

## IN PRAISE OF THE P.N.E.U.<sup>1</sup>

BY SIR CLEMENT JONES, C.B.

It was in 1902—44 years ago—that my mother went to live at Low Nook, Ambleside. There she was not only a friend but the next door neighbour of Miss Charlotte Mason. The gardens of Scale How and Low Nook were only separated by an iron railing and during the summer holidays when Scale How was empty, Miss Mason would very kindly allow us to send an occasional overflow of our visitors to sleep at Scale How. Thus, you see, through my mother, I inherited a link with the College at Ambleside. That was the first part of my connection with the P.N.E.U.

Part two begins about 25 years ago, after the war of 1914-18. My wife and I were living in London; we wanted a school for our two elder children. We chose Miss Faunce's, and I should like to say, in passing, how much my whole family owe to Miss Faunce and Miss Lambert for their never-failing care and affection and good teaching. My daughter has often told me that the happiest part of her school life was spent in this building. Unfortunately, after a few years, we left London in order to live in a part of the country where there was no Miss Faunce's, and so my daughter, to her lifelong regret, had to go elsewhere.

It was during that time that I first came to know Mrs. Franklin whose work for the P.N.E.U. not only in London and Ambleside, but throughout England and indeed throughout the world, has been beyond praise. Mrs. Franklin and I have been colleagues now for many years on the Governing Body of Overstone and I am proud to be a friend and colleague of hers in the Executive Committee.

As long as we lived in London in the 1920's, I was daily acquainted with the outside of this building, for I used to bring my children here every morning after breakfast. Very seldom did I see the inside of the

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building because my children were so eager to get there that they would rush on ahead of me and disappear within. So ended Part Two.

Part Three began last year when my daughter, who is now living on the South Coast, decided to send her boy to Miss Harris's school at Rustington where he now is.

So there you have my P.N.E.U. history in three parts, or three generations. First, my mother at Ambleside; second, my wife and myself in London with our children coming here; third, my daughter and her boy at Rustington.

During the 44 years since 1902, Ambleside has seen many changes. When I first went there, the only way to go from Windermere Station was by coach and four, unless you hired a fly and went in solitary discomfort. Rigg's Royal Mail Coaches from Windermere were much the smartest, with their drivers in scarlet coats and grey top-hats and splendid teams of horses. Later on, about 1906, when I was living in America and came home for my holidays, I heard people in Ambleside talking about the 'Yellow Peril' starting at ten o'clock. What was this? ... It was the new motor bus from Windermere Station. 'Yellow' because that was the colour; 'Peril' because on more than one occasion it had charged into the hedge opposite Low Wood Hotel.

And so the changes have gone on since 1902 from horse to motor car; from car to airplanes. And there have been wars and rumours of wars, and peace and rumours of a Peace Conference in Paris. One question that I should like you to consider is how is the P.N.E.U.

system of Education standing up to the completely changed world in which we now live? But first perhaps we ought to define what are the changes in England and English life?

It is a platitude, but it is the truth to say that in the last 40 years there has been a complete revolution in this country. Owing to the fact that we are, in the main, a law-abiding common-sense people, this has been a bloodless revolution. Vast changes are taking place everywhere—social, religious, economic, financial. A great part of the land has changed hands, a great deal of our wealth has been redistributed. It is to this side of the problem, the economic side, that I want particularly to draw your attention.

Forty years ago a great deal of the Ambleside trained teaching was given to the children of the relatively rich. In those days one set of people ate their meals, and another set of people washed up. One lot of people wore clothes, and quite a different lot of people were called in to mend and darn. And so it was with food. One set of people had strawberries and cream with their tea, while others had shrimps.

A picture of this difference is given in a poem by that master of light verse, C. S. Calverley, in which he tells us how, as a small child, he was sent to stay in lodgings at the sea-side and was allowed to play and actually have his meals with the landlady's little daughter.

'Hand in hand,' writes Calverley, 'we tramped the golden seaweed  
Soon as o'er the grey cliff peeped the dawn,  
Side by side, when came the hour for tea, we'd  
Crunch the hairy shrimp and mottled prawn.'

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Then the poet muses and continues:

"Has she married some gigantic shrimper?  
Has she mites that whine and whimper?  
"Yes," he answers, "she has at least a dozen wee things,"  
Yes, I see her darning corduroys,  
Washing cups and setting out the tea things  
For a howling horde of hungry boys.'

To-day are we not all in the same boat with our rations? Aren't we all used to washing up and darning, and wouldn't we be only too thankful if, after waiting in the fish queue, we could 'crunch the hairy shrimp'? Gone are the days when, if I may put it in alliteration, the plebeians had the prawns and the patricians the peaches.

The question before us then is how far ought we to change our ways of education to meet the stern competitive ways and changes in other places.

A fortnight ago I was at Cambridge dining in Hall at the high table of my old college. At first sight nothing *seemed* to have changed. The same deep booming of the gong that brought us all to silence; the same long Latin grace ending with 'per Christum Dominum Nostrum'; then the old familiar clatter of knives and forks, and soon the dinner was 'in full cry.' It all seemed the same as ever. My neighbour, a fellow of the college, turned to me and said 'Cambridge is completely changed by the war; the undergraduates; the food; the clothes; the shortage of

college servants; shortage of bedmakers and helps...' Then he said: 'I had a letter last week from old so and so' (mentioning another don who has retired and has been living in America). This man, writing from Boston, Massachusetts, put at the end of his letter to England. 'P.S. Please send me a dozen soft shirts.'

Could the changed conditions between 1939 and 1946 be illustrated more clearly than by such a request for shirts?

