

## PRACTICAL CARRYING OUT OF THE P.N.E.U. METHOD.

BY MISS E. BRUCE LOW.

As has already been said, our aim in Education is to give children vital interests in as many directions as possible. For this reason Miss Mason, in arranging the programmes of work for each class, provides a wide curriculum. I should like to read you a few words on this subject from one of Miss Mason's books on Education.

"In regard to a curriculum, perhaps the main part of a child's education should be concerned with the great human relationships. History, literature, art, languages (whether ancient or modern), travel—all these are the record or expression of persons; so is science, so far as it is the history of discoveries, the record of observations, that is, so far as it is to be got out of books. Before

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all these ranks Religion, including our relations of worship, loyalty, love and service to God; and next in order, perhaps, the intimate inter-personal relations implied in such terms as self-knowledge, self-control. Knowledge in these several kinds is due to children; for there seems reason to believe that the limit to human intelligence coincides with the limit to human interests; that is, that a normal person of poor and narrow intelligence is so because the interests proper to him have not been called into play."

It has sometimes been argued that in teaching many subjects the child becomes confused with all that he is expected to remember, and that he gets a smattering of each subject, and knows nothing thoroughly or well. But it has been found that this is not the case, the reason being that children have a natural desire for all knowledge. So it is while the mind is fresh, the brain clear, and while children are ready and eager to know that we want to give them "such knowledge as will open up as much of the world to them as possible for their use and enjoyment." At the same time we want to distinguish between knowledge and information. The latter is a mere record of facts, and the acquiring of it may train the memory, but it does not fresh the mind. Knowledge, on the other hand, is the result of the vital action of the brain upon the material presented to it, and as knowledge increases intelligence increases with it.

I should like now to speak of the way in which lessons are taught in the Parents' Union School. It is impossible in a short time to deal with each subject. I will only touch upon those subjects which we claim to teach in rather a different manner from the one usually adopted.

*Bible Lessons.* The subject which we look upon as the most important is the Bible Lesson, and for this reason we begin each day with it. This is nothing new, of course, as I believe that in most schools they do the same. The point I would like to emphasize is, that even the youngest children should be taught straight from the Bible itself. So many people think that the Bible language is too difficult for children, and read to them Bible stories specially written for children. It is a great mistake to think that they cannot understand the words of the Bible. Provided that suitable parts are chosen and not more than about a dozen verses are read at a time, it is perfectly wonderful how children of six or seven can repeat the passage, after one reading, almost word for word as they have heard it. This they do, not in

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parrot-like fashion, but with perfect understanding. We want children in their Bible lessons, not

only to gain a knowledge of God, but also to know and love their Bibles from the earliest years.

*History.* English History, French History, and General History are all contemporary, and only a short period is studied each term. There is also a book (usually one of Scott's novels) set under the heading of "Reading" in the programme, which treats of the same period. The children thus live in the times they read of, not only learning of events which happened, but becoming familiar with the people, their manners, customs, and mode of living.

A favourite book with the children is "The British Museum for Children," which is set under the heading of General History. This book is freely illustrated, and the children copy some of the pictures into a note-book called the "Book of Centuries." In this book there is a page marked off for each century, one side of it for the events referred to in the "British Museum," and the other side, which is of drawing paper, for the illustrations. The portion of the "British Museum" set for the term is usually contemporary with one of Plutarch's "Lives," of which the children in Form II. read one each term. For instance, one term they read the life of Pericles, and at the same time read of the Parthenon (from the "British Museum") of Phidias and other great sculptors, and copied some of the friezes of the Parthenon into the "Book of Centuries."

*Natural History.* The Natural History books are chosen with the special purpose of assisting the out-door studies. In Form II. besides one book on animal life, and another on plant life, there is one on elementary science. The children do the experiments whenever possible, and they also keep a Nature note-book in which they record anything interesting they have noticed with regard to Nature. In it they paint specimens which they bring home from their walks.

*Geography.* In the teaching of Geography Miss Mason lays great stress on the use of maps. Map questions are given before each lesson, and the children find the places themselves. They also make memory maps, and do the tests in Practical Geography under the heading of "Scouting." Besides one of the Ambleside Geography books written by Miss Mason, a book of travel is also read.

