or merely stating facts when, on getting into the train she declared, "I never could travel with my back," or in a storm, "I can't stand thunder. It makes me come over so queer, my mother was just the same."

These are not exaggerated examples of the attitude of mind of millions of mothers, wholly or partly enslaved by fear, even to the extent of undermining the health of their children to the third and fourth generations. Wet feet may have caused many attacks of illness, but would they have done so in all cases if fear had not been suggested? And what small child would dread a first visit to the dentist apart from suggestion? I remember my own experience at eight years old, about to have adenoids removed, and much interested momentarily in nursing homes and operations, until the nurse asked my mother, "Is your little girl nervous at all?" when my knees began obediently to quake. How hot one gets with eagerness that the children we are living for may drive out fear in their generation and replace it by faith!

Miss Mason warned us many times of the dangers of suggestion in undermining the will and so leading to weakness, parasitism or even criminality, but she also gave another status to the term "suggestion" when she pronounced it synonymous with the initial idea inaugurating a habit. I believe we proceed in accordance with her philosophy when we confine ourselves to this use of suggestion. Surely we may even say that with children under seven or eight, who are so well served by their senses and so little by their immature judgment, we are using suggestion most of the time. I am helped by trying to suggest, only in connection with habits that strengthen the will, such as courage, perseverance, patience, gentleness, truthfulness, neatness, etc., and the bodily habits.

Two more aspects of our subject seem to me of great importance during the early home years, as indeed later.

First concerning the great independence of life and thought now required by our children. The days are gone when our interests, like our patriotism, were narrow and exclusive.

Apart from the needs of self-expression and the fulfilment of talents and even genius we live more and more for others by imagination and sympathy. A danger, however, [p 735]

seems to lie in the possibility that intensity, or ardour of life, should be sacrificed to this expansion.

Parents need Miss Mason's warning not to allow every opinion borne on the winds of general information to take the place of principles.

Do let us encourage our children, as persons, to develop their own powers, not merely to learn about those of others—to exercise their talents, and explore and test the ways of nature, art, and science at first hand. Let us not lean overmuch towards mechanical helps, photographs, wireless, cars, etc., in our desire to present ideas and delights.

We of the P.N.E.U. have these questions at heart. Nevertheless, only active thinking and study will prevent us from confusing the issues at times. Persons can only possess what they themselves take. I believe too that if we use influence or suggestion at all strongly in promoting work in Nature Note-books, gardening, painting, even singing and practising in leisure time, we are guilty of encroachment, and may turn children right away from joys and fulfilments which we hoped to bring nearer to them.

When we have laid before them a feast of opportunities, faith will enable us to wait peacefully till they reach out and take what they need, perhaps at the cost of such effort as will greatly develop their growth.

Secondly, from the point of view of home life, there is the influence of brothers and sisters to be remembered. It may be tremendous, and mothers and nurses have to protect many small persons from encroachment. The way of wisdom is hard to find. Too frequently we resort instead to emulation. We can not altogether dispense with emulation, but its exercise even in what appears—to the less thoughtful person—only moderation, may be pernicious. We do not need to be reminded of the evils of telling one child that her sister or cousin "would never behave like that," etc. The same principle guiding us in controlling all suggestion is again applicable—that it be used to initiate a habit only. I would also strongly urge that we remember to encourage emulation of qualities or achievements rather than of persons in the family or school circle.

In all these questions and problems faith is surely our greatest need, with the realisation that all persons are equipped to deal with reality, and that their equipment is God-given.