THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH[1]

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The issue of the Report on the "Teaching of English in England" was awaited with interest by everyone connected with schools—from Primary Schools to the Honours Schools in the universities. To the majority, the interest was mainly personal. But to us connected with the P.N.E.U. the interest had in it more than intelligent curiosity. I am not to be accused of the weakness of St. Thomas if I say that our expectant interest had in it a tinge, however faint, of anxiety.

The P.N.E.U. is committed to a definite policy in education. A policy implies a combination of two factors—principles and practice.

Through Miss Parish the P.N.E.U. was invited to present its views to the English Committee. Its aims, claims, and recommendations were brought before comparative criticism, subjected to keen inquiry, contrasted and compared with other evidence. In what light would our principles and methods stand?

Experience in P.U. Schools might convince teachers that they were working on right lines towards proper ideals, but would that conviction be shared by others? Because of such questionings I spoke of the "tinge of anxiety." Well, we've had the Report and read it. How does our policy stand? I will express this opinion. The Report on the "Teaching of English in England" is a complete justification of the pedagogy of a P.U.S. as applied to English. Our principles are true, our methods correct, our aims right. Let us look for a few moments at some of the opinions expressed in the Report.

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On P.6. [sic] the committee deplore the lack of "any common fundamental idea of education, any great common divisions of the curriculum, which would stand out in such a way as to obliterate or even to soften, the lines of separation between the young of different classes." Then "we might hope to find more easily the way to bridge the social chasms which divide us."

On P.14 we read:—"An education of this kind is the greatest benefit which could be conferred upon any citizen of a great state, and that the common right to it, the common discipline and enjoyment of it, the common possession of the tastes and associations connected with it, would form a new element of national unity linking together the mental life of all classes, by experiences which have hitherto been the privilege of a limited section."

And on P.21:—"We believe such an education, based upon the English language and literature would have important social as well as personal results; it would have a unifying tendency."

These three statements alone, apart from the character of the Report as a whole, stamp it as a distinct and practical contribution to the problem of reconstruction.

The Report very rightly stresses the importance of finding a common foundation for education of all types. The P.N.E.U. can claim to be exempt from criticism on this count. The schools affiliated to the Union—Schools which contain children from every class of society—work to a common syllabus.

There is no 'cheapening' of the Programmes when they are sent to the state primary

schools.

In a real sense the P.N.E.U. has recognised the unifying influence of a common curriculum, and put it into practice.

The social value of the unity was recognised by Miss Mason, and embodied by her in her recent pamphlets and in the pages of the PARENTS' REVIEW.

And in this connection we must not forget the "Children's Week," where children from the most diverse homes are not only taught to the same curriculum, but actually sit together and work together in the same classroom.

We may claim to have anticipated the finding of the Committee on this head.

The Report has something to say on every aspect of education, and what it has to say is always illuminating. It deals faithfully with its subject, but also touches upon the process of teaching. It is said on p.7 that "a quasi-scientific theory has long been accepted that the process of education is the performance of compulsory hard labour, a 'grind' or ''stiffening process,' a 'gritting of the teeth' upon hard substances with the

primary object not of acquiring a particular form of skill or knowledge, but of the giving the mind a general training and strengthening.

This theory has now been critically examined and declared to be of less wide application than was thought. Its abandonment would do much to smooth the road of education, it would make it possible to secure for the child a living interest and a sense of purpose in his work, and it would replace the old wasteful system of compulsion and mere obedience by a community of interest between child and teacher."

On the following page we are told that "Education is not the same thing as information, nor does it deal with human knowledge as divided into so-called subjects. It is not the storing of compartments in the mind but the development and training of faculties already existing. It proceeds not by the presentation of lifeless facts, but by teaching the student to follow the different lines on which life may be explored and proficiency in living may be obtained. It is, in a word, guidance in the art of acquiring experience."

These two extracts are a re-statement of the principles of Miss Mason in her three books—"Parents and Children," "Home Education," "School Education." She pleads for good, wholesome nourishment to be given to the mind, and can find no place in her system for the mental gymnastics designed to do what Nature has already done. Nor will she tolerate the giving of mental nutriment which, on the false assumption that it has thereby been rendered suitable to the child mind, has had its nutritive properties removed and has been turned into what she calls "educational pap."

