



The Work and Aims of the Parents' Union School

BY MISS O'FERRALL (EX-STUDENT H.E.)

FOUNDING OF THE P.U.S.

Rather more than thirty years ago, Miss Mason, the founder of the Parents' National Educational Union, met with a few friends to discuss the possibilities of furthering the educational theories which she had evolved during many years of teaching experience. The result of this meeting was the founding of the P.N.E.U. and shortly afterward, in connection with it, the Parents' Union School—called in early days the Parents' Review School. The P.N.E.U., as you know, is an association of parents and teachers and all interested in the educational welfare of children, bound together to study these principles, to apply them, and to make them known. The P.U.S., about which I am going to speak more particularly, is quite a different thing from the P.N.E.U. but it is understood that all who join it accept and carry out P.N.E.U. principles. I can now only just touch upon some of these principles; you can study them for yourselves in Miss Mason's books, "Home Education," "School Education," "Parents and Children," and "Ourselves," which you can borrow from the library at the Ladies' Club.

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GROWTH OF THE UNION

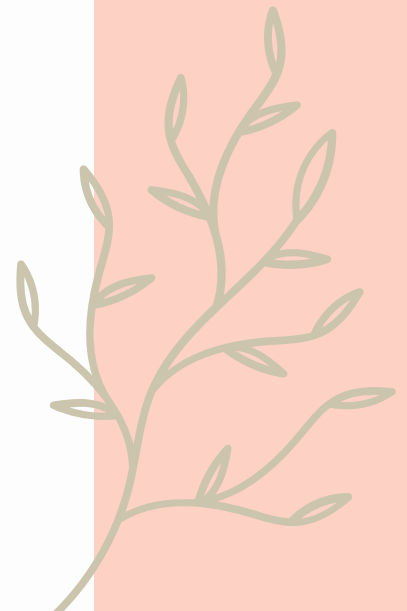
But first, let us take a brief look at the growth of the Union. Almost immediately after its foundation, the Parents' Union School came into being, and each term a programme of work and a timetable were sent out to each parent who joined the school. But where is the school? Not indeed in one place only, but all over the world there are children working in the P.U.S. And what is it, supposing I want to join, what must I do, and what benefit will it be to me? My answer is this.

The Parents' Union School was started originally for the benefit of those children working at home. I believe that two of the difficulties of many parents who teach or have their children taught at home are (1) the choice of books and (2) the fact that they don't know how their children stand with regard to other children of their own age. This was, I know, the experience of my own mother until we one day heard of the P.U.S. But once having heard of it, these difficulties melt away. You write to the Secretary of the House of Education, Ambleside, asking for particulars of the school. Then you join the P.N.E.U. and also if you wish your children to have the benefit of working in the school, the P.U.S. Then comes a paper of questions—and what questions!—to be answered about the children. Age, height, weight, health, memory tests, favorite occupations, specimens of work to be sent up, and drawings of the children's hands, etc., etc. Rather a nuisance, and rather unnecessary perhaps you may think at first, but I believe every parent would change his mind if he realized how much interest is taken by Miss Mason in his particular child. The questions duly answered and sent up to Ambleside, you receive in a short time a programme of work and timetable for your child for the coming term.

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THE PROGRAMMES

And now a word about these programmes and carefully arranged timetables. There are six Forms in the P.U.S. Forms I & II being sub-divided into IB & IA, IIB & IIA, and the average age of the children varies from 5 ½ to 6 in IB, to 17 and 18 in Form VI, and for each of these forms, a separate programme of work is issued every term. The curriculum is wide, for it is one of the P.N.E.U. principles that "Education is the Science of Relations"; that is, that a child has natural relations with a vast number of things and thoughts: so we must train him upon physical exercises, nature, handicrafts, science and art, and upon many living books; for we know that our business is, not to teach him all about anything, but to help him to make valid, as many as may be of,

*"Those first-born affinities
That fit our new existence to existing things."*

We will take as an example of the curriculum the work set for Form II—children of 9-11—for the spring term of this year.

