

P.U.S. IN HOME SCHOOLROOM.

BY MRS. JOHN BUCHAN.

WHEN I was invited to speak here to-day I was at first most reluctant to do so. My reasons for reluctance were the natural diffidence of an unpractised speaker—and the knowledge that for ignorant persons to stand up and speak to experts was to court unnecessary disaster. But on second thoughts I felt that after all I could throw myself on your mercy as regards my very meagre powers of speech, and perhaps the very fact that I was an amateur had its value.

Another reason also weighed with me, which was that I am a humble representative of a hitherto rather despised and disconsidered class of people—the parents. It is a curious fact that while so much is said with bated breath about the sacredness of motherhood, and the joys of fatherhood, parents collectively enjoy a most unenviable reputation for stupidity and obscurantism. I have heard parents held up to obloquy by teachers for the rather incompatible sins of apathy, fussiness, indifference and love of interference. The Parents' N.U. has done a great many excellent things, but not to my mind anything with such far reaching results as that of making a Union in which so much is done by the parents. In fact they may claim to have raised the status of the parents

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and committed them finally to a real and living co-operation with the other two high contracting parties, the teacher and the child. I spoke just now of the faults attributed to parents. Should I be considered presumptuous if I say that I think they partly arose from a lack of standard? There was a disorganisation in home education, it seems to me, and so many gaps were left in knowledge and aptitude because the parents were not absolutely in touch with outside educational ideals, and had really no knowledge to what a state of proficiency a child of a certain age should have attained. I have even lately heard many mothers say, "I have no idea whether my child of eight is very backward or rather forward. (I am bound to say that they always assumed the latter). What ought a child of eight to know?" I have always replied by telling the P.U. has brought into home education a real vital standard, urged them to get their programme and work it for a year, and have assured them that they will then have a very good idea of how far on or far back their child is for its age. I taught my own little girl for some time in this way, and got a far greater insight into her mind and her grasp of particular problems at a particular age than I could ever have done in any other way.

Another thing that particularly appealed to me when I joined the P.U. and started a class at my own house, is the way in which the children are taught. One great defect in home education is, that when you have a governess or a tutor whose sole occupation it is to impart information to one or two children, they are very apt to follow the line of least resistance and pour volumes of knowledge into the children's ears, while no very great attempt is made to watch their growth, to test their powers of understanding, or to see how far they are responding or re-acting to the education that is being given them. I do not of course need to tell this Conference that in the P.U. Home Schoolroom this is not the case. The children are not spoon-fed with knowledge, they are made to get it for themselves out of books. They are guided and directed, it is true, in choice of books and subjects, but the whole aim and object is, if I may use such a phrase, to give them a sort of intellectual backbone from the very beginning,

to help them to stand, to walk, and to run, so far as the mind is concerned. A P.U. teacher is like a gardener who allows the plants a free and hardy growth, instead of one who prunes, cuts and ties up all the flowers and shrubs into shapes contrary to their nature.

I could go on for a very long time talking about the subject if I did not fear to take up the time allotted to me. The little

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class which I have at home is an oasis of keen, bright happiness in the midst of all the tragic happenings of the tremendous times that we are living in, and I should like to speak of the very broad and thorough religious teaching, the enchanting nature study, and the love of their own language that the children receive, but owing to the lack of time I cannot do this.

There is just one thing I should like to mention if you will allow me. The P.U.S. child starts life with a ready-made library of good books and a love of reading them, which is like wearing chain armour against the vicissitudes of life. One *special* book in use in my class has struck my fancy as illustrating the sense of proportion so essential to all education. The other day I was asking the school-master of a private school what he would like my boys to learn before coming to him. He said, "If you teach them history try and show them what events synchronised in the world at the same time. If you cannot do it any other way write up on sheets of paper and put it round their nursery." I turned as usual to the P.U.S. and found salvation in the Book of Centuries. In case anyone here may not know of it, I will just explain that it sprang from the very excellent book by Mrs. Epps, written specially for children visiting the British Museum. The idea of this book has been evolved and extended. It consists of a big copy book, interleaved with drawing paper, on the ruled side are written names and dates, and on the other side are drawn or pasted in pictures of objects of interest of that century selected by the child and copied out of books. It does not need any pointing out how great is the educational value of this knowledge and research. Before this audience dare I confess it, that in looking at the 6th Century B.C. I was amazed to discover that Daniel, Æsop, Buddha, Confucius, Themistocles, all flourished in the same century, and for the children who had in the past a vague idea that Queen Elizabeth and Marcus Aurelius reigned at the same moment this would come as a revelation.

A friend of mine was examining school children in Scotland and put the question, "Who was Lord Rosebery?" to which she received the startling reply, "The child of Mary Queen of Scots and the younger Pitt." Well, a Book of Centuries would have helped matters there.

May I say in this connection that specimens of Books of Centuries, with someone who can explain their working, will be outside for anyone to see who is interested in them.

I must thank you for your patience and attention to these few

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remarks made from the point of view of the humble and necessary parent. In these tragic days when the golden youth of the Nation is falling and the gaps in the generations behind us are widening, to our children will fall the biggest part of reconstructing a new England, and all our thoughts and all our work should be to make them worthy of their great task, and it has been a privilege to me to come here this afternoon and address those whose life is spent in this noble end.