The child is born with a perfect mind, but one that is immature. It has a many-sided interest, and it finds itself in a world which is full of material to engage that interest. The work of the educator, whether professional or parent, is to put the child into proper relations with ideas and his physical environment. That is, the educator is the guide—the interpreter—the helper to adjustment. If we compare Miss Mason's definition of education as the "Science of Relations" with the conclusion stated in the Report, and quoted above that "education is guidance in the art of acquiring experience" we cannot fail to notice how the lines of thought converge and fix on the same ultimate conclusion.

Methods based on principles such as these and urged onward by such claims, are the

methods employed in a P.U.S. And we secure the results which the Committee would have us strive for. The “road of education is smoothed.” The child has a
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“living interest and a sense of purpose in his work.” The “old wasteful system of compulsion and mere obedience is replaced by the community of interest between pupil and teacher.” There is joy in the process of education.

I speak as one who has worked under the system of compulsion—who has presented lifeless facts under the delusion that such constituted education. The different atmosphere which pervades the P.U. schoolroom is startlingly apparent, and the difference may be traced to its source.

“The atmosphere of the best Infant Schools,” we are told on p.68 [sic], “is that of a good home.” We know that. But why confine the home atmosphere to the Infant School? The Committee, of course, mean no such thing. When they ask for community of interest between scholar and teacher, they ask, in effect, that a home atmosphere shall pervade every period of school life. Where the spirit of “Ambleside” permeates teachers and scholars, in that school you find the desirable condition of a home life.

It is impossible in a paper to which a limited time must be given to give a full treatment of the claim that a P.U.S. in the education it offers meets the demands of the Committee. It may be, however, that I have shown that concerning the idea of what true education is, and the conditions which should govern the pursuit of that education, there is unanimity between the P.N.E.U. and the Committee.

The same difficulty pursues me when I turn to the methods employed in teaching that subject which is the matter of the Report. On what lines shall the teaching of English proceed? The Report gives us the component parts, “systematic training in the sounded speech of standard English: systematic training in the use of standard English: training in reading.” Reading includes reading aloud, “the use of books as sources of information and means of study, the use of literature.”

Regarding speech Training, the P.U.S. stands in an infinitely superior position to a school where the “lecture” method is the ordinary way in which the subjects are presented. In a P.U.S. the oral work which a child does daily, and throughout his school life, offers countless opportunities for correction of faulty production of speech sound, and at the same time indicates clearly to the teacher the lessons and exercises in scientific phonetics, the correct use of the speech organs, which he must give.

Lessons in the production of the sounds of standard English are necessary to secure the final result—good speech. But it seems that the first essential toward this result must be found in the
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teacher. He must be free from reproach in his speech. Experience shows indubitably, that good speech, like good construction, is a matter of imitation more than a result of intensive, and often excessive, work in that direction.

In dealing with the Training of Teachers, the Committee find that it is desirable that the “Syllabus should indicate that Reading, Recitation, and Phonetics are essential features of the study of English.” Such a conclusion will doubtless result in a modification of the syllabuses of colleges preparing candidates for the teaching profession, and the P.N.E.U. may use its

influence for that end. The power to read fluently and sympathetically is an essential qualification for every teacher who works on a P.U.S. programme, which, as you know, contains examples of the finest work in literature.

When the section which deals with "Oral Expression" is read away goes the last faint tone of the "tinge of anxiety." First let us notice that the Report contains this opinion: "It is often not realised that so-called knowledge is not knowledge if the thinking powers are not applied to it, and that the only way to get the child to think about it and show the teacher whether it means anything to him or not, is to get him to talk about it. It then becomes a personal experience instead of a mere form of words."

Does this read strangely to any one with a working knowledge of the principles taught at "Ambleside"? The psychology is that of Miss Mason in her pamphlet "A Liberal Education for All" when she claims for *narration* that it is the true test of a child's apprehension and appreciation of his reading, and the way in which he makes that knowledge his personal possession. In fact, without this "return of thought" information does not become knowledge.

Further we read that "we wish very strongly to insist that training in continuous oral expression should be brought to the front as the most indispensable part of the school course."

