2-30–4-30. Chairman: Mr. H. W. HOUSEHOLD, M.A. (Oxon)., Sec., Gloucestershire Education Committee.

Paper by Mr. H. W. Household, M.A.—Dr. Johnson once said, "Education is as well known, and has long been as well known, as ever it can be." But Dr. Johnson was not infallible. He did not like Schoolmastering (he counted it a degradation to which only poverty compelled him) and he believed stoutly in the virtues of the cane, for (in principle if not perhaps in practice) "his ways," like those of Stevenson's grandfather, "were Spartan for the young."

Although it was always a perilous undertaking to confront him with facts which to the challenger seemed overwhelming and unanswerable, perhaps if, meeting the great rolling figure in the Elysian fields, we could get him in some quiet corner and tell him what teachers do to-day and what they dream of for to-morrow, his love of knowledge and his essential fairness *might* triumph over his hatred of defeat, and he might plead to us the same excuse that he pleaded to the lady, who asked him how he came to define in his dictionary a horse's pastern as its knee, "Ignorance, madam, pure ignorance."

Ignorance undoubtedly it was—ignorance and prejudice. Some measure of its depth we get if we reflect that Pestalozzi and Froebel and the great reformers were still to come. However, if he heeds, we will be humble. We will own that Education is not thoroughly known even now; that criticism is so acute, experiment so fertile, vision so daring and so splendid, that he would be hardly to the point of folly who should predict anything of the public education of the 21st century, except that its children, teachers, schools, equipment, methods will be immeasurably in advance of those we know to-day.

In Dr. Johnson's time psychology lent little conscious aid to teaching; and if curriculum and methods proved ill-adapted to individuals, whether few or many, it was the worse for the individuals. Curriculum and methods had the sanction of the Middle Ages: education had long been as well known as ever it could be. And a good deal later, if a Darwin had made no pro-

gress with Latin and Greek at Shrewsbury School, the authorities felt no concern. A boy had simply no right to expect a training in or through physical science, or for that matter in modern languages or English.

If no account was taken of the troubles of a Darwin brought up on Classics undiluted, be sure that no thought was ever given to the difficulties of the poor boy from an unlettered home. Of course it was not thought necessary to educate him at all. Then came the Reform Bill of 1868 and the country began to "educate its masters." But the lords of the land had no faith in the intellect of those whom they called the lower orders; or rather they were fixed in the belief that, save in rare cases, it was by hereditary transmission through countless generations, and even by divine ordainment, inferior in kind. They would give them an education suitable to their degree. And so for thirty years classes ploughed their way laboriously by oral reading through four or five meagre text-books each year, and there was little in the result to shake the conviction of the lords of the land. They could still talk of that unlettered bailiff, the best manager that the farm had ever had, who forgot nothing, could do everything, and whose like they would never see again, for the Board School could not make it—they could still talk of him without the least suspicion that but for the mischance of birth, environment, and education, such a man must have taken his place among the very foremost of his time.

At long last the truth is emerging that there is no such hereditary inferiority of intellect, that the baby born in the cottage has all the intellectual possibilities of the baby born in a prosperous and lettered home. Whether they shall be realised depends upon the after environment. It is here that inequality comes in. In the one case development proceeds apace, helped at every turn and never hindered: in the other it is checked, arrested, hindered at every turn and never helped. On the one side see the spacious rooms, the good food, the loving care of a mother free to lavish care, the constant devotion of a nurse, doctoring of the best for each childish ailment, the songs, stories and reading, the toys and pictures, the romps and games: and then, as the child grows, there is the talk, witty, serious, gay and learned of lettered folk who move in a world where there is art and poetry, a knowledge of men and affairs, of foreign countries and of other times, and where books abound. One need not develop
[p 99]
the contrast between the environments of that child and of the child of the cottage. It is very plain how unequal is the race between them. It is our task as teachers and administrators to make it less unequal, to do all that can be done to improve the environment of the cottage-born, so that he may have less diffi-ulty in proving his congenital equality, and win a surer hold upon all that is wise and good and beautiful.

