

TINKERS.<sup>1</sup>

By E. K.

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Is it too much to say that the workers of the world are divided into two classes—the tinkers and the workers with an ideal in view?

We all know the tinker. He leads a free and easy life, roaming from place to place. In the old rhyme he was a professional, ranking with soldiers, sailors and tailors. He is a nomad, more or less skilled in his work, on the look out for defects for which he has a ready patch. We connect him with Borrow and the gypsies and we are apt to admire his rough and ready ways, his care-free if hard life, his touches of imagination and humour, though we hesitate at his irresponsibility.

But what have tinkers to do with us as parents or teachers? Perhaps more than at first seems evident for if we come to think of it there are tinkers in every walk of life, ever seeking some small job, taking it up in a rough and ready way, making themselves useful and welcome, taking life easily and—never getting further! Our responsibility is to see not only that our children do not become tinkers, but that a much more immediate matter, that we are not tinkers ourselves.

A tinker has no chart, he needs no compass, he feels no compelling power, but the chance of the moment which may bring a job that wants a patch and, having procured his patch, he puts it on. He is free to choose his patches and as long as they *seem* of the right metal he asks no more. Miss Mason tells us that tinkers are plentiful in these days; that in our quest for what we call the Truth, we run after things that may be true but are not the truth and that in consequence the mighty works of God are lying latent. There never was a time like the present when men have taken up humanity as a crusade. Humanity is probed to its depths that its heights may be scaled but, somehow, the heights from the depths seem rather unattainable. We are told that humanity must be saved from

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suffering, discomfort, evil; and as long as we can get a remedial patch and apply it we feel that we have “saved our souls.”

Every newspaper, every magazine, books galore, set forth the ills to which humanity is prone and we say—“Oh, how dreadful! What can we do? Let’s try so and so,” and the latest formula from the scientific pharmacopia is hastily offered as a patch.

“What a good idea” has become an under-current to our thoughts, constantly recurring, constantly being received as the truth, accepted without being brought to any test other than that someone found it “a good plan.” This verdict of “a good plan” has been so often brought forward as a summary of Miss Mason’s work that it seems well for us to consider how we, her disciples, may convince the world that we are not tinkers; for indeed tinkers in all walks of life are hindering the perception of the truth by asseverating things that may be true but are not life-giving. Those of us who belong to the P.N.E.U. have a chart and a compass for we have an inheritance, a synopsis of dogmatic teaching but I say dogmatic with hesitation because dogma is not a pleasant-sounding word to some people.

It is interesting to study the position given by Simon Memmi to dogmatic theology in his picture of “The Seven Liberal and the Seven Theological Arts,” in the Chapel of Santa Maria

Novella, at Florence. "It is only when you have learned what civil law is, what Christian law is, in what practical theology consists (that is, our duty to God and our duty to man), and when you have given glory to God in devotional theology, that the need of dogma is felt lest action and worship should become too wide and difficult." (See Ruskin's interpretation in *Mornings in Florence*.)

I suppose most of us have come across people who have "always worked on Miss Mason's methods" though they did not know it; who think that the Kindergarten, Montessori and P.N.E.U. systems are all the same, who fancy that the P.N.E.U. Method is summed up in the word "narration"; or who consider that anything started so long ago as forty years must now be quite out of date. Our business, as Miss Mason's disciples, is not to apologize for her educational creed but to justify it; not to put forward a Method without showing its underlying principles, not to produce statistics but to show that faith in the children will stir the mighty works of God in them. And Faith is recognition and comes of that long, long gaze [p 333]

which we give to Truth lest we should miss one line of her gracious lineaments and then we know her to be "our first and oldest acquaintance."

Bernard Shaw has given in *St. Joan* a marvellous study of the direct appeal of truth. He shows how St. Joan was hampered by no tortuous reasoning or questions of expediency, that to every question of her persecutors she had but one answer—the presentation of the truth that had been revealed to her. She did not attempt to meet or confute arguments against her actions and her accusers marvelled (though they could not understand) at the result of her work. A martyrdom and long years of silence lapsed ere men recognised that she had a message of Truth and she became Saint Joan.

