WEDNESDAY, 5TH, 8 P.M.

A LIBERAL EDUCATION FOR ALL.

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When the P.N.E.U [sic] scheme was introduced into our school, I welcomed it with enthusiasm. I was taking the girls at the top of the school—girls of 12 years of age. At last!—I thought—we have what we have always wanted—books and more books! books, too, which in the main are primarily interesting and suitably written—not dead and didactic as were the old Historical and Geographical readers which one remembers—but which one had long since cast aside.

I remember the first examination! The result showed that every child found something which appealed. Whereas the test showed limitations in various directions—no child doing excellently in all subjects; on the other hand—and this is a more vital fact—the less intelligent, yea, even the least intelligent, gave marked evidence of appreciation of different subjects, or sometimes of parts of subjects.

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Every class, five in all, the lowest being Standard I., began at the same time to work to the P.N.E.U. programmes, I.B, I.A, II.B, II.A, and III. respectively, and I felt that not until I had girls who had worked to the scheme through all their classes, could I form a fair and adequate opinion of its success. However, from the start, I was glad of the opportunity given us by the Gloucestershire Education Committee, and the sincere appreciation shown by the girls pleased me even more.

As one of them wrote—(for every member of the class was asked to write what she thought of the "new" scheme) "Ever so many grown-up people would like the chance of having these books to read. Before we had these, we had to read the same old, old lot again and again!" And another—"I hear there are not many schools that have these lovely books. We are one of the lucky schools of this district." There is one point which I feel that I must mention quite at the beginning because it is one of the things which so impressed the girls at the start. It is the wonderful linking up of subjects. No longer is History, History, dead to everything else, having no relation to any other part of the curriculum, yet, here is no purposeless correlation which has been known to have been reduced to an absurdity. You will appreciate, I am sure, the wholesome disgust of the small boy, who early in the week was present during an object lesson on the spider. The week rolled on, sums were worked on the spider, dictation written about him, and even the History lesson could not leave him alone. The story of King Bruce and the spider was taken. Lessons had become deadly dull, but at last it was the day for "drawing," the boy's beloved subject. He could not wait until afternoon school began to know. He peeped! the teacher was preparing for the drawing lesson by making the copy on the board.

Out he rushed! and with heartfelt contempt in his voice exclaimed "Its [sic] that wretched spider again!"

In the P.N.E.U. scheme, there is no correlation for correlation's sake, but correlation just

as far as it will help to vitalise ideas. The girls are made to realise that the people of whom they read are human beings like themselves, who have lived, and live again for them. They study a period of English History, they read the contemporary French History, and the older girls take the History of the Literature of that period.

In addition, the literary reader and the Shakespearian Play are chosen, too, to help. This is a natural and helpful linking

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up. The children themselves realise it—not only realise it, but express a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction when they discover that one book throws light on the subject matter of another book. Even the little ones often remark "Oh! like it is in "Tommy Smith!" or "Birds in the Air," making reference sometimes to one book, sometimes to another. All are learning to apply the information which they obtain from individual books. This leads on to something more to be desired. They search at home, feeling that some book or another might tell them something more. We have often been surprised at the illustrations and interesting matter which they bring to school, and so happy in the bringing!

Since last May, I have been able to follow the working of the scheme throughout the school.

In September, 1919, the girls were divided into six classes as the Committee were able to replace the Assistant, who, during the war, had left to take up work in a Boys' School.

The question now was, "Should the top class work as Form IV."?

This, I felt was not practicable.

Our school is situated in an Urban Industrial district, a large majority of the children are from homes where the father, and sometimes the mother too, work in a boot factory. With one or two rare exceptions, our girls do not belong to that company of favoured children whose parents are able to take an intelligent interest in them. English, as it should be spoken, does not exist for them in their home life, and their vocabulary is sadly limited.

I felt, therefore, that so long, at least, as the girls are able to leave school at the age of 13, as a Gloucestershire bye-law allows, the work set for Form III. is sufficiently advanced. An extra class was no difficulty, but rather the solution of a difficulty, for we had proved that the girls who had worked for one year to Form I.A programme, were hardly ready to tackle the programme set for Form II.B. The advance is very considerable, and a two-fold one. 1. In regard to the books used. To take a typical example, Arnold Forster's "History of England" takes the place of "Our Island Story!" 2. In regard to the amount of written work required.

With a very small class, the gulf would be more easily bridged, but with a class of 46!

