

## EDUCATION AND LIFE.<sup>1</sup>

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THIS paper is an attempt to touch briefly merely one aspect of the vast subject, Education and Life, and to consider Miss Mason's ideas on education—the means by which we live,—not ignoring, but including and supplementing education—the means by which we earn a livelihood.

We live in the midst of a practical and competitive age and there are few who can afford to educate their children without bearing in mind the question "What will all this lead to?"

Most parents nowadays *have* to fit their children to earn their own livelihoods, and the pity is that though they recognize education to be the best means to their end they allow the thought of the hoped-for salary to be their ideal.

Now because we are members of the Parents' National Educational Union, it does not follow that we are going to be different from other people. We can't pretend that these salaries have no interest for us—they *have* of necessity for we are intensely practical as well as idealistic, but in educating our children we must bear in mind the ideal which Miss Mason put before us—that of producing human beings at their best mentally, morally, physically and spiritually—and in seeking to accomplish this we shall, incidentally (as it were), equip them to take their place in the world. We should remember that, as Millar rather aptly puts it: "We are not here to make a *living*, but a *life*—to grow to do God's will—to leave at least one spot of the world a little brighter and better."

If we aim then at cultivating all the latent possibilities in our children we are, in a word, teaching them *to live*—and fulness of life depends on vital relationships with the world around and on necessary growth or expansion in response to these relationships. Therefore we need a wide curriculum!

It is often argued that in trying to introduce a wide range

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of subjects we minimise the chance our children would otherwise have of doing well in examinations—"For how," people ask, "can you expect children to take the Cambridge School Certificate and Matriculation Examinations when you turn them into Jacks-of-all-trades instead of allowing them to specialize? Don't they turn into masters of nothing?"

Facts prove the contrary to be the case. Miss Goode, of Burgess Hill, sends in girls every December and July for the Cambridge School Certificate Examination. They work the Form V. programme. Other schools are doing the same. There is no cramming, but extra work in weak subjects when necessary. The girls take a wide selection of subjects and continue their general reading. Also, in home schoolrooms the examination has been taken successfully by four or five girls working on the programmes, and public [sic] elementary school children have taken their Preliminary Teachers' Certificate when working on the Form IV. programme.

These details will be familiar to all who have studied the annual reports of the P.N.E.U. for 1924 and 1925, and further desired information may be obtained at any time from Ambleside. It is understood of course that this examination work is as nothing to the things we of the P.N.E.U. really aim at, but I mention these facts to show that our work towards a higher end *does* cover these necessary evils—and that we are not idealists without practical and

common sense.

The education which will teach our children to live will give them points of contact with all sides of life, and this is necessary to keep the balance. No one school of thought in any one age has ever attained to the whole truth. Each succeeding age builds consciously or unconsciously on what has gone before, trying to retain all that is good and yet to see a little further ahead and leave a firmer foundation for those who are yet to come. Plato in his day recognized the need for balance and tried to ensure it by outlining a scheme of study in which music and gymnastics were to hold equal sway. In the fifteenth century, Vittorino da Feltre, sympathising with this same idea, prepared his pupils to fulfil their duties as citizens by training their minds, bodies and spirits in one relation; and Montaigne during the next century aimed at educating the *whole* man, not one or other of the parts.

We believe that Miss Mason has seen further than these—that she has built on all that was good before her time, and

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that in proclaiming to us that “Education is a Life,” she has given us one of the greatest educational principles on which to work, one, which if properly carried out will expand and grow to meet every contingency. “Education is a Life”—needing not only physical sustenance, but also the intellectual and moral sustenance which ideas supply—and it is one that can be entered upon by *any* child who is born into the world with the possibilities which we believe to be illimitable in so far as we do not know to what extent one idea may breed others.

In these days when games and physical exercises are so popular there is little need to plead for recognition of their valuable contribution to an adequate method of education—but we *do* need to emphasize the necessity of offering to our children *mind food* in the shape of such ideas as they may assimilate and digest; and this may be done by giving them a generous curriculum, taking care only that the knowledge offered to them is *vital*—that is, that facts are not presented without their informing ideas.

Plato defined an idea as an entity or live thing of the mind, and it is a fascinating occupation to trace the growth of an idea. We all know what it is like to have a thought “strike” us as we say. We think of something of which we have never before thought—and then it grows upon us and expands until it seems to survive indefinitely.

Apparently no one has power to beget an idea by himself; it appears to be the progeny of two minds. Either it is suggested to us by someone—it is painted in a picture, written in a book, carved into a chair or only spoken to someone who speaks it again—and who can foretell its end?

It rests with us to present the awakening idea to our children, and then to form the habit of thought and of life which will ensure the carrying out of the ideas received.

