

NOTES AND QUERIES.

I.

THE P.N.E.U. AND PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS.¹

DEAR EDITOR,—I have been asked to answer the criticism that the Parents' National Educational Union (*a*) offers help to parents for young children only, and (*b*) disapproves of public examinations. I should be grateful if you would give me opportunity in your columns for a brief statement of the real scope of the Parents' Union School work.

Before Miss Charlotte M. Mason founded the P.N.E.U. in 1888, and lectured on her educational philosophy up and down the country, she had had experience as a teacher in both elementary and secondary schools, and as a lecturer in a training college. In the course of her experience she had become impressed with the necessity for securing an improvement in the education of the children of the "educated" classes who had "lessons" at home. She therefore started a Correspondence School which should bring to such children as far as possible the advantages of the disciplined mental training of school combined with home culture. The Parents' Union School was thus started in 1891. Its programmes have been going out now for forty years. Though educational conditions, including the supply of suitable and available books, have changed greatly during this time, the programmes still go out from Ambleside as they did then, offering a definite course of work in all subjects included in a liberal education for boys and girls from six to eighteen.

For a few years the work was confined to home schoolrooms. Later it became the practice for two or three families to join together, forming a small class; and later still private secondary

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schools began to take up the work, though it was not until 1914, that the first Public Elementary School started work upon the P.U.S. programmes. There are now some thousands of children working, (*a*) in home schoolrooms at home and overseas, (*b*) in some two hundred and fifty private secondary schools and classes (a few overseas), and (*c*) in some four hundred Public Elementary Schools.

The programmes are sent out three times a year, followed by an examination paper at the end of each term. There are still large numbers of children who are educated at home; some girls, indeed, continue their work in the home schoolroom till they are seventeen or eighteen; but for the most part in these days girls go to school earlier, boys, of course, at nine or less. But we have many girls taking the work in the higher Forms in private secondary schools, including the work set for the ages fifteen to seventeen in Form V., and for seventeen to eighteen in Form VI. Girls in Form V. can, if desired, take the Cambridge School Certificate successfully upon the Form V. programme, which includes the necessary work for the examination. Many girls in our schools have done so. Girls not entering for the School Certificate Examination are able to cover the full Form V. programme. After this, our schools either arrange for special University entrance examination work where desired, or allow their girls to continue the wide reading provided by the programmes in Form VI.

The House of Education is available for girls of eighteen who wish to train for teaching or to take up any guardianship of children to which they may be called.

The P.N.E.U. also issues a leaflet for children under school age which carries out in fuller detail the suggestions laid down in Miss Mason's *Home Education* for the early training of children as to "Books" and "Things."

The P.N.E.U. therefore offers a complete course of education and training, every detail of which is based upon Miss Mason's philosophy.

There are certain advantages attached to a common curriculum, the chief of which is that it gives continuity to a child's education. Children working in the Parents' Union School in China, India, South America, or distant islands, are able to come home to England and go to a school, whether a girls' school or a boys' preparatory school, where they will
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continue the P.U.S. work which they have begun abroad. Children whose fathers are in the Services can carry their "school" about with them, or join a local P.N.E.U. class if there happens to be one. Schools find a common curriculum an advantage when changes on the staff occur, and they also welcome the examination which is conducted under the P.U.S. authority, but which is an outside examination as regards individual schools.

Most of our young children are in home schoolrooms or small classes, but many of the older pupils attend P.N.E.U. schools. The standard of the work, (*a*) of each child, (*b*) of each class generally, (*c*) of each school generally, is reported upon by a Board of Examiners (University graduates, men of much teaching experience), who undertake an examination *not* on the usual lines; that is, instead of each subject being examined by a specialist, each Examiner undertakes some hundreds of *complete* sets of papers by individual children. He is therefore able to measure to some extent the work of the Parents' Union School as a whole, the work of each P.N.E.U. school belonging to the Parents' Union School, and the work of each child individually. The Director of the Parents' Union School and the Examiners meet three times a year to discuss the examination from various points of view.

