

## A LIBERAL EDUCATION FOR ALL.<sup>1</sup>

No. II.

THE writer of a letter to the *Times Educational Supplement* for March 1st, raises three points which I am glad to have the opportunity to discuss, as they relate to matters of importance:— (a) “The considerable cost of the books required (£20 for 160 pupils).” May I submit that an average of 2s. 6d. per head for books, that is, for the actual material of education, is not much in schools so admirably built, equipped, and manned, that the average total cost per head is probably £3 or £4? Much ingenuity has been exercised in reducing the cost of the necessary books to this comparatively small sum; all the considerable volumes, moreover, will last for a number of years, so that the average cost per annum will probably be below the present allowance for books in most Council Schools. (b) The same writer speaks of the spirit “already found in the work of all good schools,” and I should like to add my testimony to the liberality and freedom with which the schools I know of are conducted. Thoughtful measures are taken to secure that the children do read, and that children’s libraries are provided. I shall quote later from letters written by boys of a certain school which show that they make good use of their library and of the time allowed for quiet reading. The schools are in fact so good that one wonders at the enlightenment shown by the teachers in their desire to fall in with a method which rests upon some discoveries as to the behaviour of the mind. (c) The writer goes on to say that “it (the scheme) does not allow liberty in the choice of books”; this is a serious charge and a true one, so far

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as certain periods of the school day are concerned. But the question is, whether it is better to work with a considerable number of prescribed books which answer, that is, which children are able to know and tell in detail, or to deal with a smaller number of books of whose contents, as of the lessons they receive, average children are able to give only a jumbled and imperfect account. I do not find that teachers attach importance to the right of choosing the books they use, but they are very much aware of the great difficulty of such choice. We all remember how, year after year, the headmasters of the Public Schools sat in conference on the question of, was it the best Latin primer to be recommended for the use of preparatory schools, or the best Latin grammar? Anyway, the incident is instructive as showing that the right books for use in a school is a vital question to which working teachers have little time to give.

My former letter, however, has met with so wide a response that perhaps you will allow me to write further. The results of practices founded on this method are so surprising and delightful, so profitable to the nation, that I believe, Sir, you will be furthering the cause to which you do such admirable service by allowing me to make some of them known through your columns.

For example, a “Lady Visitor” who is devoting herself to the work reports on what she saw last week in some council schools. Here is the report of what was going on at the moment in one class of a school of over 200 girls, not, by the way, the school to which I referred in my last letter:—

Standard IV.—a beautiful class, very alive. Children were reading aloud with

good dramatic feeling. They had taken Act II., Scene II. (*Coriolanus*), and were asked to paraphrase it, and one gave a most lucid description of a very wordy conversation. Three then came to the front and repeated in parts a small scene without books. A girl chooses her own players, and they learn their parts near the close of one afternoon. Twenty-five bought copies of *Twelfth Night* last term out of a class of 40, as their mothers wanted to read it, and in one home the father, mother, and children read it through in four nights, each taking a character.

Think of the delicious family chucklings over Malvolio's cross-gartering, and what a memory for after life will that reading be!

Should not this be a worthy offering for our men when they come back—a home in which family readings of Shakespeare, Scott, and the like make life joyous and full of interest? It may be said there is nothing new in that. Does not every school get up a play of Shakespeare's every year? But in this case may I

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call attention to the fact that there is no getting up, little teaching or explanation; the children simply *read* and *know*. We draw large drafts upon the intelligence of children, and such drafts are not dishonoured in one case out of a hundred; in fact I do not know of the "one" case.

These are, roughly speaking, the principles we act upon. Every one has a mind; mind, like body, must be fed; children, our experience seems to show, have minds of the calibre and power that they will have throughout life—that is, all children are not equal, but every child is equal to himself at his best and at any period of his life; therefore the functions which education has hitherto taken upon herself of "developing the faculties," "teaching children how to learn," and so on, are gratuitous and unnecessary. The demand of children is for large quantities of "mind food"; but information is not such food; that which they will assimilate must be put in literary form, must be of the arresting sort that one knows at a single reading. Given this kind of intellectual diet and they are omnivorous; history or travel, science or art, nothing comes amiss. The curiosity of children is unbounded, and they range with delight over a wide field of knowledge; variety is, apparently, as necessary to them as quantity and quality in their intellectual diet. But youth is the season of discipline, and the method of their *self-education* must supply the strenuous discipline which young people require. We find this in the old axiom, "The mind can know nothing but what it can produce in the form of an answer to a question put by the mind to itself." In conformity with this saying we require children to tell, in speech or writing, that which they have acquired, or some part of it. We find ourselves here, again, standing on the bedrock of Nature; for such "telling" proves to be natural and delightful to children, and they throw much of themselves into it. In the act of narrating the sort of self-examination suggested goes on continuously, for after every spoken or written sentence the mind asks itself, "What next?" and the speaker may not be disturbed during such narration by question or remark from the teacher. Behold, without any direct effort on our part, every one of the "faculties" is developing like flower or leaf-bud after a spring shower!

