

## Recipe versus Thought.

BY ESSEX CHOLMONDELEY.

“OF making many books there is no end.” How truly can this be said of those books of crystallised experience, the Recipe books. The making of these did not begin with the scribes of ancient Egypt nor will it end with the printing press. The number of recipes exceeds the orange skins on the sea shore for multitude just as the green fruit on the tree exceeds the ripe fruit in the market.

So many minds are unpublished but potential books of recipes! Some are complete, some still in the making; a few are encyclopædic, the majority are concerned with two or three interests only. The content of each of these books gives the history of a lifetime. A great part of everyday life is lived according to recipes—helpful or hindering formulas obtained at second hand from successful people and carried out according to the intelligence, capacity or material resources available. It cannot well be otherwise in such a perplexing world of unstable opinion and fluctuating occupation. “What must I do? How shall I do it?” “What shall I make? How shall I make it?” we cry and then how gratefully we clutch at the floating driftwood ere we drown in a sea of disastrous ignorance and how often we find a straw in our hands.

Some recipes are not straws, they are veritable logs; the difficult lies in our power of discernment. For instance:—

“*Fruit Salad.* Take  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. of all fruit in season. Skin and stone the fruit; when oranges are used remove pips,

skin and white pith; cut the fruit into pieces about the size of a Barcelona nut; 1 oz. of blanched almonds cut up; cover with sugar and let it stand for a few hours. Add one glass of liqueur and more sugar if desired.' Personal ideas may be vague concerning the size of a Barcelona nut, no glass of liqueur may be at hand, yet here a very hopeful dish is discernable whereas in the following the afflicted householder can only discern an act of faith:—

*“To destroy cockroaches. Mix equal quantities of oatmeal and plaster of Paris; strew upon the floor.”*

When swimming in deeper waters, the troubled seas of behaviour, the recipial driftwood is still present:—*To ensure success*

*“Early to bed and early to rise  
Makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise,  
Wise, healthy and wealthy.”*

or:—*To avoid censure and ensure popularity*

*“Speak when you’re spoken to,  
Do as you’re bid,  
Shut the door after you  
Never be chid.”*

A former generation made and clung to these, but they are not now considered useful for swimming purposes.

Nor are recipes wanting for those who desire to lead a religious life, who wish to spend a happy holiday at a seaside resort, who seek health, who engage in a new art or craft (even witchcraft—see Shakespeare) or who undertake the education of children. There are recipes afloat for all these things and many others, they may be still unpublished but that is only because a large enough demand for them in print has not yet been voiced by the public.

Useful though this power of storing up and handing on experiences may be, the recipe-habit of mind is a dangerous one. Is it, perhaps, of the nature of the leaven of the Pharisees, a trust in the letter which killeth as opposed to the spirit which giveth life? Beware of the leaven! To live by recipe is a great temptation in this efficient and hurried age, it saves time and trouble, it entirely does away with the arduous task of thinking. There are two fields in which we may not yield an inch to this temptation, the green fields of Religion and of her handmaid Education.

Certain it is that the true teacher, like the man of true religion, should live by the spirit and not by the letter, by principles, not by rules of practice, however faithfully applied. Beware of listening to the cry for educational recipes; answer it with the clarion of revealed educational truths.

Hopeful parents and teachers frequently become members of an educational Society thinking that from henceforth all their perplexities will be lightened for them by a body of rules and dictums, unpublished perhaps, but extant in the minds of the more prominent members of their Union. They are doomed to a merciful disappointment.

Their questions can never be answered by an easily applied rule, the true answer takes the form of a revealed principle upon which the member himself must act intelligently. The simplest answer to the question "What should I do when my child——" is "We do——" but such an answer merely records a practice, maybe an unwise practice under the special circumstances. A wise answer would show a principle at stake and would indicate a general line of action. In our own Union members ask "Why do you do——? Is it P.N.E.U.?" "May we do this?" Thus assailed, the speaker standing nervously behind the slight protection of a small table and a glass of water is in danger of answering quickly and all too well. After the meeting, in the quiet of the fireside, or the loneliness of the railway carriage, the answer may be found to be a mere recipe, applicable only in certain circumstances, on given material. How simple if, when asked "How should lessons be prepared" the reply could be à la cookery book:—

*"To prepare a history lesson (old style). Take 12 suitable pages of all History books obtainable. Skin and stone the facts; when imaginative writing has been used remove the pips, skin and white pith of redundant language; cut the information into pieces about the size of a small printed paragraph; ½ dozen historical anecdotes; sugar with racy humour and bright manner. Let the lesson lie dormant in the mind for a few hours. Add personal charm and more humour if desired."* How excellent a historical-salad some teachers have produced according to this recipe and what indigestion sometimes follows. It is perhaps a dish for which most of our members do not ask.

Or again:—“How do you get rid of bad discipline at home?”

“*To destroy bad discipline.* Mix equal quantities of dignity and severity; strew upon the whole household.” Will undesirable behaviour then be as dead as the cock-roaches in a former recipe?

