

P.N.E.U. Notes.

In connection with the Conference of Educational Associations, a P.N.E.U. Conference was held on Wednesday, 2nd January, 1924, at University College, Gower Street. Chairman, The Rev. H. Costley-White, Headmaster of Westminster School. The subject of the Conference was,—“A Liberal Education for All.”

The Chairman, who introduced the speakers, said that a liberal education meant an education in freedom. All should be educated so as to attain mastery over their own minds and thereby mastery over the circumstances of their lives. Freedom was the note of the P.N.E.U. system of education, which meant freedom from ignorance, prejudice and fear. Fear led to the slavery of superstition, prejudice led to the slavery of hatred and ignorance to every other sort of slavery. To attain this freedom, they must bring the children's minds into touch with great ideas and great thinkers.

The papers by MR. G. H. HUSBAND (Middlesborough), and MR. THEODORE J. FAITHFULL, appear elsewhere.

MR. H. W. HOUSEHOLD (Education Secretary for the county of Gloucester), said that the whole of the wrong twist given to public education was the consequence of the poverty under which public education began its work. It was impossible with a class of 60 chil-

[p 220]

dren or more even to keep them quiet if there were no books, and so the teacher had to pour out instruction and use tricks to present knowledge. One result to-day was that the teacher thought the whole thing depended on him, and the other was the attitude of the public towards the result and the constant criticism of the product. They had taught the child to read, but not to want to read. When every adult citizen is a voter it is of the utmost importance that they should be able to form right judgments for themselves. How can they do this if brought up on “school readers”? Such readers were partly the consequence of poverty and partly of the pernicious idea that the child of the worker could not tackle a book unless it was one written down to his level. Now under Miss Mason's method the child is compelled to form judgments. By following the P.U.S. programme the pupil becomes acquainted with a period from so many different points of view that it is obliged to use its powers of discrimination, thereby receiving training for its future duties as a citizen. Miss Mason proved that all children want to put themselves in relation with every sort of knowledge, and such widely diffused knowledge best serves the interests of civilisation, as this can only be wrecked by people who do not know what it stands for. It was only by throwing all things open to all that they could get that understanding by the people of what the past stood for and of what it had to teach.

It was a miracle to see the children in the little village schools of Gloucestershire with teachers, many of them not themselves well educated, pursuing knowledge with an eagerness they would seldom find, even at a later age, in the greatest Public Schools. These children were filled with the enthusiasm of the Sixteenth Century. That was because Charlotte Mason has put before them books written by men with something to communicate and not “school books” written by men in answer to a request from a publisher.

MISS PENNETHORNE (Organising Secretary), explained the working of the Parents' Union School, both in private and in elementary schools, stating the methods necessary for a school to

associate itself with the Union programmes and indicating how much liberty and elasticity was possible in individual circumstances whilst continuity of method and breadth of outlook were ensured to the children in spite of changes in teacher or locality. She pointed out that there was one danger attending the use of narration, namely that if the portion given was too short only a repetition from verbal memory resulted, in other words slavery to books instead of slavery to teachers. When, on the contrary, a whole story or incident had to be retold, then the individual will of the child was exercised in the reception or rejection of the ideas contained, and its reasoning power grew as it learnt to look out for cause and effect and to eliminate unessential detail whilst retaining the picturesque that struck its individual fancy. The system thus aimed at giving the pupils the mastery of their own minds. Such a liberal education would give them men and women who could so control their powers, so fill their leisure time, that when their own children came of school age, they would re-tread the path with them because they had seen the vision of where that way was leading to a new Renaissance, a new growth, a new England, and a new world.

[p 221]

The HON. MRS. FRANKLIN (Hon. Secretary), who had just returned from a most successful lecture tour in Canada and the United States, said that she had been greatly impressed by the enthusiasm for education she had met there. If money was needed for educational [sic] work, that money was forthcoming. The way of the educational pioneer in that country was easy because the Americans were the greatest idealists she had ever met. They cared for art, for nature and they cared supremely for education.