

THE PARENTS' UNION SCHOOL, AMBLESIDE.

OCCUPATIONS FOR CHILDREN UNDER SCHOOLROOM AGE.¹

"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. . . ."

"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. . . ."

"But what of only children and the child too old to play with her baby brother? Surely the Kindergarten is a great boon for these? Perhaps so; but a cottage-child as a companion, or a lively young nursemaid, might be better. A child will have taught himself to paint, paste, cut paper, knit, weave, hammer and saw, make lovely things in clay and sand, build castles with his bricks; possibly, too, will have taught himself to read, write and do sums, besides acquiring no end of knowledge and notions about the world he lives in by the time he is six or seven. What I contend for is that he shall do these things because he chooses (provided that the standard of perfection in his small works be kept before him)." (*Home Education*, by Miss C. M. Mason, pp. 43, 192, 193.)

[p 827]

We receive, almost daily, letters from mothers who would like their children to join the P.U.S. between four and five, and we need to remind ourselves 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"; but these signs are an indication that R— has been living at too great a speed. Again, we are told that B— at 4½ is quite able to do as much as J— of 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 he 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 have "occupations" but not lessons.

Miss Mason has sketched briefly in the prospectus of the P.U.S. what lines pre-school training and occupation should follow, but the paragraphs from *Home Education* quoted indicate some of the principles which should guide parents in this important matter. It is hoped that mothers (and fathers too, for in these post-war days many fathers are teaching their own children) will study this book and find help and inspiration in their all-important work. A child should enter the P.U.S. at six (possibly at 5½) ready for the serious work of "lessons." His early years should have prepared him as regards the discipline of habit and the joys 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."

It should be remembered that nursery discipline comes chiefly in the formation of habits. There should be no so-called "lessons" in the nursery. "Occupations" is the word Miss Mason used, 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" (or half-hour, as the case may be) should be a time of happy occupation and should be arranged at a time when the children cannot be out of doors. Stories, pictures, materials of all kinds are necessary because

[p 828]

the provision must be no less liberal of its kind than that for an older child.

The home nursery is the right and the best place for children—a place where the parents can share the quiet growing time with their children and give them their first delightful intimacies with books and things.

It is possible that some parents may welcome a few suggestions as to suitable "books and things," though in these days the supply is usually abundant and easily obtained. The suggestions cover a wide field and may be varied in many ways over a period of two or three years. Cheaper books and materials can 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.

All books, etc., may be obtained by members of the P.N.E.U. from the P.N.E.U. Office, 26, Victoria Street, S.W.1. Materials can be had as indicated from The Dryad Works, Leicester, and from Messrs. Cox & Co., 99, New Oxford Street, W.C.

All correspondence, or questions, regarding the suggestions should be sent to the Director, Parents' Union School, Ambleside, who will be glad to hear of other books, songs, games, etc., which little children enjoy.

PRINCIPLES AND METHOD.

Books by Miss C. M. Mason.

(a) *Children are born Persons* (1/-).

(b) *Home Education* (5/6) (Parts II., III., V. and VI.).

N.B.—Discretion must be used as to what applies to children under five and what is intended for those over five.

(c) *Some Studies in the Formation of Character* (6/-) (Part I.).

(d) *Parents and Children* (5/-).

Also, *Miss Mason's Principles in Character Training* (a mother's experience of P.N.E.U. principles), by Mrs. Evan Campbell (3d.). *Thought-Turning as a Factor in the Training of Character and A Talk to Nurses*, and, *Why Small Things Matter*, by Helen Webb, M.B. (6d. each).

STORIES TO BE READ OR TOLD.

(a) *A Child's Life of Christ*, told by Mrs. Percy Dearmer (Methuen, 4/6), or, *The Life of Jesus of Nazareth* in the Gospel words, with

[p 829]

ninety illustrations, by W. Hole (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 15/-).

Bible Stories: Old Testament, by R. G. Moulton (Macmillan, 3/6).

(b) *Old Stories from British History*, by Yorke Powell (Longmans, 1/8).

(c) *A Wonder Book of Beasts*, edited by F. J. Harvey Darton (Wells Gardner, Darton, 7/6).

