

A YEAR OF P.N.E.U.
IN A REMOTE VILLAGE SCHOOL
IN RUTLAND.

By E. G. BOLTON.

It was after a period of dissatisfaction that I first heard a lecture on P.N.E.U. work in elementary schools. Much interested I soaked myself in Miss Mason's engrossing books, and had the good fortune to see the work in progress. A sympathetic Director (himself an enthusiast) afforded facilities for an early start with just a few subjects. Now, after a year, each term of which meant more subjects added from the P.N.E.U. programmes, several results are evident, which may interest *Parents' Review* readers, especially those who have the good fortune to teach in Elementary Schools.

First and foremost, much more work is being done, and I account for this by the practical application of the P.N.E.U. motto, which does away with the bugbear, Revision. In other words the "I can, I will" supersede the "I may."

It is good to note that with an increase in quantity there is also the much desired improvement in quality, and as this is specially evident in written work, marking has become something of a pleasure. The wide and varied reading has resulted in an astounding increase in vocabulary. I had been warned that spelling would suffer, but I find that recourse to dictionaries for five or ten minutes each day to clear up difficulties of meaning, pronunciation, and spelling, help to combat this drawback. Of course, the context in which difficulties appear, is a great help in learning meanings of words.

With the elimination of questions and answers and the substitution of narration, the children begin to talk and talk intelligently, and even the few nervous children who falter in narrating before a whole class, usually do fairly well to their intimate friends in their own class group of three or four. What is perhaps more remarkable is that there are evidences of a struggle to eradicate "street" language. I recently
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heard a girl in the playground say, "I have no use for it," when asked to change some little feminine knick-knack, and "Be a Spartan," is the usual admonition to the whimpering victim of a cricket mishap. Other evidences have delighted me with the fact that a start has been made.

Our children are encouraged to narrate in verse, which has proved a very valuable and advantageous exercise. Besides an improvement in beauty of expression, there is a value which, though it cannot be estimated, must be considerable. I mean the thoughts, phrases, and words which never get recorded on paper, but which are reserved mentally.

Are the children keen? Is it necessary to drive rather than travel with them? are questions which have been asked me. I think the following is typical of the enthusiasm which pervades the school. A boy of eight who was listening to wild animal stories—I believe the book was *Tommy Smith at the Zoo*, suddenly startled the large room where two teachers were busy with their respective forms, by clapping his hands and ejaculating to their astonishment, "This is better than school!"

In my own form, after one term on P.N.E.U. programmes, I set the following for composition: "How I like School Life." Carefully avoiding to hint about the change in our work, I

rather looked forward to marking. Even my liberal anticipations were surpassed, for ten of the twelve spoke enthusiastically of the new era. Some loved the books, others the pictures, while one youth was so glad that he did not have to wait “for the dunces,” but could go on at his own pace. Of the two the elder said, “There was no need to change. The old work had always been alright and should be now.” I pictured it being talked over at home, and was thankful even for that. The twelfth wanted, as I expected, to leave school. However, even he is being caught up, for he makes us in plasticine some really good Greek soldiers, etc., and so regains his prestige in the class.

Teachers who have really got the gist of the scheme, find work more pleasurable than it was before. Boredom and weariness never come in school hours—there is no time with the ever changing varied lessons. Then there is the added delight of wide reading, so very necessary in this work. Above all there are results which oftentimes raise one to realms of ecstasy [sic].

And parents,—those who ought to know and take a much
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more active part in school work—Does it in any way arouse their curiosity or, better still, interest. May I again quote my own experience. Three mothers asked me what it was all about, and I suggested that we might meet one night in school and talk it over. Every parent was invited by letter and on the stated evening nine arrived. We talked quite informally, and agreed to meet monthly for further chats. Our membership has grown to thirty-four, largely through the efforts of the first enthusiasts. At our monthly meetings they see all their children’s books, we discuss such things as attendance, punctuality, etc.—and how these talks have cleared the air—they arrange school outings and concerts, and visit the school one day each term. This winter we are going to read together “As You Like It,” and I anticipate better work from the children by so doing.

In conclusion, I ought to mention that each Friday an exercise book is taken home, and when returned on Monday, father has initialled it. Thus I know father has looked at it, and father likes it, possibly because it appeals to his vanity. Then, too, parents borrow text books for the week-ends, and in one case where “King Lear” was always in request, I discovered that the family were reading it together!

I have dared to set down these observations, not because they are peculiar to me, but in the hope that some other “struggling in the dark,” may be helped, and then, too, out of gratitude to Miss Mason and her disciples.