

## CHARLOTTE MASON AND GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

By H. W. HOUSEHOLD.

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I AM not going to speak to-day to teachers as teachers. Indeed, I have advised many who have consulted me as to which day they should attend (having but one to give) to come to-morrow and not to-day; for to-morrow they will receive skilled professional advice, and to-day they will not. I want to deal with matters of wider interest, and, I think, at the moment of more importance.

I have chosen as my subject Charlotte Mason and Gloucestershire, and I want you to consider not only what Charlotte Mason has done for us here, and what in humble return we have done for her, or rather—as she would have preferred me to say—for the cause so dear to her, the right education of boys and girls; but also the lessons that the world at large may now be asked to draw from our experiment.

It is more than ten years now since early in 1917 we first embarked upon it by introducing five schools to the Charlotte Mason method of teaching and the programmes of the P.N.E.U. We little knew how profound was to be the importance of the step that we were taking. To-day 270 schools or departments of schools out of the 422 in the county are affiliated to the Parents' Union School. There may be, probably are, some, a few, head teachers among the 270, who have adopted the programmes, and some shadow of the method, in order to be in the fashion, without any real conviction or, I may say, understanding; but the vast majority, as they have shown again and again, are both convinced and enthusiastic. No true teacher who had given fair trial to the method could be other. They know that the children of the primary schools (those are the children for whom they can speak) had never before found access to a liberal education, or been able to indulge their inborn craving for knowledge. If they had doubts the children have removed them. These children want to learn; they really are, as Charlotte Mason declared they would be, athirst for knowledge—not information imparted, but knowledge won by their own efforts, two very different things. These children

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want to learn. What other children do? Dr. Lyttelton, who has been so much impressed by their proved eagerness and power, tells us that some sixty per cent. of the boys who leave the Public Schools, leave with no desire to go on learning what they have been taught. Mark that word "taught." Our children of the P.U.S. do not want to go on learning what they have been taught—at least not if we use the word as it is commonly used; they want to go on learning what they have been encouraged to learn, shown how to learn, put in the way of learning. The difference is profound, and goes to the very root of the rival methods, of that which is traditional—the Training College method—and that which Charlotte Mason has put before us. The mother tongue has found small respect in our English Public Schools; and it is very difficult for boys under fourteen or fifteen to get knowledge from books written in a foreign tongue, most difficult of all when the whole structure of the language, of accidence and syntax, is so widely different from that of our own as in the case of Latin and Greek.

The child who shall want to learn must have good books—not text books—many good books in the mother tongue from which to dig out the knowledge which its growing mind demands. What sort of knowledge is that? Let me tell you by example—an example that I gave

recently for another purpose. They want to hear of Odysseus and Nausicaa, to read the immortal stories of Herodotus, and Plutarch's *Lives*; they want to hear of Thermopylæ and Salamis, and to learn how democracy raised Athens to her height of glory and then ruined her, and why; to learn about the majesty and the fall of Rome, and the meaning and heritage of both for good and ill; about Merovings and Carolings, Seljuks and Ottomans, about the Crusades, and the making of Europe (for he who knows not history, as Cicero said, remains a child); about Buddha and Mohammed; about Rembrandt and Beethoven; about Edmund Spenser, Dr. Johnson, Ruskin and Carlyle; about the wonders of the heavens and the earth, and all the romance of science—which the laboratory too often misses. In knowledge of such range as these examples typify, the child of the Elementary School in Gloucestershire now has his share. Such a princely feast is spread before him, and he helps himself with joy and a great thankfulness. He gets a liberal education, and what he has done with it has convinced Dr. Lyttelton that the boy of the Preparatory School and of the Public School