In **Bible Lessons**, the children are studying the Exodus and the Gospel according to St. Matthew, the periods set for this term taking us from the Night of Deliverance to the Return of the Spies, and from the Sending out of the Twelve to the First Palm Sunday. There are also other books set for Sunday reading at home, such as *Sidelights on the Bible*, *Wigwam Stories*, and *The Northumbrian Saints*. These latter are optional.

English History is studied from *A History of England*, by Arnold Forster, 55 B.C. to 910 A.D. being this term's period. The same period is studied in **French History** from Mrs. Creighton's *First History of France*, while in **Citizenship** Form IIB is reading *Stories from the History of Rome* by Mrs. Beesley and IIA Plutarch's *Julius Caesar*, and *A Citizen Reader*, by Arnold Forster.

For **Reading** Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, *The Little Duke*, and *Wigwam Stories* are set in both divisions of the form, while in addition, IIA takes a period from Bulfinch's *Age of Fable*, Malory's *The Coming of Arthur*, *Puck of Pook's Hill* and Longfellow's *Saga of King Olaf*, while IIB is reading *The Adventures of Beowulf*, Longfellow's *The Discoverer of the North Cape*, and a portion from *The Heroes of Asgard*.

From this, it will be seen how the different subjects are arranged to fit in with one another.

In **Geography** both Forms are reading portions from *The Ambleside Geography Readers: Book III* written by Miss Mason. This is a series of five books; Book III

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● Bible 2.0
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● Sunday Reading
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● The Interdependence of a CM Curriculum
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being on the Counties of England. They are also reading *Our Sea Power* by H.W. Household, and *Round the Empire* by Sir George Parkin. All geography is, of course, studied with an atlas.

French is studied from Siepmann's *Primary French Course* and *French Songs* by Violet Partington. The grammar is learned to fit in with the lesson, or rather the stories are made to fit in with the grammar, and after reading and translating the story, the children, as far as they can, narrate it in French.

In **Arithmetic** IIB. is doing Weights and Measures with practice of back work. IIA, Simple Interest, Practice, Compound Practice, and H.C.F. of large numbers.

English Grammar is studied from Meiklejohn's *Short English Grammar* and includes parsing and analysis.

For **Natural History**, *The Sciences* by E.S. Holden is set—a most delightful book in dialogue form. IIA also take a section from *Life and her Children* by Arabella Buckley, while IIB has the choice of that or *Jack's Insects* by Edmund Selous, the author of those charming books about Tommy Smith and his Animals which rejoice the hearts of the children of the first form.

In connection with the Natural History, every child in the P.U.S. keeps a Nature Book in which he paints from nature flowers, birds, insects, animals—in short, any natural object which takes his fancy—and he writes his own descriptions and notes, not those dictated by his teacher. Children who are too small to write dictate their notes which are written down for them.

Older children make lists of birds and flowers—and sometimes of mosses, fungi, sea-weeds, etc.—with their English and Latin names, Natural Orders, and date and place of finding. Probably few people know that this idea of Nature Note Books which is now used in so many schools, was not thought of until started by Miss Mason and that it was from ideas of Miss Mason's that Sir Robert Baden-Powell kindly says he got many of his ideas upon scouting.

But to return to our programme for Form II.

Our next subject is **Picture Study**, another feature of the P.U.S. Usually, there are six pictures by one artist set for the term; this term there are three each by the Dutch painters Jan Steen and Gerard Dou. This is a lesson eagerly looked forward to by the children. The method on which it is carried out is somewhat as follows: Each child is given a copy of the picture to be studied, and this he looks at carefully for several minutes. When he feels that he really knows it well, he turns it face downward and proceeds to tell you all he can about it.

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Nature Study
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Every little detail is noticed—the position of the woman sitting on the chair, the key hanging up on the wall, the vine leaves creeping in at the window, etc., etc. Having done this, he looks at his picture again, while the teacher adds any comments it is necessary to make and the child then paints either a portion or the whole of it from memory. The position of the figures and the details in these reproductions is sometimes quite remarkable.

Then comes **Drawing**—six twigs of trees, studies of animals that you have been able to watch, children at play in brush-drawing. Original brush-drawing from books set for readings.

