

THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF CHARLOTTE MASON

by J.D. ROSE of Matlock

‘When I heard of any new kingdom beyond the seas the light and glory of it entered into me. It rose up within me and I was enlarged by the whole. I entered into it, I saw its commodities, springs, meadows, inhabitants and became possessor of that new room as if it had been prepared for me so much was I magnified and delighted in it.’

Although the poetry is that of Trahene [sic], the spirit and mystical inner vision is that of Charlotte Mason. Believing in the power for good and the inner desire to learn present in every child, she formed her ideas into a new Liberal Education where, instead of drudgery ‘Studies serve for delight’. In those first years this must have seemed a revolutionary concept to the elders of the Victorian ‘Establishment’ who favoured a sternly repressive regime, believing that ‘children should be seen and not heard’, and who took so little interest in the child’s special needs and the uniqueness of his personality. Today though, matters have changed and many of Charlotte Mason’s ideas feature in the 1944 Education Act also the more recent Newsom Report. That the curriculum should be ‘Child centered’—please forgive the Americanism—and not

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seen simply as ‘knowledge to be stored and facts to be won’ is accepted in theory in all State schools, whilst the value of Literature as a learning medium and not simply as a subject is being more gradually realised. The Hadow Report states that ‘Love of reading, joy in the discovery of Literary beauty and enlargement of imaginative experience, these are among the most treasured fruits of a sound English Education’.

Charlotte Mason believed that no child was born good or evil but had potential for either and that this was developed [sic] by his contacts with the outside world especially his relations with Authority. Whether this be in the person of teacher or parent the effect on the child can be lifelong—Charlotte Mason writes ‘The principles of Authority on the one hand and Docility on the other are natural, necessary and fundamental’. Society is framed on the principle of Authority; from the school prefect to the reigning monarch each man is influenced by his contact with Authority—even the hermit or the anarchist; he who renounces Society is in the last resort responsible to an Authority within himself.

Docility is the trait shown in accepting Authority and the teachers [sic] task is to guide the child between these two. Docility can swiftly become subservience and the more noble state of ‘proud subjection’ should be aimed for. Charlotte Mason lays down two conditions to achieve this; the teacher first must show his power is not arbitrary, that he is both in Authority yet under it and secondly the child must be free in his choice of knowledge; there must be no coercion.

Methods of achieving this latter are by encouraging concentration, vesting authority in various members of the class and appealing to that innate sense of Literature present in all children. ‘The teacher who allows his scholars the freedom of the city of books is at liberty to be their guide philosopher and friend and is no longer merely the instrument of forcible intellectual feeding’.

Charlotte Mason believed the child need not be instructed but should be directed and that ‘the children not the teacher are the responsible persons; they do the work by self-effort’.

They have a real thirst for knowledge and if nurtured this not only aids their efforts at school but becomes their continual helper in 'all the interests, duties and joys of life'.

One of the foundations of Charlotte Mason's teaching lies in her own Love for children. Together with this is her respect for each individual child. Each separate personality sacred and none '... may be encroached upon whether by the direct use of fear or love, suggestion or influence, or by undue play upon any one natural desire'. She goes on to say with to my mind at least almost prophetic insight into today's teaching methods, that 'People are too apt to use children as counters in a game, to be moved hither and thither according to the whim of the moment'.

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She saw the problem not so much in terms of teaching method as in the need for a more 'adequate conception of children—children merely as human beings whether brilliant or dull, precocious or backward'. She saw the extreme sensitiveness of the young child and the very real dangers of Authority; also its effect on the child in the years to come. 'Fear is no longer the acknowledged basis of school discipline; we have methods more subtle than the mere terrors of the law. Love is one of these.' Children are drawn to the teacher with the attractive personality and very often become docile to the point where personality becomes submerged and they become dependent on that teacher. Good is that which pleases the teacher and 'wrong' that which displeases him, and it is for this end that the pupil works hard or behaves well. Yet at the same time the child is becoming dependent, his character is undermined, and he becomes 'a parasite who can go only as he is carried, the easy prey of fanatic or demagogue'.