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would do the same if a like feast were put before him. It is many a century since school studies were a delight, not perhaps since there were schools in Hellas that used her glorious literature. We have only known school studies as a discipline, daunting and repellent, until Charlotte Mason arose to show us what they should be. As a result of what Dr. Lyttelton did at the Brighton Conference some of the Public and Preparatory Schools have been studying the methods at first hand, and we—the P.N.E.U.—have been asked for teachers who are familiar with them. Only a fortnight ago a little group of masters from one great school spent two days visiting three of our Gloucestershire Elementary Schools. There may be some even here (there are many, I know, who are not) who will say, "But must Elementary School children have all this? They must indeed be taught to read and write and deal with numbers, they must draw a little (it is useful), sing a little, exercise their bodies (we must not be a C3 people), and do some handwork; but from a large proportion of them (much the same proportion after all as in the Public Schools!) one must not ever expect any keen desire for knowledge, or any intelligent use of the mechanical accomplishments which they have acquired. A good drilling in the three R's, and then to work! Literature and Art and Music are not for them!"

We have all heard people talk like this, all read articles in the same detestable and foolish tone in papers that should know better. For a very vocal section of the country is horrified to-day at the cost of our elementary education, and especially at the salary bill. There are some odd provoking things in the salary scales, but the salary bill is not too high if the schools are to have the teachers that they should have. There is no reducing the expenditure on education; but we might get more for our money. And the children of the workers should get more—must get more if they are to qualify as sound citizens. In the Parents' Union School they get it. You cannot in a democratic country have one education for the children of the workers, and another and better for the children of those whose means are more ample. If you do, you drive still deeper the wedge that threatens to sever class from class. The people will have nothing in common, and to the mass of them the education of the few will always be suspect: it will be a class education. In a P.N.E.U. School the worker's child gets the same education—foreign languages apart—as any

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other child. There is no class distinction; all are using the same books, all are going to the same fountain head for knowledge, which they are to draw from its source by their own effort for themselves. A full mind is a contented mind; there are too many starved and empty minds about.

I called Dr. Lyttelton a few minutes ago to bear witness to the failure of the traditional teaching methods and the text book to inspire a love of learning. Let me now call two teacher fathers who brought up their boys on the programmes of the P.N.E.U. by the Charlotte Mason method. Both sent their boys with free places to their local Secondary Schools, and both lamented that when they passed from the rich fare of the programmes and the freedom of the method to the lectures, the slow dictated notes, the perpetual question and answer, and the arid text books of the Secondary Schools, progress was arrested, interest was lost, the boys complained of being talked to all day, and the children who had been left behind in the Elementary School were obviously romping ahead of them in all the English work. Why is this? It is entirely a question of teaching methods, of the difference between right methods and wrong. I am convinced—the results of our ten years' experiment have convinced me—that the traditional teaching methods, because they are, or appear to be, so skilful, and have therefore obtained so firm a hold upon schools of every type, a hold which they are riveting more widely and more firmly every year, are doing great harm to education.

Forgive me if here I draw upon my own experience. When I first began to teach in 1894 in a Preparatory School, now well known, I had never been in a classroom, never read or thought about teaching, or the ways of the mind. By the wise advice of Sir Michael Sadler after a year's work I went back to Oxford and took a one-year course at the Oxford Day Training College. It was invaluable to me in many ways; it made a teacher of me, and it enabled me a few years later to enter the service of the Board of Education and to qualify for the post I now hold. In the interval I spent four years at Clifton College, the then headmaster of which, like some other progressive headmasters of that time, was looking out for men who had been trained, of whom then there were hardly any in the Public Schools. Now men who have not been trained, and there are still very many in the Public Schools, are not likely to commit the mistake of over-teaching into which the trained

