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*.)

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I EXPECT most of you here have read Miss Mason's pamphlet on a "Liberal Education in Secondary Schools," which is to be the subject under discussion this afternoon. At any rate you will know something of Miss Mason's teaching, and of her method of education, and will have heard how successfully a number of elementary schools have been working, during the last few years, on the lines which were originally laid down

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by her for the teaching of children in home schoolrooms. A number of private schools also use her method, and those of us who know its results, are very anxious that more and more schools of every kind should follow their example. With that end in view, I want to try to describe to you Miss Mason's method in the working, particularly as regards children above the elementary age, and to contrast their education with that given to girls of the same age in other schools. I hope you will forgive my quoting mostly from my own experience.

Let us start by briefly considering the attitude of most so-called educated people at the present day towards knowledge. Mr. Fisher was talking to us the other day about the ceaseless war which we of the teaching profession have to make against the common ignorance of mankind. He reminded us what a small proportion of men and women there are who care to keep alight the flame of knowledge and help the world to make intellectual progress, and how important it is, therefore, to see that everyone has such an education as will give him the opportunity of swelling their ranks. It was rather startling to be assured that to nine-tenths of the human race, thinking is painful and indolence is pleasant, but certainly we all know many boys and girls who leave school glad to have done with lessons, with no thought of continuing their education for themselves, and therefore speedily forgetting most of what they have already learnt. They never dream of reading anything but light novels, and if they go to the theatre, choose always to see musical comedies and revues. That such a state of things exists is surely the fault of the education they have received. They must have started their school life as all healthy-minded children do, with a keen desire for knowledge, but something has killed it. Miss Mason holds that the trouble lies both with the kind of knowledge that has been offered them, and with the way in which they have been taught to deal with it. She tells us that children have a desire for many different kinds of knowledge, and that we are depriving them of their rights if we stint them either as to quantity or variety. We must put before them the best kind of mental food we can, suitably varied, and we must train them from the first to assimilate it for themselves. People often find this question of variety a stumbling block, and find fault with the wide curriculum of the Parents' Union School child. They say that if he attempts so many different subjects, he

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will get only a very "scrappy" knowledge of any of them and will know nothing thoroughly. It is

true that vague, disconnected knowledge is likely to produce only that restless habit of mind, which causes people to be always running after some new idea or fashion. Such a substitute for true knowledge was perhaps in Mr. Fisher's mind when he talked of examinations having at least the merit of preventing excessive dispersion. But when each subject is studied carefully, thoroughly and consecutively, and is linked up, whenever possible, with other subjects, as it is in the P.U.S., the result is very different [sic] The child makes as much progress in each subject as do other children of his age, if not more, and into the bargain, his love of knowledge, instead of gradually dying away, grows increasingly stronger, and his interests and sympathies are greatly widened. I cannot imagine any subject that could be left out of our syllabus without detracting from the total value of the children's education, and what an outcry they would make themselves if such a thing were suggested to them!

This matter of a wide curriculum is closely bound up with the question of the method of teaching. Miss Mason has time on her time-table for so many subjects, because of the way in which the children learn them. Her theory rests on the important truths—that all children have enormous powers of attention, which can be called into play by gratifying their love of knowledge, and that it is the nature of the mind to know that which reaches it in a literary form. For this reason, Miss Mason puts well-written books on every subject into the hands of the children, and thus they learn by reading for themselves what a specialist has to tell them about each subject. As they never read a passage more than once, they read with the closest attention—there will be no second chance—and by the process of narration after reading, their knowledge is both tested and fixed in their minds. This narration is a very important part of the children's work. To tell again what they have read, sounds very simple, but in reality it involves hard work. It is impossible to *tell* what they do not *know*, and to make an orderly narration of any passage read, involves the repeated putting of the question "what next?" by the mind to itself, till the whole thing stands out clearly in the memory. The process of narration does for the mind what the digestive organs do for the body. To have narrated a passage satisfac-
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torily implies, not a mere parrot-like committing to memory of words, but the having made that passage one's own—a part of oneself. It is not an easy thing to do at first, but improvement soon comes, and the child himself proves to us that what he has read once and narrated at a lesson, say, in October, is still clear in his memory when, at the December examination, he is asked again for that piece of knowledge. In a large class, it is of course impossible to give all the children in each lesson a chance to narrate, but we find that they are all eager to do so, and listen to their more fortunate companions attentively, and afterwards readily supply any omissions that have been made, or correct any inaccurate statements. We may notice; in this connection, that the teacher, when hearing narration, leaves the children to do all the work. She does not interrupt them if she disagrees with any statement they make, nor help them out with questions if they hesitate. She knows that it is disturbing to be interrupted, and that questions upset the train of the narrator's thoughts—his mind is no longer free to ask itself "what next?" for he has to cast about to find the answer he feels his teacher is expecting. As for the written work done by the children, it takes the form of reports, which they write after perhaps two of their lessons each morning. This is, as a rule, in addition to narration, not instead of it, for we expect a report to be rather a prècis of the whole lesson, with the salient points given their proper proportion of significance. This, children find considerably harder than