Recitation—a psalm, 12 verses each from the Old and New Testaments, two hymns, and a scene from Julius Caesar or forty lines from Longfellow.

Music is studied on the Curwen Method and in addition, Musical Appreciation classes on one particular composer are set for each term. This term the one selected is Schumann. These classes, which now take a prominent place in many schools, again owe their origin to Mrs. A. Glover who devised them for the children of the P.N.E.U.

In **Singing**, two English Songs and two French Songs are to be learned, also lessons in sight-singing.

Then come **Drill** including Swedish Drill, Ball Drill, Skipping, etc., and Handicrafts, help in house or garden, Repousse work, Knitting, Sewing, and boys as well as girls mend clothes from the wash each week.

In addition to this work, IIA also takes **General History**, for which they are reading a book on the British Museum. In connection with this, each child keeps a century book, that is a large notebook interleaved for drawing and writing, which they divide up, giving a page for each century back to about 15 B.C., earlier dates being added as required. In this book, they draw specimens of the architecture, ancient implements, carvings, etc. of the period they are studying and write in the names of famous people and events.

Latin and **Practical Geometry** are also begun in IIA

From this rough sketch of a term's programme, it may be seen what a vast range of interests are opened out before the child which he pursues with never-ending delight.

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TIMETABLES

And now we will take a look at the carefully arranged timetables. Practically all the bookwork is done in the morning when the children are fresh and ready to tackle the more arduous part of their work. The hours are not long—two and a half for the first form, four for the Vth and VIth; an hour more later in the day for II, III, and IV, and a couple for the Vth and VIth. This is exclusive of practicing, dancing, sewing, and a certain amount of reading. The lessons are carefully arranged for the various days; no lesson is longer than twenty minutes in the first form, while in the Vth and VIth, the average length is about forty minutes.

LESSONS

Now comes the question of how to teach the lessons. In the P.U.S., the teacher is not there to thrust second-hand knowledge into the heads of the children. It is her duty to open the doors in many different directions through which the children may walk in the pursuit of knowledge whilst she is there to guide and direct as occasion requires. She does as *little* as possible *herself*. "What a nice easy job," I think I hear you say. But when you come to try it, you find that after all, it is so much easier to do the sum yourself than to keep yourself in the background and to give just exactly that right amount of direction which will enable Tommy to do it for *himself*.

It has been said "that there is no impression without expression," and certainly this method is adopted in the P.U.S. The children have their own books which they read for themselves, but they do not stop there. Every lesson is either narrated or reported. The length of the passage taken will, of course, vary according to the age of the children, from a few lines for the little ones to several pages or a chapter for the older ones. After a single reading, the children are asked to narrate the passage, and I must say the results are quite astonishing. Sometimes in the case of older children, they write a report on the lesson instead of narrating with equally satisfactory results.

The advantages of this method are various; two important ones being that it secures the habit of attention and that it develops a good clear style in speaking and composition. As regards the first—if the child knows that he will have to narrate or report what he has read after a single reading, he is bound to give it his attention or else feel small and stupid when his turn comes and he has nothing to say.

And as regards the second, as all books on the P.U.S. programmes are chosen from those of the best authors, the child is bound to develop a good style in composition, for he will naturally write and narrate in the style of the book he has been reading.

This method of narration and reports is one of the secrets of the P.U.S. Think of the time you save. You read your book once, and you know it and go on to another—and there is no looking up at the end of term before the examinations; indeed this is not allowed.

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EXAMS

We will now pass to a week before the end of term. One morning an envelope marked "House of Education, Ambleside" arrives. It contains the examination questions. As soon as the day you have fixed on comes round, you open the envelope, and the examinations begin. They last for one week, and the subjects are not all done in one lump—three hours arithmetic, two, history, or whatever it is, but in the usual time set for that subject on the timetable. Thus you might have forty-five minutes history on Wednesday and forty on Friday.

