

STAGE II

4. Why did Charlotte Mason place so much value on a wide curriculum for children of all ages?

The privilege that PNEU children enjoy in regard to the scope of the curriculum is great—surely one of the greatest privileges one could imagine for a child. It provides a great feast of such variety that the appetite is never jaded. It is, in fact, such a wholesome and vitalizing diet that were PNEU to become more widespread throughout America, a generation of little T.V. zombies might even be brought back to life. It is with the most extraordinary gratitude that I prepare the lesson plans for tomorrow—for each school day is like a Thanksgiving dinner of knowledge, with the double enjoyment of sharing the children's delight, each with *his* own new knowledge.

Among the many great contributions which Miss Mason's philosophy has made to liberate children from the prison-like fare of mediocre, conventional and thoughtless education, perhaps the most welcome difference to the children is the wonderful variety and extent of the curriculum. 'What do we have today?' is the eager question.

Miss Mason's great respect for the child 'as a person' led her to believe that we must, by providing a wide curriculum, allow the child to establish as directly as possible as many relations as possible. In her day, the world had only recently changed, and was still changing, from that in which it was feasible and practical to train (or educate) the child in the path of his forebears; a gentleman's son was educated to be a gentleman, and the clerk's son to be a clerk, and the tradesmen's sons to be tradesmen.¹ 'Now', says Miss Mason, 'we must deal with a child of man, who has a natural desire to know the history of his race and of his nation, what men thought in the past and are thinking now . . . the best thoughts of the best minds taking form as literature . . . as the inhabitant of a world full of beauty and interest, the features of which he must recognize and know how to name, and a world too, and a universe, whose every function of every part is ordered by laws which he must begin to know.' We would wish to see children acquire, and Miss Mason quotes Shelley, 'understanding that grows bright gazing on many truths'. This quote from Shelley particularly remains in one's mind, for it is so perfect a description of what the PNEU teacher notices daily.

The curriculum in most schools, except those which are specifically Church schools, includes no allowance for establishment of an enduring relation to God. This relation, for which children have a strong desire, is given the position of first consideration by Miss Mason and the lessons are so planned that the child finds himself moving with confidence in this world of religion cloaked in great literature. Narration comes easily, the previous lesson is easily recalled, and the coming passages eagerly anticipated. The difference between the Old and New Testament gives a different tone to the days when we have one, or the other. At least to me, but I feel sure that it

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does to the children, too, and the comparison of those two worlds, half-conscious though it may be, surely increases their knowledge of each. A teacher (at least this one) is awe-struck at the nine-year-old's understanding of Christ's point in St. Luke, Chapter 9, vv. 57-62, that worldly concerns would impede the religious life; paradox provides, not a knotty problem, but a reasonable humour to the child-mind.

Miss Mason realized that without a good general knowledge of history, without a sound feeling for the past, man is politically and personally unsound. The very well-considered programme in this subject which a child enjoys who enjoys the privilege of PNEU for all his school days must surely be a very profound personal advantage. Miss Mason so wisely urges that the child begin *not* with the history of his own country. The tales of Rome and Greece which are provided give perspective and moral standards to the young mind which are very apparent. Naturally, in a political sense, it is very true that 'a rational well-considered patriotism depends on a pretty copious reading of history'.

Miss Mason writes in copious detail of the benefits and methods to be used in providing the necessary mind-food of various subjects. Literature, citizenship, geography, foreign languages, mathematics, art, and science are all discussed at length to the great profit of the teacher. I find it very helpful, as well as pleasurable to browse in the pages on Curriculum, and in our classroom experience I find many delightful instances of proof of the value of the wide curriculum.

¹ Page 157.