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teacher so commonly falls, or, should I not in fairness say? is driven by his training; and boys who are learning mathematics and Latin must do a lot of hard work for themselves. The forty per cent. who, on Dr. Lyttelton's calculation survive, have come through with trained minds, well disciplined, and capable of close concentration; but a liberal education they have not had: there are still too many yawning gaps even in a classical education, though not so many or so wide as they were a generation ago when a boy could go through a Public School and read much history in Greek, but none in English, studying the anatomy of language, and losing all the thought that makes the dry bones live. "Our anatomical researches," says Edmund Candler, speaking of that time in *Youth and the East*, "no doubt had their practical value as an aid to expression in the living tongue, but were no more inspiring than a post-mortem. We did not sail with Ulysses or feed Lesbia's sparrows." Poor souls, how should they when that unexplained optative hung over their heads, and the paradigm of an irregular second aorist, and a set of verses for which the poem of Catullus must serve as a model and provide some sparkling phrase! We know what Wordsworth thought of

The trade in classic niceties,  
The dangerous craft, of culling term and phrase  
From languages that want the living voice  
To carry meaning to the natural heart;  
To tell us what is passion, what is truth,  
What reason, what simplicity and sense.

*Prelude, Book V.*

Our children are brought up on and inspired by great masterpieces of living literature, and in eager fancy they will stride along beside Mr. Greatheart, roam the taverns with Prince Hal, adore Di Vernon, sail round the world—a most real world—with Francis Drake, thrill with emotion as Nelson lies dying on the “Victory,” and as Scott writes his last letter in that splendid tent of death in the Antarctic. In the Public School, I say, there was and is hard work to be done which boys cannot entirely escape, and which has its influence on them. In the Elementary School there is very little hard work for the child: the trained teacher does too much for him. In the ordinary course, apart from arithmetic, there is no subject on which he can really bite his teeth. On the English side (literature, history, geography, science) there is systematic over-teaching, and the worst offender commonly wins the highest praise. The Charlotte Mason method abolishes the over-

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teaching and it has no passive and bored children, for it throws the burden on each individual child, who must make a real effort of concentration (which he has no wish to shirk) in every lesson.

By great good fortune I escaped the common error of the trained teacher, because I had not to teach in the then almost bookless Elementary School, where to escape it was impossible. Following the advice and practice of my Preparatory School headmaster, one of the ablest teachers, though untrained, that I have ever known, I developed a method which had its resemblance to Miss Mason’s, though neither he nor I had ever heard of her, and could only give empirical reasons for what we did. In the English subjects I never heard a prepared lesson in the old Public School way, not yet extinct. If the boys had to get up some text book stuff in preparation we got rid of it next morning in ten minutes or less with half-a-dozen testing questions, which were answered in as many lines on paper, and then we got to the real business of the hour which both they and I enjoyed. With little boys I used good books—it might be Freeman or Froude, Macaulay, Lecky or Carlyle—books that were not ordinarily used with boys of ten. I read aloud much, and required afterwards a written account of what had been read. One reading and then narration, you see! With intending candidates for university scholarships in history, whom I prepared, I did much the same thing. I gave them many books to read; I never dictated a note; when I gave my own weekly lecture I talked hard for the best part of an hour. I tossed problems before them, and started eager controversy and debate. We saw the two sides of the great questions, though temperament might attach some of us with a fierce loyalty to one. Afterwards I always required a long essay on some part of my lecture. The results, both with little boys and sixth form boys, were exactly those to which we are now

accustomed in the P.U.S. There was interest and there was power. My boys won scholarships in numbers that surprised.

I have been enormously helped by that year of training; training helps every teacher; but it does encourage a most dangerous belief in the importance of pedagogic direction, a most dangerous reluctance to allow the individual pupil to do his own work and get his own result from it, and a profoundly mischievous devotion to the text book, which no normal boy

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or girl will ever read except under compulsion with mental nausea.

Now it cannot be contested that the present teaching methods, which have spread from the Elementary School into schools of every type, have developed out of methods which were devised to meet the deplorable, the impossible, conditions under which the teachers worked in the Elementary Schools for very many years, and from which they have not yet entirely escaped. We can see that it was very natural that the 1830's and the 1870's should have done just what they did for the education of the people, but we can see too that, as with so many other things they did, they showed no imagination, had no vision, and made the most deplorable mistakes.