Another power open to abuse is the power of suggestion. This tends to work more subtly and the teacher who understands the child's motives carries a greater responsibility than he often realises. It is difficult for a child to develop a stable outlook when his emotions are under a steady bombardment by suggestion and counter-suggestion. 'It is an instrument easy to handle, and unconsidered suggestion plays on a child's mind as the winds on a weathercock' writes Charlotte Mason 'It should be used only as a surgeon uses an anaesthetic.'

There is also a danger in the power of influence used by the teacher. This can be 'an atmosphere proceeding from the teacher and enveloping the taught' and the result can be a form of idolatry or at least supineness in the child so that his initiative dies and 'He goes into the world as a parasitic plant, clinging ever to the support of some stronger character'.

Similar to the power of suggestion is the power to use or misuse those 'Desires whose very function appears to be to bring nourishment to the mind'. One of these is the desire for approbation which the baby shows in his cries for attention. Later this may be used to encourage work and the setting up of good habits but the danger lies in the vanity that attends this need for approbation; the desire for approval for its own sake, whether from the worthwhile or the worthless.

One special form of emulation considered dangerous by Charlotte Mason is the 'system of marks, prizes, place taking by which many schools are practically governed'. The desire for knowledge is crushed, the soul is forced into a kind of academic straight-jacket and the one desire is to get top marks.

Apart from the inordinate pressure put on pupils to surpass their fellows and pass exams there is often deliberate tuition of pupils for

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certain set scholarships. 'This deliberate cult of cupidity is dangerous' writes Charlotte Mason 'For there is no doubt that here and there we come upon impoverishment of personality due to enfeebled intellectual life'. If we are to use the natural desire for acquisition then surely the highest goal and the most noble purpose should be the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake only.

A further snare for the growing personality to avoid is the desire for power. In my own experience in industry prior to entering teaching, I have seen the desire for power completely warp a person's character. It can become a most compulsive factor especially when allied with money. It was I think Pope who wrote how 'Wealth accumulates and men decay' and Charlotte Mason's own approach to this most insidious desire was extremely realistic; she wrote 'Power is good in proportion as it gives opportunities for serving; but it is dangerous in boy or man when the pleasure of ruling or managing, becomes a definite spring of action'. In schools she wrote 'No boy should be allowed to wax feeble to make another great' and if the child is to be ambitious let him be ambitious in the management of knowledge rather than other pupils for there he does not encroach on anyone's personality.

The final danger is the desire of society. Charlotte Mason writes how much depends on the company one keeps and that a child with a love of knowledge for its own sake will usually choose friends of similar calling.

If the sacredness of the personality is to be upheld there are but three legitimate educational instruments open to the teacher. 'The atmosphere of environment, the discipline of habit, and the presentation of living ideas'. Thus the P.N.E.U. motto 'Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life'.

In the creation of the right atmosphere no deliberately artificial element should be induced, the pupil should not be isolated in a so called 'child-environment' and there should be 'no sprinkling with rosewater or softening with cushions'—children must learn to face life as it is. Colour schemes, harmonious sounds, beautiful forms and gracious persons all enhance a child's spiritual growth so that 'He grows up aesthetically educated into sweet reasonableness and harmony with his surroundings'.

In schools the danger lies with the teacher who may be perhaps over-condescending so creating intellectual feebleness and moral softness in the child. Charlotte Mason noted how a stimulating atmosphere was immediately noticeable in some schools and considered that the 'bracing atmosphere of truth and sincerity should be perceived in every school.'

On the other hand there should be no laxness in the atmosphere. As in the home, where the parents are in authority and the children in

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obedience so in school where the teachers represent authority. Neither should the strong be allowed to lay their burdens on the weak or the teacher expect the power of decision from the child.

