

## “OURSELVES.”

BY MISS PENNETHORNE, *Organising Secretary, P.N.E.U. Ex-student, House of Education.*

I *can* be what God wants me to be,  
The alone may return to thee alone.

STEP by step, little by little the individual and the race are coming into their Kingdom—the city of Man soul. The enormous expansion of human consciousness, of human capability is one of the striking features of our own age. We may compare with a smile Pope’s dictum, “Presume not God to scan, the proper study of mankind is man” with the modern psychologies and policies which look for the divinity in the heart of man and reaches out to God through the Brotherhood of his peoples. “Man know thyself” is a command and perhaps the greatest promise is “then shall I know even as I am known,” but the means are not as divinely simple as the end. The study of ourselves as isolated individuals is very dangerous as an amusement and very misleading as an occupation—it leads to morbidity, to introspection and to the attitude of mind expressed in the nursery rhyme:—

“Oh why was I born so great?” said he,  
“The Pig who was late for tea.”

We older people forget what a very lonely thing develop-  
[p 593]  
ment is—how surprised the child is when it falls from the dignity of some communing with the highest to the indignity of having failed in some simple household observance. The great thoughts and the mean actions of which we are all alike capable seem unique experiences to the child, groping its way in the dawn through the newly opened gates of the city of Man soul. To us, the teachers and the parents the greatest of all tragedies seems to be that while the possibilities of each personality are so vast and unending the actual achievement is often so pitiful—even the great with high resounding names might have been so much greater.

We as guardians and guides find too often the reason in ourselves. We teach out of the world’s experience the facts and theories of history—the laws of creation and call them art, the laws of experience and call them literature, the nature and use of the solid earth and call it geography, the laws which govern nature and call it science, the laws of composition and enumeration and call them mathematics and the laws which govern man’s attitude to other men and to God and call them morals and religion, but we do not teach except by inference or to the few the laws which relate to man’s very being, logic, psychology or physiology. We see the result all around us to-day; social barriers have gone down, the limitations of space and time have been marvellously curtailed, and the result is that each person born into the world has the possibilities of a wider field for his activities than ever before. Thus we find ourselves more at the mercy of our own and other people’s personalities. The world is full of catch phrases about self-development, self-experience, full of admiration for forceful personalities, and full of the dust of their conflicts—and it seems in danger of completely forgetting that ‘personality’ is merely crude raw material. It is character which is an achievement, it is

character which is the result and attainment of our brief earthly living—it is character which is the goal towards which we struggle; we begin with ‘I am’ (for all children are persons), but do we all end with ‘I will,’ when the man realises that he is captain of his soul? Look at two typical examples whom all the world will recognise, George Noel Gordon, Lord Byron—an uncontrolled personality—biting pieces out of saucers as a tempestuous child, breaking the social laws of God and man as a miserable young man, dying from neglect of physical laws in a romantic undisciplined attempt to shorten the slow working of international law. Then compare with him an equally brilliant and insistent personality, John Henry Newman, who just when he had all Oxford under his spell broke it by his own act

[p 594]

and never again was free or unfettered or even properly understood—who had to follow where he could have led, who had all his high projects wrecked by lesser men—and who died at last the saint God meant him to be—which do we really believe to have added most to the sum of human achievement, so that what “man hath done man can do again?”

What then is to be our method of approach to that self-knowledge which should not merely be the sum of our isolated experiences, but the heritage which man inherits as man. The world had solved that problem at different epochs in divers ways—the ancient world solved it by ‘philosophy,’ and we read to-day the Socratic dialogues and the Nicomachean Ethics—but that was the education of the rulers in a world of slaves (and it is interesting to see the point of view expressed in the controversy in the notes of H. G. Wells’ [sic] History of Mankind” over the education of Mr. Gladstone as to the value of the survival of such an education.)

The mediæval world solved it through the means of the confessional, the absolution and the penance, yet broke down through its own degradation of its own means, when it used Earthly Armies as its instrument and sold its own opinions as the gift of God. The modern age seems inclined to substitute Psycho-Analysis [sic] and the doctor—as if morbid pathology were as common as ‘sin.’ The Analysts do not agree among themselves—mercifully—as to whether some impulses are equally determining factors in all men because they eliminate the spiritual factor—they do not look before or after man’s life here in a physical body—and forget that psychology is the study of the ‘psyche,’ a something that comes and goes, that has heard more than it could ever tell and listens for something it has not yet heard, and which deeply bears the mystical imprint of both. The analysts themselves admit that the conscious is within our control, and surely it is not the man after the likeness of God who does not control his unconscious by his conscience. ‘Repression’ is not as some would have us believe an evil *when* it is self-repression.