*Picture Study and Musical Appreciation.* The children study one artist and one composer each term by means of their works.

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Each child has six reproductions of the works of the artist, and from these he learns to appreciate the best in Art, and also something of the lines of composition, light and shade and the style of the various artists. The music is played to the children by the teacher, who also tells them a little about Musical Form, so that they can not only enjoy good music but understand it.

*Handicrafts.* I think I need scarcely say anything about handicrafts, because people are realizing more and more the value of manual work as a means of education. We try to give our pupils models to do which are within their powers, and then we demand from them that their work shall be neat, exact, and, if possible, artistic.

At the end of each term the children answer examination questions set by Miss Mason, and the papers are marked by an examiner according to the standard of the pupil's work with regard to others of his age and class. That is to say, that if a child obtains 100 per cent. for History it means that his work in that subject is considerably above the average for his age and class. Parents of children who are taught at home often consider that one of the greatest disadvantages of home teaching is, that they have no means of ascertaining whether their children are as advanced as they ought to be. By this method of examining the difficulty is

overcome.

*Time-Tables.* Miss Mason also sets the time-tables for each form. All the book-work is done in the morning, so that the hardest work is done while the brain is fresh. The younger pupils have lessons from 9–11.30, and as they get older the time is increased, the higher classes working from 9–1 o'clock. All have a break in the middle of the morning for drill and recreation. The afternoons are devoted to handicrafts, brush-drawing, Nature-painting, and the daily walk. There is no evening preparation done, so the children have this time free for pursuing their hobbies, and for reading the books set under the heading of "Reading" in the programme. Besides the Scott novel already mentioned, one of Shakespeare's plays is read each term, as well as other books.

It will be seen that the school hours are very short, and the subjects are many. The reason we are able to teach so much in so short a time is, that the children give their whole attention. They know that they have to do the amount of work stated in the programme; there is no revision at the end of the term, so time wasted cannot be made up by cramming. As a rule, however, the

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children are so keen and interested in their work that they attend because they want to know.

The only lessons taught orally are mathematics, languages, and English grammar. History, Geography, Literature, Citizenship, and Natural History are taught from books. The children recapitulate their last lesson, it is connected by the teacher with the lesson in hand, and then the children read from their books, of which each has a copy. After one reading of the amount to be taken for the lesson the children narrate what they have read. Miss Mason sets great store on the value of narration, because by this means the teacher is able to find out, better than by asking a number of questions, whether the children have understood their lesson. More important still, the children learn to tell what they have heard or read in a clear manner and in good language. This is our only way of teaching composition, and we find that children who have learned to narrate well can also write naturally and easily.

Perhaps it will be said that in a lesson given in this way the children practically teach themselves. It was once said that "Teachers taught too much, and scholars learnt too little." We teachers aim at helping the scholars to educate themselves. We can do much in the way of guiding, explaining what is not understood, and above all we can help by our interest and enthusiasm. Too much explanation bores a child, and we don't want to come between him and the knowledge he desires.

During the walks with our pupils also we avoid too much talking. The walk-time is a splendid opportunity for teaching many things, but it must be done without seeming to be didactic. We go into the fields and woods with the children rather as learners with them, remembering that Wordsworth said, "Go forth into the light of things, let Nature be your Teacher." We know that if we approach Nature with love and reverence she will unfold to us many of her secrets. I think I am right in saying that almost all children who belong to the Parents' Union School are lovers of Nature, partly, of course, because so many of them live in the country. It is also due to the fact, however, that they are taught the life-history of even the smallest and most insignificant of animals or insects, and the wonders of plant life. Surely none who know these things can fail to be very loving and tender with every living thing.

In the time set apart for the walk we often do scouting, gardening, or play games, so

that with much variety, and usually

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an object in the walk, children do not get bored or find the walks dull.

I have just skimmed over a few points in the practical carrying out of the method, as there is no time even to mention everything. I hope, however, that if there are any questions you would like to ask you will do so, and we will do our best to answer them.