

## COLLEGE STUDENTS TO-DAY

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Probably there are more fallacies concerned with the Charlotte Mason College than any other college in this country. Only the other day somebody was heard in the village referring to Scale How as 'that house on the hill where they have the most luxurious private dances,' no doubt referring to the annual Christmas affair attended last year by some students from Manchester University. No, not even in the year 1952 do we live a giddy and godless life, but we do not live a dull life—far from it, as this article will show.

When faced with the question, 'What is the Charlotte Mason College?' or 'Who was Charlotte Mason?' or, even more terrible 'What does P.N.E.U. stand for?', our minds, and no doubt our faces, rapidly assume a blank and woolly aspect while we cast around for a few words with which to describe our ideas and activities. It is extraordinarily difficult, especially if one has spent nearly three years at College, to give a succinct account of 'Charlotte Mason's College.' For it was and still is very definitely hers, in spite of the demands of the Ministry of Education and Manchester University. Probably a visitor sees College from a more detached angle than we ourselves, so we hope the reader of this article will consent to a conducted tour.

Ambleside is one of those places that is really too large to be called a village, but would not dream of comparing itself with its larger neighbours, Windermere and Kendal. Sheltered on three sides by the mountains, it sprawls at the head of the Windermere valley. Above the village and overlooking it stands Scale How, a square grey stone house of three storeys, which Charlotte Mason bought when her students became too numerous to fit into Springfield. Seen from the road, Scale How does not look as if it could hold its fifty students; it resembles rather a private dwelling than a college. Miss Mason tried to maintain a homelike atmosphere and even now it has not entirely disappeared. The atmosphere in College is very friendly; the lecturers and students, the domestic staff and the men who work on the estate, the Junior and Senior practising schools and their staff are all united in a close bond of friendship and service. A remarkable instance of the family unit was given on the day of the King's funeral, when everyone met in the library to observe the two minutes' silence and to listen to the service. Afterwards everyone gave a hand with the clearing and washing-up and laying of meals for the rest of the day.

A visitor arriving at College would climb the steep drive from the road and might see an energetic game of netball in progress on the hard court; or, if the visitor were lucky, he might notice a bunch of people—it is rather difficult to determine just who and what they are, because they are kneeling on the ground apparently absorbed in examining a drain. No, as he approaches he realises that of course young ladies know nothing of drains and that the object of their interest is a minute species of nature. A few minutes later the group move forward, to pause again while, with heads thrown back and mouths wide open, they regard  
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the sparrows chirping in the treetops. The Nature Walk is a great feature of College life and, while no doubt a source of amusement to the inhabitants of Ambleside, it does help to foster an interest in Nature Study. Every student keeps a Nature Note Book in which paintings, notes

and lists of birds and flowers are recorded. She soon enters into the enjoyment of finding rare and interesting flowers and of bird-watching—the arrival of the first curlews at Blelham Tarn, the whooper swans on Rydal Water, and occasionally the great excitement of some rare visiting birds, as, for instance, when eight waxwings sat on the tree by Miss Kitching's window at Low Nook!

As the traveller makes his way up the drive, he cannot fail to notice a curiously shaped building known as the Beehive. Here the Junior portion of the Practising School is taught. It is a large one-storied room with desks in the four corners screened off from one another. Forms Lower IA to IIA are taught here by first and second year students, who come down for a week at a time about three times a term. Practical teaching begins after the first term at College, in the Junior School for a year and then in the Senior School for another year. During their training the students also teach in the State Schools round about for two periods of four weeks, and everybody has to do one period of teaching practice away from College during training.

