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"Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, and a life."

REPORT OF THE
THIRTIETH ANNUAL CONFERENCE,

Held at the Westminster Palace Rooms,
44, Victoria Street, London, on Monday,
Tuesday and Wednesday, March 12th,
13th and 14th, 1928.

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TUESDAY AFTERNOON, 13TH MARCH.

Chairman: MRS. HUBBACK, M.A., Principal of Morley College.

CHARMS AND ARMOUR.

By ESSEX CHOLMONDELEY.

I WAS reading, before Christmas, a book dealing with ancient man, telling of the different devices he had for protecting himself and for going on living. Ancient man, according to this book, had very definite views about life, and he found it a very great struggle. There were three kinds of charms which he used. One of them, which is found in the old caves where these men had their habitations, consisted in the teeth of bears and other formidable wild animals. The author pointed out that among present-day races of a rather elementary culture,

it is believed that if you are so much of a man that you are able to kill a bear, the very strength of that bear passes into your possession, and you are so much stronger by one bear power. Therefore, in ancient times you wore the bear's teeth round your neck, and everybody knew that you were so much stronger than other more unfortunate people who had not encountered bears and who had not been able to slay them.

Another kind of charm very much in fashion in those days was shells. Shells were the exclusive property of a very ancient goddess, and that goddess, if you wore a shell which was her property, took care that no evil overcame you. She protected you because you were wearing part of her very self.

Another way they had (a pathetic way), of ensuring life was that when they died they painted themselves over with a kind of red ochre made from the soil, because, as we all know, red is the colour of life, and if they painted themselves with the colour of life, they held that the life passed into the body and that, though it appeared to be lifeless, sooner or later life would return.

Think, again, about armour. These ancient races did not seem to discover armour. But armour was soon discovered. When human people have discovered a source of life, they feel at once that they must protect it and they wear armour of one kind or another. Those two things associate themselves in the mind, charms and armour, whenever one thinks of that great problem that has beset every generation—the problem of how to go on living and why anyone should take the trouble to go on.

If you put your trust in charms, it works very well up to a certain point. As long as everybody else believes in the bear's teeth, and in the sea shells, and in the red ochre paint, there is a sense of security. But ideas change. It is no good going on wearing a bear's teeth if people no longer believe in bear's teeth.

Just after Christmas, I saw a most entertaining list of charms that could still be bought in India. It was in a little Indian paper, translated into rather queer English, that came up to us at Ambleside. Instead of having advertisements for tooth paste and pills and clothing, as our papers might have, it had a title page of the different charms which you could buy for so many rupees and annas. You could buy charms for success of several different kinds. One of the most expensive

charms of all gave you every kind of success that you could wish for. So that charms are still among us.

Armour we see in museums, but we have long since given up wearing armour on our bodies. Armour is a protection only so long as weapons do not change; directly weapons change, the armour changes with it. Charms have the great disadvantage that if you put your trust in them, the trust you put obscures the true sources of life; and armour has this other disadvantage that though you may be protected from danger, you are usually shut up in some sort of prison, as we can see in those old pictures of knights in armour. I must tell you about a modern idea of a war-horse in full armour. "After all, the caparisoned war-horse was much the same as a tank, except that the horse wore the tank and supplied the motive power (one-horse power), and that the man power on the tank was just one man. It was as much of an armoured car as is our modern tank." The disadvantage of that armoured state is that the wearer suffers a terrible handicap to the power of moving about freely.

At the back of all these charms and of all the armour in creation is the desire for a fuller life and the terrible fear of losing it. Fear is at the root of every form of charm and of every form of armour, whether it is physical armour, whether it is mental armour, whether it is a spiritual charm or whether it is a magical charm.

I think that the youth of every generation is more like David than like Goliath. It is presented by the older generation with a beautiful suit of armour, just as David was presented by Saul, and youth finds that it has not proven its armour and discards it, selecting a few smooth stones and using its sling. The difficulty is that we do not all stay young, and as the years go on, we fear for our life and there is a tendency to go to Saul for his suit of armour and to practise in it until we can go in it. It is fear that does that.

We, of the Parents' National Educational Union, say that "Education is a Life," and that is always twisted round into just exactly what the speaker wishes to twist it into. Perhaps it means that we educate children for the whole of their lives. It is no use just bringing them up to be splendid young people; we have to bring them up in such a way that they may go on through the whole of their lives vital people. It is no good just thinking of their school age, their college careers and their first

emergence into professional life ; we have to think of them young, middle-aged and elderly if we are really going to bring up people. We, of the P.N.E.U., have got a very great advantage, because besides feeling the common needs of humanity in this respect, we also have certain very definite things we believe in, and those things inspire us with hope and faith, and therefore, with courage ; as you know, once you have courage, charms and armour are only worn as they are needed, and if they are not absolutely needed they are discarded. If you are a person of great courage, you find you can discard far more than you ever thought could be discarded before,—discarded only to make room for those things in which you believe.

