

## BOOK REVIEW

### A PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION RESTATED

**For the Children's Sake** by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay  
(Crossway Books, Illinois, USA. ISBN 0-39107-290-X)

The title of Mrs Macaulay's book means much to those of us who trained at Charlotte Mason's College in Ambleside. FOR THE CHILDREN'S SAKE was our motto, and the book's subtitle *Foundations of Education for Home and School* was what our training was all about: the interpretation of education as enveloping the whole of a child's daily life; the environment and the atmosphere in which he grew; an educational programme which would nourish his mind to the full, encourage his natural interest and curiosity and NOT stifle his inborn wish to learn nor his individuality, and would above all respect him as a person from his very birth. We set out to teach in PNEU schools, homes and classrooms armed with this philosophy and provided with programmes of work to guide us.

In her book Mrs Macaulay most ably reiterates and assesses Charlotte Mason's ideas — and questions why they are not more widely known today — not as one professionally trained in the system, but as a parent who witnessed an “indescribable” and “electrifying change” in two of her young children after they joined a small PNEU school where, as she says, “true education was going on” from which they came home “glowing with life and interest... their eyes bright and their minds alert.” Thereafter she studied, tested and applied Charlotte Mason's principles in the bringing up of her own four children and has spread this philosophy among her contacts in Switzerland, the USA and elsewhere. As she states in the initial acknowledgements, her book was “lived first and then written.” Like Charlotte Mason she realizes that the basis of a wholesome approach to life with children — as parent or teacher — is an appreciation of them as people. Looking at today's world she sees all too often that children have become “the chattels of adults”, their worth expressed “in terms of dollars and cents”, the sole purpose of their education being seemingly “to fit them for the highest paid job possible.”

Charlotte Mason built her philosophy on a strong Christian base and as young parents the Macaulays had been searching for a practical philosophy of education which would “relate to the truth of Christianity.” But ideas which are good and true, as the book admits, are not the sole property of Christians; they are shared by those of other religions and by many who follow no religious faith at all. While quoting passages from the Bible in support of Charlotte Mason's concepts, Mrs Macaulay is careful to point out that a ‘non-believer’ can see their wisdom and truth equally well. She sees Miss Mason's philosophy and her own findings and ideas as being perfectly in keeping with the various beliefs of many peoples throughout the world. “The principles of education always remain the same, the details have to be planned so that they are appropriate for the individual, including the time and culture in which he is living.”

While leading the reader through the essence of Miss Mason's books, yet mindful of today's world, Mrs Macaulay stops from time to time to reconsider a concept from a rather

different viewpoint. Giving a short synopsis of Miss Mason's philosophy as a "plan to establish a better educational practice" she speaks, as indeed Miss Mason did in her own day, of "the disappointing experience of much school education." But she also reminds us to be tolerant and realistic when

[p 38]

scrutinizing any school's curriculum, for there is an overriding compulsion to meet a country's qualification examination requirements.

Whether you are already steeped in Charlotte Mason's work, or quite new to it, you will find Mrs Macaulay's book well worth reading and, what is more, enjoyable as well as worthwhile.

D. Russo (C.M.T.)