I shall never belittle the work of the Elementary School, or of the splendid teachers who in two generations have changed the manners, morals, tastes and aspirations of the country beyond all recognition. But they will know what I mean if I say that you can still tell an Elementary School—the typical Elementary School—and its books and its work, a mile off. They are like nothing else on earth. An Elementary School education has always meant, and still means, a cheap education. An Elementary School text book means a cheap book—which is not a *book* in any other sense—carefully adapted in language and content to a wholly derogatory estimate of the needs and powers of the children of a certain section of society who are supposed not to require or to be capable of the same kind of education as the children of parents who—have more money. The nation has had no other conception of the needs of the children of the workers.

Unfortunately, too many of the teachers themselves acquiesce in that derogatory estimate. They lack faith in the children who fill their schools. But after all what teachers, what schools of any kind anywhere, except within the P.N.E.U., have faith in the child's desire and ability to learn?

For a bookless school (and the Elementary School for at least two generations was practically bookless) the teacher had to be trained to talk, to give information, to question, to demonstrate upon the blackboard: for the management of huge classes he had to be trained to hold attention, to set a pace, exact a task, to get a certain response to his initiative. Without him nothing could be done: the child was lost in the class. The bright child wasted time, and still wastes it,

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terribly, while the slower ones are making good their part. And the tradition still holds. So the importance of method in teaching (as opposed to method of learning), the method of imparting information and obtaining answers, is enormously exaggerated by the Training College and by the young teacher when he leaves it. He wants all the children to do the same work, get the same information, make the same response; see in the poem, the novel, the play what he sees—all that he sees. That is his ideal, that is what he would have if he could. The best pupil is

the most exact reflection of himself. It is all wrong, terribly wrong. The training methods would never have been what they are if the Elementary School had not once been a bookless school with impossibly large classes. With wonderful skill and devotion the training Colleges have ploughed the sands. For most children refuse to learn that way. Receiving information and winning knowledge are very different things. And poor text books never made any normal children wish to learn. So skilful have been, and are, the teachers who come from the colleges that "method" and text book have made their baleful way into every type of school. At the moment there is probably more over-teaching, more dictating of futile notes, more explaining of what no child need know at a child's years, on the part of young trained graduates in Secondary Schools than anywhere else. They are expected—or they think so—"to give a good lesson" before the inspector: unless they talk they make no mark. Rather their merit should mount as the words they use are few and the pupils' independent work is much.

In the P.U.S. the child is the unit, not the class. He is treated as a person who has his rights. He is put into communion with the man who had knowledge, who wrote a book that men can read—and not a text book that children *must* read, but no other human being will consent to touch. Each gets from the book what he can; no two will get quite the same, and none will be compelled to get or see what an adult will get or see: it only makes books odious to treat them so. That is the spirit that wraps up Shakespeare's plays in great volumes of scholar's notes, and makes all children hate them, for they associate them with a futile antiquarianism imposed upon them for examination purposes. In our Gloucestershire schools, like other branches of the Parents' Union School, they read a play each term in a plain text and [p 451]

love them all; and an Elementary School child, beginning to read Shakespeare at the age of nine, will have read some fourteen or fifteen plays before he leaves, seeing more in each he reads, though never what the adult—the teacher—sees. That, and perhaps more, he will see by and by when he too is an adult.

Not everlastingly lectured to, questioned, explained to, the child becomes a great lover of books; he gets much delightful and usable knowledge, and makes such amazing progress as one has never seen in any type of school before. In the Secondary School he separates himself out from his fellows in a manner that cannot be mistaken. He is at the top of his form, for he knows how to use books, even text books; he does not depend upon the teacher for initiative (though too often he is expected to wait for it); and he has stored for use such a mass of organised knowledge, which he has won for himself, as other children have not. It is sometimes objected that the Secondary Schools are the reluctant victims of the examination system, which is imposed upon them from without, and that they would do other and better if they were free. But that excuse fails them. The child of the P.U.S. faces the same examinations gaily and confidently. A year's work on the special syllabus is enough and they pass with distinction.