a detailed narration, and at first a form III. child, or one new to the method, is inclined to use up all her report time over relatively unimportant details. Here again, “practice makes perfect,” and in a short time, she becomes more discriminating.

Having thus glanced at Miss Mason’s method from a general point of view, let us now think of the treatment given to each subject separately. I will begin by showing you what work we do in handicrafts, art, science, and mathematics. These are subjects which people, who have heard only of our unusual use of books, imagine that we pay very little attention to, or leave out altogether!

As regards handicrafts first of all—during the winter terms the girls learn cardboard sloyd, and in the summer term claymodelling, both of which forms of handwork are very popular with them. The students at the House of Education

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also learn other kinds of handicrafts, such as netting, raffia-work, basket-work, chair-caning, brass-work, leather-work, wood-carving and book-binding, and several of these they often teach their pupils as hobbies, in addition to the regular handwork done in school. Then, as the girls have no “homework” to do, they have time for regular sewing and knitting in the evenings, as well as the usual piano practising that all girls have to do. At neither of the schools that I myself went to from the ages of 13–16 and 16–18, did we do any handicrafts whatsoever, not even sewing, and I expect there may be other girls’ schools in the same position.

Drawing and painting, like handicrafts, get their share of attention during the hour we spend in school before tea. The outstanding feature of our children’s art training—I mean that which is not to be found in other schools—is what we call picture-study. Six beautiful little reproductions of some great artist’s work are studied by the children each term, so that they become familiar with the best in art, and learn to enjoy it. Last term at Ambleside, the fifth form girls attended an interesting course of University Extension lectures on “How to enjoy pictures.” They not only appreciated the whole subject more than most school-girls of 16–17 would, I think, have done, but they also had the keen pleasure of recognising old friends among the pictures shown them on the screen. Once the lecturer assigned one of these to the wrong artist—a slip which they were quick to notice, although it was a couple of years since they had studied this particular picture.

In music, as in picture-study, the girls have the privilege of getting to know something of one man’s work each term. Chiefly this is done through their weekly musical appreciation classes, which are a great joy to them, but they also learn themselves any part of his music that is within their powers. If he has written any songs suitable for them to learn, they learn them in their singing-class. They learn to read music by means of Tonic Solfa.

Nature Study takes an important place in the work done by the children, and is taught as much as possible from field-work. They learn a great deal about flowers and birds from Nature walks, and their interest is quickened by the keeping of Nature Note Books, in which they enter notes on anything that has struck them, and make paintings of flowers or insects

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they have found. Once a week in school they have a half-hour for “nature painting,” as they call it, but it is a favourite occupation out of school hours too, and great is the pride they take in these nature note-books. Then during morning school they study Botany with the aid of interesting books, and read other delightful natural history books, such as Mrs. Buckley’s “Life

and Her Children" (in form II.), "The Fairyland of Science" (in form III.), and "Winners in Life's Race" (in form IV.) A book called the "First Year of Scientific Knowledge" introduces them to geology and physics, which studies they carry on in other books when they reach forms V. and VI. Astronomy is also begun in form IV.—much to the envy of the 12-year-olds in form III., who have tasted its delights from the little book called the "Sciences," which they read in form II. They also read in the fourth form some book on domestic economy, which, rather to my surprise I must own, they enjoyed thoroughly. I do not think many school girls have the opportunity to make a wider study of science than P.U.S. girls, though those at schools with laboratories have the advantage of learning chemistry, perhaps a good many are deprived of science altogether. I went through the two schools I mentioned without being taught one word of any scientific subject.