“When round thy ship in tempest hell appears,  
“And every spectre mutters up more dire to snatch control,  
“And loose to madness thy deep-kennelled fears,  
“Then to the helm, O Soul!”

We must never confuse outside discipline and authority, the control of others, with self-control. With little children the guidance and help from without must be and can be wisely and helpfully given, but the real control comes alone from the self which recognises its own safe and necessary limitation.

[p 595]

And so we *ourselves* must *ourselves* be given the knowledge by which to form our character from our personality, our will from our wish, our wisdom from our instincts. We, in the Parents' Union School, do definitely aim at doing that for those committed to our care whether as parents or as teachers.

*Knowledge of the laws which govern our bodies* is a much wider thing than mere instruction in the laws which govern the life of sex, but the whole feeling of to-day is that the *parents* must be prepared to hand on this torch of life to their children 'lighted.' Modern social life, modern school life are full of pitfalls for those who do not know life as a force full of awe and wonder and majesty, for a wrong knowledge produces the 'conscious' in the wrong sense of the word, those who snigger or blush with shame, where the initiated walk in safety and guard themselves.

*Knowledge of our Souls* is far too often lost in knowledge of how to battle against the opinions and practices of other creeds or shades of opinion differing from our own. The religious instinct is as common as any other where it is appealed to—we cannot *teach* a child faith or religion; we can and must give it opportunity for exercise and practice of religious duties so that these may be a habit and a duty and not depend upon waves of emotion and we must share with them in humility and reverence such revelation as has come to ourselves. And where we ourselves have *nothing* to give we must remember that the children as persons have a right to share in the religious experience of the world and if some phase quite foreign to us appeals to them it may be their 'vocation'—all men do not see the same visions or hear the same voice, but those who hear nothing are generally those who were deafened by much teaching or stultified by little opportunity. And *lastly* the *Knowledge of Ourselves* which we may roughly call psychology, the observation of character, and the training of character. Indirectly even schoolroom lesson helps us when we come in contact with the personalities and ideas of great men whether they be the patriarchs of the Old Testament or the patriots of our own and other countries—great poets from David to Rupert Brooke; great literary creations from Job to Browning's 'Men and Women.' The right way of thinking over and discussing 'characters,' the right narration by the children of the great material presented to them forms an enormous aid to the right interpretation of the living man and woman with whom they are brought in contact. The habit of thinking about real people's good qualities, of wise discussion of personalities as apart from 'gossip' must be attained, and that by practice—we have lost the art which flourished in the 18th century with its 'man of parts' and its woman of 'quality,' and we shall never

[p 596]

recapture dignity in private life until we have learnt to value and to estimate 'character' again.

And *lastly* we have the definite teaching of Miss Mason's own book 'Ourselves,' the only book of practical psychology, a guide to the Kingdom of Man soul which we can put into the children's own hands and which will teach them of "Loves' Lord's in waiting," gratitude, gladness, courage, loyalty, [sic] of the Lords of the Exchequer, the desires for knowledge for society, for fame—there they will learn of the ruler Reason, and his limited sphere, of the work of conscience, of justice and the work of the affections. There they will learn to distinguish between the House of Mind and the House of Body and how each has its proper place in a fair corner of the city. The five 'pages' which bring things for our notice—our senses, the explorer,

Imagination, the Lord Intellect and the demons of sloth or restlessness which lurk like thieves at the city corners.

We may discover the children's own thoughts on these subjects through the wise and impersonal medium of discussion of a book where personal questioning would be impertinent or didactic. We may offer not merely our own opinion or our own experience coloured as these must be by our own temperament and opportunity, but a wider, clearer survey, more true of all times and of all peoples. So we may hope to train citizens, not individualists, men and women who will remember that they are not lonely egos, selfish because only knowing 'self,' but electrons whirling in rhythmic obedience to eternal law as parts of a divine system with its place in the whole, differentiated enough to do their own work, to find their own vocation and to add their quota to the sum total of the wealth of love and experience in the world. Then only can they with full hearts finish the prayer from which the phrase comes "and here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls, and bodies to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice."