A LIBERAL EDUCATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

(*Papers read at P.N.E.U. Meeting of the Annual Conference of Educational Associations held at University College on Jan. 7th*.)

II.

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I HAVE been asked to say a few words about the result of teaching boys on the P.N.E.U. system—and, though I cannot claim

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to be a speaker, I can speak from 10 years' practical experience of these methods, as for that time the method has been carried on in my own Preparatory School, and under my own direct supervision.

I think I must detain you for a moment with a few words on how Miss Mason's methods differ from others in use at the moment.

Firstly she does not assume that the boys dislike work, and it is therefore necessary to disguise work as play—or to give them coloured bricks in place of units. If a boy dislikes work it is often because it is made so dull and uninteresting that it would bore an angel. I can only speak from my own experience—but I find a very small percentage want any driving—far more want restraining from overdoing things.

Secondly—and this is the whole mainspring of the system—Miss Mason insists that children are really human beings—and must be treated as such. Failure in the past, complaints of inattention and laziness, all can be traced to the inability to recognise this fact on the part of reformers and teachers. Formerly, the children did not do the work—we did it for them—we separated what they should learn from what they should not learn, and then made them do it—by notes, by explanations, by special preparation, by any means the brain of man could devise—but always working on the principle that the child could not be expected to do anything but accept what we cared to throw him. Quite unconsciously, I honestly believe, the master so dominated the boy that the latter could not develop his own mind—he merely tried to produce what he thought his master appreciated—not what he wished to produce—or what he could have produced had his mind not been really in subjection to another and stronger.

When I was a boy at a Preparatory School, I wrote Latin verse—or rather, I didn't. But I attended classes where I was supposed to (though I really knew nothing about English verse, and much less about Latin verse). Anyhow, I was there, and did my best to please the gentleman in charge. If the words wouldn't go into a hexameter line one way, well, you pushed and shoved until they slipped in by another route. It was like a jig-saw puzzle, but with the very great difference that failure meant repetition during cricket. I am convinced I gained nothing by it, unless it was a form of low-down cunning, and

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I well remember my joy, when looking for a word in a big reference dictionary, to find the very line quoted as an example!

English verse was there for me to learn—not to appreciate or criticise—and like the gallant Six Hundred we did not reason why. Miss Mason always advocated it, and now I see there is quite a movement in favour of suitable boys being given opportunities to write English

verse. They learn and read samples of ballad and verse, and why should they not reproduce in an effort of their own? They have not been given a chance in the past. For examination and other pestilent reasons they have only had time to hear what the critics said, what a man wrote, and in whose reign he lived. Can boys write verse? Certainly they can—let them have the chance Miss Mason offers them, and if people knew what really creditable attempts they produce, they would unhesitatingly agree with her.

The same applies to essay writing—boys are still taught to write down the advantages and disadvantages of the point under discussion—to tabulate what they are going to say, and then try to produce what they think is acceptable to the powers that be.

What is the result? A hundred boys' essays are all alike—the same style—the same shibboleths—the same opinions—Why? Why should not a boy say what he likes in the style he choses [sic] for himself. He is not there to reproduce the ideas of another—he is there to express his own ideas, and as far as possible in his own style.

Another trouble of the past is condensations—now, the P.N.E.U. avoids condensations. The boys read plenty of good English in the original form and the result is a good vocabulary and ease of expression. A boy must necessarily form his vocabulary from what he reads—and he doesn't want précis, he wants standard works, and as many as possible. If a boy wrote out "Honesty is the best policy" 10,000 times—would it make him honest? It would merely cease to affect him. It would mean only as much as Nestle's milk or Spratt's dog cakes—words he accepts through seeing them so often. You cannot teach honesty by condensation, and you cannot teach English either.

Let us look at a foreign language. Is a boy to acquire a vocabulary by learning so many words a day? It sounds a little pre-historic, but I know it is a method in use to-day. No, he can only obtain a vocabulary by constant speaking or reading, as he acquires it under P.N.E.U. methods. It is not so

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easy to find suitable books, but the P.N.E.U. English method can be applied, and I am very satisfied with an experiment I made with my top forms. In French I chose a book whose story was one of interest and known to the boys, and let them read it in class without any preparation. When they could read the book at sight, I chose a harder one, and so onwards. With the forms in question, I started them with a Gospel, which they read very quickly. From this I passed to the "Scarlet Pimpernel" and last term to Kipling's "Jungle Books." Not only have the boys been very keen to read on overtime, but their vocabulary has increased by leaps and bounds—just as my Junior boys who learn English on P.N.E.U. methods, who surprise me with the words they not only use, but of which they know the meaning. Miss Mason's methods, to my way of thinking, not only mean liberty of thought, but also initiative on the part of the boy.

