

PROFESSOR HUXLEY AND THE P.N.E.U.

BY MARION KING.

I HAVE been reading Professor Huxley's lecture on "A Liberal Education and where to find it" in his "Lectures and Lay Sermons," and think it may be of some value for us to consider his views and see how far the Parents' Union answers his question "Where to find it?"

This discourse, "A Liberal Education," was addressed to working men and is worthy of close attention. Seeing that any "liberal" education must begin whilst a child is young and continue throughout life I think it will not be out of place to consider some of the points in Huxley's lecture by the side of those of the Parents' Union. Huxley employs the metaphor of a game of chess as a parable of life, all of which is well worth reading but is too long for me to quote here.

He goes on then to emphasize the fact that there is no such thing as an uneducated man. From infancy the child is educating himself by means of eye, ear and touch. "Suppose," Huxley says, "an adult man in the full vigour of his faculties could suddenly be placed in the world and left to do as he best might. How long would he remain uneducated? Not five minutes. Nature would begin to teach him through the eye, the ear, the touch, the properties of objects."

The importance of training the senses as one of the most vital factors of Education is fully realised in the Parents' Union School. "To every one of us the world was once as fresh and new as to Adam," Huxley writes, "... for every man the world is as fresh as it was at the first day and as full of untold novelties for him who has eyes to see them."

Do we not strive, through living books and living ideas, to
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open the eyes of the children that the world may for ever be fresh and new to them? Let me give one more quotation. "That man, I think, has had a liberal education who has been so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will ... whose intellect is a clear, cool, logic engine ... ready like a steam engine to be turned to any kind of work ... whose mind is stored with knowledge of the great and fundamental truths of Nature; one, who, no stunted ascetic, is full of life and fire, but whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience, who has learned to love all beauty, whether of nature or art, to hate all vileness and to respect others as himself." Does this not wonderfully sum up what we are all working for? "Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life." The result of a child's education depends on his environment, the training he has had in habits of mind and body and the presentation of living ideas which awakens the personality of the child. "A man is not educated till he can make himself do what he ought to do" is a thought which underlies the Parents' Union. I think it is not wrong to say that our children are "full of life and fire," for one never hears complaints of dull children among Parents' Union School children. I can also add that, with many others, I have personally had experience of the way in which such a training develops the personality of the child and invigorates and brings out the dull child.

The doors of Nature are opened to the child and he is taught to love beauty because only the best, of books, music, pictures is presented to him. I am afraid I may be exceeding the space ration, but I must just add one more point. It must be kept in mind that Huxley was

speaking to working men, for them and for their children. He was pleading for a liberal education for all just as the Parents' Union pleads for a living education in the paper entitled "A Liberal Education." Our Union, too, follows one of the principles of Huxley's South London Working Men's College, that is, it is self-supporting, the public leads and we follow. If only the parents of our elementary school children would take to heart what Miss Mason and others have written about liberal education (and to some extent they do) they would desire these things and the Parents' Union will be able to supply them. We are waiting and working, and the demand is indeed being made.