In the creation of the right atmosphere Charlotte Mason considers there are two possibilities: either 'to create by all manner of modified conditions a hot-house atmosphere, fragrant but emasculating, in which children grow apace but are feeble and dependent; the other to leave them open to all the "winds that blow" but with care lest they be unduly battered'.

Secondly Education is a discipline—‘a discipline of habits formed definitely and thoughtfully whether mind or body’. That there is need for discipline is never denied but it should be of the right sort and aimed at forming and developing the latent powers of personality. Charlotte Mason writes ‘We need not labour to get children to learn their lessons, that if we would believe it is a matter nature takes care of the lessons be of the right sort and the children will learn them with delight’. The formation of habits is important, but these will develop if the curriculum is correctly followed out. ‘There is one way to achieve this, that is the children must do the work for themselves.’

One of the most forceful means of forming the right intellectual habits is Charlotte Mason’s method of narration and repeating aloud the knowledge learnt. There are two rewards resulting from this:—First the power of attention, and as Charlotte Mason writes ‘No intellectual habit is so valuable as that of attention’. Yet attention is not the only habit to follow from self-education, there also develops, habits of fitting and ready expression, of obedience, of goodwill and of impersonal outlook. Finally from the self respect generated by this form of education develop the physical habits of neatness and order.

Some of the habits which develop from a Liberal Education are those leading to ‘good and useful living, clear thinking, aesthetic enjoyment and above all in the religious life’. The spirit does effect the flesh:

‘Nor soul helps flesh more now, than flesh helps soul.’

and it becomes important that the right habits are formed. ‘Habit is to life what rails are to transport cars’, and ‘If we fail to ease life by laying down habits of right thinking and right acting, habits of wrong thinking and wrong acting fix themselves of their own accord.’ We cannot ignore this vital force for as Charlotte Mason writes ‘Habit is like fire, a bad master but an indispensable servant’.

In the formation of habits there is always an element of conflict and this is where discipline takes effect. It is sheer willpower which creates the right habits ‘Sow an act and reap a habit, sow a habit and reap a character’. In the classroom the ‘sowing’ should be ‘rare and casual’ to prevent the child reacting against the teacher’s attitude, and one of the [p 57]

most effective methods is to read of ‘wise thoughts of great minds’ since this plants the unconscious desire to emulate. Eventually self-conquest must become a ‘chivalric impulse which the child cannot resist’.

Finally the third point or instrument of education namely that it is a ‘life’. To Charlotte Mason life was no more self-existing than it was self-supporting, ‘It requires sustenance, regular, ordered and fitting’. Like the body the mind requires food and the food of the mind is not so much information as ideas. Without a diet of ideas we deteriorate mentally in the same way as without food we deteriorate physically and yet to quote Charlotte Mason ‘there is but one sphere in which the idea never occurs in which the conception of an idea is curiously absent, and that is the sphere of education’.

The treatment of ideas for children is equally important. They should not be offered with a set purpose or at set times but as part of the child’s atmosphere ‘breathed as his breath

of life'. Coleridge noticed how 'from the first or initiative idea as from a seed, successive ideas germinate'.

The traditional aims of Education are in the main gymnastic namely 'a continual drawing out without a corresponding act of putting in'. Even today with the much heralded 'creative approach' matters have changed very little. Charlotte Mason makes an extremely penetrating observation on the child's redemption of ideas and selective powers: 'As a child grows we shall perceive that only those ideas that have fed his life are taken into his being; all the rest is cast away or is, like sawdust in the system, an impediment and an injury'.

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(Continued from March issue of Parents' Review)

One danger which the teacher faces in his 'sowing' of ideas is that of offering opinions in their stead. Although opinions are often formed from ideas the actual act of crystallization can destroy any vitality they may once have had.

Even in the field of science there is scope for forwarding ideas—'Scientific Truth' wrote Descartes 'are battles won'. Even Arithmetic and Geometry can become interesting if the child can feel himself facing the same problems as say Pythagoras, Plato, or Euclid, while History, English and Art offer immense scope for the questioning mind. Indeed as Charlotte Mason writes 'The mind feeds on ideas and therefore children should have a generous curriculum'.

