

CHILDREN UP TO SCHOOL AGE AND BEYOND

'Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life.'

By E. KITCHING

(Director, Parents' Union School).

PART I.

*'Education is of the Spirit ... and implies a continuous going forth of the mind.'*¹ [*'Educāre' = to bring up a child, physically or mentally, to nourish (Lexicon).]*

Happy is the child whose parents have thought upon this counsel before his arrival, for in these exacting days when so much falls upon the mother's shoulders there is little time for reading and not much for thought, and the mother must be furnished *cap-à-pied* with emergency remedies in thought and in deed to meet the constant and sudden raids that will be made upon her love, her knowledge, her forbearance, her sense of humour, and her patience. The reward is great for the mother who willingly gives herself up to the most important work in the world—the care and nurture of her children; and again happy is the child whose father takes a due share in this work.

It is a far cry from Tom or Mary, not yet one year old, to Tom and Mary at seventeen and eighteen, and yet never was there a time when it was more necessary for parents to get a far-reaching vision of education, above and beyond schooling, not only in its various aspects but as a whole. How far new theories of education are wise, how far the increase of scientific knowledge should alter or modify our practices, is not a question to be decided easily. Scientific thought comes and goes and, though

[p 17]

the teaching of Science is a message of God to this age, the 'results' are often a matter for further experiment before they can be applied. In the meantime parents who do not follow a carefully thought out method of education, find it difficult to fulfil the claims their children have and make upon them.

'Method implies two things,—a way to an end, and step-by-step progress in that way. Further, the following of a method implies an idea, a mental image, of the end or object to be arrived at. What do you propose that education shall effect in and for your child? Again, method is natural, easy, yielding, unobtrusive, simple as the ways of Nature herself, yet watchful, careful, all-pervading, all-compelling. Method, with the *end* of education in view, presses the most unlikely matters into service to bring about that end; but with no more tiresome mechanism than the sun employs when it makes the winds to blow and the waters to flow only by shining. The parent who *sees his way*—that is, the exact force of method—to educate his child, will make use of every circumstance of the child's life almost without intention on his own part.'²

'The educational error of our day is that we believe too much in mediators. Now, Nature is her own mediator, undertakes herself to find work for eyes, ears, taste, and touch; she will prick the brain with problems and the heart with feelings; and the part of the mother or teacher in the early years (indeed all through life) is to sow opportunities and then to keep in the background, ready with a guiding or restraining hand only when these are badly wanted.

Mothers shirk this work and put it, as they would say, into better hands than their own because they do not recognise that wise letting alone is the chief thing asked of them, seeing that every mother has in Nature an all-sufficient handmaid, who arranges for due work and due rest of mind, muscles and senses.’³

‘It is well he’ (a child) ‘should be let grow and helped to grow according to his nature; and so long as the parents do not step in to spoil him, much good and no very evident harm comes of letting him alone. But this philosophy of “let him be,” while it covers a part, does not cover the serious part of the parents’ calling; does not touch the strenuous incessant efforts upon lines of law which go to the producing of a human being at his best.’⁴

‘Weigh his estate and thine; accustom’d, he,
To all sweet courtly usage that obtains
Where dwells the King. How, with thy utmost pains,
Canst thou produce what shall full worthy be?

[p 18]

One “greatest in the kingdom” is with thee,
Who all-unhindered sees the Father’s face,
And thence replenished glows with constant grace:
Take fearful heed lest he despiséd be!

Order thy goings softly, as before
A Prince: nor let thee out unmannerly
In thy rude moods and irritable: more,
Beware lest round him wind of words rave free:

Refrain thee; see thy speech be sweet and rare;
Thy ways, considered, and thine aspect, fair.’
C. M. Mason.

In the words of Frederick Denison Maurice, ‘the family is the unit of the nation.’ Parents will together consider how to bring up Tom and Mary to be their best, physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually by providing for their needs in the great relationships of life, to Man, to Nature and to God.

