

THE HOUSE OF EDUCATION UNDER MISS E. A. PARISH

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Miss Ellen A. Parish came to the House of Education as Vice-Principal in 1922 at the invitation of Miss Mason. For many years Miss Parish had been working at the P.N.E.U. office in London. She was intimately concerned with the whole work of the Union. To her above all, was given the responsibility of cheering and guiding the P.U.S. work in the State Schools. Miss Parish travelled all over the British Isles, visiting these schools and others within the Union, encouraging the teachers taking part in 'the liberal education for all' movement.

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All this time she worked in closest touch with Miss Mason and she frequently visited the College.

Charlotte Mason died in January 1923. By her will Miss Parish was appointed Principal of the House of Education for life. How hard it is to tread in the footsteps of the great, Miss Parish trod that path with unflinching courage. She endeavoured to keep for the students all that was essential in their special training, while giving them those opportunities and freedoms which were right for a new generation.

Miss Parish held herself responsible for carrying on Miss Mason's work in Miss Mason's way, as far as it lay within her power to do so. In 1923 the College could take forty students for a two year course, admitting twenty each January. Fairfield (the small Practising School) consisted of one boarding house to accommodate about thirty-three pupils, aged nine to seventeen. The smaller children came daily for morning lessons only. The students in training undertook the teaching at the school under the supervision of the College staff, but there was a resident headmistress and a resident matron.

The curriculum of the College and its activities were influenced by the work to which students went out at the end of the training. There was a great demand for trained students, both in P.N.E.U. schools and in families where the parents were members of the Union. A thorough grasp of the educational principles of Charlotte Mason was required, as well as teaching ability. During the two years at the College, students became increasingly aware of an outlook upon children and upon knowledge which inspired all their work. Children are persons and because they are persons they recognise authority, responding to it with obedience. The student is also a person—a person in authority and under authority. This relationship between authority and obedience is fundamental and can be relied upon in daily living with children. Parents, children and teachers are all equally persons and, in regard to knowledge, they are needy persons. They need to know. The human mind hungers for knowledge as the body does for food. Every person needs the light of truth in many aspects, an ever deepening and growing awareness of the relationships of ideas, people and facts. Knowledge cannot be stored, it is not a possession. People with live minds dwell in a state of knowledge where they meet the thoughts of other minds expressed in word, work of art, craft or music. There has never been an educated person because education is not an achievement, it is a life to be lived. The power to live it depends upon force of attention, power of will to choose direction, and habits which support rather than hinder a choice when it is made. Above all, every person needs the knowledge and love of God, indeed it is under the teaching power of the Holy Spirit that all

truth is perceived and that every relationship is realised.

These two principles, that children are persons and that knowledge is a state rather than a possession, deeply affect the work of teaching. Techniques and skills are of less importance than faith in the children's own power to learn and a mind alive to many aspects of truth and beauty. The two years at the House of Education prepared the students to give instruction where necessary, to encourage right habits of mind and body in their pupils, but above all to know more widely and more clearly and to delight in knowledge. Thus prepared, each student entered the field

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of work provided by the Parents' Union School. Term by term they followed, with the children, the programmes of work which bring so much inspiration and guidance to teacher and pupil alike. The work was already well known after the ten weeks of school practice at Fairfield.

To Miss Parish the word 'training' meant a preparation to serve. Life at College must give opportunity not only for growth in knowledge, experience with children and delight in the countryside. There must be a standard of simplicity in living. Certain limitations of leisure and freedom must be recognised and accepted because character grows strong upon acts of will. The steady choice which enables a person to co-operate with others in a household, to respect its ways with its limitations, is never easy to young people. Miss Parish both with staff and students encouraged a certain austerity of outlook which to her had proved a valuable help in daily living. It strengthened the power to put personal convenience and preference aside in order to concentrate upon the work in hand.

Hard work, steady work, co-operation in limitations and rules of the House, responsible teaching practice at Fairfield, these Miss Parish required from the students. Equally essential was the element of delight. There should be delight in the Lake District itself, in music, games, dancing—above all delight in knowledge. Once or twice a year there were days when the routine work of the College was put aside. An expert would visit the house; students and staff would give their time to what he or she came to provide. Signorina Lunati lectured on Dante, Mr. Leslie conducted Communal Singing, Miss James held classes in pipe-making and pipe-playing, Dr. Thornley conducted his fascinating nature walks. None of these can ever be forgotten. At Miss Parish's invitation, Professor de Burgh (the College examiner) gave his yearly course of lectures on Plato's *Republic*, a delightful finish to a year's reading which Miss Parish enjoyed as fully as the students.

In 1929 it was decided to enlarge the College in order to train more students, and considerable alterations were made to the house. At the back of the property, separated [sic] from it by an old wall and a mass of elder bushes was a large farmyard surrounded by barns and granaries. It was possible to buy these buildings and Mr. Theodore Fyfe of Cambridge was invited to transform them into premises useful to the College. The work began in the summer and was completed the following year. No one admiring the spacious and graceful 'Barn' (Hall of Assembly, Concert Hall and Dance Hall) could imagine the sad and neglected farm buildings out of which it was constructed. Local builders worked to Mr. Fyfe's direction. They put into their work the beautiful craftsmanship of the locality, using the stone of which the old barns had been built. Miss Parish was deeply interested in every detail of construction and design, contributing many practical suggestions. When the new walls began to rise, a stone was laid by every person at College and Fairfield.

The heart trouble which caused Miss Parish much suffering in 1933 obliged her to give up work entirely the following year. She lived in a small house close to the College and still took part in some of its activities. As time went on, her illness made this impossible and she was advised to leave the place which she so deeply loved. She faced this sad departure with her usual calm courage.