Talk and books are perhaps the greatest educators. The mutual talk that trains the greatest men we cannot give. Such a man as Sir Charles Dilke (his biography happens to be one of the latest to hand) must always start with an advantage that no words can measure, journeying at the age of nine all over England, “reading Shakespeare and studying Church architecture, especially Norman,” as he tells us, with his grandfather, one of the first antiquaries and masters of letters of his day, who had devoted himself wholly to the training of the boy’s mind. But books! There we can do something, though still only a little, to redress the inequality.

We will not take Sir Charles Dilke or his like, but the boy from a good middle class home where there are books in plenty, and sufficient money to make it possible to indulge all healthy tastes. What is such a boy doing at the age of nine? Why of course he is reading boys’ books, Henty, Ballantyne, Herbert Strang, Captain Brereton, and the like, devouring every story of adventure, poring over the books that instruct him in his hobbies, incidently enriching his vocabulary—already enriched by environment—at a rapid rate, and acquiring much knowledge by the way of natural science, of history and geography, and of affairs. And remember that from earliest childhood he has listened through many a happy hour to some well-loved voice reading to him prose and verse, which the ear could grasp though not as yet the eye. He has revelled in the many books in which children specially delight, read to him repeatedly, in History of every time written with charm and skill for children, in Nature Stories, Fairy Tales, and many a page of poetry. The effect of all this is deep and lasting. He had already learned to love books: he is on the way to acquire that “art of leisurely and meditatively reading for pleasure,” of which Mr. Fisher told us the other day that there is “no art which is more valuable in after life.” And they are real books that he reads. Mr. Fisher had a word to say of books. “There are two kinds of books,” he said, “books and text-books. My advice to you is to read
[p 100]
books. Text-books are one of our great dangers.” And to that danger the child of the elementary school is especially exposed. Home books he has few or none, and what he has, like his school books, are commonly written by industrial mediocrities. I confess myself

among the sinners. When a Kipling, in collaboration with a distinguished Oxford professor, writes an English History for him there is a storm of indignation, and because they see that to which we are blind we call them "Jingoes" and ban the book. And when that boy from the cottage does get real books in school it is rarely that he gets them either of the right sort, or in sufficient quantity, rarely that he is allowed to read them by himself. We cannot do wrong if we provide for him according to the general taste of the boyhood of the day: we cannot do right if we will prescribe for him what we as grown people think he ought to want to read, but does not. Yet that is what so many teachers will do, and it is so difficult to persuade them that they are doing wrong. It is not natural for a child of nine or twelve to want to read Dickens or Kingsley, and it must be confessed that now-a-days he finds less charm in Scott. It is not such reading that will make of him a reader. Robert Louis Stevenson tells us what real reading is.

"In anything fit to be called by the name of reading," he says, "the process itself should be absorbing and voluptuous; we should gloat over a book, be rapt clean out of ourselves, and rise from the perusal, our mind filled with the busiest kaleidoscopic dance of images, incapable of sleep or of continuous thought. The words, if the book be eloquent, should run thenceforward in our ears like the noise of breakers, and the story, if it be a story, repeat itself in a thousand coloured pictures to the eye. It was for this last pleasure that we read so closely, and loved our books so dearly, in the bright, troubled period of boyhood."—(*Memories and Portraits*).

But you will say, "Surely we must let him hear the great names, and introduce him to the great books before he leaves us at thirteen, or he will never know them." Tell him the names if you will, but for the rest have faith. It is not one in ten who will read more or better books because he has ploughed through these in oral reading lessons with 30 or 40 class-mates: whereas it will really be quite difficult for him to escape them a little later on, if you have taught him so to gloat over books appropriate to his age, that he has been "rapt clean out of himself." And the glad day is coming when you will have him
[p 101]
till he is 18, and of age to follow you down the golden paths. As for the books of his choice there can be no longer any shadow of a reason in the rural counties why he should not have them. The scheme for rural libraries in connection with the schools, which with far-seeing beneficence is being promoted by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees will bring light and joy to many a village home.