The home is the right and the best place for children, a place where the parents can share the quiet growing time and give them their first delightful intimacies with things and books, a place where (when the difference between autocracy and authority is recognised) the spirit of disciplined freedom makes the general atmosphere natural. In these busy days it is not easy for parents to secure the sense of leisure with the serenity and faith which are necessary to wise government; but it is in the home that children may most easily be taught to face the discipline of life. Parents who know something beforehand of the child’s estate, his powers and his hindrances, will not be unduly uplifted when they see his wonderful sweetness and reasonableness, nor unduly alarmed when he gives way to temper, to deceit, to vindictiveness, to domineering ways, or when, after an illness, good habits fostered with much patience, seem

to have taken wings. Upon the parents' attitude to these tendencies, both good and bad, and to such as these, will depend the growth in grace in the years to come of Tom and of Mary.

Even before Tom and Mary are there to assert themselves, most parents know that much may be done in the way of preparation for them. But method, a way to an end, must always be borne in mind; a step-by-step progress, with a guiding principle to light the way. A system of observing certain rules to achieve certain results may succeed with a machine or at the gambling table, but even a machine may fail for weariness, and chance may wreck the rules evolved by the player. Method waits upon the growth of a living being, and upon principles which are adaptable to the circumstances of the moment: a principle is in touch with life and can pervade it.

[p 19]

For knowledge of the child's estate, parents are asked to turn to the pages of *Home Education*. 'Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven' is the one profound description we have of the child's estate; and in *Home Education* we are greatly helped in considering what we may do to educate children by knowing first what we are forbidden to do—'offend'—'despise'—'hinder.' Next the formation of habits in detail is considered as one of the assets we are allowed to give children. Then there are some chapters on early lessons (from six to nine); the final section deals with the Will, the Conscience, and the Divine Life in the child from his earliest years.

Charlotte Mason had great faith in parents and believed that their individuality was a great possession for their children; she therefore hesitated to put forward directions and practical suggestions which might interfere with the true relations of parent and child.

'But,' she says, 'our greatness as a nation depends upon how far parents take liberal and enlightened views of their high office. Mother love is not enough to secure for children that continual progress which is necessary if character is to be achieved.' So in *Parents and Children*⁵ some of the principles which underlie the office of parents are examined. The limitations and scope of authority are considered, also the provision of ideas upon which the children's minds will grow.

A child of nearly two will pull your hand with confidence in a strange place and say 'look! look!' as he explores the ins and outs of his new home with its outbuildings; and this is his attitude to all that he meets in the world around him, both as regards persons and things. And his parents should be ready to go with him and let him look and satisfy his natural curiosity in the natural questions that follow. It is not always an easy task, for children must not be 'hustled' with information. Wise parents know when and where to fortify their children with just as much knowledge as they are likely to need for the present, realising that knowledge and experience must come gradually.

A wide view of the whence and whither of education must be taken so that ideas may have time to grow and distinctive qualities opportunity to flourish; there must be time too for the training of the sensations and feelings; and for the considered correction of defects of character. Parents need time to ponder upon the teaching of morals, upon the work of faith and duty, and above all upon the things of the Spirit, for they stand as revealers of God to their children.

Even children untaught in religious matters will ask questions about God, and many children will express very candid opinions, moralise, criticise their elders, say 'Why shouldn't

[p 20]

l?'; they will feel interested in, and superior to, that 'naughty little boy'; and they will show extraordinary powers, for example, of sympathy, pity, goodwill, a sense of justice. But in all these matters they need the helping hand of their parents, both as regards the knowledge convenient for them and in definite training, lest the rough and rude winds of life catch the tiny sails hoisted and submerge the delicate craft with its little captain.

In the pamphlet 'Children are born Persons'⁶ come further considerations of the child's estate, and the various forms of tyranny which militate against the freedom that is due to children are discussed.

