

## I AM, I OUGHT, I CAN, I WILL

I was very much interested in Rosemary Bowmer's letter. Her suggestion that the P.N.E.U. method might be in *danger* of becoming archaic is bound to make some of us sit up, which is quite a good thing. I have been surprised and disappointed to find that many C.M.Ts no longer read Charlotte Mason's books. Of course there is much in them which is archaic but so there is in the Bible. Recently, however, I have found that it is only by reading and rereading her books that one reaches the very core of her thought, which is not, nor can be, archaic. What is archaic about the P.N.E.U. is the way some of us present it.

It is true that many of us have been afraid to criticise seriously any of her teaching and that the authorities have been inclined to insist that we should toe the line. Certain criticisms have been developing in my mind of late and I feel less nervous of voicing them because I am more than ever certain of C.M.'s great and lasting contribution to educational thought.

Perhaps someone can explain why Miss Mason changed the order of the P.U.'s motto. On page 330 of *Home Education* C.M. says this "*I am, I ought, I can, I will*", these are the steps of that ladder of St. Augustine whereby we 'rise on stepping stones of our dead selves to higher things!'. This change of order makes a world of difference, I believe. If there is something you ought to do it is what you owe, and the power to do it is available. The other way round suggests the Pelagian heresy. Pelagius was a monk, born in England in the middle of the 4th century, who came into conflict with St. Augustine. I believe that the Victorians were guilty of the heresy, and their correctness has been followed by a Dionysiac reaction. From a Christian point of view *right action* is not enough, and C.M.s teaching on habit, I believe, is misleading. I used to think it was my salvation, but I have learnt since to see that the God Jesus came to [p 3]

manifest does not demand right action such as the Pharisees sought, but complete surrender, because He alone knows what is in man and the individual man's potentialities. The idea is clearly apparent in the lives of the saints and is crystallised in the Eucharist or Communion Service, and from that point real growth begins.

The big chunks of truth which C.M. gave us are:

*The child is a person,*

*Education is the science of relations,*

and a great deal of valuable thought about the behaviour of the mind.

Unfortunately, when critical persons from outside our Society spot weaknesses in the P.N.E.U., they incline to proceed no further. There is plenty of work for her real disciples to do. Her teaching was prophetic, but we must make up our minds why this is so. There are many things I am still searching for, and I hope that other C.M.C.s will let us know what their findings are. These things do not drop into one's lap but really have to be dug for.

NANCY HATCH (1914)

(Pelagianism: a view of the relationship between God and man that lays undue stress on human self-sufficiency.—Ed.)

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## I AM, I CAN, I OUGHT, I WILL

I, too, wonder why Charlotte Mason changed the order of St. Augustine's words, "I am, I ought, I can, I will" to the P.U.S. motto we know so well. Miss Kitching left a note about it. In

1888, Charlotte Mason writes about the motto using St. Augustine's sequence. A little later on there is an unfinished quotation from a notebook, "I am (human nature), I can (power), I ought (responsibility), I will (purpose)". In 1891 this became the P.U.S. motto.

Why was the change made? I wonder if the answer is to be found in "Ourselves"? The book follows the P.U.S. motto. First comes the description of our human nature with its infinite possibilities: *I am*. Coupled with this, chapter by chapter, advice is given to show how best to use these possibilities: *I can*. Responsibility—*I ought*—follows in a section on the conscience, leading on to *I will*, purpose. But this is not the end of the book, the last section passes on to the life of the soul in God's service, closing with another quotation from St. Augustine.

In the chapter on gladness the reader is advised to say, "I can because I ought" but more often a chapter closes with cheerful reassurance based on a variety of simple ways of facing difficulties and of using human nature rightly. "For indeed what human nature is depends on how we use it" (chapter 19, Book II). Charlotte Mason is writing for young people growing up through difficult, if happy, years. The knowledge of "I can" is essential for them and is closely linked with "I am". A previous generation of parents expected children to have an adult sense of responsibility. They would surely have put "I ought" before anything else. But Charlotte Mason wished to answer that cry of childhood, "How *can* I help doing—being this?" followed by "I can't *help* it". In "Ourselves" the answer is, "Yes, you *can*; try this way, try that". When later in the book, the duties and responsibilities of life are discussed, they can be faced because the reader already stands firmly in the knowledge of "I am and I can".

Pelagius? Charles Williams in "The Descent of the Dove" writes of him:

"There was a meeting in Rome—perhaps a clerical conference, or something of the kind. A certain Pelagius, an Irish Christian, was present at it. He was not a priest but he was in Rome in an effort to revive and excite religion; he was conducting a mission to the Romans. His particular method was to encourage men to be *men*. He was orthodox enough and full of real love for, and desire for the good of, his fellow creatures, but he thought his fellow creatures were perfectly capable of fulfilling the Will of God and of being chaste (or whatever) if they wished. Men need not sin unless they chose and if they did not choose they need not sin. This, too, was orthodox enough." But, the author continues, "Pelagius was faced by St. Augustine of Hippo. Adam had fallen through the sin of pride and all mankind shared in the corruption of this fall. Only through grace could a man be saved, 'the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ'." To St. Augustine, Pelagius' teaching was absolutely false. To Pelagius, grace was a necessary help, always to be found by the right-willing man but to Augustine man could not move at all but by grace, "by that principle that was not within him".

Charlotte Mason, writing on conviction of sin in Book II alludes to "the constant operation of the Holy Spirit upon the spirits of men". With this would not both Pelagius and Augustine agree?

Perhaps any argument for a right sequence of these words is beside the point. "The powers of Mansoul are many but they are one." Through life, action is guided sometimes by "I can because I ought, when responsibility and duty are apparent, and sometimes by "I ought because I can"

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when a sense of power or skill shows that there is a service for which we are responsible. I wonder if there is a first or a last in these words? Do they not stand straight and strong like four

pillars holding up the roof of daily life and there is neither first nor last?  
ESSEX CHOLMONDELEY (1919).