

## THE P.U.S. WORK IN A P.N.E.U. SCHOOL.

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I HAVE been asked to give you some account of the work of the P.N.E.U., and to indicate an outline of how it can be carried out in schools and home schoolrooms.

The P.N.E.U. was founded in 1888, by Charlotte Mason, and there are now branches of it in many districts at home and abroad; the membership is made up of parents and all those interested in education.

Those who become members have the opportunity of co-operation and consultation on common ground, for example in our own branch besides lectures, excursions and concerts, we have various social gatherings every year when the parents of children attending the school in connection with which it is run, and the staff, meet and confer.

Other advantages members have are the use of a large library of educational works at the Central Office in London, the Parents' Union School and the House of Education, a secondary training college for teachers in families, classes and schools working in the P.U.S.

The Parents' Union School was devised in 1890, to introduce some of the advantages of school training into home education. But the principles applied and the methods used have proved as valuable in schools as in home teaching, and there are now many thousands of children doing the work set.

Members have a definite and progressive syllabus of work for each term for six forms, that is for children from the age of six to eighteen. These programmes of work have been most carefully thought out, and a definite number of pages set term by term in a good many living books of literary value, so that a child who has been in the school all these years will have worked on consecutive lines in the subjects: Religious Knowledge, Literature, History, of other countries as well as his own, Citizenship, Geography, General Science, especially in one [p 447]

branch, at least two languages, a practical knowledge of arithmetic, and given the ability of Algebra and Geometry up to Matriculation standard.

In the school itself, in teaching children of all ages it is possible to carry out the programmes of the P.U.S. in Forms I. to VI., and therefore, boys up to preparatory school age and girls up to eighteen are able to receive education without a break, and to cover continuous courses of work in all that concerns a Liberal Education.

The teachers themselves, accustomed to the use of the P.U.S. programmes, are able to see the work of the school as a whole and not only in the water-tight compartments of the special subjects.

Children who have attended a primary school from the age of nine to twelve, and another, from twelve to eighteen suffer from loss of time when change of method occurs.

We can never expect uniformity in details, but a foundation of certain educational principles should do much to unify school education and to unite it with that carried on in the home into an harmonious whole.

One of the characteristics of the P.U.S. is the width of the curriculum. We believe that Education is the Science of Relations, by which phrase we mean that children come into the

world with a natural appetite for, and affinity with all the material of knowledge; for interest in the past and in the age of myths, for a desire to know about everything that moves and lives, about strange places and peoples, for a wish to handle material and to make; a desire to run and ride and row and do whatever the law of gravitation permits. Therefore we do not feel it is lawful in the early days of a child's life to select certain subjects for her education to the exclusion of others, but we endeavour that she shall have relations of pleasure and intimacy established with as many as possible of the interests proper to her; not learning a slight or incomplete smattering about this or that subject, but plunging into vital knowledge, and we believe that no education seems to be worth the name which has not made children at home in the world of books and so relate them mind to mind with thinkers who have dealt with knowledge. We reject epitomes, compilations and their like and put into children's hands books which, long or short, are living; for example, children of eight or nine in Form IIb. are given their own copies of English History, Stories from Roman

[p 448]

History, Geography and Natural Science, as well as a standard work to read each term. Only this last term one little girl I know in this Form who had to be away from school in quarantine, not only read to herself the prescribed term's work in her Stories from Roman History, but finished the book. By means of this free use of books the mechanical difficulties of education—reading, spelling and composition—disappear and learning is, in fact, made a pleasure.

This process continues throughout the school, until in Form VI. almost every subject of interest is added, Art, [sic] Studies, Citizenship, Musical Appreciation, Physiography and Geology.

Children in the P.U.S. are given free access to the daily papers, such as *The Times* and its "Classroom Supplement," and thus obtain subject matter for the last pages of their century books, which are another characteristic of the method.

The older girls in the P.U.S. are encouraged to debate on subjects of varied interest.

A most important feature of the P.U.S. is Nature Study; besides the books on Natural History which the children read each child keeps a nature diary of her own which contains paintings, notes, lists of flowers and birds, which demand close observation; in families where organised games are not possible this gives enormous interest to the daily walks.

Nowadays children work so much more in home classes and schools; this makes physical exercise and organised games possible.

To go back to the question of books, we find that the use of books makes for short hours. No book-work or writing, no preparation is done in the P.U.S. except between the hours of 9.0 to 11.30 for the lowest class, to 9.0 to 1.0 for the highest, with an interval for drill or games. From one to two hours, according to age and class, are given in the afternoons to handicrafts, field-work, drawing and music, and the evenings are absolutely free so that children have leisure for hobbies and reading. We are able to get through more work in each subject in a shorter time than is usually allowed because children taught in this way get the habit of close attention and are carried on by steady interest.

In a large school we find certain modifications of this time table are necessary.

How is this habit of close attention encouraged? By

[p 449]

expecting the children to narrate what they have read once. We believe that children are born

with the gift of narration, and that as soon as they can speak fluently they will take a delight in using this gift. At first a child should only be expected to narrate when and what she has a mind to, but after the age of six when she begins lessons, she will begin to narrate the fairy story that has been read to her or a Bible story or something from a natural history book, and as time goes on, when she can read with ease and fluency, she will read her own lesson books aloud or silently with a view to narration; this forms the basis of composition. As the child advances in the school the method of narration changes, and she is taught to generalise, classify, infer and discriminate.

The term's work is tested, and there is no distressing cramming for the term's examination. The pupils know their work and find it easy to answer questions set to find out what they know, rather than what they do not know.

It has been said that the P.N.E.U. does not approve of public examinations. The P.N.E.U. recognises the necessity of public examinations, just as any other educational body must, but it deprecates the narrowing influence upon the activities of both teacher and taught. The subject of examinations was taken up at the North of England Conference and suggestions were made as to the possibility of securing a suitable examination which should be the final record of a scholar's years at school instead of a preparation for his after school career. It has been proved that P.U.S. girls of average ability can secure the Cambridge School Leaving Certificate at the age of sixteen or seventeen, without any difficulty on a broad basis, or in eight subjects, the maximum allowed, without too much sacrifice of the wide curriculum; that is to say that where girls have gone steadily through the school there need be no cram or specialisation for the examination, and that during two years in Form III., one in IV. and two in V. of steady work upon the programmes, they will have covered all the necessary ground in the subjects to be taken for the examination, except in Latin. They will, during the last year, give all the language time to Latin and French.

But many schools are handicapped by having to take girls and boys with neglected education whose parents are even more eager than other parents that they should make up for lost time by passing a recognised public examination as soon as

[p 450]

possible, but surely it is no credit to a clever girl to take the examination at fifteen because she has by dint of specialisation been able to cover the minimum of subjects and to remain ignorant of so many she should have learnt, and the certificate taken on the minimum of subjects does not give exemption from matriculation.