

PARENTS' UNION SCHOOL WORK IN BOYS' PREPARATORY SCHOOLS.

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BEFORE reading my remarks I must warn you that several points I am going to refer to were touched upon last night; and many opinions contrary to what I am going to put forward were also expressed. However, if you will forgive a certain amount of overlapping, I shall read the paper just as I have written it.

Last night also I was surprised and yet pleased to hear of so many doubts and difficulties. We adopted the P.U.S. programmes only three years ago, and this is the first Conference I have attended, and consequently the first time that I have addressed such a gathering. I can still regard the P.N.E.U. from without and am familiar with persons who refuse to have anything to do with it. I believe I am right in saying that many people are left quite cold, if not actively hostile, by the

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prevailing tone of so much that has been written about the results of P.N.E.U. work. The outsider, on glancing through pamphlets and reviews, says that it is too good to be true, or he may revolt from it as from a heavenly Jerusalem where the streets are paved with gold and you play harps all day long. This first impression lasts a long time, and the unbeliever who has caught this impression, refuses to read any more.

When I was asked to open this discussion with an address on P.U.S. work in Boys' Preparatory Schools, I accepted readily enough, but as I began to think things out and prepare a few notes, the difficulties of my undertaking became more and more alarming. For one comparatively young in the craft of teaching and organisation to pretend to much knowledge would surely be rather presumptuous, and I lay myself open to correction in any opinions and criticisms I may pronounce. But I do feel it a very great honour indeed to have been asked to lay before you this morning the fruits of my short experience.

Yet as for myself, I know that for any trouble I may have been caused I shall be amply repaid. For in putting together these remarks I have been compelled to apply the philosopher's advice, "Know thyself"; and whatever may be the result I personally shall reap considerable benefit from having turned a searchlight on to the workings of my school. At almost every step I have been faced with doubts as to whether our ways are the best; and I should like to make it clear to you at the outset of this discussion that I do not claim to have struck the perfect balance between the Public School requirements and the programmes of the P.U.S.

I do not wish to take up your time this morning by repeating too much what others have said and written before. I shall not speak at great length about the undoubted advantages to be derived from working the P.U.S. programmes according to the principles of Miss Mason. There is sufficient proof on record to convince most people, if they care to examine it. I shall try to confine my observations to concrete facts, to give you a glimpse into the workings of a Boys' Preparatory School.

It is first requisite that you should all understand what a Preparatory School is, why it exists and what is the material it has to work on. There would be no point in this discussion if it were simply a question of turning a certain number of boys on to the P.U.S. programmes and

working through them in the ordinary way.

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About fifty or sixty years ago the Public Schools began to stop taking boys at the early ages of nine, ten or eleven, as had been the custom for centuries. It became the practice of parents who intended sending their boys to the big boarding schools to send them first to private schools until they had reached the more suitable age of thirteen or fourteen years. And so the demand for these private schools (soon to be called Preparatory Schools) grew, until now there are upwards of five hundred in the country of every size and kind, but all with the avowed object of preparing boys for the Public Schools. They are a halfway house merely, a stepping stone to something else, not a be-all and end-all in themselves. Accordingly, to a certain extent we are not our own masters. It is the Public School that calls the tune which we have to dance to. The tune they call is an old tune, although it has been changing a little lately. But still the air is the same old classical air that has existed for hundreds of years. We undertake to teach our boys this tune. In other words we undertake to prepare them to pass an examination at the comparatively early age of thirteen or thereabouts. Our first duty is to get the boy into the school for which he is entered, and to get him in as high as possible. Our second duty is to see that in doing so we do not stunt the boy's intellectual growth. And it is in performing this second duty that the P.U.S. programmes and the teaching of Miss Mason are of such great help to us.

Before going any further I should like to impress upon some that may not realise it that, whereas the leaving age is, within narrow limits, fairly constant (approximately thirteen to fourteen), the age of entry to our type of school varies very considerably. We are liable to have boys sent to us at any age from seven onwards. In special circumstances we may even have to take a boy of eleven. And when you consider that their proficiency in the Three R's is also subject to a very wide variation (and not always dependent on age), you will realise that our difficulty at the beginning of a boy's time with us is much greater than it is in the case of the Public School. The first thing we have to do, then, is to see that the foundations are right, that their axes are sharp before they are sent out into the wood.

