

ON FIRST LOOKING INTO MISS MASON'S BOOKS: OCTOBER 1941.

By E. F. BOZMAN.

I owe my introduction to the works of Miss Mason to a practical cause; I began to read her in order to be able to offer an opinion from the publishing point of view on a project for a 'Life.' The reading thus undertaken, a matter of duty at first, soon became a labour of love.

My first impression was of a number of striking remarks on educational and philosophical problems, simple in statement and thought, seemingly obvious at first glance. Then as I read more the remarks began to fit together to form a clear and surprisingly modern conspectus of the educational field. I soon began to realise that the apparently simple and disarming propositions were endowed with that hidden depth that belongs to work of genius.

Reading further, I tried to discover the distinctive qualities of this writer, who has so powerfully affected educational theory and practice and has won the support of so many leaders of thought, not only in her own generation but in ours also. I should say that underlying all her work is her wonderful intuitive understanding of children, especially of very young ones;

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and her teaching and writing are effective and durable because she has founded her private structure of the human mind, which is both the raw material and the finished product of education, on the rock of a wide reading of the great philosophers. On this rock she has built steadily and naturally with the materials of her own experience as a teacher of children.

Like Jean Jacques Rousseau she believed in the beneficent processes of nature, and based her method on natural law. From this basic assumption it follows that parents must play a vital rôle in education. Unlike so many of her predecessors she did not attempt to lay down a hard and fast system. Her methods are all flexible and suggestive, leaving scope for the personal child to develop according to his bent. Her chief concern was to free the individual, then to discern a way of progress, to show him a light ahead.

This she certainly succeeded in doing, as time has now shown. Her view of mind-processes and the wholeness of personality has not been superseded by modern psychological discoveries, and her recognition of the importance of leaving children alone, free to develop their powers, must have been years ahead of her time. Indeed her synthesis offers a much better balance of power between the claims of body, mind and soul than most modern educational theories. Her way of progress has taken practical shape in the widening activities of the P.N.E.U.. And the light ahead, which for her was the Christian faith, burns undiminished for all to see, brighter than ever by contrast with the present enveloping darkness.