I wrote to Miss Parish on the matter, suggesting that we

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worked the class next to Form I.A as a preparatory form, working to the programme set for form II.B, but omitting one or two of the books, and being satisfied with less written work in the early part of the year. The letter was forwarded to Miss Mason who sanctioned this arrangement; and said, too, that this form,—II.B preparatory, as we call it, might be reckoned as a P.N.E.U. form. As far as I can at present judge, this plan will be more satisfactory in our particular school.

I wondered at first—and I should have deplored the fact if it were so—whether the influence of the teacher's personality were lessened by the working of a set scheme, given and

examined by an outside authority. I do not think so! It *is* rather—that the personal opinions of the teacher—the colouring by her of the subject matter in hand—retire further into the background. Thus is there more chance of the child forming her own opinions—a *good* thing.

Then too, the best of us can never hope to have given original thought to every subject of a school curriculum.

The P.N.E.U [sic] scheme offers the product of the original minds of able thinkers. It gives children inspiring ideas which promote thought and enquiry—and the more a child thinks, the more he lives—and this is the child's right!

It was the wideness of the P.N.E.U. scheme which, at the beginning, gave me such satisfaction. I have always talked to my girls on all manner of subjects apart from the lessons of any syllabus. Knowing that their outlook on life is extremely narrow, I have tried to make them realise that life holds many interests of which they have never even dreamed; and that the more they can get into touch with things beyond their own horizon, the more enjoyable and purposeful their life becomes. Here we have a store of varied interests offered to them.

Some may be inclined to think that the P.N.E.U. curriculum is too wide. It may be, if we labour at it in our own way, expecting every child to remember everything that she has read [sic]

This, I understand, is not Miss Mason's idea. In fact, at the conclusion of her book, "School Education," Miss Mason sets forth the Children's Magna Carta which I will quote. "My plea is—and I think I have justified it by experience—that many doors shall be opened to boys and girls until they are at least 12 or 14, and always the doors of good houses—that they should be introduced to no subject whatever through compendiums, abstracts or selections—that the young people shall learn what

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history is—what literature is—what life is—from the living books of those who know."

There is one important rule which *must* be followed. Miss Mason insists on one reading only of the subject matter, a careful and attentive reading to be followed by narration. I am convinced that this is not too much to expect from the child. It is a habit to be formed. We all know that habits are more easily formed when the child is young; that is why I feel confident that the girls who are now in the lower part of the school, will when they reach the upper classes, fully justify the working of the scheme in an elementary school.

Not only do the girls narrate after a single reading; but what, perhaps, to the uninitiated is more wonderful still—they *must* and *can, without any revision*, reproduce, at an examination, the knowledge which once and for all they have made their own. There is a tendency to belittle the powers of a child. We could not do these things perhaps ourselves; can we expect the girls to do it? Yes! If *we* fail, it is because we have not formed this habit of concentration, we have not developed this particular attitude of mind. We grown-up folk have, as Tagore says, "already built our shells of habit around us." In the child, the process of building is still going on.

We have just had a particularly interesting experience. Last term being such a short one, it was arranged that the Easter examination papers should be worked *after* the Easter holiday. Great was the fear that the term's work would be forgotten! The fears were groundless, the children were ready when the call came.

It was really an education to take the examination in Form I.B.

When the girls in this Form first came up from the Infants' School last September, at the

average age of six, there were only three at the most who would offer to tell back what had been read to them.

At the end of the first term at the Christmas examination, it was difficult—they needed a great deal of persuasion and encouragement. Only a few were able themselves to put the question "What next?" to their own minds. But at the examination just passed—and which was begun the day after the reopening of the school, there was a marked difference. They were eager to tell what they knew, many wanted to tell *all* they knew, and even the diffident ones could not bear to be left out of it.
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A question was read to them, and had you been there, you could literally have watched the girls bring to you from their storehouse one grain after another, until the whole had been brought; and this, after one reading, in the case of some questions, a reading given three months before—and a holiday between!

Then, when the child could no longer find an answer to the self-put question "What else?" with a confiding smile she would look at you and say "I don't know any more." Surely here—and think what vistas are opened to girls who, working on these lines, go on from strength to strength!—surely here are the beginnings of an appreciation of wide reading which broadens one's outlook on life: and which, to adapt some words of Rudyard Kipling:—

"Shall show thee treasure hid
Thy familiar fields amid;
At thy threshold, on thy hearth,
Or about thy daily path;
And reveal which is thy need,
Every man a king indeed."