The Parents' Union School staff at Ambleside consists of highly qualified women (Ambleside-trained or University graduates), each of whom contributes knowledge in some special branch to the work. Moreover, the Practising School (for children) attached to the House of Education forms part of the Parents' Union School, and has the advantage of cooperation with the College staff and with the students.

In speaking at the Conference of Education Associations in January this year, Dr. Stead, of Chesterfield, in his paper on "The Foundations of the New Prospect," enumerated three essentials:—"a philosophy of education, a suitable curriculum based upon that philosophy, and a body of inspired teachers to carry it out." Miss Mason has provided these essentials for her Method, but she added further conditions:—that the education provided must be liberal, that it should be a liberal education for all, and that it must be an education for life.

Starting with the facts that a child is a person, with all the powers of mind and body that he ever would have; that his mind needs food, not training, and his body exercise, and that
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both the food and the exercise must be in great variety, Miss Mason secured with her curriculum in the Parents' Union School a steady progress in the knowledge of Books and Things which makes it possible for boy or girl to take that variety of subjects which leads to fullness of living. Believing that all normal children have a natural power of attention, and that knowledge is acquired by the feeding of the mind and the use of the power of attention, and

that information is not knowledge, she determined to eschew text-books and to choose for the P.U.S. curriculum books which bring the children into touch with the minds of authors who write with first-hand knowledge and in attractive literary style. She showed that if pupils make steady progress through the Forms of the P.U.S. they prove themselves capable of that fullness of living which is the desire of all true teachers for them.

Miss Mason also proved that, (a) examinations set at the end of each term which give boys and girls the power of showing what they know, and (b) the valuation of each candidate's papers *as a whole*, were a benefit both to pupil and to teacher. She considered that public examinations which limit the work of the pupil and necessitate specialist teachers for young children do not give a true estimate of the work of any individual child. She also considered that girls could be qualified, in respect both of capacity and of standard, to take a "recognised" examination at the end of their school career without specialising, that is, if they are allowed to work steadily through the full programmes of the P.U.S. up to the age of seventeen for this examination. This has, in fact, been proved possible, and it is followed in practice by a year's reading in Form VI. up to eighteen.

It has been said that the P.N.E.U. does not approve of public examinations. The truth is that the P.N.E.U. recognises the necessity for public examinations, just as any other educational body must, but, in carrying out Miss Mason's work, the P.N.E.U. deprecates the use that is made of public examinations to regulate what a child should know and what a teacher should teach. As a Society we continue Miss Mason's protest against the sacrifice of a child's steady growth in knowledge,—the knowledge due to his age,—for the sake of reaching a certain limited standard, in a limited selection of subjects which are easily markable, at an entrance examination for school or University.

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The important addresses read at the North of England Education Conference in January (1931) show that educational authorities are doing what they can to break the vicious circle which excludes the large majority of the children of this country from attaining a satisfactory educational record. Dr. Steel (Glasgow), in an able paper, protested against the conditions imposed by examinations upon secondary schools; and suggestions were made in other papers as to the possibility of securing a suitable school record for the child who was not what might be called an "examination candidate." It was shown that neither Intelligence Tests nor the ordinary external examination could be considered really successful in estimating a child's powers. Similar expressions of opinion at Educational Meetings for some years past exhibit a widespread dissatisfaction with the existing systems of examination.

The general feeling amongst educational bodies seems to be that the time has come to distinguish between a matriculation examination, which is the first step towards the University, and a school certificate examination which should be more or less a final record of a school career. If such a distinction should be drawn it would give examining bodies more freedom in providing an examination which should make it possible for more boys and girls in the country to gain a satisfactory final record of their school course. It would also give more freedom in the choice of subjects, and would place the candidates themselves more in the hands of general Examiners than in the hands of specialist Examiners. This course would, it is hoped, have a favourable reaction upon the general curricula of schools, and would also enable Heads of schools to give the individual members of the staff a wider interest in the education of their

individual pupils.