Infant and Junior Schools have for years used oral expression as the ground work of all lessons. But when the child is transferred to the Senior School his stream of speech seems for some reason to have dried at the source. The Board's "Suggestions" state that "from seven to ten years of age every lesson should still afford opportunity for free expression and for developing the power of connected and continuous speech. [sic]

But in view of the evidence offered to the Committee, accepted and quoted by it, and embodied in its conclusions on this most important of all aspects of the teaching of English, opportunities "for free expression" and "for developing the power of

connected and continuous speech" must no longer be limited to the age of ten. The number of schools under the Board's survey in which the programmes of work and "Ambleside" methods of instruction are used prove beyond doubt that oral expression as the "most indispensable part of the school course" may operate as the ordinary means of instruction in every school subject associated with the Humanities, from the age of entry to the leaving age. And in a most natural way, too. Where the "Conversational lesson" appears as a particular lesson on the Time Table, it ceases to have that natural air in which spontaneity is produced. The scholars sense its artificiality, and resist its imposition. The choice of subject is apt to be haphazard and "apropos of nothing."

The P.U.S. offers better conditions for scholar and teacher.

One opinion expressed in the section we are considering leads us to the consideration of written English. It is this: "Oral work is, we are convinced, the foundation upon which proficiency in the writing of English must be based."

This is true not only as a matter of educational practice but also historically. Man invented speech first. The invention of writing followed later. Speech is an essential of man's every day experience, and in the first stage of education the development of speech must be our first consideration. When we ask our scholars to write, we must ask them to speak through the written symbol. The content of the vocabulary, the range of ideas, the fluency and correctness in oral expression must be the measure and standard of the child's writing in the

elementary stage. At this stage he must be regarded as the apprentice. The production of the craftsman belongs to a later period. No craftsman can exercise his art without an adequate supply of good material. If the natural and spontaneous expression of thought is dammed at the source, need we wonder at the thin trickle which flows through written English?

Written narration, following the single reading, is a great aid in securing a higher standard of written work. The diction, thought, and style of the author unconsciously influence the expression of the scholar. I have appended some examples which prove, by demonstration, this claim.

We teachers connected with the P.N.E.U. must express our gratitude to the authors of the "Report" for their condemnation of the attempts to make children write 'Essays.' When we reflect on the small number of authors in English who have successfully attempted the writing of the Essay, we may well ask why this form of writing should have been so universally adopted as a suitable exercise for children who are at the stage of acquiring

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language and learning its use. If it be argued that the "form" of the Essay is what is aimed at in requiring this kind of Composition from children, then the reply is that letter-writing, answers to suitable questions in Geography, History and other subjects in the syllabus, verse-making, descriptions of scenes and incidents in the plays and authors read, provide opportunities in abundance for the application of the Essay 'form.' That is to say, before expression (writing) there must be analysis and synthesis. Child or adult must take stock of his material, select from his stock, arrange, and then use. Each of these conditions must be observed in any piece of good writing.

And in choosing subjects we ought to choose from the world of the child, and undoubtedly the best and most suitable material is to be found in the books and subjects of his class-room, the life of the school-room or playground, his hobbies and amusements. To ask a boy to write an account of an agricultural operation first from the point of view of the labourer and then from the point of view of the farmer is to plunge his mind into a world which isn't his world. This is, for all too short a time, the world of imagination. The mind of a child impinges but rarely on the hard world of stern reality. Keep him from it. It will claim him soon enough.

When a boy reads "Macbeth," shall we say, *He is* Macbeth, Macduff, The Porter, and each one of the characters in turn. He identifies himself wholly with the characters, and this is, I think, the reason why children can read and understand Shakespeare to an extent which surprises those who, because they leave Shakespeare for problems which they propound from the experience of their world, say that children cannot appreciate the great dramatist.

Then let the child write of the thoughts and experience of the world whose borders are set by his imagination and whose material is selected by himself.

Finally, have we been right in giving the child so much of English literature? And have we led him to it in the right way?

It seems so, for we read on p. 83—"The experiments of the Parents' National Educational Union, whose methods, we are told have been adopted in more than 100 schools, are widely known. The Head Master[2] of one of these schools described to us his satisfaction with the results. Manuals and text books are superseded by books of literary value, and the pupils are encouraged to get knowledge for themselves."