Opposed to the Herbartian principle with its stress on the method of the individual teacher and where the child's mind becomes a 'Sac to hold ideas', Charlotte Mason believed rather in a 'spiritual organism' with an appetite for all knowledge as a more adequate definition of the child's mind.

The most vitalising form of mental sustenance is to be found, writes Charlotte Mason in the world of books. With books of high Literary standards the child's mind quite naturally does 'the sorting, arranging, selecting, rejecting and classifying' in much the same way as one constructs a jig-saw puzzle. The reward though is far greater, for as Plato so often asserted 'Knowledge is virtue'.

To help children attain the best that they are capable of they need two guides 'to moral and intellectual self-management which we may call

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the Way [sic] of the Will' and 'the Way of Reason'. The function of the Will is to choose and decide and early in their lives children should be taught to distinguish between 'I want' and 'I will' so that later in life they develop a decisive character and are not at the mercy of every fashion, fad and convention that the world decrees. 'Character is a finely wrought metal beaten into shape and beauty by the repeated and accustomed action of the will'. There is a clear distinction between conduct which is so often the aim of education and character. 'Conduct may be arrived at, as we have seen, by indirect routes, but it is of value to the world only as it has its source in character.'

The involuntary act, usually a habit, can be an act of Will but to be sure that what we do is right it is necessary to make a conscious decision and with every choice we make we grow in character.

Most people, writes Charlotte Mason, have the tendency to follow the path of suggestion in the classroom, but there is a danger that by first accepting the suggestions of others we come to depend on them and as Charlotte Mason noticed 'the parasitic creatures who live upon the habits, principles and opinions of others may easily become criminal'.

His Will is the safeguard of man against the unlawful intrusion of other persons—the power of choice is stimulated by the ideas present in great Literature and by the examples of famous (and also infamous) characters in History. The full potential of his Will should be shown to the child early in his life. 'Just as to reign is the function of the King so to will is the function of the child.' The child should be made aware of the temptations stemming from lust: of the eye, of the flesh and of the pride of life and perhaps even more important that one must first understand in order to will.

Willpower is essentially a power of choice and in an intellectual sphere this becomes crucial in that all our lives are the direct result of this choice. All actions, all decisions, are basically value judgements and as Charlotte Mason wrote '... the will is responsible for every intellectual problem which has proved too much for a man's sanity or for his moral probity'.

Finally there is a wide difference between free will and free thought: it is vital that the will, in fact free will, must have an object outside of self.

The second cornerstone in the vast superstructure of the mind is the power to reason. Charlotte Mason defines this as 'that which gives a logical demonstration of (a) mathematical truth and (b) initial ideas accepted by the will'. In the former case it is a fairly sound guide but in the latter regardless of whether the initial idea be right or wrong reason will confirm it by 'irrefragible [sic] proofs'. Not only the Biblical

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figure of Cain or the Literary one of Macbeth, both in range of the children's experience, came to grief through the misuse of reason but in everyday life the child can be shown how each criminal act can be justified according to the reason of the criminal. First then is the premis [sic] that 'all that is reasonable is not necessarily right' and since reason only comes into force at the ordering of the will, the right to choose should be fully appreciated, for then and only then does reason become the servant and not the Ruler. Again the routine of habit can apply for better or for worse, for Reason 'works upon the material it is accustomed to handle'. In the Bible, when the child learns to apply reason, 'miracles will not be matters of supreme moment because all life will be for him, matters of wonder and adoration'. Charlotte Mason saw Reason as one of the great qualities: 'the reason firm, the temperate will, endurance, foresight, strength and skill'.

The use of will and reason is bound up with the essential good and evil nature of the child. The well-being of body, mind and soul is all part of the teacher's responsibility for 'Children are not born bad but with possibilities for good and for evil'. To Charlotte Mason it was essential that Education became the 'handmaiden' of religion and that with the equal potential for good and evil in all children they should be shown by example towards the 'good'.