To go on to mathematics: here the habit of close attention stands P.U.S. girls in good stead, so that they manage to keep up with most girls of their age, although they do no evening preparation. The third form has four arithmetic and two geometry lessons a week, while the fourth form substitutes algebra for the Wednesday lesson. The girls in the fifth and sixth forms all go on with their mathematics, and have two arithmetic, two algebra and two geometry lessons a week, whereas in some schools, it is usual for all, except a select few, to give up mathematics in the higher forms. Arithmetic is taught from the first as far as possible through problems, so that the girls learn always to think for themselves.

Let us next consider how the P.U.S. girl learns languages. She begins French first of course, and spends more time on that in every form than on other languages, but at 10 or 11 years old, she begins Latin, and probably German too. When she reaches the fifth form, she learns Italian as well. People often say that children cannot be expected to learn so many
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languages at once, but I have never found that they confuse them with one another. Rather they profit by being able to compare them: for instance, they are much interested in learning an Italian word such as "finestra" to notice its likeness to the French and German words they already know; and the grammar that they learn from one language often helps them considerably in learning another. As far as possible, the girls are taught to narrate in French and German, and in the fifth form in Italian, after reading a passage, and it is surprising how quick this practice makes them at picking up new words and expressions. Of course, at first they have not the vocabulary or knowledge of grammar, to depart very much from the words of the book, but they gain in freedom as they go on. Again, their habit of attention proves valuable to them, and enables them to get through the amount of work in the morning's lesson, which most girls only get done with evening preparation as well. They are trained to visualise words correctly when they first meet them, and to get a clear impression of, say, a new rule or a new verb the first time they are taught it, so that it is not often that the teacher has to spend time over the difficult task of dislodging a wrong idea. It was considered most surprising at a Conference meeting last week, that a class of boys of 13 and 14 should show pleasure and excitement over the learning of French verbs. Personally, I have always found that children enjoy both French and German verbs, and are as keen as one could wish to write them out absolutely correctly—and that, without the stimulus of the ingenious system of competition which an able Master has evolved for his boys.

English Grammar is taught throughout the school, instead of being given up in the upper

forms as it is in most schools. In forms V and VI, while continuing to analyse and parse once a week, the girls read such books as Abbott and Seeley's "English Lessons for English People," and Trench's "Study of Words" and "Past and Present." These all interest them deeply.

So much reading of well-written books, combined with the habit of narration, leads naturally to successful composition and good style. When we give the girls compositions to write, we do not set them such subjects as "a lead pencil," or "honesty is the best policy," or "the pen is mightier than the sword"

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(all of which I remember groaning over myself at about the age of 13!) but about some scene out of one of their literature books, some character they have been reading about in history, some event or important speech that has been read to them a day or two before from a newspaper. Correct spelling is another natural outcome of their use of books; they are never allowed to spell orally, but are taught to visualise all new words. In order to avoid any mistakes in dictation lessons, the passages are always carefully prepared first—so carefully that they rarely make a mistake when they write them down. Each sentence is only repeated once, so again close attention is essential.

Scripture is placed in the forefront of the subjects we teach, as its object is to give the children that most important part of all the knowledge that is their due—the knowledge of God. They are trained from the first to narrate the passage of Scripture which has been read to them, as closely as they can in the words of the Bible; which they succeed in doing very well, although at first the Biblical language is interspersed with rather startling paraphrases of their own. In this way they very soon get unusually familiar with the text of the Bible, and I have known a little girl of 9 write the answers to three questions on the Old Testament and three on the New, in language so closely following that of the Bible that a stranger to the method would have thought she had been learning by heart. In reality, each passage had only been read once, and that some weeks before. The reading is followed by narration, and then by such teaching as Paterson Smythe gives in his "Bible for the Young." The older girls use commentaries to help them in their study of the Bible, and in addition to their week-day classes, they study in detail on Sundays some part of the gospel story, in such a way as to teach them to read between the lines, and to picture the whole scene in their minds.