A P.U.S. gives literature to a child for its cultural value—

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for the child to drink from the fountain of goodness, truth, and beauty. He does not disregard the information which literature can give, nor does he remain deaf to the "harmony of sweet sounds."

His History and Geography books are his books "for the day"—for the necessities of his work-a-day world. His Chaucer—Spencer—Shakespeare—Tennyson—Scott—Dickens—Thackeray are his books for "all time." Through them he establishes contact with life—learning some of its lessons without the "blows and buffets" which this "rude world" dealt those who speak to him. Put simply, literature is read for its substance and not its form.

Have we been right in our view? On p. 8 dealing with the ways in which the mind may gain experiences of human relations we read that this may be done through the "personal records of action and experience known to us under the form of literature," and that "the creative power of the author whose record he is studying" is a "personal force."

On pp. 9 and 11, where we are told how literature should be dealt with, we are warned that "literature . . . . must be handled from the first as the most direct and lasting communication of experience by man to men" and that "we are strongly of opinion that in dealing with literature the voyage of the mind should be broken as little as possible by the examination of obstacles and the analysis of the element on which the explorer is floating."

Here, I think, our use of unannotated and unabridged editions, at which much criticism is levelled, is confirmed.

As the last quotation let me give from p. 12: "It remains for us to consider the actual and possible position of English in the highest sense, that is as the channel of formative culture for all English people, and the medium of the creative art by which all English writers of distinction, whether poets, historians, philosophers or men, have secured for us the power of realising some part of their own experience of life; and . . . . "we have found with pleasure that there are now a number of elementary schools in which a considerable degree of success is being obtained on these lines."

Do we claim rightly inclusion in this number?

I am indeed happy to re-affirm the opinion that the Report justifies the aims and methods of a P.U.S. in the teaching of English. My happiness will be increased if I have congenial company. But being solitary will not lessen it.

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ILLUSTRATIONS.

These examples of written work have been done by children in P.U.S. in Gloucester. Much of it is work done at the Terminal Examinations, under strict examination conditions.

The atmosphere of an examination room is not exactly conducive to flow of thought or language. The most surprising thing is the pleasure which the children get from the Terminal Examination, a pleasure which has to be seen to be realised by those whose memories of the examination room are not associated with eager and joyful anticipation.

I hope they serve to show the facility in written work which follows reading and narration, a facility which is a measure of the facility which a child acquires in its speech.

Age 9 4/12.

THE STORY OF ARISTAEUS, THE BEE-KEEPER.

Aristaeus was a bee-keeper. He was the first man who ever kept bees properly. Aristaeus' mother was Cyrene queen of the water fairies. One day Aristaeus' bees died. So he went to the side of the lake where his mother lived, and told her his troubles. One of his mother's Fairies heard him and told his mother. She told the waters to open so that Aristaeus could come down to her. When he got down the waters closed again. Aristaeus' mother told him that there was a man called Proteus, a prophet, who would tell him why his bees died. She told him that Proteus would change himself into all sorts of shapes and make noises like fires and floods to get away. She told him not to be frightened, but to fasten Proteus up by a chain and hold the chain tightly. Then she led him to the cave where Proteus came to sleep, and hid him behind a rock. When Proteus came in and went to sleep Aristaeus sprang out and bound him with a chain. When Proteus found that he was caught he changed into all the shapes he could and made noises like fires and floods. But when he found that he could not get away he asked Aristaeus what he wanted Aristaeus said, 'Tell me why my bees died?" Proteus looked him in the eyes and said, "It was your own fault. It was from you that Eurydice was fleeing when she stepped on a snake and it bit her. Orpheus and Eurydice asked the gods to make all your bees die as a punishment." Aristaeus asked him how he could gain their forgiveness. Proteus said "take four fine bulls and four fine cows and sacrifice them, and put their carcases in a wood. Leave them for nine days and at the end go and see what has happened. You must also pay due funeral solemnities to Orpheus and Eurydice."

Aristaeus thanked him and went away. He carried out Proteus' orders. On the end of the ninth day he went into the wood and found some bees at work on the carcases. He captured the bees and took them home and kept them.

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THE RIVER GANGES.

Age 7 years.