You are given one question at a time, and when that is finished, you are given the next. This method avoids the fatigue caused particularly in the case of younger children when the whole of the time allowed for one subject is taken at once. The examinations are not to be a burden to the children but a pleasure. If one subject is finished before its allotted time is up, then the remainder of the time may be used for another subject which the children have not had time to finish, but any questions for which there has not been time during the week may be omitted. Examinations conducted on this method cause no strain to the children. In the case of little children who cannot write, they dictate their answers, which are written down for them. Songs and repetitions are heard, and exercise books, paintings, handwork, and drill are inspected by the father or outside friend, sewing by the mother, and a report of these with marks given by the parent is then sent up to Ambleside with the written examination papers. After a few weeks, this report and papers are returned together with a report from Ambleside on the written work, and from this report, you are able to judge where your child stands in comparison to others of its own age. Each subject is marked—100 being the maximum—and there are remarks by the examiner and by Miss Mason who sees the papers and signs the report of every child in the P.U.S. which amounts to some thousands.

P.U. SCHOOLS OF EVERY TYPE

So far, we have been thinking of the P.U.S. as confined to children taught at home, but though originally inaugurated for their benefit, it was destined to spread in many other directions. Several families joined together, and their children worked together on the P.U.S. programmes, then private schools adopted the programme, and more recently many elementary schools have started working on the method, so that now all over Great Britain you may find P.U. Schools of every type.

Who can tell the immense possibilities for the better understanding and sympathy which may arise between class and class as a generation of children of all classes, in families and schools all over the world, grows up reading the same books and nourished upon the same educational ideals which Miss Mason has given to the world?

TEACHER'S TRAINING COLLEGE

And now we will turn to yet another part of the work of the P.N.E.U., namely that of the College—the hub of the wheel as it were.

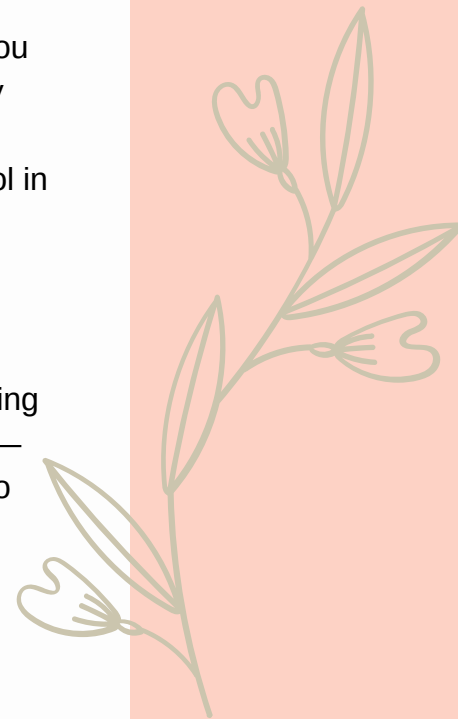
Situated amongst the mountains and lakes of one of the most beautiful parts of England lies the little town of Ambleside, beautiful in the sunshine—perhaps almost more beautiful in the rain when great clouds roll over the mountain tops. Here with Miss Mason at its head, is the House of Education where for the past thirty years, upwards of five hundred students of P.N.E.U. have spent one of the most wonderful parts of their lives. Here is the home of the P.N.E.U. Could any spot be more ideal; and as one thinks of what P.N.E.U. is doing in the world, one realizes the significance of Blake's words which hang up in the college hall:

"Great things are done when men and mountains meet,
This is not done by jostling in the street."

Started in 1892 with three or four students and a course of one year, the numbers at the college and length of training soon increased so that now you will find about forty students, the course being two years. During this time the students study directly under Miss Mason, Miss Parish, and the staff, the principles of the P.N.E.U. together with practical work in the Practising School, which is run in connection with the college. A short description of what you might see on a visit to the school and college may be of interest.

Having crossed Lake Windermere in a steamer or traveled five miles by coach from Windermere station, you reach the far end of Ambleside and turn in up the long drive which leads you to the House of Education, or Scale How, as it is familiarly known. In front of you is a group of children and one or two students who go into a room on your right about halfway up the drive. They have come from "Fairfield," the schoolhouse, just across the road, and are going to the schoolroom in the College grounds where the first to the fourth forms work. You walk on up to the left past a flourishing little oak tree planted two years ago by Mr. Household, a name familiar to many readers of the Parents' Review, in honor of the occasion of the adopting of P.N.E.U. Methods in the fiftieth school in Gloucestershire.