If we may suppose that as an idea comes of the contact of two minds, the idea of another is no more than a *notion* to us until it has undergone a process of generation within us, and for that reason different ideas appeal to different minds, because by inheritance, certain persons have it in them to attract certain ideas. We will therefore allow the necessity of including in our wide curriculum such subjects as Religion, History, Languages, Mathematics, Science, Art, Physical Exercises and Manual Crafts, believing that these, rightly proportioned, will supply the necessary food for mind and body.

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In our method of education we depend largely on really good books which we allow the children to study for themselves trusting that they will thus come into direct contact with the minds of great men, and from them obtain the captain ideas which they most need which will have the power to fashion their lives. If from no other than a literary point of view, we could not afford to omit the study of the Bible from our Parents' Union School programmes, for there we find some of the most stirring tales of adventure, drama and tragedy. But above all we need it for its revelation from beginning to end of the God who is the inspiration of all our lives, for its store of spiritual truth and moral impression, and for its light on our every path.

History is the means of establishing relations with the past as well as with the present, and historical knowledge may be said to be knowledge of *many* subjects for it gives invaluable teaching on the lives, manners and customs of long ago—indirect moral teaching which can often be brought to bear on our modern problems—and its inspiration to noble living and deeds of daring have thrilled children the world over in every age.

A knowledge of languages should open up the way to contact with the people of other nations, a better understanding of their ways of living and thought, and, through this understanding, should do much to establish truer citizenship and world peace.

The subject of Mathematics is one which many people shirk and one which is frequently criticised as taught in the P.U.S.

Roger Ascham, writing in the sixteenth century says, "Mathematics serve as a stimulant to dull wits, and slow people, *properly taught*, turn out best." This is very true.

The moral and mental value of mathematics cannot be over estimated. It is much more than a discipline and provides food for the mind and the opportunity for creative efforts—and activity means *life*. The child who shirks a subject like mathematics [sic] is lacking in moral strength, and we must be careful to refrain from murmuring as we frequently do, "I can't expect the poor little thing to do mathematics. I never could myself." If we feel like that we must rather hide it and give the "poor little thing" a chance to get his balance right. *All* can *approach* mathematics. *Success* isn't necessary, but *effort* is, and to shirk it stamps moral failure.

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Plato, too, was of the opinion that the subject should be taught in childhood, and he recognized its appeal to intuition and imagination, and its link between the physical and spiritual world as it "draws the soul upwards, and compels it to reason about abstract numbers, steadily declining the discussion when any numbers are proposed which have bodies that can be seen and touched."

In teaching our children Science—or Nature Study as we prefer to call it—we place great faith in the ideas which may be obtained by recognition, for we believe that the power to recognize birds, trees, flowers, fruits, stars and all natural phenomena implies a certain amount of classification and an excellent groundwork for more advanced and technical scientific instruction. Mother Nature is a wonderful teacher and with her our children will be quite safe, but we must remember that in order to keep a reasonable standard of comparison and a principle of veneration it is necessary to sustain our scientific education largely on books as well as on things.

As regards the Art portion of our programme, we may never know the ideas which the beautiful music and pictures set to be studied have inspired. But we are quite sure that by

giving our children the opportunity of becoming acquainted with true Art from their earliest days we are opening to them a store house of treasure which they will never exhaust. And we all know the perfectly wonderful drawings which are the outcome of our drawing lessons—minus all mechanical aids these pictures are produced—some of them laughable in the extreme and devoid of art instruction, but very often highly imaginative.

Of Physical Exercises there is little need to speak. With many other educationists of the day we recognize their great importance *if* they are kept in proportion to the rest of the programme;—and it is the same with Manual Training.

Our children delight in handicrafts, and the liberal selection set for the term's work offers scope to their powers in all directions, one child obtaining inspiration from one branch, another from something different, but each and every one, thanks to the wide selection, finding his own particular bent.

In conclusion, may I quote a paragraph from one of the Home Education Series, which I think sums up what I have been trying to say. Miss Mason writes:—  
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“I think we should have a great educational revolution once we ceased to regard ourselves as assortments of so-called faculties and realized ourselves as persons whose great business it is to get in touch with other persons of all sorts and conditions, of all countries and climes, of all times, past and present. . . . We should tend to become responsive and wise, humble and reverent, recognizing the duties and the joys of the *full* human life. We cannot, of course, overtake such a programme of work, but we can keep it in view; and I suppose every life is moulded upon an ideal. We talk of lost ideals, but perhaps they are not lost [sic] only changed; when our ideal for ourselves and our children becomes limited to prosperity and comfort, we get these very likely, for ourselves and for them, but we get no more.”

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<sup>1</sup> An address given to the Dublin Branch of the P.N.E.U.