THE APPLICATION OF P.N.E.U. PRINCIPLES IN THE HOME.[1]

I am an enthusiast for the P.N.E.U. I am an enthusiast because I believe that we of the P.N.E.U. really have the one thing to offer which the whole world needs—an absolutely effective system of education covering the whole life of the child—the whole life of man.

I know this is an enormous claim to make, but of the truth of it I myself have no doubt, and it has grown up within me during the last sixteen years after some experience of P.N.E.U. methods and their application to the training of my own children. I am convinced myself of the truth of Miss Mason's theory of education because I have invariably found that it is able to meet every condition by which it can be tested. I would we had a professional here, one trained in Miss Mason's College at Ambleside, in the old country, but unfortunately distance and expense prohibit our enlisting the services of one to do pioneer work out here. She could speak to you in enthusiastic terms of the progress of the Union and of the revolutionising of education in every class of the community. My witness is no less enthusiastic, though I cannot speak in the language of a professional. But as I am speaking mainly to those who are not well acquainted with the P.N.E.U. perhaps you will allow me to tell you briefly how I first became interested in Miss Mason's Theory of Education.

Anyone who has lived in the wilds of South Gippsland for a few years on end will bear me out when I say that, in the winter time especially, one is apt to be thrown very much on one's own resources for intellectual entertainment of however modest a kind. Day after day, week after week goes by and the prospect from one's dining room window is monotonous in the extreme—a blurred vision of hills, dimly seen through the ever-incessant

rain. Perforce we turn our thoughts indoors and are thrown back more than ever on the companionship of books. We wander at leisure in pastures new and delightful, and browse at will in unexplored fields of thought. Thus it happened on one of those damp and murky winter days, some fifteen or sixteen years ago, browsing around amongst the bookshelves, I lighted upon a pile of magazines, and remembered having rescued them from a sale in the city, thinking, at the time, "one never knows what one will be reduced to in the Back Blocks." Glancing at some of the articles, I was struck by such titles as these:—"The Mind of the Child," "The Child's Inheritance," "Fairy Stories, a help or hindrance in Education," "The Child, a Person." My attention was arrested by these head-lines, and I felt, here was something right in my line. I only had one child then, but often worried over my helplessness and ignorance of everything in relation to the upbringing of a child. Well, this apparently casual introduction to the "Parents' Review," and subsequently to all Miss Mason's books on Education was a revelation to me; they met a need, a soul hunger, which surely all mothers must feel when for the first time they realise the responsibility of having a child in trust for society, when, to put it plainly, we realise that in sixteen, eighteen, nineteen years, as the case may be, we shall be handing over to the world a man or woman, who, very largely as the result of our influence on him, will contribute to the betterment or downgrade of the world as a whole. To me this was an overwhelming thought. It seemed to me that as far as the mother is concerned everything else must take second place to this, our chief job in life, that of handing on our children, equipped to the best of our power, in body [sic] mind and spirit for the service of the world.

Well, then, keeping that idea as our lode star, how are we to set about fulfilling our trust? One is apt to be appalled, almost to desperation, at the immensity of the task, and at one's own ignorance. But the goal seems worthy of the greatest effort, so we throw ourselves into this vocation of ours with a will. In our desire to learn we must not be too ready to pick up any ideas on education that happen to be going. When we read on the question of child training let us have our critical faculties very wide awake, so that we shall not be led astray by theories, however attractive, that do not spring from a thorough understanding of the child as a person.

Probably nothing short of your own experience will convince you that there is anything fundamentally different in Mason's ideas from those of the one hundred and one other educationalists that crop up from time to time. It is experience that has con-
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vinced me of their validity and uniqueness, and hundreds of parents have found in Miss Mason's teaching just the help which they needed, covering as it does every phase of the child's education—religious, physical, moral and mental. It gives definiteness to the aims of the mother. Instead of vague conceptions of training she will now have a plan to go upon.