Miss Mason answered many questions in her life-time. It has been said by those who knew her that by her answers she revealed an underlying principle, she would never merely prescribe a course of action. In one of her letters to her students she admits that when a point of theory or practice is challenged, she finds it necessary to think out the matter down to its roots before the retort can be adequately discovered. A “large discourse, looking before and after” is wanted. “May we do it?” cannot be decided by imagining or remembering what will probably follow if we *do*; this is merely “looking after.” It is the underlying principle, brought to mind and carefully held in view—“looking before”—which should give the final word of permission. Miss Mason left no recipes behind her. She believed in thinking persons, therefore she bequeathed certain principles based upon truth itself. Every parent and teacher is free to apply these principles in ever fresh practice according as new needs and difficulties arise. If members fail to understand these principles and are content to act only according to advice—however sound,—they will make P.N.E.U. thought into a series of recipes which though useful at the moment, will be entirely inapplicable to the material of everyday life in another generation.

At the Children’s Gathering at Canterbury the question arose: “May a P.N.E.U. teacher make use of oral lessons? If so, when? and to what extent?”

“What does Miss Mason herself say about this?” is the first thought of the person who endeavours to find the reply. But the first *thought* may be the second *duty*; the first duty is the effort to arrive at the principles involved. A teacher may reflect thus:—

*Education is a Life.* In order to have fulness of life, the mind like the body, needs food, exercise and rest. School life must present the best balanced supply of these

three needs. Certain subjects such as mathematics and languages provide exercise. Granted that children do their own work by themselves to a large extent, oral lessons can be freely used in these subjects. Other subjects such as literature and history should supply the ideas upon which the mind must feed. May oral lessons be given in these subjects? in science? in Geography? Our desire is that the children should grow in knowledge. What *is* knowledge, is it the same as information?

“The distinction between knowledge and information is, I think, fundamental. Information is the record of facts, experiences, appearances, etc., whether in books or in the verbal memory of the individual; knowledge, it seems to me, implies the result of the voluntary and delightful action of the mind upon the material presented to it. . . . The information acquired in the course of education is only by chance, and here and there, of practical value. Knowledge, on the other hand, that is, the product of the vital action of the mind on the material present to it, is power; as it implies an increase of intellectual aptitude in new directions, and an always new point of departure.”  
—(*School Education*).

Information thus takes a second place but though knowledge be the first aim in view, cannot we devote time to the kind of lesson which does give information but does not bring knowledge? Is it not important to learn certain *facts* of history, natural history, geography, and should not time be given up to such learning? Time is short and very precious. In these subjects every lesson must intend knowledge, information must come incidentally and keep its “second place.” Children must study in order to know, for they know in order to live.

Continuing his enquiry the teacher goes on: “How do people get knowledge?” Knowledge results when the mind has accepted and has worked upon the ideas presented to it. Literary form is the vehicle which carries an idea most surely to the mind and it is certain that the mind finds itself free to work delightfully upon those ideas which it meets through good literature and good art. Accordingly it would appear that, in subjects which provide food for the mind, each lesson must

(1) present ideas in a suitable form (literary for preference);

(2) ensure "voluntary and delightful action of mind upon the material presented."

Can an oral lesson fulfil these obligations? If so, I may give them, if not I must forbear. It is necessary to be even more specific. Is the oral lesson which I have just prepared on "The Great Air Currents of the World" justified? I thought it would be useful in clearing up a confusion which I find is prevalent in my class after the term's reading. Is it justified by any original thought on my part,\* by my vital interest which will enable my class to receive and use the ideas that I hope to set forth? Is it justified also by the opportunity which I shall give the class of doing individual work upon what they have heard? Or does this lesson consist of carefully got up information, or is it "a single grain of pure knowledge to a gallon of talk"? I wonder if it is only my manner which will hold the attention of the class and if the memorisation or tabulation of essential facts (with which I intend the children to finish the lesson) is merely a mental exercise?

An honest answer must be given and the answer will permit or forbid the lesson in question. Perhaps even if he finds permission, the teacher will decide to attain his end by other means; but he has at least done his best to examine the truths upon which he intends to base his practice. He is ready to consult Miss Mason's books and the advice given there concerning the use and misuse of oral lessons will not be used as a recipe but will be intelligently followed.

It is a very much harder task to recollect and apply a principle than to follow a precept, hence all the recipe-activity in the world, but we are all born persons and the power to think is there in each one of us if we will but use it. To be a "member"—a living part of a living organism—implies and entails the duty of careful thought. Members of the P.N.E.U. are fortunate in possessing Miss Mason's books by which to attempt the answering of their

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\* "Original thought justifies an oral lesson or a lecture, but can the teacher have vital interest, therefore original thought on many subjects?" (MISS MASON).

own questions and by which to test their answers. Here can be found a clear exposition of those laws of mind, those central truths, upon which all P.N.E.U. method must be based. Here again, can be found sage advice. It is the part of every member to seek and find in his own mind the best means of applying those principles, that advice, to new occasions and to particular instances. This is the contribution that each one of us can make to the Union, the only one worthy of a thinking person. We have no body of rules, no recipes. A few firmly rooted principles have been shown to us and in these consist the strength and usefulness of the Union. If in the study and expression of these principles we use our liberty, our best intelligence, our careful consideration and our honest labour, we shall find a steadily growing power of meeting new difficulties, not by recipes old or new, but by vital truths. It is possible to attain, as a society and as "persons" to that kind of knowledge which sets men and women free from mere theories of life, while enabling them to live wisely and choose well among the many new and distracting doctrines which daily come to light.