It may here be asked what the Preparatory School master may reasonably look for in a new boy of eight or nine. I have known a new boy who entered a Preparatory School when

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nearly eleven without being able to read. I also have in mind another who knew his Latin Regular Verbs, Active and Passive, at the age of six. We certainly do not want the former and cannot expect the latter; but there is a midway between these two extremes.

He should of course be able to read, and to have reached the stage of reading naturally, and of looking on books as sources of information or pleasure. There are many excellent books for children, but I believe the picture book habit can be overdone. Many of the attractive books that are brought out nowadays positively discourage the reading habit. The child may or may not read the title and explanatory notes under a picture (generally not, judging by the questions asked); at any rate, if his books are mostly of this type, he does not so early settle down to the solid reading of a book without any pictures at all, and he may very easily develop into a mere catalogue reader, the person who eventually gets his news from the front, middle and back pages of an illustrated daily.

If the boy can read well, he will of course be able to write. There is no need to stress the

importance of neatness, but it must be remembered that speed soon becomes essential, and we should be sure that children are taught to write in a way that will suffer as little as possible from the strain of increased output. As well as having a library the nursery should be kept supplied with plenty of pencils and exercise books to encourage voluntary practice in writing and composition. Cheap atlases and mapping books do not come amiss either.

To a child brought up in such a nursery spelling will probably present few difficulties. The bad spellers are very often the children who have not formed a reading habit early. It stands to reason that so long as a boy reads by single words instead of by phrases he will write each word as a separate entity, and consequently be always making the irritating mistakes over one and won, their and there, where and were, to, too, and two. While in the same sentence he may very likely spell right some such word as "extraordinary" or "immediately." Bad spelling is sometimes due to bad habits of enunciation in early childhood. Some children grow up a syllable short in most of their words, so that, for instance, we get CANDER for CANADA in a piece of dictation.

As regards arithmetic I am very thankful to receive a boy of nine who knows his tables, can add, subtract, multiply and divide reasonably well.

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Furthermore, we like to see ability to concentrate and to work on paper for more than a minute without being attended to, which again is the result of good nursery discipline in early years. This ability to concentrate and to be patient can be encouraged by such things as jig-saw puzzles, transfers, or even blowing bubbles. Do you remember Ruskin's account of his childhood? Hear what he says:—

"My mother's general principles of first treatment were, to guard me with steady watchfulness from all avoidable pain or danger; and for the rest, to let me amuse myself as I liked, provided I was neither fretful nor troublesome. But the law was, that I should find my own amusement. I had a bunch of keys to play with, as long as I was capable of pleasure in what glittered and jingled; as I grew older, I had a cart and a ball; and when I was five or six years old, two boxes of well-cut wooden bricks. With these modest, but, I still think, entirely sufficient possessions, and being always summarily whipped if I cried, did not do as I was bid, or tumbled on the stairs, I soon attained serene and severe methods of life and motion; and could pass my days contentedly in tracing the squares and comparing the colours of my carpet; examining the knots in the wood of the floor, or counting the bricks in the opposite house... In all these particulars (he says a little later), I think the treatment or accidental condition of my childhood entirely right, for a child of my temperament."

Incidentally, whatever Ruskin would have approved or disapproved of in our P.U.S. methods, he would have been delighted to see the prominent positions taken by the Bible, Shakespeare, Scott and Bunyan in our programmes.

If parents would always co-operate with the home governess or whoever is giving the children formal lessons, by providing as liberally for their mental as they do for their physical welfare, we should not have much cause to complain about the lack of general information so often noticeable in children.

If a boy can read fluently, write legibly, and knows his twelve times tables, and can pass his days contentedly in his own way, he is ready to derive what benefits there may be from school.

First, then I attach importance to laying good foundations or improving faulty ones. But there is that barrier through which we know every boy has to pass at the end of his time with us, where he will have to show his passport. We cannot forget this. Please do not put me down, as one possessed of a Common Entrance Examination complex. Generally speaking there is no cause for uneasiness as to whether a boy is going to pass or not. But I want you to realise that in working out our programme we must keep this examination in view. The passport must be stamped correctly. It may be an excellent

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passport in other ways, but, unless it bears the traditional stamp indicating a certain proficiency in Latin and Mathematics, it is no use for seeing him through the barrier into many of the great Public Schools. This means that an early start must be made in Latin, earlier than that in the P.U.S. Time must be allowed for the slow boy to reach the standard of passing and also for the clever boy to have a chance of a scholarship. *Pari passu* with Latin, the three branches of Mathematics as well as French must be well taught. For thus only will the boy be able to pass through the porchway or entrance supported by the pillars of Latin and Mathematics leading from the Preparatory to the Public School.