In *School Education*⁷ we read of 'Masterly Inactivity' and the necessary qualities it calls forth on the part of parents; like peace it is not absence of action but has constructive and abiding power. It waits upon the knowledge, the self-revealing knowledge of a child.

This and much other knowledge the waiting parents may ponder until they come to the happy if anxious time when they are face to face with their own child, when Baby's own point of view must be considered. The supply of nourishment, food and love, is not enough without thought upon the fact, for example, that Tommy, under one, is so entirely different from what Mary was at the same age; that Mary at twelve months was in some respects in advance and in others behind Tommy; that each child from the first is most like his father, or his mother, or one of his forbears, in this or that physical feature, and, later, in his ways. Here is the parents' opportunity to cultivate with love and patience the habits which both Tom and Mary need, and upon which they may achieve character. There are, too, traits of character which must be brought into practice, and tendencies (of which the parents are often only too conscious as their own failings) which must be starved out. Mary, who screams at two until she gets her own way, may become an unpleasantly managing woman; Tommy, who sulks and is silent, a morbid, self-pitying man; Tim, at three, always want to see the wheels go round and prefers some such occupation to his food for which he never seems hungry; while John, at two, is always hungry for his meals, likes making a noise, splashing in water, for example, when Tim would rather throw stones and watch what happens. 'He has such a strong will' is sometimes a description of what is really 'willessness'; when Tom cannot make himself do what he ought his will has not been trained to function.

[p 21]

But the small boy who from an early age can hammer a piece of wood, or help in the garden beside his father, and the small girl who can 'help' mother in the house, and both Tom and Mary who can look forward to an hour after tea of stories and games, are saved from many handicaps which come to children who are sometimes homeless in their homes.

Again, wise parents realise that they must be on the watch lest they should encroach upon the respect due to children by constant admonition, undue praise, unwanted suggestions as to how to do things which the children have already learned to do quite well; by making the most of every opportunity for moral suggestions on the example set, for instance, by other 'good' children; by suggestions that the child should appreciate or pity when his knowledge is not yet ready for it. Happily brought up children learn gradually from the parents' own attitudes of sympathy, love, kindness; but such lessons must be unconsciously learned; they are part of the natural and proper atmosphere in which a child should live.

'Change his thoughts,' we say, with regard to a baby who is 'being tiresome'; and there are always possibilities for distracting his attention. When an older child needs his thoughts

changed, he may, for example, be taken out of a self-pitying frame of mind by the thought of the needs of children, and, as his small world enlarges, he is taught of the great and good deeds of noble men and women. A boy (or girl) should be trained to change his own thoughts and regain his will power thereby. But long before this is possible, children will show signs of dispositions of mind which it may tax mother or father to the utmost to deal with,—signs of jealousy, resentment, domination, cruelty for which apparently there is no cause, but which the mother must watch and guard against and even nurse her child against, as she would nurse him through an attack of measles. Parents who have helped to form habits of mind or of body in their children have the comfort of knowing that such habits have the assistance of bodily, if invisible, nerve structure. So too parents who provide the right ideas for the mind have the assurance that they are putting their children in possession of that ‘expulsive power of a new affection’ which does such wonderful rescue work in time of temptation.

Every father and mother can tell of the amazing powers of young children in perceiving, apprehending and making use of knowledge.

Rosanna (aged eighteen months) was out in her ‘pram’ one September and was offered a bit of Dutch clover to smell. She did so and then with a beaming smile blew upon it, evidently remembering that in the previous March she had been shown how to blow a head of dandelion seeds.

[p 22]

Tommy (aged five) is very strict with the teller of stories, who is not allowed to omit or alter anything in the version of the story as first heard.

Dick (aged six) sometimes offers his own solution to a question. ‘How could God make the world in six days, Mummy?’ And ‘Mummy’ perplexed and wise, says she must think about it. Dick, later, ‘I know, a thousand years with God is as one day, and one day as a thousand years.’