By now the visitor has reached the front door and Ethel, the faithful servant of the College, no doubt lets him into the hall. He will notice students moving to and fro, often carrying chairs and books; one stops to rearrange the bowl of flowers on the chest. The floral decorations in College are her concern during her last year and, summer or winter, she must find either leaves or flowers to grace the Principal's drawing-room. Or he may notice another, leaning against the radiator with pencil and notebook in her hand, waiting until the drawing-room door opens and she hears the Principal's instructions for the day; the Senior Student has to visit the Principal each day before lunch and her instructions may vary from making copies of a school list to collecting money for some College enterprise. A bell rings and the visitor is ushered into lunch; two dining-rooms connected by folding doors house students and staff who eat together except at tea, which the staff enjoy alone, and supper on half holidays. Everybody has to be on time for breakfast at eight, a difficult task in winter. Two pianos show that the dining-rooms are not confined to meals; during the day odd half hours are snatched for practising, for every student has to learn the piano for at least one year. Usually she continues for the whole three years, for it is a great asset when teaching. For the music-lover the whole course provides ample opportunity for listening to and making music; the pianist is always in demand at College—for playing hymns, accompanying dances, or for teaching the children. Music appreciation on Friday evening is a joy to all; there are quite often good concerts in Windermere and Kendal and a musician of repute generally visits the College each term to give a recital.

After lunch the visitor, now rendered invisible, would follow students and staff to the Library. This is a large and airy room with three French windows opening on to the lawns; there are bookcases lining the walls and a few much coveted armchairs round the fire, for this is a common

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room also. At the far end is a slightly raised platform, where students sit during lectures. Although the Library is used for many purposes, one always connects it with Criticism Lessons; these are held every Thursday morning, when students and staff arrange themselves around the room to watch the two unfortunate students who have to give the lessons. Desks for the children are arranged in the centre of the room and, after the student has taught, her lesson is criticised, often by her best friend! Each student has to give three lessons during her College

career, all of which must be given to different forms and different subjects taken. It seems a cruel system to the outsider, but students watching gain knowledge of how to teach, or at least how not to teach, and the whole affair is part of that 'hardening-up' process. Charlotte Mason once asked a student why she had come to College. 'To learn to teach,' she replied. 'No,' said Miss Mason, 'to learn how to live.'

Although learning how to teach does form a large part of the day of the student, as we shall see when visiting the lecture rooms, it is only one part. There are numerous other activities. In the Barn, for instance, a large and very fine hall apart from the College, we find a stage equipped with lighting and learn that plays and entertainments are often given. The first-year play is a great feature and, as the whole thing is kept secret, rehearsals often have to take place before breakfast. Impromptu entertainments for the domestic staff, skits, dances and parties, concerts and film shows all take place in the Barn. So also do the Brownie, Guide and Cadet meetings, another feature of College life. The College Cadets are the only company in Westmorland and their presence is always in demand at Rallies and Parades; they also furnish Lieutenants and Brown Owls to run the School companies.

Next to the Barn is the first year lecture room, Troy. Its counterpart, Athens, is the property of the third years, while the second years enjoy the inspiration of St. George; next door, successfully conquered we hope, is The Dragon, the Art and Craft room. To the uninitiated the names of rooms appear strange and sometimes meaningless. I shall never forget the face of a very new first year who discovered she was to sleep in Last Resort! The Bus, another first year bedroom, has a tradition of noise and fun. The bedrooms are mainly for two or three students and it probably is here that one does 'learn to live.' Much visiting and entertaining of a mild sort goes on, and at night hot drinks are brewed on methylated stoves.

Miss Mason's aim was to give as wide an education as possible, and so the College course is on very broad lines; nowadays, with the press of the Manchester final examinations in the distance, it has been increasingly difficult to maintain this wide approach. However, the first year is still a general course and, although there is specialisation in the second and third years of study, the cultural subjects are not forgotten. There are opportunities for tennis and hockey and the active student enjoys climbing and swimming in the summer. There are so many wonderful places to visit, it is always difficult to choose how to spend a 'half.' Should it be Buckstone's Jum or the Langdale Valley? The Climbing Club goes further afield and one can visit Borrowdale or Patterdale and pass the night in a Youth Hostel, returning via Fairfield or some other mountain.

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Whatever outward changes the Manchester examinations may create, the spirit of Miss Mason's teaching will remain and inspire fresh generations with her love and respect for children. In these modern days the idea of the importance of the individuality of the person and the wideness of his education are matters of supreme importance. Miss Mason lays stress on these fundamental ideas, which are so easily forgotten in the bustle of unification and centralisation.