THE P.N.E.U. IDEAL IN EDUCATION.

BY H. E. WIX.

We are all so much more interested in education now than ever before that it is interesting to wonder what is the reason. We are quite sure it is connected with the war, and next that it has something to do with Germany, which till 1914 we thought of as the "home of learning." And so it was, of a sort, and we have had a most vivid object lesson of the power of education taken seriously. In England we have not believed in it much as a *power*, but Germany never made that mistake. The Government knew that by means of education the whole people of Germany could be moulded as desired. And the Government succeeded perfectly in its object.

Now we know that "man's aim should exceed his grasp," and there we have perhaps the whole secret of Germany's downfall. She failed because her aim was attainable, and because she reached it. It is for the rest of us to profit by the lesson, to hitch our waggon to a star, to educate for life and not for a living, to remember that a boy is not being educated merely to become a baker, or a soldier, or a doctor.

There are people who think the P.N.E.U. teaching is too idealistic; having had our fill lately of materialistic teaching perhaps they will reconsider it. Certainly the results of P.N.E.U. teaching are extraordinary. I know of one educationist who would have nothing further to do with us because the examination papers sent in by the children of the Parents' Union School were "too good." But we all know that the more we expect from people, the more we get.

Education is such a vast and complex term; it covers so much ground, for it means nothing less than the training for life of that complex being—man. And life is eternal, of which a few moments are spent here "in the body pent." And man is divine as well as human, god as well as animal. We must place

our ideal higher than the requirements of a trade or profession, for the duration of this world only.

There are many accepted divisions of human nature, such as body, soul and spirit. Miss Mason, our founder, divides it into four sides, or aspects, the physical, the moral, the mental and the spiritual. These are, of course, too closely interwoven to be clearly defined, but for the purpose of convenience I propose take the P.N.E.U. ideal in each.

You may think there is nothing new to be said as to *physical training*; that at any rate England's ideal here is splendid. But the P.N.E.U. ideal stands on a broader base than that generally accepted. Games, and drill and gymnastics are too often the sum total of physical training. But Miss Mason holds that children should also learn to do all that healthy young animals, as they are, *can* do. No girl or boy who cannot swim, row, skate, ride, climb trees or a rope, and dance, has had an ideal physical training. You may think that is nearly impossible, but ideals *are* difficult to reach. Drill, excellent and necessary as it is, is but a modern makeshift, made necessary because our natural means of strenuous exercise have so far slipped from us.

Under physical training would also fall in part, several, if not all, handicrafts. One need only watch the baby fingers of a child trying to fold a piece of paper true and straight, to realise how much physical effort is necessary. Or watch the little girl trying to hold her needlework

aright while she hems, or to manipulate her paintbrush, or to control those extraordinarily stupid fingers and make them play five notes in due order and time! Part of all these things are physical. The same is true of claymodelling, Sloyd, wood carving, metal work, leatherwork and the rest, all of which form part of the P.N.E.U. curriculum. Dr. Stainer once said that to play the organ well, it was not enough to have musical genius, but one must also be an acrobat. This all shows how impossible it is to draw any line marking where the physical side of man ends.

Handicrafts are often considered mainly from the point of view of the moral training they afford—for they teach so wonderfully the habits of accuracy, and self reliance. It is no new thing that physical acts have a moral influence. Our old Nannas have known it a long time. Now scientists have proved that actions oft repeated leave such an impress on the tissues of the brain that those same actions, once an effort, become soon almost unconscious, that is they become habitual. Every

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nurse knows how the smoothness and happiness of baby's life depends on habits, well and duly formed, until they have become so much a part of him that they are no more effort than breathing. All this is, I think, recognised by everybody. But having found this wonderful instrument Habit, it is generally dropped when the child leaves the nursery. But, we of the P.N.E.U. know that it can be used very much longer, indeed right through life we never quite lose the power of forming new habits.

So we use habit as one of the means of attaining our ideal in moral training. We do not talk much of the fault, but help the child to replace it by the contrary good habit. It needs diligent, ceaseless effort.