Recognising these and some other points in the behaviour of mind, anybody's mind, we are able to draw up alarmingly full syllabuses of work, term by term, which the children revel in and cover easily, and are prepared to enjoy the week of "ex-

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amination” with which each term ends. These examinations serve the same purpose as the narrations which follow each period of study; they are rather records (and very full records) than tests, and are of great educational value. Since the wise action of the Board of Education in substituting friendly inspections for formal examinations, the children who attend elementary schools are especially open to receive “a liberal education.” Their natural love of knowledge has free play because they are not distracted by competition in any shape; they do not work for prize or place, and so are peculiarly open to what has been called the “joy of learning.” This temper to be found in Council schools is well illustrated by extracts from a few letters from the boys of a big school; these came to be written because governesses who have been trained at a certain Secondary Training College have been asked to give a little help in Nature study to town schools. The plan is for a governess and her pupils to undertake a school, sending from time to time such specimens of twig or flower or fungus as are required for the term’s work. But I cannot introduce the boys’ letters better than by an extract from Miss A.’s, the more so as she makes a point to which I am anxious to call attention:—

The “bird search” the boys refer to is for the notes on the hours of the birds’ songs suggested in the February *Parents’ Review*. Miss B. and Miss C. with their pupils, and I with my two, are keeping an account of the birds which sing and the hours and the weather in which they sing. These lists we are going to exchange every month, and D. suggested that the boys should join us. I wish you could see how happy D. and E. are over it. They have thrown themselves into it heart and soul and are full of ideas and plans to give the boys pleasure and help them. It is bound to have a lasting influence on these two girls and the boys, that they have found this ground of common interest, isn’t it? Doesn’t it all make one see visions of the future with a new sympathy and understanding binding all “classes”? I am so glad that D. and E. have this wonderful opportunity.

Here are some fragments from the letters of the boys, much too short to do justice to the writers (they are in answer to a letter from the two girls which afforded an opportunity which was seized by the genial master):—

Do you fancy Coriolanus and Last Days of Pompeii, they interest me fine. ... I think the letter you sent us has given us something to think about when we go into the parks or woods and notice the kinds of birds. ... We are learning out of books now which are very interesting, especially Coriolanus. I would like to know which book you like best of all. ... We have not seen or heard many birds yet, but as time goes on we are going to copy your example and listen for them in the woods. ... We are getting very brown bread and not much sugar

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and tapers. Flour is 3s. 5d. per stone. I want to know how you like the Science books and Coriolanus. I like them very much. ... The birds are helping to make things happier since they started singing once more, especially the thrush and the lark. ... I should like to spend about a week doing nothing else but examining the trees and watching for the birds. ... We have been comparing your twigs with the twigs we get at — and they are

not a patch on yours. ... The best twigs are the horsechestnut, oak, and ash. ... the scar on the horsechestnut is very plain, and the cluster of buds upon the oak. ... I have only seen one tree that came anything near as good as the ones from Oxford. ... We should be very pleased if you would send us some idea about the birds in your parts. ... At school we are reading some of Shakespeare's plays, such as *As You Like It* and *Julius Caesar*. At present we are reading *Coriolanus* and we have read *Evangeline* by Longfellow. ... I wish I was going with you searching because I am interested in birds. ... There are not many birds over here. There are only crows and shepsters and robins, and we see just a few seagulls. ... Mr. S. told us about your bird search, and I think every boy will join you as most boys are interested in birds.

I have called in witnesses to support certain points which I wish to make: A liberal education should make for joyous living in whatever circumstances the boy or girl may hereafter be placed; it should make for a happy home life in the present and afford memories enriched with the pageantry of literature, exquisite scenes over which we have laughed or wept with those dear to us, and is there a closer bond? It should afford the intellectual groundwork for natural social intercourse; and here we get a happy example of the bond of union afforded by a common curriculum; a generous relation, unvexed by the jealousies and sorenesses which too often attend attempts at social intimacy between persons belonging to different classes; the benefit, too, is mutual; indeed Miss A insists especially on the gain to her two pupils.