John (aged eight) had been told that in this world it was not possible for everyone to have the same as everyone else, and after much pondering he said, ‘Yes, I see that justice is not always equality.’

So education does not start without much to go upon; the child is a person, a whole person, with all the powers latent that he will ever have. Therefore education must advance altogether if it advance at all. One-sided development will leave other sides maimed. ‘Wisdom is justified of *all* her children,’ and varied knowledge in many directions is as necessary for the growth of the mind as varied food for the body.

PART II

A QUIET GROWING TIME AND PLAYROOMS.

‘In this time of extraordinary pressure, educational and social, perhaps a mother’s first duty to her children is to secure for them a quiet growing time, a full six years of passive receptive life, the waking part of it for the most part out in the fresh air.’⁸

We constantly receive letters from mothers who would like their children aged between four and five to join the Parents’ Union School, and we need to remember that children deprived of a quiet growing time suffer later when ‘lessons’ should begin, showing signs of a lack of vitality or a want of concentration, ‘so unlike what R. used to be.’ These signs are an

indication that R. has been living at too great a speed. Again, we are told that B. at 4 1/2 is quite able to do as much as J. at six, that he is indeed quicker in some ways. There is no doubt about it; B. has 'lived up to' J. in everything. J. has not had anyone but his mother or nurse—a very different matter! But B. must still have his quiet growing time, especially as in any case a child works harder up to the age of six than he will at any other period of his life. He should still enjoy the nursery freedom; he should still have 'occupations' but not lessons.

A child should enter the P.U.S. at six ready for the serious work of 'lessons.' His early years should have prepared him as

[p 23]

regards the discipline of habit and the joy of life out of doors; he should also have learned that knowledge is desirable and he should understand something of what it means to say 'Our Father.'

Home discipline is attained in the formation of habits. There should be no so-called 'lessons' in the playroom. 'Occupations' is the right word, and for these no time-table should be set and there should be a sense of much freedom both in the manner and matter of 'What shall we do next?' Again, just as the best-loved toys are the simplest in construction because they give full scope to a child's imagination, so all material used should be of the simplest kind. 'Apparatus' should be avoided. A children's 'special hour' should be a time of happy occupation and should be arranged at a time when children cannot be out of doors. Stories, pictures, materials of all kinds are necessary because the provision must be no less liberal of its kind than that for an older child.

It is possible that parents and teachers may welcome a few suggestions as to suitable books and things for the playroom. Those offered in the *Playroom Leaflet*⁹ cover a wide field and may be varied in many ways. Classification according to age is little indicated, as so much depends upon the individual child. Cheaper books and materials may be had, but little children should have large, well illustrated books and make models with good material; and in the case of clay, they should make large models in drawing and picture.

Books are also suggested which give help in modern methods of dealing with the physical care of children,—clothes, food, ailments, accidents, preventive measures, as indicated in the list. From these books, too, may be secured wise advice upon the handicaps from which some children suffer, in speech and sight defects, clumsiness, over-sensitiveness, and other nervous handicaps, which are not always recognised at first for what they are.

When the idea of P.N.E.U. Playrooms was started some fifteen years ago the name was chosen of set purpose. Nursery schools and classes have been carried on for many years in poor neighbourhoods, but it was felt that in a Playroom attached to a P.N.E.U. school it was very important to omit the word 'school' or 'class,' and in this way to divest it entirely of any idea of school work, class work, time-tables, examinations, organised games and the many things that are useful and necessary in dealing with a number of children of school age. There should be no uniform, badges or 'colours.' These are part of the promotion when 'Tom' is old enough to go to school, and the dignity of it should not be forestalled! It is important to go back to what we did 'at home,' under the direction of a good

[p 24]

nannie, co-operating with the mother, or in a home where the mother undertakes the whole of the up-bringing of the children herself, with the father's help. Playrooms should make up to

children for what so many of them miss now,—that is, the give and take of community life in the family; for children in close daily contact do far more for each other than is possible for an only child to receive in the care of the most devoted parents. In considering, therefore, what is necessary for a playroom we must bear in mind the outfit, happiness and discipline, and the general provision made in a good nursery.