But body "Habit" cannot live or grow without a soul. A spiritual impetus to give life to the habit is necessary. As we think, so we act. In a tiny baby the nurse or mother turns his thoughts from sulks to the pretty blue sky, and as he grows older he is let into the secret of this, and learns to do it himself. So he learns the first steps of self-control, he learns how to choose from among the ideas clamouring to enter in, which he will accept and enjoy, and which he will shut out. But he cannot yet get on alone; there is not really very much that his parents and teachers can do, but there is one very important thing. It is their business to offer him fine inspiring ideas. Perhaps he is a selfish child, does not want to change, or at any rate does not *will* to be unselfish. The idea of the grandeur or the beauty of unselfishness must then be presented to the child. The means will vary, sometimes it is the example of some hero friend, sometimes a picture, sometimes the Scout ideal, sometimes a lucky chance turned aptly to the occasion. We have everyone of us felt the impact of an idea; we shall find that whenever we have really tried to cure ourselves of a fault it has been owing to an idea having struck us. I can remember very well the room which showed me as in a flash, the *beauty* of tidiness; endless scoldings had left me cold, but now I really tried. The desire having been awakened the teacher watches and helps inconspicuously while the new habit is being formed. It needs patience and much perseverance, and some habits are tender plants for a long time. And so gradually, as the child grows older, he learns to discipline his will, to discriminate between true and false ideas, to form a right judgment. So, having learnt to be faithful in little things, we may trust, not without hope, that as a man, he will be faithful in big things.

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Jack Cornwell could never have stuck so doggedly to his duty if he had not habitually

done little things well, and when I read a life of him a few days ago, I found that this was his characteristic always. Heroism of this enduring sort is not of mushroom growth, but the result of "character," built up slowly and surely. And this kind of heroism is in its degree possible to everyone of us and everyone of our children.

But there is another habit, a mental habit, which we all of us long for, though few attain it. I mean the habit of attention, or concentration, and memory which results from it. For this, too, is a habit, and one which children can acquire perhaps more easily than any other. Their appetite for knowledge needs little whetting, for their "curtiosity" is naturally great. If only they can get at the sources of knowledge—I mean things and books—all will be well. But impediments must not be put in their way. Explanations and oral lessons *are* impediments. Long explanations dull the mind and often take away all desire for knowledge; children want to find out for themselves, to use their brains vigorously, and this they can best do if they read good books. They can train themselves to remember and tell all about long passages which they have only read once. And this "narration" as we call it, means "thought," and it is by thought that the brain grows. Ideas give birth to thought; books and things are the twin mines of ideas. Grown-ups who have never tried to read and then re-call their reading have no conception of the growth of the mind that results. Parents who have had their children in the P.U. School often envy them. For they love good literature and know a surprising amount of it, first hand. They have read Piers Plowman for example, and not merely "about it." They remember what they learn in a most enviable manner, they are level-headed and clear in judgment, interested in almost every subject under the sun. Knowledge is living to them and most enjoyable, in fact quite exciting, even thrilling. They also know an unusual amount about the world they live in—flowers, birds, butterflies, rocks, fossils, fungi—and are the nicest companions for a country walk or a visit to a museum or picture gallery that anyone could want. I shall never forget the expression of a staid old British Museum official when two little P.U. School girls saw Rameses II.'s statue for the first time. I fancy he thought such lively enthusiasm almost irreverent.

But in this intellectual side of education there must be something more than interest aroused, and knowledge learnt. There

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must be wonder, such wonder as Mr. Stephen Paget has told us about. Without that, knowledge will be bitterness and vanity. Albrecht Dürer knew that well and has left us his wonderful picture "Melancholia" that we might also learn it. But knowledge infused with wonder of the divine Creator becomes the wisdom which we long for our children to possess. Simoni Memmi and Taddeo Gaddi taught us in their wonderful picture in the Spanish Chapel that *all* knowledge, of either Christian or heathen philosopher comes from God. And this is a great part of the P.N.E.U. ideal. We believe that there is no lesson which does not increase our knowledge of God. We learn about Him pre-eminently in the scripture lesson, but that lesson sheds a light over the rest of the day's work, a light by which we may read the true meaning of each branch of knowledge in turn. For "all knowldge [sic] is sacred."