So at 10 or 12 let the boy have his Henty. That will make him ask many questions, want to know many things. Don't tell him everything. Put him in the way of finding out. Meanwhile read to him Puck of Pook's Hill and Rewards and Fairies, and you open to him the gates of History and the Drama, and it will be strange if he does not enter. When he has learned to tear out the inside of the book of his own choice, you may introduce him to one of yours, and he will be ready to exercise what has now become a habit. But don't give the strong meat to the babe; let him first acquire the power of digestion. On the other hand, do not feed him on concentrated pre-digested preparations when the natural food is at hand. The so-called literary reader, the book of snippets, is rigorously excluded from our Gloucestershire Schools.

"Oh, but," someone may say, "the child does not come to school to be amused and read novels." Certainly he does not, but how happy if in the course of educating him you can amuse, and still happier if you teach him to amuse himself. For, after all, that is going to be one of the chief fruits of his education, if it is successful. He does not learn Arithmetic

merely that he may be a huckster, or Reading that he may be able to puzzle out the latest notice of the Food Controller in the grocer's shop. We want to open to him the greatest of all wholesome pleasures, and put at his command the wealth of wit and wisdom and beauty heaped high in an immortal literature. Then he may be a happy man and a good citizen, which no amount of oral reading out of text books will ever make him.

A more just criticism, and one that must be met, would be to say that provision must be made somewhere for hard work and practice in overcoming difficulties. Life cannot be all taking in: there must also be giving out. Of the two boys we are comparing the one has the stimulus of intellectual conversation. At home and at school he has abundant opportunity for self-expression. It is not so with the other. It is but rarely that the home can furnish any such stimulus or opportunity, and at School he

is but one of perhaps 40 or 50 in a class, and the teacher is very apt to do most of the talking. That is a temptation that besets every teacher everywhere, and the larger the class the harder it is to resist. The "chalk and talk" of Mr. Holmes's phrase are the natural refuge of the overburdened. But of course they are fatal to the boy's chance of mental development. If he is particularly virtuous he may become a pale reflection of you, which is the last thing you would wish; he may use your words, pretend your thoughts are his, make you his prophet. But then how shall he hereafter, and so very early, stand alone?

In that very remarkable book the Biography of W. E. Ford (a wholly imaginary character) a disciple, a grown man, comes to Ford in his trouble, seeking to learn from the master a way of escape. The reply goes to the very root of all moral and intellectual education. "You," he said, "must be God. I can't."

The aphorism quickens curiosity. We should like to see Ford at work with a class of ten-year olds, and we are allowed to do so.

"In the first lesson of a term's course," says the biographer, "he usually gave us little to do but listen, unless one or other of us let his attention wander, when Ford would recall the truant with a beckoning question. Leaning over his desk, his eyes unveiled and looking, it seemed, through the wall behind us into some clear distance, he would map out a line of work upon which we were going to embark. He held out no baits: "You'll find that part fairly stiff," was often his comment after outlining an attractive section of his programme. When we, in imagination, were already engaged upon the detailed struggles that he had promised us, he would begin to open up vistas. At this point, our subject led into regions of history, at that, into a world of scientific miracles; its development had been a long exciting business of human exploration and discovery; gradually a sense grew upon us of its place and value in the sum total of thought and knowledge.

Then—we felt the moment coming—he would push himself back from his desk and begin a slow, measured walk between the window and the blackboard. … He spoke as though to himself, … searching for simple words in which to clothe his conviction that some trite school subject had its note to sound in the music of the spheres. … We listened for all we were worth, piecing together what we could. It seemed for the moment the most desirable thing in heaven or earth to be

able, some day, to see arithmetic or geography as Ford saw it. And later in the term, when some "fairly stiff part" of the work stood up, stark and inexorable, to be tackled, we went for it with little beguiling or driving. …

His wide knowledge fascinated us; but whenever any of us had come hot-foot upon some fresh question, our instinctive desire was to find out what Ford thought about it, rather than what he knew. Theory never came from his hands in heavy lumps, but sprang straight into flight, to be followed eagerly to the limit of our vision. And it was never as his own theory that he insisted upon it. “Here’s an idea; see it fly!” was his attitude. … He propped a truth upon his own authority, his own reputation with us, for the first moment only; the next moment he had left it hovering before its flight in the air before us, and had joined us as a spectator.”