(d) *The Fairy Book* (Old English fairy tales), told by the author of "John Halifax, Gentleman" (Macmillan, 7/6)

(e) *The Golden Rod Fairy Book* (fairy tales of other nations), told by E. Singleton (Bodley Head, 6/-).

(f) *The Light Princess and other Fairy Stories*, by George Macdonald (Blackie, 2/-).

(g) *The Arabian Nights*, illustrated by E. Dulac (Hodder and Stoughton, 10/6).

(h) *Old Deccan Days: Hindoo Fairy Legends*, by Mary Frere (Murray, 7/6).

(i) *Forty Good-Night Tales*, by Rose Fyleman (Methuen, 3/6).

(j) *The Magic Fishbone*, by Charles Dickens (Warne, 4/-).

(k) *Winnie-the-Pooh*, by A. A. Milne (Methuen, 7/6).

PICTURES TO TELL STORIES ABOUT.

(a) *Bible Pictures*, by Harold Copping: Old and New Testaments (R.T.S. 160 pictures, 1d. each).

(b) *A Nursery History of England*, by E. O'Neill (Nelson, 10/6).

(c) *A Nursery Geography*, by G. S. Dickson (Nelson, 6/-).

A Picture Geography for Little People, Asia, by "Bryher" (Cape, 3/6).

(d) *Beasts of Many Lands, Beasts that help Man, Homely Friends*, painted by Edwin Noble (Wells Gardner, Darton, 4/- each set).

The Wonder Book of Animals (Ward Lock, 6/-).

(e) *Star Stories*, by M. Kinney (Blackwell, 2/6).

VERSES TO HEAR AND TO LEARN. FUN AND NONSENSE.

(a) The hymns for young children from *The Church and School Hymnal* (S.P.C.K., Words only, 1/6; Music edition, 3/6).

(b) *The "Original Poems" and Others*, by Ann and Jane Taylor, edited by E. V. Lucas (Wells Gardner, Darton, 7/6).

[p 830]

(c) Edward Lear's *Book of Nonsense* (7/6), or, *Nonsense Songs and Stories* (6/-), (Warne & Co.).

(d) *Mother Goose's Nursery Rhymes and Songs* (Dent, 2/-).

PICTURES TO PAINT.

(a) Ralph Caldecott's *Painting Books* (Four Series).

(b) Kate Greenaway's *Painting Book*.

(All Warne, 1/6 each.)

SONGS TO SING.

The Baby's Opera, The Baby's Bouquet: Old Rhymes with original tunes, arranged and decorated by Walter Crane (Warne, 4/- each).

LETTERS AND WORDS TO PLAY WITH.

The Children's Letter Box (2/6), *The Children's Reading Box* (3/6), prepared by E. R. Tetley (Jackson, 3/6).

THINGS TO COUNT.

Beans, pebbles, dominoes.

GAMES TO PLAY.

(a) *Old English Singing Games* with old melodies (Black, 1/-).

(b) *Three Hundred Games and Pastimes*, by E. V. Lucas (Chatto & Windus, 7/6).

THINGS TO CUT OUT OR TO MAKE, materials, etc.

(1) *Cut-Outs* (Pictures of other lands) Portfolios 1 and 2 (Evans, 5/- each).

(2) *Pictures and How to Make Them* (animals and birds), from S. Massey, 116, Fore Street, E.C.2, (3/6).

(3) Dryad Materials: Bead Box (5/-).

(4) „ Coloured Paper Outfit (5/6).

(5) „ Mosaic Outfit (5/-).

(6) „ Potta Clay (1/6 a lb.).

(7) „ Crayons (4d. a dozen).

(8) Milled Blackboards (P.N.E.U. Office, 1/3).

(9) Tray of sand for nursery; cartload of sand in garden.

(10) Coarse pins and knitting cotton (Cox & Co.).

(11) Paint box and brush (P.N.E.U. Office, 2/6).

(12) Blunt scissors, large needles, coloured cotton, wool, coarse double-thread canvas, etc. (Cox & Co.).

(13) Boxes of bricks (i) Stone Bricks, (ii) Plain Wood Bricks (from 2/6 a box, Gamages', High Holborn, London, E.C.1).

¹ Issued for the use of P.N.E.U. members only.