"God is no drudge," says Dunois, proud of his army, and meeting God half-way with it. "No," says Joan, in effect, "but faith takes you on without an army and then the way becomes clear." What a wonderful study the whole play is of the 'Way of the Reason'! There is the poor Dauphin who tinkers feebly with each scrap that he catches from the last speaker, the unscrupulous lords of Church and State who hope to tinker the tottering fabrics to which they have pinned their faith, the heartless ecclesiastics who tinker with one patch, and one only in their search for heresy in order to win the approval of the God they worshipped,—the Church as embodied in ecclesiastical law. St. Joan baffles them all, for the Truth has made her free to act with a single eye. We need the faith and the courage of St. Joan in these days to keep us from the tinkering that is offered on all sides. It is rather curious to compare Bernard Shaw's estimate of St. Joan with a summary given in a recent book on psycho-analysis,—

"When such a hyperthyroid enunchoid is at the same time an eidetist with a conception of the world so different from the normal, a character and biography like Joan's is almost inevitable."

Only the other day, as an answer to the P.U.S. preliminary questions, a phrenologist's account of a little girl was sent, and it was easy to see how Miss Mason's questions, answered by a mother, even a fond mother, gave the truth about a child in a way that no scientific formulæ could. But psycho-analysis has done its worst, we hope, and as the sediment sinks in a bottle swept through a muddy pond and the living creatures become visible, so truth is emerging. The popular cry now is for

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synthesis, and clergy and laity alike are thinking that perhaps, after all, M. Coué may be of more help in stabbing a reluctant will into action.

A most devoted mother has written a book setting forth how she has, with great success, brought up her children on suggestion and auto-suggestion: she writes,—“Earnestly and frequently impress upon a child that he is good and kind and self-controlled, and he will become so. Again, I should not say: ‘I wish to be kind to everyone’; I affirm: ‘I am kind to everyone.’ There is nothing vague or complicated about that.” No, there is nothing vague or complicated about it—but is it not going from one extreme to the other? Is it not admitting that we have lost sight of the fact that *everyone* is a person? The will is the crux of educational problems to-day, as it has ever been, and how to strengthen the will is the battleground of educationists. The will *is* the man. Much that is written to-day tends towards a conclusion that a man and his will are two entities and that as long as a man is made to act under someone’s will, it does not matter if it is not his own. This is not to be confused with the exercise of deputed authority which also belongs to each of us. To suggestion the will gives way, like the judge to the importunate widow, under constant pressure, and therefore, as Miss Mason tells us, we only stultify the will by such “tinkering,” and in *Ourselves* she discusses “the way of the will.” But we are, as a Society, supposed to offer many forms of “tinkering,” and we must decide what we stand for. Only the other day a paper arrived in which “P.N.E.U.” was said to be good for the lower forms of a school as a preparation for the Dalton plan in the upper forms! It is hard to see the relevance of such a remark except on the assumption that “P.N.E.U. = independent study + narration.”

In a letter received recently, the writer said, “I joined the Union thinking it was simply a National Educational Union for Parents, and not knowing till I read the synopsis you sent me that the P.N.E.U. stands for a definite theory of education.”

We need to be continually taking stock of what Miss Mason has taught us, lest our very familiarity with her teaching should prevent our seeing how it stands in relation to current thought; more than this, lest we should be led away by the implication that we are only tinkers, with good plans to offer, and should allow ourselves to be confuted by the side issues of new theories

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which can only fall into place when education is treated *as a unity*. Miss Mason’s conception of education as a whole is still new to the world though it is just forty years since *Home Education* was published in 1886.

“Probably the chief source of weakness in our attempt to formulate a science of education is that we do not perceive that education is the outcome of philosophy. We deal with the issue and ignore the source. Hence our efforts lack continuity and definite aim. We are content to pick up a suggestion here, a practical hint there, without even troubling ourselves to consider what is that scheme of life of which such hints and suggestions are the output . . . . What we have to do is to gather together and order our resources; to put the first thing foremost and all things in sequence, and to see that education is neither more nor less than the practical application of our philosophy. Hence if our educational thought is to be sound and effectual we must look to the philosophy which underlies it.”