A wider, more joyous individual life, family life, and social life are not the only advantages afforded by the liberal education we propose. Employers of labour will appreciate the fact that the young persons they engage are in the habit of giving absolute attention to instructions, and of showing intelligence and resourcefulness in carrying them out; nor will they be slow to discover the fact that their employees are actuated by high ideals of character and conduct drawn from the literature upon which they have been nourished, and are governed by religious knowledge and principles, the teaching of which has never been allowed to become tedious to them.

Education at present is apt to be confined within its banks—the four walls of thousands of admirable schools; but we want  
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irrigation; this Nile of ours must be led into every paddyfield in the Empire, not merely as a school-room occupation, but as a supreme influence in life. As a result we may expect not only general amelioration in manners—perhaps our manners are fairly good on the whole—but a general sense of duty and discipline, not imposed from without, but a spontaneous product originating from much seed sown. “Let us now praise famous men” is not an idle counsel, and children in this way become acquainted with many famous men, famous deeds, and sage counsels.

The man who has assimilated a good deal of ordered reading on both sides of many questions is less likely than another to be carried off his feet by the tub orator. Besides he has many interesting things to think about, and no man has a grievance, “but thinking makes it so”—the never ending process of logic-grinding about some trifling matter of less work or more wage. When there is a real grievance regarding work or wage or other matter such a man, who has imbibed something of “the science of the proportion of things,” may perhaps be trusted to

see life steadily, and see it whole.

To turn for a minute to the question of how the proposed scheme works in a school I am allowed to quote from the answers of a head mistress to a series of very pertinent queries put to her by a well-qualified inquirer:—

About how long would an ordinary lesson last?—Cf. time-tables. About 20 minutes in Standards 1 and 2 and 30 minutes in Standards 3 and 4. Is all your teaching of Scripture, history, literature treated in this way?—Practically all in Standards 1 and 2. In Standards 3 and 4 the children are gradually becoming habituated to reading silently, and then reproducing the substance of what they have read either orally or in writing. Sometimes the reproduction takes the form of answering a question carefully prepared by the teacher. Long answers are not desired; just sufficient to make sure that the children have grasped what has been read. (The teachers and children seem to find many opportunities of free chat about any subject on hand, especially when the children bring books, illustrations, &c., which they very often do.)

In a 20 minutes' lesson about 10 minutes will be spent in reading and 10 minutes in narration (Standards 1 and 2). In a 30 minutes' lesson about 10 minutes are spent in silent reading, five minutes in observing the spelling and punctuation, and 15 minutes in writing. In a class of 45 children about how many in an ordinary lesson would be put on to reproduce (that is, narrate) after a single reading?—Two, three, or four, in the lower standards, five or six higher, everything depending on the difficulty of the subject-matter and the ability of the children. Very much tact is required in this part of the work, as the children must narrate, and yet must not be (consciously) coerced.

Every child in a class narrates at some time during each week, and some narrate many times. Does it make the ordinary teaching of reading

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any easier?—Not just at first, but later I have found that Standard 2 read "Water Babies," "Alice in Wonderland," "Through the Looking-Glass," &c., with understanding and enjoyment, whereas formerly I have used these as Standard 4 readers. Have you on this account to curtail other work?—No, not at all, as a reference to the time-tables will show. The subjects I still take according to my own old schemes are reading, writing, arithmetic, needlework, drawing, drill and games, handiwork. The subjects in which I have adopted Miss Mason's methods are:—English history, French history, natural history, geography, Scripture, tales, recitation, pictures. Plutarch's lives are used in connexion with citizenship lessons.

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Sir,—Miss Charlotte Mason's letter in your issue of February 15 made reference to experiments now being carried out in various elementary schools. Perhaps it may be of interest to your readers to know in greater detail what is being done in Bradford. In this city, the head teachers are always at liberty to introduce new methods [sic], provided they have first been

discussed and approved by the Director of Education and H.M. Inspector. Consequently, last autumn, about half a dozen head teachers, after having met Miss Mason personally, and having carefully studied her programmes, &c., decided to give the scheme a trial, and it is now adopted, in a form modified to suit their circumstances, in all these schools. In the only school in which a full term's work has been completed, Miss Mason herself is satisfied with the results obtained, and though it is, as yet, too early to draw any general conclusions from the results of this scheme, it seems certain that elementary schools can learn some definite lessons from Miss Mason's methods. Particularly is this so in the emphasis laid upon individual effort, and in the attention given to the extensive reading of carefully chosen literature. The traditional oral lesson, in which the information is prepared by the teacher and given out in digested form to the children, is almost entirely supplanted by actual study done by the children themselves, and the results of the study are tested rather by narration, written and oral, than by catechetical methods. The initial cost of the books is somewhat heavier than usual, but having regard to the fact that fewer renewals seem to be necessary, the total cost over a period of three years does not exceed the average.

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