Is it possible that the wide scope of Miss Mason's work may help towards the relief of some of the difficulties at present encountered by those concerned in the education of young people? The contribution which she made to educational thought she made practical by a policy which secured, (a) continuity in a curriculum which made for "fullness of living," (b) examinations each term, of a character to estimate the growth of each pupil "as a person," (c) the possibility of a final "recognised" examination at seventeen. She believed, and indeed proved, that a girl (or a boy) starting upon such a method of education at six is still a person, original, unstereo-

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typed, and free, at eighteen, with her powers still fresh, with her mind still alert, her body under control, and her state of knowledge so enriched that she is able to enjoy fullness of living in whatever circumstances her life's work must be pursued—Yours etc.,

H. COSTLEY-WHITE.

Chairman of the P.N.E.U.

II.

THE PARENTS' UNION SCHOOL AND THE CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL CERTIFICATE.

The Cambridge School Certificate Examination, if passed with credit in four subjects (including Latin), gives exemption from the Cambridge Previous Examination and the Oxford Responsions; if in five subjects (including Mathematics), it gives exemption from the London Matriculation, and if in five subjects (including Latin or Mathematics), from the Matriculation Examinations of other Universities, English and Scotch; it is also recognised by the Board of Education. It can be taken "overseas."

Girls who work for six consecutive terms in Form V. cover the necessary ground for the School Certificate Examination, provided that they have taken the following subjects: (1) Religious Knowledge; (2) English; (3) History of England; (4) Latin; (5) French; (6) Elementary Mathematics; *or* (6) Botany, *or*, (6) Geography and Arithmetic. P.U.S. candidates are advised to take (7) Botany in any case, and to add if possible, (8) Art; *or*, (8) Music, as the work in eight subjects can be counted towards the Certificate as a whole.

Each year the special work in Religious Knowledge and English is set during the first six months, and the special Latin book starts in the September of the previous year, so that candidates may take the examination either in July or December of any year.

It is hoped that the Heads of P.N.E.U. Schools preparing candidates for the C.S.C. will allow the full programmes to be taken until the last *three* terms before the examination. It takes six terms to cover the C.S.C. work in all the above subjects. During the last three terms it may be necessary to give all the language time to Latin and French, but it will be well to

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continue the work in European History, Citizenship, Empire History (see Geography), till the last term, as these subjects all bear upon English History: in Science, Astronomy might be continued in addition to Botany.

The Examination Regulations containing the detailed syllabus must be obtained from W. N. Williams, Esq., Syndicate Buildings, Cambridge.

The following subjects in the C.S.C. syllabus are covered by the two years' work in Form V.:-

- (1) Group I. **English** (see N.B. 1). Sections (a), (b), and (c), or (e).
- (2) **Religious Knowledge** (d) and (f).
- (3) **History of England** (b) and (c).
- (4) Group II. **Latin** (see N.B. 1).
- (5) **French**
- (6) Group III. **Elementary Mathematics** (see N.B. 2). (a), (b), and (c).
- or (6) **Geography and Arithmetic**
- or (6) **Botany** (see N.B. 3).
- (7) **Botany** (see N.B. 3).
- (8) Group IV. **Art** (a), (b), and (d), or (i), Part I.
- or (8) **Music**

N.B. 1.—For 1931, take *Richard II.* in **English**, section (b); and in **Latin**, *Livy IX.* for prepared translation.

N.B. 2.—In **Elementary Mathematics**, take also for the second year *Numerical Trigonometry*, Part I., by A. W. Siddons and R. T. Hughes (Cambridge Press, 1/9), chapters I.; II.; III. and IV.

N.B. 3.—In **Botany**, take also for the second year the following books instead of (i.) *Geology*, and (ii.) *Scientific Ideas of To-day*:—(i.) *Applied Botany*, by J. S. M. Ellis (Hodder & Stoughton, 4/6), pp. 1–77; 78–155; 156–240. (ii.) *Elements of Natural Science*, Part I., by W. B. Smith (Arnold, 5/-), pp. 1–51; 51–107; 108–160.

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