The children must have toys, but not too many. They must have games, for the most part invented by themselves with their own toys, or without. They must have things to do with the simplest materials, easily found in any home. They must have plenty of good stories, songs, nursery rhymes, pictures of all kinds. There must be a sense of freedom; secured by wise authority exercised by those in charge, so that the children may give and take what is *due* to each other. Children who have fallen into bad habits, who are self-centered and show want of thought and consideration for other children, must be trained to contribute their share to the happiness, goodwill, gaiety and thoughtfulness which go to make a happy Playroom. These qualities soon become a tradition where those in authority understand something of the quality of a child, his reasonableness, his special powers, his special temptations, his knowledge, his qualities and his defects.

A love of children is the chief qualification for those in charge of a Playroom; and the first condition is that every child must be treated as a person. There is the shy child who needs encouragement, and who may be allowed at first just to look on. One little boy I know often lay under a form when anything fresh happened until he had got used to his new surroundings; then he accepted the teachers's [sic] hand and joined in a game, and the ice was broken. There is the self-assertive child who is inclined to wish for an audience; but in his case the children will probably take him in hand themselves and show that if he wants to join in their games he must do as they do. There is the child to whom everything new brings a kind of panic, and who needs constant reassurance that what she is asked to do she can manage easily. There is the child who cannot eat vegetables, who dislikes milk pudding, who even finds it difficult to eat anything at all, but who very quickly learns to do as all the other children do provided that too much notice is not taken. About many others [sic] matters, too, the path of wisdom lies in not taking too much notice. Some children will do anything to attract attention. There is the vindictive child who has probably come from a home where she has been starved of the love due to her and who must be prevented from carrying out any kind of bullying

[p 25]

or terrorising. There is the nervous child with tricks who may be teased if a careful watch is not kept. There is the child with a lisp or stammer, of whom her mother says, 'Oh, she will grow out of it as she grows older'; but children do not grow out of these things unless the cause is traced and the right way found to overcome the handicap. But in every Playroom there are a number of healthy and normal children, upon whose help the teacher can rely in welcoming newcomers and making things easier for the children to whom life is difficult.

All these matters are of the first importance in a Playroom; for handicapped children should be freed from the domination of handicaps before they are too well established, or the children will suffer much on account of them later on. Ten children is a possible number for one teacher in normal times, provided the range of age is about 4½–5.

As to the actual conduct of a day in a Playroom, I have some notes sent to me by a lover of children who has had much experience in her own Playroom. All the suggested arrangements

should be kept as elastic as possible. The children are there from nine to twelve, and from nine to nine-thirty they are free to play with each other and do anything that takes their fancy. It should be play *with* each other, because this is the time when so much may be done to give children an opportunity of carrying out fair play. Someone in authority should be in the room, but she should never interfere unless the play becomes rough or destructive or too noisy, or some child is being unfairly treated. The children make ships and trains, etc., with the forms and chairs. They chase each other, have tugs-of-war, swing each other round, get used to each other in many ways, laughing and talking and singing. The condition is that when the bell rings at 9.25 the children know that playtime is nearly over, and immediately everything must be put straight for the morning's occupations.

These begin with a very simple hymn, which some of the children will sing, and the new ones will learn gradually. Then there is a short very simple prayer. Then comes a Bible story told reverently (much depends upon the attitude of the teacher), with a picture sometimes, and then sometimes a piece of poetry is learned, or a hymn. The children choose the verses which they would like to learn. Sometimes a fable is acted. It must always be remembered that some of the children are four and some five, so that in the next period, while those of four have playthings from the cupboard, those of five may be picking out letters, or making figures or letters on the board, or using their coloured counters. During the next period the children may take journeys on a magic carpet (a large picture is used), or have another story told, again with a large picture, about animals, or a history story, again with a picture.