Starting then with the idea that the child is a person, very much alive in all respects, how are we going to set about our task of upbringing? Briefly, by the discipline of habit and the inspiration of ideas; but these two phrases carry with them a whole world of significance. We all subscribe in word at least to the necessity of forming good habits early, but do we as enthusiastically put this theory into practice? I think if we neglect to make use of this very valuable help in early training it is more because it requires a certain amount of thought, care and discipline on our own part, than because we are in any way uncertain of the value of habit forming in child training. But to goad as it were into action, let us constantly remind ourselves of the physiological nature of a habit—that "the constant direction of the thoughts along a certain line produces a set or bias in the tissues of the brain, this set is the first trace of a rut, or path, a line of least resistance along which the same impressions made another time will find it easier to travel than to make another path—so arises a right of way for any given habit of action or thought." If we only realised what a powerful weapon this is with which nature has provided us, we would wield it tirelessly from the very first. Why is it that we see so many pitiable cases of children taking charge of their parents, of mothers saying "I can do nothing with her?" Surely it is because the Mother has not realised what is going on in her child's brain long before he or she can speak, and that the *habit* of obedience must be ingrained from babyhood.

To take an everyday and apparently trivial example, we all know how a baby loves to throw spoons or anything that comes handy, off the table. We must not be satisfied with replacing the things, or removing the offender to a safe distance from the table, we must let him see by word or look that this must not be, and if he persists, slap his hands, and the next time he is tempted to try it on he will remember the sting.

There are a hundred and one ways and opportunities during the day for teaching obedience, and though you may flatter yourself your off-spring is an exceptionally strong-willed child, if we honestly make use of every opportunity, and never give him reason to think that if he cries long enough for a thing he will get it,—in fact, show that we possess a stock of patience of which Job

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himself might boast—if we train on these lines, *before our babes are two years old*, we shall not repent it afterwards. After that, of course, his own will will often try to dominate the situation, and we may find ourselves in a very ticklish position. We may even appear to have to accept defeat under exceptional circumstances, but it is not a real defeat,—the good work that has been put in during the first two years will assert itself, the *habit* of obedience cannot be altogether ignored, and the victory will ultimately be on the side of "I ought" and therefore "I will." Our manner of rule must be just and decided. We should never let our children think that though we have refused a request at the front door, so to speak, that they can get there by some backstairs passage. Moreover, I cannot hold with those parents who think that children have a right to demand a reason for everything—and I think nature bears me out in this attitude; for I understand that the instinct to obey, i.e., the feeling "I ought" is developed at a much earlier stage than the instinct to reason, and if we give way to this latter instinct, and try to force the child's reasoning powers, before nature intends they should be exerted, it is to the detriment of his mind as a whole, and tends to obscure and hinder the action of that very responsive earlier instinct to obey. The child's will, thus guided wisely and sympathetically becomes his handmaiden instead of master—throughout life.

With regard to the other habits which I think we should make it our business to cultivate during the first two or three years of our children's lives, I would place next in importance to obedience, contentment, attention and unselfishness. The whole atmosphere of the home will help or hinder contentment. We should aim at making our children's rooms bright and restful. We should surround them with at least a few good and beautiful pictures and colourings to look at, so that their taste may be pure and good.

During the babyhood of our children let us remember that the more tranquillity a child has enjoyed in infancy, the more he is likely to possess afterwards. It is for this reason that it is much more desirable for children to be occupied with things than with people; things are tranquil objects, with people their feelings and sympathy or dislike are continually excited. With regard to the habit of attention, we all, parents and teachers alike, bemoan the inattentive scatter-brained child, but whose fault is it more often than not? Do we connect this inattention with any laxity of training in the nursery years ago? What about that multitude of playthings we have permitted? Has it been our custom to take enough interest in our children's amusements to see that one toy is played with for a sufficient length of
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time before he is allowed to leave it for another, that a puzzle which has been started shall be worked out before he flits off to a picture book that has caught his eye?

Of the importance of the early training in unselfishness we are all agreed, and I do not propose to go into the question of the best method of cultivating unselfishness here, but may I just say this, that the constant direction of our children's minds outwards, the bringing them into touch with big thoughts and big deeds will go a long way towards combating this spirit of selfishness so characteristic of the present age. They become so vitally interested in other things, other people, other ideas, that they have no time or little for themselves,—the big outside world; whether it be portrayed in the heavens, the world of nature, or of books, is so wondrously fascinatingly interesting, that quite unconsciously self-assertiveness seems to vanish.