The five senses also need directing—smell can develop the power of discrimination, a healthy use of the will in discriminating between the smells of garden, fruit and flower for their

own sakes and not simply as ministering to taste. Today with our tremendous problem of mental health where over half the hospital beds in this country are occupied by mental patients this aspect of education becomes especially relevant and very little seems to have been done since the time of Charlotte Mason's writing.

In directing the child's energies the teacher should be careful of the power exerted by his own personality either in suppressing [sic] and subduing his pupils or by creating undue nervous tension in the class by their efforts to impress.

There is a danger in making the child too dependent on the teacher's opinion since he can become a parasite always dependent on some other.

Together with the growth of body is the growth of mind and whilst few educationists neglect physical growth a great many allow the mind to become 'a chartered libertine'. Of the intellectually maimed, Charlotte Mason writes 'History and Poetry are without charm for them, the scientific work of the day is only slightly interesting, their job and the social amenities they can secure are all that their life has for them'. The need for spiritual and intellectual nourishment is as demanding in a young child (and adult) as is the need for bodily food. In general

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schools tend to ignore or misuse the desires tending towards these ends. For instance the need for emulation, the desire of the child to come first is actively encouraged by marking and the exam system. Thus the desire to have, avarice, is employed so that the most pushing, not necessarily the most able child, comes to the front. Again the child is often encouraged to work for the teacher's approbation and his vanity encouraged. In time these can become general aims of life as well as leading to a clash of standards as to what is accepted in school and what is accepted in the outside world. Exams tend to become an end in themselves where 'children cram to pass but not to know'.

Instead of choking the child's natural love of language and forcing him to work for unworthy rewards the child should be shown the delightfulness of knowledge for its own sake, and this when cultivated should replace praise, blame, and punishment. Not only in the classroom but in the playground also the child's behaviour should be observed and Charlotte Mason writes of the risk that 'excess zeal may exterminate the primary feelings of love and justice'.

'Children are not to be fed morally like young pigeons with pre-digested food. They must pick and eat for themselves and they do so from the conduct of others which they hear or perceive.' Apart from example, the school subjects poetry, history, geography and biology all play a part, but direct lessons are according to Charlotte Mason 'worse than useless'. Art, Literature and the Bible are some of the guides suggested yet the two main virtues praised by Charlotte Mason are present in everyone—'a cry for fair-play reaches the most lawless mob', whilst the doleful cry 'its not fair' reaches most teachers at one time or another.

In Education there is a clear need to distinguish between rights and duties. As Charlotte Mason writes 'it is not easy to learn that we have exactly the same rights as other people and no more'. Education plays a special part here for 'To think clearly requires we know, knowledge as well as consideration'.

Even one's personal thoughts about other people can be a matter of justice or injustice and children should be taught that Truth, 'justice in word is their due and that of all other

persons'. Equally important as justice in word is justice in action normally termed integrity. This concerns bad workmanship and general shirking whether at school or later on at work, together with an inward acceptance of honesty especially when there is little chance of being found out. Finally there is integrity of opinion. It is far easier to accept the prejudices of the group than to think matters out for oneself yet 'The person who thinks out his opinions modestly and carefully' is conscientiously doing his duty.

The third part of this essay will be in a later number of the Parents' Review

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(Continued from April issue of Parents' Review)

The foundations on which we build our opinions are our principles 'those motives of first importance which govern us, move us in thought and action' and if these principles are to stand firm against the

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elements of cynicism and doubt some antedote is necessary. Literature is probably the most effective 'Every lovely tale, illuminating poem, instructive history, every unfolding of travel and revelation of science exists for children'. The world is theirs: 'La terre appartient a l'enfant toujours a L'enfant' wrote Maxim Gorky.