At ten years old, the children begin to learn what Citizenship means by reading Arnold Forster's "The Citizen Reader," and as they pass on through the school, they read other books, which add to their knowledge of the government of their country, and of the problems which government presents. They read also a book which teaches them much of human nature, and of their duties in ruling themselves for the benefit of others.

I have not time to go into detail over the teaching of history,

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literature and geography—all of which subjects are mainly taught from books, and are closely correlated with each other. You probably know already what a wealth of reading the children enjoy; how much literature they study in connection with their history period for the term; how they do not confine their reading to English History alone, but read French History, European History, Indian History, Ancient History; how they learn geography from books which appeal to their imagination, and give them practice in careful map-study, combined with the sort of knowledge they would get from travelling themselves, and from books of travel. I think they are

particularly to be envied this part of their school work. So many school girls learn history from oral lectures entirely, and as for literature, until perhaps they reach the sixth form, they may be confined, as I was myself, to *one* play of Shakespeare's per year, with pages of laboriously learnt glossary.

I should like you to see how much our children love their books, and how much they make them part of themselves. The Shakespeare play they read each term, from the second form upwards, is a special favourite. Last term when we had a fancy dress tea-party about half of them chose to dress up—quite without any prompting, as characters out of the various plays they were reading. They take great pleasure in Scott's novels too, of which they generally read one each term, out of school hours.

Miss Mason makes provision too, of course, for the physical training of the children, and tries to make that as varied as their mental training, but as all schools do much in this respect, I will spend my last few minutes in considering how the adoption of this method affects the teacher.

On hearing a description of this method of education for children, the teacher often wonders what is left for her to do! She is no longer called upon to "get up" her lessons and pour them out to the children; she may not let her personality intervene between them and the writers of their books. There are no marks for her to give, no punishments to set. But let her once start using the method, and she will soon find that although she has to practise "masterly inactivity," she is certainly no passive spectator of the lesson. There is always scope for her guiding hand, and it makes an immense difference to the children if their teacher is enjoying the lesson with them;

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her sympathetic remarks here and there—sympathetic with the subject that is—carry them along with her. Then, too, unless she has absolute control over her class, the children may, in their eagerness, get into disorderly ways, and interrupt one another's narration; or, feeling that she is not entering into the lesson, like all children they will probably grow careless and frivolous. The gain to herself of teaching in this way is enormous, both in the way of interest, and in the saving of labour. She cannot do anything but enjoy the children's books, and as the individuality of the children comes out both in narration and in their reports, there is nothing monotonous in the correcting of their work.

It is very difficult to translate an "atmosphere" into words, and I am very doubtful whether I have succeeded in conveying to you the happy, healthy atmosphere of our P.U. Schoolrooms—even though I know it so well myself, having had the privilege of spending eight years at Ambleside, training and then teaching under Miss Mason's influence. The children who grow up with the benefit of such an education as I have tried to describe, not only have much knowledge stored up for their own and other people's enjoyment, but have formed a character which will be a lasting asset to their country. They are single-minded people, with a broad outlook and many interests in life; they are both thoughtful for others and have also acquired that "self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control," which "alone lead life to sovereign power." And so we, who have seen for ourselves how much knowledge presented in this way does for the children, are naturally anxious to see its influence spread still further. We feel that to give true knowledge to all the citizens of our empire would be the most effectual way of putting an end to the present-day state of friction and unrest. A writer in the "Spectator," about a month

ago, assured us that ignorance was at the bottom of the trouble in Ireland, and surely ignorance which leads to wrong thinking is the cause of very many strikes. Miss Mason in her pamphlet advocates a liberal education for all classes of the people. Nothing could unite us all so much as a basis of common knowledge, and what more important thing can we do for our country than to help in giving to its people the kind of education that will put them in the way of having a "right judgment in all things?"