In a moment or two, you enter the college where you can see the students at work, or you may visit the Practising School and watch the teaching of all the forms in the P.U.S. There are from twenty to thirty children in the school, varying in age from six to eighteen, who are taught by four students and the mistress—herself an old student—in charge of the school. The students take it in turns to go on duty at school, their work there lasting for a week at a time.



The afternoons are free as far as book-work is concerned for both students and children and are spent in nature work, walks, Girl Guiding and games. The nature walks conducted by a member of the staff are of absorbing interest; in fact, a writer once wishing to describe them said, "When Scale How goes for a Nature Walk, it never has time to get beyond the garden gates, it finds so many interesting things to see on the way." Ambleside is, of course, an ideal place for nature study.

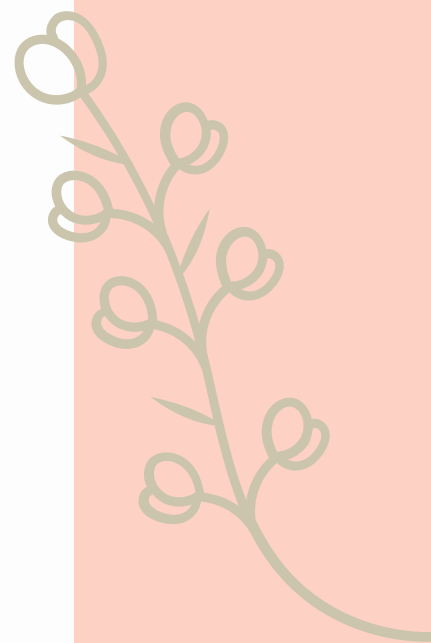
You have no difficulty in recognizing a Scale How Student if you happen to be staying up at Ambleside, for you are sure to meet her carrying, what may seem to you, a few uninteresting looking specimens of flowers or fungi, or examining a weed in a ditch. A stranger came up to me one day when I was out and asked me if I came from Scale How, and when I replied that I did, she said, "I thought so because you were looking at the catkins."

Bird Walks are another feature of Scale How training, and Ambleside again affords an ideal spot for this purpose. The head of Windermere is almost the daily walk of the bird lovers, for there is the place where the migrants stop, perhaps for an hour or two, on their way north or south, so that besides the regular residents, you may see many visiting birds.

As the staff conduct the Nature and Bird Walks for the College, so the students take them for the school. Then comes 3:45 when the children have an hour's work before tea—handicrafts, singing, painting, picture study are the type of lessons given at this time. Then comes tea, after which the children read and sew and have some time to amuse themselves. The students work for two hours after tea and again for an hour after supper except on half-holidays and on Tuesday evenings when one student reads a paper on some subject of interest. Many of these papers you will have noticed in the Parents' Review under the title of "Scale How Tuesdays." Another interesting time at the College is Thursday mornings when two or three students give Lessons for Criticism before the other students and staff. When they are over, Miss Mason calls upon those present to criticize the lessons, finally summing them each up herself.

At the end of each year come the students' final examinations when the Senior Students, usually about twenty, pass out of the college to their various posts, members of an ever-increasing body of House of Education Students.

It must not be imagined from this that Scale How Students are the only people allowed to teach on this method. This is far from the case. Many parents have a governess who has studied the methods under Miss Mason herself, but a great many do not, for the demand for students far exceeds the supply, and there are hundreds of mothers and other people using the method who have never had the opportunity of Ambleside training.



CONCLUSION

I have endeavored to give you some brief account of the work and aims of the P.U.S., and I have spoken rather of the facts than of the ideals which lie behind. I can only say that the more I know of these ideals, the more wonderful I find them to be, and the more you study them, the more you will realize the truth of our motto: "Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life."

Three Tools of
Education
ep. 4