John Masefield says in his "Book of Discoveries," which we are enjoying together at the present time, "Only knowledge is always good. Boys and girls should have enough knowledge of the creatures in the earth about them to enable them to enter into other lives than their own. There is no greater delight on earth than to enter another brain by an act of the imagination. Lying stock still in the grass watching life at work makes a man ashamed of the little he can understand."

If I seem to have dwelt at unnecessary length on the question of habit n [sic] child-training, it is because I realise that if the machinery of family life is not in good working order the life of that little community cannot be as happy and joyous as it should be. But though the cultivation of habits is essential to good life, we must not confuse issues and say that habit any more than discipline *produces* character. Where then shall we look for our lodestar, our inspiration, whereby these dry bones of habit and discipline shall be vitalised? We find the answer in the second of our educational weapons, viz., the inspiration of ideas, or, in other words, by knowledge, and the training knowledge brings with it. Knowledge, not learning—learning is worth little in itself, knowledge is worth much. Learning is the acquisition of the bald facts, the sort of brain food we get served up in text-books wonderfully concise, perfectly hygienic and withal predigested brain food. Knowledge is this matter vivified by the contact of a master mind, which means no less than by the spirit of God Himself; and in this way what was mere information has become a living thing, and has the power within it of illuminating another mind; for we all know that "it is of the nature of an idea which strikes us to breed ideas, and we think only as we are touched by thought." And the best thought and the best
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knowledge of the best minds is writ in books—living books. Further, as we are told by Miss Mason, children come into the world perfectly fitted to enjoy and appreciate knowledge, and their minds reject mere learning and flag under it just as much as the healthy body becomes anaemic if always fed on predigested food. This, then, is the crux of the whole matter, which we of the Parents' Union, following in Miss Mason's footsteps, will labour unceasingly. Everyone has an instinctive love of knowledge, we all know knowledge when we get it, just as we know good, and we take to it kindly. Children have no intellectual limitation save that of ignorance—they *require* knowledge just as they require food. "As the underfed child is of stunted growth, so intellectual underfeeding accounts for the low moral and intellectual status of many persons, and if we have few mental rescoures [sic] the reason is that we were kept on short rations as children." Now, how does all this affect out [sic] practical every day nursery or school room politics? It is of the most vital moment—we all want to make our nurseries, or whatever takes the place of the nursery in modern homes, the happiest place possible. What is the high road to happiness—active, conscious happiness that we call joy?

It is a liberal mind diet—for children get bored and therefore cross for just the same reason that we get bored if left too much to ourselves; their minds are craving for food, real food, and sheer boredom often makes them quarrelsome.

Our own resources are too limited to sustain a growing knowledge, and it is only when we and the children feed on the same books that delightful intercourse is possible.

"But your children are so interesting," a surprised mother once said to me. And if so, why not? Why are not all children interesting, not interesting from a psychological point of

view, but healthily, companionably interesting they should be, and they are where there is a mutual joy in books.

But this subject is simply inexhaustible. It is the elixir of life. The mother who has not soared with her children into realms of imagination, gone through thrilling adventures with the "gentlemen of fortune" in search of hidden treasure, mutually felt the responsive thrill to deeds of heroism and self-sacrifice of the explorers to the South Pole, felt the kinship of Mowgli's brothers in the Jungle—the mother who has never tasted these experiences, and felt the glow from the children's faces as she reads, the parted lips, the eager eyes, some times even the tears—has missed perhaps the chief joy of life.

I trust I have made our task appear big enough to satisfy even the greatest glutton for work. Here, if anywhere, is a

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scope for all our energies. Is our particular bent in the line of things practical, things literary, things scientific or artistic? What more promising field for labour could we ask than the mind of the little child?

"If we regard children for themselves and as themselves, without any reflex thought as to what we do for them, and what they think of us, what other people think of what we are to the children, and so on through the endless chain of self-involved motives, if we look out upon the children and not in upon ourselves we shall see them as they are—with the great possibilities proper to them as persons, and with the fearful hazards which it is our part to steer them through."