Now as to our material, the boy who comes to our school. Miss Mason started from the premise that "children are born persons." And yet there are many people who think that boys are all alike, regarding them much as the uninstructed and popular world regard soldiers or sailors. In a Preparatory School you find as many completely different persons as you would in a like number of full-grown men. For "the boy is father of the man." Every conceivable shade and combination of character and ability is to be found there. Even parents do not always realise this. A remark such as "a boy who is keen on games is pretty sure to be keen on his work" has been made to me more than once. It is impossible to generalise in this way. The man in the street represents the majority of mankind, and the boy who is the father of the man in the street represents the bulk of our boyhood. The ordinary boy is born with the faculty of extracting enjoyment from almost anything. He enjoys the companionship of school. He ought to enjoy his lessons. But I think it would be stretching a good point to say that he enjoys his lessons as much as anything he ever does. A boy of twelve probably enjoys cricket, football, bicycling, or even sitting down to a good meal more than lessons. When all is said and done, should we like to see him dash in from the field with shouts of joy when the school bell rings? True, we expect him to return willingly, but we cannot look for more. But once we have him inside the classroom there ought to be present a quiet atmosphere of keenness and enjoyment. A very valuable faculty in a Preparatory School teacher is that of being able to recall the feelings of early youth. And among the best ways of keeping these memories alive is to be familiar with the spirit

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of eternal boyhood revealed in the pages of *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and much of Kipling. I would recommend them as source books for schoolmasters almost as soon as anything.

The school curriculum falls into two parts: those studies which serve for delight, and those which do not. History, Geography, Literature, Citizenship, Composition, Picture Study,

Musical Appreciation—all these and others when presented to the boy in the right way are enjoyable. But in the case of Grammar, Latin, French and Mathematics with many boys I am afraid it is different. These studies serve for ability, and the *average* boy can hardly be said to enjoy them for themselves. But there are certain things in connexion with them which he can be made to enjoy. He can learn to enjoy the satisfaction of achievement with the sense of power which it gives. I am afraid I may be accused of uttering heresies in saying this. But to me it seems that this is a sound though perhaps not very high ideal to set before a boy. Let him feel that in mastering Latin Grammar, Sentence Construction, Quadratic Equations or Pythagoras he is forging a weapon that will stand him in good stead: its immediate use being to enable him to carve his way up the school and into the next with the possibility of scholarships and a University career. Let him feel that his English subjects are going to make him into a full man, and that his Latin and Mathematics are going to make him into an exact man. Let him derive an incentive to further efforts by marking his progress in these sciences. Let him feel that he is marching along a road, that every construction or proposition mastered, like a milestone passed, will bring him steadily nearer the goal. As he grows older the weapon we have helped him to forge (to go back a metaphor) may be cast aside, or it may become a weapon which it will be a pleasure for him to use during the rest of his life.

And yet in Latin it need not be all grinding. There is no doubt that real enjoyment even for the boy of most Philistine outlook can be gained from translation. Boys familiar with good English books unconsciously learn to feel the power of words, “words that may become alive and walk up and down in the hearts of the hearers,” as Kipling says. For example, Vergil taken in a certain way can exercise his spell over the boy still shaky in his grammar and incapable of distinguishing the three indirects with any certainty. He can learn to recognise
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that he is a “lord of language,” and to feel almost as you or I “all the charm of all the muses often flowering in a lonely word.”

I shall now pass on to a consideration of last term’s Common Entrance papers. There are ten compulsory papers, of forty-five minutes duration each, made up as follows: two Latin, two French, three Mathematics, one History, one Geography, and one for Scripture and English together. Seven of these are taken up by Latin, French and Mathematics, and only three are devoted to all the English subjects.

I shall not say any more about the former subjects at the moment beyond remarking that for a slow average boy to reach the standard demanded by some of the great Public Schools sound teaching and a good deal of time is necessary.