“‘The proper study of mankind is man,’ is one of those ‘thoughts beyond their thought’ which poets light upon; and I am able to add my personal testimony to the fact that under no

other study with which I am acquainted is it possible to trace such almost visible expansion of mind and soul in the young student as in this of philosophy.”<sup>2</sup>

It is a rather curious coincidence that two books quite recently published have referred to the want of the idea of unity in education. In the *Church Times*, there was a review of Dr. McVittie’s *Train up a Child*, from which I quote the following: “As far as my knowledge goes,” says Dr. McVittie, “England has never given to the world anything deserving of a system of education.” “Apparently,” says the reviewer, “he has never heard of Miss Charlotte Mason’s system, commonly known as P.N.E.U., which embodies many of the principles set forth in these pages, and has been widely adopted both in schools and home tuition.”

Dr. Mackail in his *Classical Studies*, says: “We have, up to the present time, never had, at least since the Middle Ages, any system of national education or any thought-out co-ordination of the whole field of human studies . . . . Our culture, including science as well as letters, has grown up casually . . . . in a habit (not a fit) of absence of mind.”  
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May I quote another illuminating paragraph: “The industrial and political revolutions of the last century have been followed or accompanied by a cultural revolution . . . . Great new fields of knowledge have been opened. There has been an immense specialisation of industry in the intellectual field. One of the most marked results of this revolution was that competition of studies rather than co-operation of studies became prevalent . . . . and vocational training was held of more account than the formation of a wide solid basis of intelligence and character. Education was given and received, not for its own sake . . . . but for its material profit. As cause and as consequence there came a marked loss of belief in learning as an end in itself, as an inward possession. . . . . We have been living until lately on the intellectual and moral capital inherited by us. But we have been using it up fast . . . . The object of most clear-sighted thinkers and administrators is to realise, while there is still time, the ideal of humanism.”

And the Professor adds a further word of warning: “Discussions may be largely futile if they do not start from some concordat, from a common ground of accepted fundamental principles . . . . But the end will not be effected by tinkering with machinery: all parties concerned must have, from their different points of approach, a common aim in view, the consolidation of humanism, the reinstatement of the commonwealth of studies.”

We need to review and renew our faith by dwelling on such thought as is given us in the stanzas “He could do no mighty works,” in Book III. of *The Saviour of the World*, from which I quote a few lines. Here is the source of inspiration and of courage and the standard by which to estimate the “good plans” that come before us day by day.

And is it true He doth no mighty works  
In this our England, grown so scantily dear  
To the cold sons she nurtures at her breast?  
Where be the men of might, the giant race,  
Who did great things in our midst!

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Tinkers enow have we, but where that one  
Who knows to mend a broken Pilgrim’s heart  
So it shall hold the red wine of God’s grace?

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Do mighty voices shake our Senate House,  
Enunciating, not expediency,  
(Vain god we bow before,) but principle,  
Pure patriot-principle, sure word of God?  
These have been; are they now?

Who tells a tale  
Shall open all men's eyes to see the way  
Men work on men, and nature lays cool hand,  
And God holds every issue,—tho' the Name  
Be little named on the pleasant page?  
Who rears his child to know that one sole aim  
Shall dominate his days; for God, in God,—  
His steadfast purpose, his supremest joy?

Not gone are they, the mighty works of old;  
Latent they lie, as Sleeping Beauty bound,  
Till magic kiss of faith shall wake them up;  
Then, see—they stir, they rise, stretch hands, try strength,  
Ope eyes and go forth, strong and fair to bless  
Mankind,—those mighty works our God doth keep  
Sealed 'neath His hand till men shall come in faith!<sup>3</sup>

Miss Mason welcomed the wonderful discoveries of science as God-sent to minds prepared, for she believed that we are all under “the teaching power of the Spirit of God.” But she realised that the busy mother, over-burdened with family cares, becomes overwhelmed if left to choose between the many points of view on the up-bringing of children current to-day; that what she needs is definite help on definite lines with an end in view which she may have some hope of achieving for her children's sake.

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<sup>1</sup> An Address given at a Teachers' Conference, April, 1926.

<sup>2</sup> *Parents and Children*, by C. M. Mason.

<sup>3</sup> From *The Saviour of the World*, by C. M. Mason, Vol. III., pp.98 and 99.