What is it that makes *persons*—persons and not just individuals? We all say very glibly, “ children are born persons,” and we know that persons are born children, but are we absolutely certain what we mean when we say that persons are persons? Does it mean they are individuals? They certainly are individuals. If you would just go through the portrait gallery you have in your mind of really great persons, you would find that each of those portraits represents somebody whose life was free, in very many directions, to be lived in other people, in great causes, in great ideas. The more an individual becomes a person, the freer he becomes. We see that children are born persons. We can each think of the child we happen to know best at the moment, and I think we shall find that they are extraordinarily free to enter into the subject in hand. If it is a game, they are not interested in themselves playing the game, but in the game. If it is a punishment, they are interested in the punishment, and not in themselves being punished. As time goes on, unless there is something to counteract it, there is a tendency for us all not so much to be interested in the games we play, whether they are big games or small games in adult life, not so much to be interested in ideas but to be so terribly interested in ourselves playing games and thinking about ideas. So many philosophies set forth by present-day thinkers tend to accentuate this. You see every person in the world knows that there is a great deficit in vitality somewhere. Everybody is giving us recipes for keeping more and more lively. You should do this and that ; you should read this or that ; you should hear this or that, and then you will be more lively. The difficulty is that the more you think about yourself being lively, the more entangled you become in

yourself, the less you really care whether you are alive or not, so you are in a dilemma. It really is a matter of going back to that ancient saying, which has been haunting Christianity all these years, "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Directly your life is an interest in itself, it is lost. The interest is so much armour that prevents you moving about.

What is to be done? What are we to do as a Union when we say that education is a life? Do we mean a losing life, making free people, or do we mean a very careful, beautifully arranged "saving" life, which will produce fettered persons, persons who are not free?

As a concrete example, supposing we all decided that we must do so much reading a day or else we should lose our vitality. If we read regularly from the feeling that we should lose our life unless we did so, it would become a tyranny to us. We might lose ever so many valuable chances of other duties well performed simply by sticking rigidly to that. But supposing we did it from a totally different motive, not that we wished to live more fully ourselves but that we wished to have something to share with other people in order that they might live more fully or that we might enter into communication with them more perfectly, or that we might help others to some idea that perhaps they might want urgently, then our attention would not be on ourselves but on other people, and if we found some other duty we should not do that reading and we should not miss it.

The great difficulty is to find an object outside of ourselves for which to live and for which to work. I hope everybody here has such an object, and in proportion as they have that object and live for it, they will be free persons rather than fettered ones.

If you are going to bring up people into liberty for service and for a larger life, it will be a very gradual growing process and will probably mean a great many small things faithfully performed. What do we believe in that will help us? The synopsis of the P.N.E.U. says that we believe in ideas, in relationships; every relationship understood, entered into and fulfilled is a door of escape from your own self. Every knowledge entered into takes away the focus from one's own personality into the wider world outside. There must be ever so many avenues of escape and children must be brought up in

them, and hence you have all that we believe in about the wide curriculum and the various things that children must find, and learn and do. If you live constantly in ideas, you do not live in yourself ; you are passing out always instead of staying in.

Free people, if they wish to be truly free, must be disciplined, and you have the very stern discipline in children of having habits formed in them and in grown-ups of forming habits in themselves. It is a very stern discipline indeed, and it is one that goes on throughout life. Again, in order to be free people you must have the freedom of your circumstances and of your environment, of your atmosphere so to speak, the thing that you are living in and born in ; that you must use to the utmost.

Education is an atmosphere, a discipline and a life : the discipline of habits, the life of ideas. Achievement is two-fold, the achievement of wisdom and the achievement of character. Nobody achieves being a person ; that they were born and that they remain, whether they are fettered persons or free persons. But you can achieve character, built up on discipline.

To-morrow, we shall all go back to ordinary life. We shall not be conferring here longer than to-morrow morning, but as a body we shall all be at work. The question is, how can we each one be a true member of the P.N.E.U. ? There are certain avenues of work. There is the one great avenue of teaching, and there is the even greater avenue of the bringing up of children at home. There is the avenue that we at Ambleside pursue of trying to live out Miss Mason's life as she left it to us to live—in the training of the students, in the thinking and planning towards the work of the P.U.S. There is the avenue of which Mrs. Franklin is a guardian angel, the very severe work of letting people know what we are working for. But it is of no use being a Union unless everybody is working in that Union, and by working I do not mean doing public service only, but in having the principles and all that they mean at heart. If you believe in the kind of approach to mind that Miss Mason believed in, it colours the whole of your outlook upon all your work and intercourse with other people. If you know that ideas are so precious that they are the best kind of alms that anybody can give to each other, almsgiving of the mind becomes your duty and it becomes your duty that you should always have an alms to give.

Let us re-read Miss Mason's books and really see how far

the things in those books would be useful in our lives. The things she says and teaches are needed so much to-day in our Women's Institutes, in our Boys' Clubs, in our Girls' Clubs. The hope is that we shall all be a real Union, all working out in some way these things which we have at heart ; that we shall not leave it to Mrs. Franklin at the office to carry out Miss Mason's work, or to Miss Parish and Miss Kitching, at Ambleside, but that we shall all work together for it, all interpreting it and using it, just as in hundreds and hundreds of home schools, homes and nurseries it is being used all over the country and all over the Empire.

Then our P.N.E.U. principles will be a real source of life, and no longer a charm or an armour ; then we shall slowly achieve not a sought and found life, but a lost life, a life of service, service directed towards the very basis of all life.