Neither '... limited vocabulary, sordid surroundings and absence of literary vocabulary background, or thought are hindrances'. Sometimes these become incentives since the more hungry the child the more eager he is for his dinner and the spiritual appetite is every bit as demanding as the physical. There is a special interest in that which reaches him in Literary form, a point that I can confirm from my own experience. Reading Longfellow's *Hiawatha* to a really 'tough' form I was surprised how they understood the sense and meaning behind the poem without knowing the words. There was an almost innate sympathy with the poet and an unconscious sense of form. Trying the traditional approach to Grammar with the same group I can only too well confirm 'that they decline to know that which does not reach them in literary form'.

Charlotte Mason takes a special interest in the care of the soul noting that man 'has an urgent, incessant, irrepressible need for the infinite'. She suggests that all approaches must be made through Christ and that any words or thoughts of ours are poor and insufficient compared with those in the Bible. In particular this appeals to the Literary sensibilities of the child far more so than the standard method of approach 'torrents of talk, tedious repetition, objuraction, and recrimination in every sort of way in which the mind may be bored and the affections deadened'.

Greater care should be taken in Education to fit this to the needs of the child and not the child to the needs of Education. These should not be based upon 'his uses to society, nor upon the standard of the world he lives in but upon his own capacity and needs'.

On the matter of Curriculum it was felt that 'the normal child has powers of mind which fit him to deal with all knowledge proper to him, give him a full and generous curriculum, taking

care only that all knowledge offered to him is vital, that is, that facts are not presented without their informing ideas’.

Education has changed since the time that Charlotte Mason wrote, but many of her grievances do still seem to exist. The State Secondary system whilst perhaps having some ‘inherent principle’ now, is still in a state of experiment with very different standards and curriculums operating in different schools, yet the general approach is just as utilitarian as when Charlotte Mason wrote. As at the time of Voltaire it still seems true ‘The human race has lost its Title Deeds’ and the narrowness of school curriculums still seems far from the child’s basic need foreseen by Shelley, that ‘understanding that grows bright gazing on many truths’.
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Perhaps this ‘narrowness’ lies in our failure to allow for the powerful force of imagination in each child. ‘The child’s amazing vivifying imagination is part and parcel to his intellect’ and to ignore or destroy this is a criminal act whilst to develop it is an act of creation. Astronomy can become a fantasy of ‘light and heat’, the behaviour of an atom or ion can be a fairy tale—providing no semblance of this is deliberately suggested, and in the pageant of history the child watches his own filmshow in a cavalcade of changing scenes and personalities. Literature is perhaps the most imaginative subject, ‘a very rich and glorious kingdom since’ as Charlotte Mason writes ‘the child already has an innate understanding of words’.

One very real danger in the lesson is the use of the questionnaire, the test. With its lack of need for reflection this produces ‘no intelligent interests, nothing but the aptness of the city gamin’. Just as Reason can be either a man’s servant or his master, so Imagination may become ‘a temple of self-glorification, a character of horrors or a House-Beautiful’.

Education is ‘a Science of Relations’ so that no subject or experience stands alone. ‘Physical exercises, nature lore, handcrafts, science or art’ are all part of the pattern and the child should be taught values rather than facts—‘Those firstborn affinities, that fit our new existence to existing things’. Three points follow this aim. First the child ‘requires much knowledge for the mind needs sufficient as does the body’. This knowledge ‘should be various, for sameness in mental diet does not create appetite (i.e. curiosity)’. Finally ‘Knowledge should be communicated in well chosen language’ since the child’s attention ‘responds naturally to that which is conveyed in literary form’. Thus the curriculum suggested by Charlotte Mason offers each child, in each subject, the most varied diet possible in the most easily assimilated form.

There are three types of knowledge mentioned—the knowledge of God, of man and of the universe—but the knowledge of God ranks first. It is better to discuss this with children in a mature fashion since this is one of those ‘firstborn affinities’ which it is the teacher’s part to develop. Children should be encouraged to ‘narrate’ what they have learnt; whilst their innate literary understanding will be drawn by the ‘fine English, poetic diction and lucid statement of the Bible’. Two aspects of religion are defined, firstly ‘the attitude of the will towards God which we understand by Christianity and that perception of God which comes from a gradual slow growing comprehension of the divine dealings with men’. The first is a positive action, the second a gradual awareness.