[p 26]

At 10.30 comes half an hour for lunch and more play. Some children will bring lunch with them, some will have biscuits at the parents' request, but most of the children will be glad of a little mug of water. The little coloured cups sold at Woolworth's are very useful for this, as they are very various in colour and each child can have her own. The play of course should be out doors when possible.

Then should follow two periods of fifteen minutes each of various occupations. There may be a percussion band for which the children sit on the floor and beat time with their instruments to the piano accompaniment, changing the instruments so that each gets a turn. Part of the time they march or run to music. Sometimes one child beats time for the rest of the band. This probably will include all the children, as will making something in clay, or learning a few words of French with a picture or in a game, or listening to another tale, again with a picture; or, two or three children who find it very difficult to sing a correct note will have a little help in ear training, while the others are writing or making piles of numbers with counters. Then comes a period of singing games, or physical exercises,, [sic] or painting, or handwork, or sand trays. All these occupations should be varied each day. A quarter of an hour is enough for most of them, but the percussion band, singing games, painting or handwork should be allowed a longer period. But the teacher must be on her guard. Some children will show signs of fatigue, and she must know when it would be wise to change the occupation or when a little encouragement is the wiser course.

Children should be allowed to talk and ask questions; no narration should be expected. Children will volunteer their own small experience about the matters that are brought up, will bring things from home, will repeat what they have heard Daddy or Mummy say about the events of the day and indeed provide a large part of the carrying on. But care is necessary.

Children must be trained not to interrupt each other or the teacher, to talk quietly, to ask questions one at a time. Again, when they are sitting at any special occupation, many children have to *learn* to sit still and to work quietly. Here the tradition of the playroom will help a great deal, because children like to do as other children do. If the weather is good, there should be a running game out of doors in addition to the usual half-hour. In summer-time much of all this can be done out of door, games, jumping, ball games and even stories when the children sit on rugs or little chairs while listening.

There is also much to be done in the cloak-room in the way of training the children in dressing themselves, keeping their shoes in the right pigeon-hole, and being brisk both here and in the Playroom in putting things away in orderly fashion.

[p 27]

It must be borne in mind that the children need a serene atmosphere, without fuss or worry. They will supply all the spirit and noise necessary, perhaps sometimes too much of the latter! But the teacher must be prepared to learn from the children and to act quickly but never hastily. It is important that she should learn to see the children's point of view and also to realise that children need the help and support of wise authority. No one should undertake the charge of a P.N.E.U. Playroom who has not made a careful study of 'Home Education' and 'Parents and Children,' and the chapter on 'Masterly Inactivity' in *School Education*, testing herself by the self-study questions at the end of each volume. These questions take up the essential points in the method set forth. She should also secure the advice of a teacher who has learned to understand children; so that she may be able to help, for instance, the child with a vivid imagination, who will romance about what she has seen or heard, because her mind has not been given sufficient material upon which her imagination can work; with the child who suffers and won't tell; with the child who 'tells tales'; with the child who 'stays put,' whether physically or mentally. Such matters are sure to come up. But the joy of working with and learning from the children, and the love and trust which any child shows to those who understand or try to understand her, and the increase in the nervous stability of highly-strung children, will repay a hundredfold the thought and care which the Playroom teacher can give to any children committed to her charge.

(To be continued.)

¹ *An Essay towards a Philosophy of Education*, by C. M. Mason. (Dent, 7/6.)

² *Home Education*, by C. M. Mason (P.N.E.U. Office, 7/6), p. 8.

³ *Home Education*, p. 192.

⁴ *Home Education*, p. 5.

⁵ *Parents and Children*. (P.N.E.U. Office, 3/6.)

⁶ (P.N.E.U. Office, 6d.)

⁷ *School Education*. (P.N.E.U. Office, 5/-.) Chapter III.

⁸ *Home Education*, p. 43.

⁹ Free to members of the P.N.E.U.