I have noticed this very much in science. Before I had my own school, I held several posts as science master, and it was my custom to explain everything as fully as possible. All the apparatus—what I would do—what would happen—why it happened—so that all the boys had to do was to listen to me.

Preparatory school boys only have a grounding in general science—something for someone else to build on when they go to a Public school—but I use a different method now. I set up the apparatus—or describe it—then I ask the boys what will happen—and let them tell me this and give a reason. I do not pretend they can always answer—but I do say they learn in a

way that suprises [sic] me, and in a way my old forms of considerably senior boys never answered. I attribute this solely to the fact that under P.N.E.U. methods they have been taught to think for themselves. And original thought—one piece of original work, however small, is worth all the pages they absorb from someone else. What we want, is men who can think for themselves—not men who reiterate the thoughts of another. This ability to think has been depreciated in the past and personally. I am willing to take any steps or adopt any plan which makes the boys more self-reliant mentally or physically. Miss Mason's methods do this, and in a school they can be expanded and applied in so many directions that I can only hint at their utility.

I have given you some of my own impressions of the
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P.N.E.U., but before I came to-day, I wrote and asked one of my old assistants, who now has a school of his own—what he thought of his results with Parents' Union methods. He deals in his answer only with English, and he says:—

"I am confirmed in my belief in the P.N.E.U. Not only do I find it a time-saver, but my boys have a consecutive and connected view of the term's work without revision. This is no small recommendation in view of the number of subjects which find space in the time-table. The method, too, stimulates interest, attention and clarity of thought. As far as I am concerned, the method has come to stay and I am very pleased at the way the boys have increased, not only the range of their vocabulary but also in their powers of observation."

The gentleman who was kind enough to find time to write to me at the end of a busy term is one of the best and most careful teachers I know, and a man of over 20 years' experience in Preparatory Schools, and his words carry weight.

I am often asked if boys trained on P.N.E.U. lines succeed at Public Schools after leaving their Preparatory School, and I can unhesitatingly say they do. But I am afraid I can't support this or tell you the results of my experience without sadly over-working the first personal pronoun, and I must beg you to be patient with me in this respect.

But I wrote to the headmaster of a well-known Public School too. Four P.N.E.U. trained boys from my school have won scholarships there comparatively recently, and I asked his opinion.

He writes that he finds them intellectually fresh and keen, self-reliant and ready to enter into every branch of the school life. They had all been placed high at entry, but this has not stopped them climbing steadily to positions of eminence, which shows that they have not been forced but have developed along the best lines.

About a year ago, I was asked to write an article on the Parents' Union methods of teaching English for the Preparatory Schools' Review, and the point in it which struck masters was the absence of preparation for the lessons. At first sight this seemed rather a tall order to them, especially when the programme included European and Ancient as well as English history in conjunction with a book on World history. Theories are all very well, but headmasters ask more than theories, for
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they have learnt to distrust the gentleman who usually advocates educational reform though he has never taught a class in his life.

Recently I was told of an idea of printing Euclid's books in Greek, so that boys could

learn Greek and Mathematics at the same time. I hate to be pessimistic, but from what I know of boys, they would learn neither Greek nor Mathematics!

Well, I was saying, proof is what is wanted, and I am not asking anyone to accept the theory of History with no preparation without some practical support.

I daresay you know there is a History Prize, the Townsend Warner, open to boys from the Preparatory Schools, and as a rule about 70 compete. For the last two years I have sent in two candidates who have learnt history on Miss Mason's methods with no preparation, and moreover in each case the boy was one with Mathematical leanings and no special bent for English. In 1918 we won 15th and 17th places and last year 3rd and 5th, and the examiners' comment was that some of the answers of these boys was up to the standard of the VIth form at a Public School.

I am afraid I have made a feeble effort to explain the results of Parents' Union training, but I am more of a teacher than a speaker, and in any case it is a subject beyond my power.

The immortal Mr. Jorrocks said of his hunt horses that "he kept no cats that couldn't catch mice," and I have kept Miss Mason's methods *for ten years*, and a headmaster does not do this without a good reason, I can assure you.

As the headmaster said in his letter to me, the method has come to stay, and it has come to stay for this reason, that it is not a question of a programme, but a revolution in our attitude towards children and education in general.