The river Ganges rises in the snow-fields of the Himalaya Mountains. The plain of the Ganges is lovely and green. It is very fertile, and when the snow has gone away the plain is flooded. The Indian people grow rice,

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cotton, and ever so many kinds of corn and fruits. Some of the men work on farms and are farmers. They plough the fields ready to plant the corn. They are very poor and their houses are crowded together. The ploughs are very nasty and rough, and the people use oxen instead of horses, to pull the ploughs, because they have no horses in their towns. The Hindoos bathe in the sacred river and they think it the very best river. They go and pray to the wooden and stone Gods in Benares. It is a very beautiful town.

There are many rivers running into the big delta and it looks very pretty. Calcutta has a different name. It is called the "City of Palaces" because it is full of palaces. Calcutta stands on the River Hoogly. The English people use the Hindoos to carry the food from the ships. Some of the English have lovely houses. The town of Delhi stands on the river Jumna. The people in Delhi make lovely silk, and the people in Stroud could not do it half so well. They get golden thread and thread it through the silk.

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Suppose you yourself were at the banquet of Macbeth, given on his becoming King.

Age 13.

We were all in the long low hall of Macbeth's palace. The long table was laden with all kinds of food and wine. It was a banquet in which all the nobles of high rank took part. We all stood up as the king and his queen came in. Macbeth greeted us, and standing at the head of the table, told us all to sit down, according to our degrees. We were going to start the feast when a man appeared in the doorway; he had a rough, cruel face, a face one would associate with a murder or dishonest act.

Macbeth got up and walked towards the door and was soon in low conversation with the man. We could not hear anything of the conversation, but anyone looking at the king could see that he was pleased and angry in turn. We had begun to eat when Macbeth came back, and Lennox, a lord in the king's palace, said, "My lord, here is a place reserved." The king did not seem to see it, and, looking towards his chair at the head of the table, began talking to the empty chair what we thought was nonsense. Lady Macbeth offered an excuse, saying that the king had fits and was often like that. We continued our feast without much more trouble until towards the end, when he was taken with another seizure. These seizures spoiled our feast. At last Lady Macbeth dismissed us, and we left the room mystified, yet happy.

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Age: 14.

WRITE A SCENE FOR ACTING FROM "CRANFORD," OR "AMOS BARTON."

"CRANFORD" SCENE 1. ACT 1.

Inside Miss Jenkyns' House.

Enter Miss JENKYNS, MISS MATILDA, MISS B. BARKER, CAPTAIN BROWN, AND MRS. JAMISON.

CAPT. BROWN: "Good evening, ladies."

ALL: "Good evening, Captain Brown."

(*All seat themselves in their respective chairs, Capt. Brown helping Mrs. Jamison into her chair, and then goes and stands behind Miss Jenkyns' chair.*)

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CAPT. BROWN (*To make some conversation*): "Dear Miss Jenkyns" (*that lady stiffened*) "have you seen any numbers of the "Pickwick Papers." "Capital Stuff!"

MISS J.: "Ah! Yes, I have seen and read some."

(*Miss J. had not read any, but she wanted them to think that she had.)*

C. BROWN: "And what do you think of them? Are not they famously good?"

MISS J.: "I do not think that they are by any means as good as Dr. Johnson's. But still! perhaps the author is young, and who knows how great he may become, if he will only take the good Dr. Johnson as his model."

C. BROWN: "I should be very sorry for Mr. Boz if he changed his writings for any such pompous stuff."

(*This is said quietly. Perhaps Miss Jenkyns did not hear for she does not answer*.)

C. BROWN: "Will you allow me to read you a passage from this month's number? I do not think the company can have read it."

MISS J.: "Just as you please." (*Folds her arms*).

Capt. Brown proceeds to read out a passage and when he has finished he says:—

C. BROWN: "Now what do you think of it?"

(*Miss J. did not answer the question, but says*:—

MISS J.: "Fetch me 'Rasselas' out of the book-room, Matty?" (*Exit Matty*.)

(*Re-enter Matty with a book. Gives book to Miss J.)*

MISS J. '"Now, allow me to read a passage from 'Rasselas'."

(*Proceeds to read. Capt. Brown in the meanwhile tries not to look bored but fails, and drums on the table with his hands. When she has finished he says*:—

CAPT. Brown: "It is quite a different sort of thing, dear madam."