Of course we must not tell the boy what to do and say, and what to think. He must think his own thoughts, speak his own words. You agree? Then what about his composition? Is he writing about subjects he has chosen in language of his own, or have you provided the subject, the order and method of treatment, and about nine-tenths of the words? The composition is always a difficulty. Many teachers have been helped to overcome it by the School Garden and Nature Study, which in the country afford subjects for enquiry, observation, record, description, and illustration, in such profusion and variety, that children may follow their own tastes, and conduct their own independent enquiries and observations, if only the teacher will sometimes stand aside and forbear to spoil the fun. So have I seen the most delightful and original work. I recall two fat notebooks filled by a little girl with her observations, through two seasons, of the ways of a robin, and in the same school poetry of considerable charm and real feeling for rhythm and language. Of course in that School unprompted observations were being made, and original records were being written by all the children from Standard I. upwards. In another School I remember to have been delighted by a series of observations made, again by a girl, during her walks to and from School, and recorded in the very spirit of Gilbert White himself, and indeed in language curiously like his, though the child had never read him. I mention these only as striking examples among many similar in character. That is how composition is done in these Schools, and in many another where the Garden and Nature Study are allowed to play
[p 104]
their very charming and most helpful part within the classroom.

But Gardens and Nature Study are not everywhere possible, and I confess that I had not discovered how to provide for the hard work and the copious self-expression, where those allies were wanting. Then in a happy moment I stumbled upon the experiments and methods of Miss Mason, whose name I doubt not will be honoured hereafter in the select company of the great Educational Reformers.

Either we miss our mark in the Elementary School or our aim is wrong. Miss Mason thinks that, gravely underestimating the child’s capacity, we set our aim too low. She criticises our “plausible and pleasant ways of picturing, eliciting, demonstrating, illustrating, summarizing, in fact doing all those things for children, which they are born with the potency to do for themselves”; and she tells us that if we will have courage, “we shall be surprised … at the amount of intellectual strong meat almost any child will take at a meal and digest at his leisure”; adding that “teaching and tale, however lucid or fascinating, effect nothing until self-activity, be set up, that is, *self-education* is the only possible education; the rest is the mere veneer laid on the surface of a child’s nature.”

I shall not explain the details of the scheme by which she achieves her purpose and sets up self-activity: those will be given in papers that are to follow. I will only say that it depends first upon the supply of books exceeding in quantity and quality, in range of subjects and of course in cost, anything to which the Elementary Schools have been

accustomed, and second upon the systematic oral narration by younger children and written summarizing by the older of that which they have heard read or have read themselves.

Five Gloucestershire Schools have been working under Miss Mason's scheme since last May. Even in three months the effect was already manifest. The gain in interest and intelligence was great: the imagination had been stirred: the vocabulary had been enriched in a very striking way; and the power of expression had developed to an extent that can best be realised if I say that a child is now writing three or four rapid vigorous pages stamped with its individuality, where six months before it would scarce have written one, and that one without trace of facility, vigour, or self-expression. The difference between the child from the cottage and his happier rival was being rapidly reduced.

[p 105]

It is impossible not to form the very highest hopes of the ultimate fruit of the scheme, when it shall have been at work for four or five years, and children are coming up to the top of the School who were entered to it at the bottom.

If I have a single criticism to make it is that Miss Mason's children may apparently go through their childhood without ever reading a children's story of adventure. That no doubt is because her scheme was first evolved for and applied to children of the class who see plenty of them at home. The cottage children, however, if they are to know the pleasures that are to be found in fiction, should surely see some children's fiction in the School. The bow must not be for ever bent.