Of course, I know that the Training Colleges take a very different view of their task today from the view they took twenty, thirty years ago. The right use of books is studied; the child's point of view has attention; the principles of Charlotte Mason are sometimes discussed. But the long established tradition of class teaching is not easily overthrown, nor is the text book easily dethroned from the position of authority which it has usurped like a tyrant and like a tyrant abuses. The Charlotte Mason method, as our best teachers tell me, turns their old Training College methods upside down. But I need not appeal to them. The principal of a well-

known Training College in the north wrote himself a few weeks ago, "What little I know of it has led me to regard it as the negation of teaching and the elimination of the teacher." There you have it! Not a bad epitome if you don't know much about it, and wish to exaggerate a little to give pungency to your phrase. That principal, of course, does not think that a teacher earns his keep unless he talks and questions all day long. His ideal teacher is one of those whom Wordsworth describes,  
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Who have the skill  
To manage books, and things, and make them act  
On infant minds as surely as the sun  
Deals with a flower; the keepers of our time,  
The guides and wardens of our faculties,  
Sages who in their prescience would control  
All accidents, and to the very road  
Which they have fashioned would confine us down,  
Like engines.

*Prelude, Book V.*

I would not be misunderstood. The teacher has more to do than ever, but it is not talking.

The fashion of appointing young trained honours graduates as specialists in this and that exaggerates the already dangerous tendency imparted by the Training College. Young, enthusiastic, full of their beloved subjects, very proud of the knowledge which ten years hence will seem so meagre, they must talk to class after class as they go round the school, pumping in information that stuffs and crams the torpid victims to the ruin of digestion and appetite. "We hear her voice going for fifty minutes out of every hour," said a headmistress of a Central School (P.N.E.U.) to me the other day of a clever young graduate from a modern university who came to her with the enthusiastic and (if you assume the standard of good teaching) well-earned commendation of the authorities from the Vice-Chancellor downwards. What can the poor children do, what can they become, talked to for fifty minutes out of every hour? "But surely," you will perhaps say to me—"But surely you yourself talked for an hour as hard as you could talk to that history class of yours." Yes, but they would follow up that single hour with eight, ten, twelve hours of independent reading and writing without a word from me or from anybody else. My real proportion of talk was five or six minutes in the hour, not fifty. And moreover, I was a form master for the greater part of the week, teaching all the subjects as they came along, French and mathematics included. Until the pupil is fifteen or sixteen, and of age to specialise, the specialist is out of place in the classroom. Not long ago we had the specialist plan spreading even into the Elementary School, and inspectors recommending it—the English master, the history mistress, the geography mistress, and so on. One knew not whether to laugh at the absurdity of setting these half-baked experts to specialise, or to weep for the sorrows of the children swamped under floods of evanescent, inappropriate and most useless information. The specialist idea has been

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worked to death. Let us get back to the form master and form mistress, give the child a book and let it work. A degree course that produces an English specialist who is afraid of taking a class in geography and history on P.N.E.U., or, for that matter, any other terms, must be a strange course.

Of what use then, I shall be asked, is the specialist in the P.N.E.U. School? Of more use than now in other schools, I think; for now, with his over-teaching, he is frankly an obstruction to the pupil in quest of knowledge. But he might be a great helper. There is no history book yet written, and I am sure there never will be, that does not provoke a hundred questions that it cannot pause to answer: the specialist is there, as with Miss Parkhurst's Dalton plan, to point to the books in the library where the answers can be found, or on occasion himself to give them, and to stir up further questions. The same thing is true of other subjects. We want more specialists in our P.N.E.U. Schools if they will play that part, for, to tell the truth, from Ambleside downwards we are rather lacking there.