In the study of man, history plays a special part in linking the wisdom of the past with the problems of today. Montaigne saw how man might with the help of history ‘inform himself of the worthiest minds that were in the best ages’.

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History seeks to inform and with this information there develops a rational well considered patriotism instead of the emotional bias of the jingoist. Ignoring all discursive talk Charlotte Mason suggests a concentration on two aspects: knowledge and 'a keen sympathy in the interest roused by that knowledge'. Only a single reading is required then the child should relate what he has learnt. No re-reading should be allowed and the teacher should be sympathetic but attentive to the main aim of the lesson.

Ancillary to both History and Literature is the subject of Citizenship. This should be taught as much for inspiration as for knowledge and as a starting point Plutarch's 'Lives' are suggested. This can be developed to show twentieth-century equivalents and the question of right and wrong raised both in regard to the State and to the individual.

Composition is taught in the first place as an oral subject and later on when written the subject can be varied by the use of verse. 'Many children write verse as well as prose and the conciseness and power in bringing their subject to a point, which this form of composition requires affords valuable mental training.' In subjects written children should be encouraged to write of that which interests them deeply. This particular insight of Charlotte Mason is echoed in both the Newsom and the original Spens reports and now seems accepted practice. Considering the centuries of forced toil in schoolrooms the misery of the Board schools and the 'payment by results system' it seems amazing that it has taken so long for us to realise that children learn better when they are interested.

The approach to Art proposed by Charlotte Mason is in terms of the spirit but the foundations for creative effort must be formed 'line by line, group by group, by reading, not books but the pictures themselves'. There is no attempt to instil [sic] a technique of painting but a gradual growth of the children's power to appreciate, an opening of the eyes so that as Browning wrote we love:

'First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see.'

In the approach to science Charlotte Mason follows the ideas of Huxley believing that this should be of 'common information' but that its teaching should follow the French model of treatment in a literary form. Universal principles are linked with common incidents of everyday life. The only sound method of teaching science is to afford a due combination of field and laboratory work with such literary comments and amplifications as the subject 'affords'. Charlotte Mason concludes 'we are anxious not to make science a utilitarian subject'.

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In mathematics children should be shown the mysterious natural law which underlies the subject. Mental agility can also become an aim for though there is a danger of too much mental gymnastics in education 'the mind like the body is invigorated by regular spells of hard exercise'.

The conclusions reached by Charlotte Mason are clear and concise and it is this somehow feminine sense of 'the practical', this ability to apply her knowledge which is her special gift. The history of Education is strewn with high ideals. From the well-meaning Comenius and the impractical Rousseau to the *New Statesman* philosophers of the Nineteen-

sixties, the gulf between the thinkers and the doers still remains as wide as ever. In few other spheres apart from Education has so much been offered and so little applied: the world outside may have advanced from the bow and arrow stage to that of the hydrogen bomb but the classroom has changed little and if one may judge from those figure-studies so finely wrought by the Greeks on vases and plateware teachers have changed even less! Why this is so remains a mystery but perhaps the applied ideals of Charlotte Mason and the obvious success of her system may help to change this; I hope so. Milton in his claim that magnanimity was the proper outcome of Education would have agreed that 'the slow imperceptible sinking of high ideals is the gain that a good school should offer so that instead of creating monotony "Studies serve for delight"'. That '... the wings of man's soul beat with impatience against the bars of his ignorance'. In this spirit of optimism I would like to conclude with the remainder of the piece by Traherne expressing the pure wonder and delight that is childhood: 'the streets were mine, the people were mine, their clothes and gold and silver were mine as much as their sparkling eyes, fair skins and ruddy faces. The skies were mine and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the world was mine and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it'. As well as teaching let us learn from children for 'No man knoweth the things of man but the spirit of man which is in him'.