Fathers and mothers this is our work, and we alone can do it. It rests with us, parents of young children, to be saviours of society. Nothing else matters in comparison. The avocations about which people weary themselves are as foolish child's play compared with this one serious business of bringing up our children in the right way.

As you have been told time and time again, Miss Mason deals with the whole life of the child. Each child comes into the world with faculties or possibilities. If the child is going to become a great scientist the germ is already there. If he is to become a great thinker the seed is already sown. Is a Paderewski born? We hold him in our arms. We cannot, though we die in the attempt, produce a Fabre, a Meredith, a Beethoven—but, and this is the point we need to grasp above all others, we can—yes, terribly can—bar the doors of a life full of possibilities, cut short, nullify in fact his or her particular quota to the progress of the world. If we face the full meaning of this thought, surely in portioning out our valuable time to this and that necessary employment we shall put in the forefront the training of *ourselves* on the most comprehensive lines. Whoever else can afford to specialise in this age of specialisation, mothers certainly cannot, and the greater the demand for specialisation the more important it is that we who have to prepare the way for the professional educationalist, who perforce has to be a specialist to a certain extent—that *we* should be able to take a sympathetic and intelligent interest in anything and everything in which our children are concerned. Such a phrase as "I take no interest in such and such a thing" should be anathema to the mother. Does it sound a counsel of perfection? If perfection means many sidedness. Yes, it certainly means discipline for ourselves. It is so easy to rush from one extreme to another—from the ideal of being the expert housekeeper, unrivalled in that capacity, but having no time for children's fairy stories, to the extreme of the

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inefficient individual who has not enough concentration to do any job well. It is not easy to strike the happy medium, preserving at the same time "the heart at leisure from itself"; and I repeat that we shall only achieve this goal by making it the aim and object of our existence.

Do I seem to digress and to labour my point? My only excuse is its unparalleled importance. Read, think, watch—three impossibilities you are inclined to say in these days of stress,—not impossible if you value your children at their true worth. If we start on this basis I am confident of the result; we shall find our children so absorbingly interesting that we shall be keen to meet them at all points. Is one gifted with imagination?—and what child is not—we shall breathe with them the atmosphere of Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, Thompson Seton, Defoe and Sir Walter Scott. Is one alive to every movement in the grass, quick to detect the note of a bird, we shall read with them Fabre's fascinating books on the adventurous lives of insects, and we shall ever be ready to hear of new discoveries which the child is only too eager to tell. It is no question of putting ideas into their heads, we are the learners, they the teachers, though unconscious ones. Ours to keep open the avenues of approach to their minds. Keen as we mostly are on fresh air for the body, let us be at least as keen on the wind of the spirit having wide open portals to the mind.

We parents should be educationists first and foremost. I don't care how successful we may be in society, philanthropy, in politics, or in anything else, we are failures in so far as we do not succeed in handing on to the next generation children alive in body, mind and spirit for the service of the community. Time enough for us to criticise the schools and the teachers when we have set our house in order, when we are able to say, in handing over our child to the head of the school: "You may not find this son or daughter of mine gifted in any special direction, but at least you will find him or her wide awake, and with a well nourished mind." I don't think any headmaster or mistress would ask for a better recommendation than that.

A few years ago I was standing at the centre of one of the most beautiful parks in England, that of the Lord Bathurst in Gloucestershire. From the central point there radiated seven avenues of glorious beeches, with over-arching branches, roofing in pathways grass-carpeted, enticing one to explore the mysteries beyond. And the thought struck me, our task, our mother's task, is just as delightful and mysterious as that. The wonderful avenues to knowledge are all there waiting to be explored; children are agog to start on the adventure, but they are too
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little, too inexperienced to start alone. Shall we explore those paths with them?

"All power be yours, He saith,
Over my little ones,
Be yours to have and hold,
Be yours to make or mar
This lovely thing I wrought
With love brought from afar.

Lord of the skies and lands
Take pity on our dust,

Strengthen our mother hands
Lest we betray thy trust.”

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[1] A paper read by Mrs. Eustace Wade at the Annual Meeting (April 18th, 1921), of the Melbourne Branch (Australia.)