By change, I think most people mean change for the worse. 'Tempora mutantur' sighs the pessimist. 'Change and decay in all around I see' says the hymn. The point is perhaps that life is one long discard in which we should retain our good cards and give up others in exchange for new ones. Apply that same principle to education.

On Friday last the King and Queen paid a visit to Winchester College, and in his speech the King said:

'I feel that, in a changing world, old foundations, such as this, bear witness to the unchangeable principles which guide British life and are the source of British influence.'

In the same way, I think, in the P.N.E.U. we should, as time goes on, guard carefully the principles of Miss Mason, making only such changes as will benefit the future of the children.

For instance, yesterday morning (May 20th) the Ministry of Education announced the details of a scheme to give increased financial help to students going to Universities. Students who win scholarships awarded by Universities will be eligible to receive such assistance as may enable them to pursue their studies freed from financial anxieties. The extra help will provide for the payment of approved fees and a

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maintenance allowance sufficient to raise the students' total resources to an approved standard figure.

Another announcement dealt with the recommendations of the Norwood Committee for the reform of the Higher School and School Certificate examinations.

In all these problems I feel that in holding firm to the teaching of Miss Mason we must at the same time see that the children are not in any way denied access to the awards and advantages now being arranged.

In quite another field of change, I have seen it suggested by Dame Meriel Talbot that we should make rather more use of the honoured name of Charlotte Mason and rather less use of our cumbrous initials P.N.E.U.

I do not propose to enter into the question of any changes whatever, because I do not think that I am qualified to do so, but I do ask that those of you who *have* far more experience in these matters than I have should from time to time examine the situation.

Now, in looking ahead there is one matter which I feel does need all our support and will, as time goes on, need more still, and that is the importance of keeping the P.N.E.U. constantly before the public as a going and growing concern. We have, as you know, an excellent Propaganda Sub-Committee presided over by Lady Reid. They are carrying out a splendid piece of work in organizing Talks, Meetings, Publications and Broadcasts, and we owe them a great debt of thanks for their devoted and unflagging zeal in spreading the cause of the P.N.E.U.

Among what are often called 'Miss Mason's methods' I find in talking to my friends that as a rule a great deal of stress is laid on Narration and Nature Study, with relatively less emphasis on the Individuality of the Child, and the need for Religion. I should therefore like to dwell for a moment on these two latter points.

By this I do not mean in the slightest degree to belittle the value of Narration or Nature Study. Far from it. I have always regretted that those two subjects played so small a part in the programme of my own education. That, however, was probably due to the age in which I was brought up. At that time children were taught to be seen and not heard. 'That will do' said our elders and betters when we began excitedly to describe what we had seen or heard. In later life, and in public life particularly, many people must have been sorry that they were not trained in Narration during their early years.

And it is equally true of Nature Study: many of the older generation must often and bitterly regret not having been taught more about birds and flowers and trees; as we grow older we feel the loss of such instruction more and more, and try to teach ourselves by observation and the numerous excellent books that are now available. In April I was staying with my eldest brother, who has recently retired after leading a most active life for many years. He told me that at long last he had the spare time to enjoy—and how much he did enjoy—looking at the simple, beautiful things of outdoor life—the different trees and birds. He added that he only wished he knew more about them. After all it is not only for the immediate future that we need

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education. It is also important to form tastes and acquire knowledge which may be a solace to us in the evening of our lives.

I mention these subjects because I do not want you to think that I have overlooked them in coming, as I now do, to the other two points which I mentioned, namely the Personality of the Child, and Religion.

First, then, as to the need to protect the child from being crammed and moulded into a conventional pattern, this is so vital a part of Miss Mason's philosophy—'the child, the person'—that perhaps it might be taken for granted, were it not that one still sees, in so many schools, children being poured into the moulds.

I know that my own Victorian school days must seem to many of you to have taken place in the dark ages, but my recollections of some of the masters who taught me are very vivid. There was one master of the type that would on paper be called a good 'all round' man, that is to say, public school and university; athlete and scholar; a clergyman; a clear thinker, with a concise style of writing. Yet, the man was a bully; vain; sarcastic; he seemed to enjoy crushing the boys with his caustic wit. As a result, numbers of boys were completely crushed. Now I mention that case just to have the pleasure of adding: 'Such a thing simply could not have happened either in this house or at any P.N.E.U. school.'

I come finally to the question of religion. If I have read Miss Mason aright, one of the first articles in her belief was the need for a religious basis in education. That for me would be the deciding factor in choosing a school for children. How often in recent years have we seen a general loosening of religion and of discipline in schools and universities; where formerly attendance at Chapel was compulsory, now it is optional. Pews that were formerly filled have now not only been emptied, but in one College Chapel that I know they have been removed

altogether. You may say that the mere handful of worshippers to-day are really in earnest whereas the larger numbers in former days were not, but I do not believe that, on balance, the change has been for the good. The broken marriages and broken homes of to-day bear witness in many cases to a previous complete abandonment of religion.

Therefore when it comes to the teaching of young children for whom we are responsible, let us put in the forefront of education the Love of God.

We are not likely to deceive the children in these matters of right and wrong. I know that in the United States, for instance, children are often spoke of as though they were very gullible—‘easy fruit’ is an expression I have heard used, or ‘That’s as easy as stealing candy from children.’ Of course, you can forcibly take sweets from children, but when it comes to true or untrue; just or unjust; black or white; the child can be trusted to know the difference.

And so I will close this address with a text—unlike a preacher who begins with one. My text, which I have kept to the end, contains much of the philosophy and teaching of Miss Mason. ‘Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, think on these things. Those things do; and the God of Peace shall be with you.’

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<sup>1</sup> An address given on May 21st, 1946, to the London P.N.E.U. Branch at 3 Queen’s Gardens, W.I.