The History paper is set in English history only, and should present no difficulty to a P.U.S. taught boy, provided that a certain amount of revision work is done, to keep him familiar with the work of previous terms. The first question last term consisted of ten events scattered through history from 55 B.C. to A.D. 1846. These had to be rearranged in chronological order with the exact dates given to three of them. Between 900 and 1600 there were only two events, and those were the dates of kings. A little systematic date learning enables a boy to tackle that question with confidence. Please remember that it is the boy of average memory that we must think of, and remember also that oldish boys join the syllabus with every variety of previously acquired knowledge. A boy came lately, for instance, who had been to two other schools in a short period. He joined us in the twelfth century, and I discovered that he had

already done from William the Conqueror to Henry VII. at both his last schools, and had never been any further. In the character sketch question, out of four choices not one came into the work we had done since last Easter term, a year ago. Hence you will see that some time must be given to revision.

Again, in Geography it is necessary to refresh the memories of the older boys with revisional work. Naturally a good knowledge of the British Isles is looked for by the Public Schools, but if we stick to the Form III. programme, the average boy will not be able to cope with some of the more important questions. I find that our boys enjoy the Geography lessons as much as any in the week. The work we have done this term on Belgium, Holland and Spain, has been particularly

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interesting. But we have to be prepared for such questions as, "What are the main towns of either Lancashire or Yorkshire? What are their main industries, and why are they there?" Or again, "Compare the positions and activities of Glasgow and Birmingham." We use an additional book in Form III. which deals with the British Isles rather more from the commercial point of view than the Ambleside books. This is especially necessary as there is no mention of Scotland or Ireland in any of the Ambleside books after book II. (I see that Form II. have been given an alternative book for next term. This may serve the Common Entrance requirements of Form III.).

The Scripture and English paper is easy enough. The Scripture expects familiar knowledge of the Gospels and Acts, and of the favourite stories of the Old Testament. The English questions are very general, and are the kind that may clearly reveal a boy's style and imaginative powers, but hardly the width of his reading. It is interesting to notice that no questions on formal English Grammar appear now.

I shall now try to show you how we use the P.U.S. programmes.

A boy with a term's work before him may be likened to an artist about to paint a landscape. Imagine him the morning after his arrival at school. He has, as it were, a large blank canvas, with pencil, brush and paints to hand. On the notice board are a time table and a syllabus, the subject of the picture to be. The maker of these is responsible for balance and proportion in design, while the teacher will have to see to accuracy of line. Wealth of detail will depend to a large extent on the memory of the boy. We do not want a picture of two or three buildings painted in great detail, and only a hint of foreground, distance, and sky. We want rather a piece of the world, sea, sky, land, sunshine and shadow, mountain and plain, the beauty of nature, and the wonderful works of man.

We must, therefore, in drawing up the syllabus select judiciously. With the extra time needed for Classics and Mathematics, we cannot in a Preparatory School take and work the P.U.S. programmes as they stand. But in making our selection we must bear in mind the boy's landscape. Some parts have got to be treated with more detail than others, but every inch of the canvas must be touched by the brush, however lightly. We endeavour to take all the subjects, but we cannot take all the books.

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Short Bible readings begin the day three or four times a week. Might I here suggest that the Bible Lesson examinations set for Forms III. and IIA. are unnecessarily long? Six questions seem rather out of proportion, and take a long time to answer as well as to correct.

