

## FROM A TUTOR'S POST-BAG—III

### THE WAY OF REASON<sup>1</sup>

Among all the varied aspects which must be taken into account in the upbringing of children, the P.N.E.U. considers that right training in the use of reason plays a vital part. As Charlotte Mason pointed out, it behoves us to ask whether, in view of the many pressing claims on modern education, such a large part should nowadays be played by such training. Only then can we proceed to a consideration of the form this training should take.

Great concern is felt by educators at the growing discrepancy between the environment provided by school and that of the outer world. School and home are often felt by pupils (especially during [p 156]

adolescence) to be two distinct spheres having little in common; there are often different scales of values in each environment. Girls especially are maturing earlier, yet nowadays ever more stress is laid on the necessity for continuing one's education: full-time education for many must continue far beyond the stage at which they are physically ready for adult life. Teenagers are exploited and allured by persistent commercial interests, and those who have been ill-prepared at home and at school will be a ready prey to every new mode of conduct presented to them, however undesirable such conduct may appear to their parents and teachers. If this aspect alone were to be considered, it is apparent that some systematic training in what Charlotte Mason calls 'the way of reason' is vitally necessary, perhaps even more today than in her time.

But such training must be a slow and gradual process, from infancy upwards. Training in right *habits* will lay the foundation for the right use of reason, for it is only in adolescence that the boy or girl will benefit from the actual philosophical study of the workings of reason. The child must at the same time learn that there is a connection between these three: habit, reason and will, and a child who has been brought up to the right use of will stands a much better chance of using his reason to good effect. We must aim at a gradual unfolding, so that during adolescence reason is seen to be 'a good servant but a bad master' and that you can prove anything you *wish* to prove, be it right or wrong. It is here that the untrained, unbridled will takes reason on his back and gallops off to a country of his own choosing.

What training, then, should take place in childhood? The child, seizing upon all his affinities, will inevitably be led to study the conduct of others, and this can be invaluable. Much of his observation will of necessity come from the books he reads. It is important, therefore, to use the right books, written by those who, remembering the precept 'Judge not ...', have placed their characters *impartially* before us. In early childhood suitable stories from the Bible, fairy tales and the heroic literature of Greek and Norse mythology will be eagerly read by children themselves as soon as they are able to get at books, and Plutarch and Shakespeare will follow naturally. *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, will show motives for conduct, the workings of reason for good or ill in a tormented mind, all presented without the pointing of any moral on the teacher's part.

Literature is but one aspect of the curriculum though perhaps the most important. When young children do pass judgment, either in real life, or on characters or events from their books, they do so very harshly in terms of black and white. Characters can, as Charlotte Mason says, be on either side of a dividing line. In adolescence, however, there comes, with an awakening sense of

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relative values, a blurring of this line—and here is the danger point, especially in moral training. *Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner*, but adolescents often, under the influence of wrong reasoning, excuse without having taken the trouble to understand or to stand back and examine their own train of thought.

Geography in addition to Literature can be a most valuable study in training children in 'the way of reason'. Why do different nations choose such and such a way of life—why have they made such and such a use of their resources? History links up with this—the general course of a nation's history, as opposed to the individual lives which have helped to mould that nation.

The study of Geography and History will lead naturally to the contemplation of current affairs and it is here particularly that the adolescent will need to bring properly trained reason to bear on the problems of his own times. Comparison of different newspapers is a valuable training in discrimination, as is the detailed examination of arguments set forth by biased writers. Pupils should be taught to study the correspondence columns during a national controversy and listen for 'the grinding of many axes'. They will be rewarded too by a close study of advertisement techniques, the use of words emotionally weighted, the appeal to desires, *suppressio verae*, and—a growing tendency in these days of visual aids—the carefully-posed photograph. It is here, I feel, that the P.N.E.U. Picture Study, with its insistence on close attention to detail, will be of the utmost value to children whose eyes are assailed on all sides by the lurid and meretricious. Boys and girls who have the Old Masters 'hanging in the galleries of their minds', as Charlotte Mason puts it, will have standards of comparison; they will see through the false visual reasoning of the advertiser.

A disturbing feature of the present day is the fashion for adaptation and imaginative reconstruction of books, plays and events. A child told me the other day, 'I'm not going to listen to Children's Hour plays ever again. They didn't do *Sense and Sensibility* properly; they messed it about and put in things that weren't there.' Perhaps the P.N.E.U. child, brought up from the start on 'strong meat' would react likewise, but there must be many children who would have no powers of discrimination at all and who would accept the whole of a highly imaginative rendering as gospel. The child who has been taught to compare, contrast, and reason is not in such danger.

This lack of discrimination is seen at its height, of course, among teenagers. Their desire for mental security is fostered by their rapid physical development and they find security in following the customs of their peers—the law of the herd, whether intrinsically good or bad,

prevails. Educators must face this tendency. The training advocated by the P.N.E.U. in the way of the

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will and of the reason should help to provide that stability of mind which will run like a shining thread through the inevitable changes and upsets of life. 'It is our part to see that reason plays its part.'

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<sup>1</sup> This essay was written by one of the students now taking the P.N.E.U. Correspondence Study Course. The author is a mother. She is an Honours Graduate in Modern Languages of Oxford and has had wide teaching and administrative experience at home and abroad. She is now on the Board of Examiners, Oxford and Cambridge Schools Board, setting and marking G.C.E. papers.