MISS J.: "I am quite aware of that and make allowances."

(*Capt. Brown seeing that argument was useless gave up talking, and Miss J.—as her pride was hurt—spoke no further. But later in the evening Capt. Brown was sorry for his behaviour, and tried to make it up with Miss J., but Miss J. practically ignored him, and when he spoke to her, she snubbed him, and so the conversation stopped.*

Age: 14

DESCRIBE MILLET'S—"LE VANNEUR."

"Le Vanneur," would look very nice in colour and would blend very nicely. The chief colour would be yellow, the light yellow husks, darker yellow coin, brown sacks, ruddy brown measure, and darkest of all, the barn. The winnower's bright clothes would show up very nicely.

The winnower's figure shows strength, his features express patience and determination.

What a tiresome task! To sift husks from the grain all day is not very inviting. Few would care to take his place.

His place of work too is not very nice. A small barn, without door or window visible. He looks too strong to do that kind of work, although it is very tiring and needs patience. Perhaps he has to get up early and go home late at night to earn his living.

His bare feet, big clogs, and trousers tied with straw are characteristics of a peasant's clothing.

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Perhaps he has a large family to keep from his scanty earnings.

Millet knew only too well how to show a peasant's work, for was he not a peasant himself? Had he not all his life worked on a farm, except for the times when he could paint a little? His family too were all peasants, so it was no wonder that he could show a peasant's life.

Age 13.

Write an essay on (a) Imogen in the cave at Belarius, or (b) Wordsworth's poems with quotations.

Posthumus the banished lord, husband of Imogen, believing her unfaithful sends her a letter saying that he is in Milford Haven in Wales to lure her there where his servant Pisanio will kill her. She goes, but Pisanio does not kill her but gives her a man's suit and goes back home. In wandering in the mountains she comes to a cave where dwell Belarius a banished courtier, and the two sons of the king, stolen in their infancy by Belarius in revenge on the king for his banishment.

Imogen enters the cave and the three are out, and being very hungry eats their meat and is caught, and offers to pay for the food, but they decline it, but allow her to sleep in the cave, while they go out hunting. When they come back she cooks for them, and they are surprised at her neat cooking believing her to be a boy. They treat her with great respect and kindness. The two boys grow up to love her greatly, being, of course totally unaware she is their

sister.

Then comes Cloten, the queen's son, searching for her, for by this time she is missed. He meets Guiderius one of the boys and insults him; they fight, with the result that Cloten loses his head, which Guiderius throws into the sea.

On their return they find Imogen asleep, drugged, and believing her dead lay her beside the corpse of Cloten, who is dressed in Posthumus' clothes, having got the faked letter. Imogen waking up takes him for her husband, and is found weeping by him by Caius Lucius a Roman.

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Age 13.

Write 30 lines of blank verse on one of the following:—"Alcestis," "Miranda," "Hamlet."

Hamlet the king of Denmark had a son,
Who greatly loved a sweet and pretty maid
Yet sometimes when his madness did return:
It seemed as if he simply hated her.
One day alone he met her in the street,
Ungartered was he and his ragged plume
Was all undone: he looked a scene of madness.
And after staring at her in the face
He grasped her hand; and held it there for long;
And then he let her go, and home she went,
To tell her troubles to her father dear,
And also how that Hamlet caused her dread.
Her father then went straight unto the king,
And told him all about his step son's acts.
But when Lord Hamlet enters reading, he:
Addresses him and asks him questions three.

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Age 13 *years.*

Write thirty lines of blank verse on one of the following: "Alcestis," "Miranda," "Hamlet."

HAMLET.

To die to be no more, was Hamlet's thought
As he did sit and brood, this thought grew strong.
No person would he try to make his friend
He needed none to help him in his life.
The cause of all his misery we know,
His mother who had been a loyal friend
Now took a tyrant for her lover's best
Before her husband's death had yet grown old.
The jealousy that caused his father's death,
Now hung around him like a great big stone
For him to fathom out, and make his best.
To punish them who deserved punishment.

[1] Lecture given to the P.N.E.U. Conference held at University College, Gower Street, London, on January 5th.

[2] The writer of the paper.—ED.