The period of English Grammar is for many boys and masters a dull one. Personally, through my own fault doubtless, I find it also a very discouraging subject to teach. It is difficult to notice a daily advance in knowledge as in other subjects. A boy may go on for terms without getting any better, and then suddenly he may wake up some morning to find it all as clear as daylight. I have read much about its necessity, but it is an irksome occupation worrying a boy of twelve over this subject when he is spending so much time over French and Latin Grammar, knowing as one does that later he will understand it all without any trouble. It does not help the Latin either very much. Boys are not any handier at Indirect Questions because they are taught in English Grammar that they are Noun Clauses; nor do they spot the difference between Final and Consecutive Clauses any more easily for learning that they are adverbial. Again, Prepositions are obvious in Latin, but it is not obvious that "A preposition is a word placed before a noun or pronoun to show in what relation the person or thing denoted by the noun or pronoun stands to something else." Surely this is "darkening counsel with words." A preposition is a preposition in Latin, a small word governing the accusative or ablative case, and there is the end of it. I should leave the boy to understand the formal definition when he is a free man and of mature age. I have had boys well above the average in English, who enjoy using the English language and are keenly interested in metaphors and similes and who are at the same time extraordinarily slow over the technicalities of grammar. The only thing to do is to go on displaying it until it dawns upon them, to set and correct work, and wait patiently. I bow to the necessity of having it on the programme, because for one thing scholarship papers quite frequently have complicated questions on it; though, as I have mentioned before, it has dropped out of the Common Entrance examination altogether. But I think that otherwise it is really sufficient for a boy to be able to parse very briefly, and to do perhaps a little simple analysis.

In English Literature we read the books set each term. It

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is interesting to notice how the small boys enjoy the *Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Heroes of Asgard*, which are rather boring for many adults. We take most of the History books. I was sorry when *The Ancient World* was dropped, as it was much appreciated by the boys; and the Roman and Greek parts are useful as aids to their classical studies. We do still read a little each term. *Tales from Troy and Greece*, *Stories from the History of Rome* and *The Age of Fable*, together with *The Ancient World*, *Hellas*, and *Plutarch*, enable the boys to place their Greek and Latin in an intelligible setting. It is a pity that we do not read Kingsley's *Heroes* sometimes, since it possesses literary qualities superior to anything in the *Tales* or *The Age of Fable*. We use Oman to supplement Arnold-Forster in Form III., partly because it is used extensively in many of the schools to which our boys go, and partly because we consider that Arnold-Forster is not quite sufficient for the older boys. We continue the French History in Form III. also. Some boys pass rapidly through Form II., and it is a pity that they should not derive the full benefit of that excellent little book. Accordingly we have not any time left for the *Readings from Indian History*. We keep Century books, though the interest in them varies a good deal. I should like to mention what a great success *The Romance of Excavation* was. Some boys got copies of their own in the holidays.

Plutarch is read in Form III., but now and again we drop it in II. if it is a young or backward Form. However, we take the *Citizen Reader* in the whole of Form II., as well as *Stories*

from Rome in the lower half.

As regards Geography, we keep to the programme with additional work in Form III. as mentioned previously.

In Natural History we read the *Eyes and No Eyes* series in Form I., and Miss Buckley's two long books in the Upper Forms. A good deal of Nature Note Book work is done. For the rest we study the Painter and Composer each term, and Form I. does regular Handwork.

Before bringing this address to a close, I wish to refer to two features of the P.U.S. methods; narration, and the absence of marks. The practice of narration is kept up throughout the school in all English subjects. We also use it in Latin and French as far as possible, with beneficial results. With regard to marks, while we do not mark the English subjects, we do mark the Common Entrance papers, which III. and IIA. do

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each term; and we keep a careful record, so that a boy can see how he is improving from term to term. We are never troubled by a boy working for the sake of marks, nor by the other evil of the conscientious but slow boy becoming discouraged because he is always at the bottom of the Form, however hard he tries. But we use the Common Entrance papers as a means of making each boy work against himself, and of providing him with a fairly constant standard by which to judge his own efforts. We also have a system of short weekly tests in some subjects, and percentages of these are kept.

We must not forget that the boy is shortly going to be cast adrift in a larger world than ours, where marks and place in Form are regarded with reverence, and where the boy's personal comfort will depend to a large extent on his weekly report. He should not be entirely ignorant of percentages and of the prevailing system of judging merit and ability by what a person can get out of a hundred.

I hope that I have not drawn this address out to too great a length; and I trust I have raised some points round which discussions may arise. Before closing I should like to make sure that I leave with you the impression that we are greatly attached to the P.N.E.U., and all that it stands for. For such is indeed the truth. At the same time any school that is worth while should possess an individuality of its own. And we must remember that no method of education can ever be like a magician's wand for anyone to wave, and, "hey presto!" a miracle is performed. A method, however excellent, requires exponents who are not only keen and enthusiastic believers in its efficacy, but also possessed of a willingness at all times to learn from apparent failure, striving always to disprove the ancient proverb, "You can take a horse to the water, but you cannot make it drink."