

When Children Love to Learn

A PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF
Charlotte Mason's Philosophy for Today

ELAINE COOPER
GENERAL EDITOR

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When Children Love to Learn

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The Contributors

Susan Schaeffer Macaulay grew up in Switzerland at L'Abri Fellowship, which was founded by her parents, Francis and Edith Schaeffer. She and her husband, Ranald, have led the work of L'Abri in England over the years and are vitally involved with educational issues.

Jack Beckman (M. Ed., M.Phil., Ph.D.) has recently completed his doctorate in education at Cambridge University, England, where he concentrated on Charlotte Mason's educational principles and practice. He is particularly interested in her work as applied in the preparation of teachers and is currently a member of the education faculty at Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, Georgia. He is also on the board of Charlotte Mason Schools International.

Maryellen St. Cyr (M. Ed.) has many years of experience as a classroom teacher in both primary and middle schools. She has worked as a curriculum director and a principal of elementary schools. Currently she is Director of Charlotte Mason Schools International (CMSI), a nonprofit organization established to help teachers, parents, and schools develop a Charlotte Mason education.

Bobby Scott (M. Ed. in School Administration and M. Ed. in Counseling) is experienced in teaching both high and middle schools. He is at present principal of Perimeter Christian School, a large private school in Atlanta. He has been pivotal in bringing Charlotte Mason's ideas into the American educational scene and has helped start schools. Mr. Scott established the Charlotte Mason Institute which, now under CMSI, serves an increasing network of schools interested in the ideas and application of Charlotte Mason's educational philosophy.

Elaine Cooper runs Child Light Educational Trust in England together with Susan Macaulay. Mrs. Cooper is married, with three teenage children, and is involved in education as a concerned layperson.

Foreword

Following the success and ever widening readership of Susan Schaeffer Macaulay's book *For the Children's Sake*, the number of requests for help and guidance has increased from parents and teachers seeking a deeper understanding of educator Charlotte Mason's philosophy and teaching methods.

It is so encouraging to know that many good teachers will be helping to take this philosophy on into this century, therefore enabling many children to have the wonderful start in life of a good Christian education, with a broad curriculum, adapting it to modern needs but not forgetting the lasting values in life—appreciation of good literature and the arts, awareness of the environment, and love for God's world.

Realizing the need to train and help students understand her philosophy and teaching methods, Charlotte Mason (1842–1923) set up a “House of Education” (later named Charlotte Mason College). I was fortunate enough to spend three years at the college, albeit nearly thirty years after the death of Charlotte Mason, but we were given a thorough understanding of the philosophy by reading (and narrating) her educational books. The spirit of Charlotte Mason lived on in her college. It was always a small college where each individual was an important person. Many of the lecturers had been trained at the college, and there were still people around who had known Charlotte Mason.

It is sad that in England the many small PNEU schools (Parents' National Education Union schools started by Miss Mason) have disappeared, but Charlotte Mason was forward thinking and would have wanted us to advance thoughtfully with our times. I am sure she would have been glad that our national curriculum advocates the reading of good literature, including Shakespeare, the study of great artists and musicians, and developing an awareness of the environment. So although teachers are not necessarily

aware of Charlotte Mason, her influence continues in many good schools in England.

In many ways during the last few years I have been the link between the past and the future in Charlotte Mason circles. My connections with Miss Mason started when I was five years old and my parents sent me to a small PNEU school within walking distance of home. I spent three years at this school, and a very happy time it was, learning so many things that have remained with me for life. I learned basic reading, writing, and mathematics in a painless and enjoyable way, but more important to me were the lovely afternoon nature walks with the Head Teacher or her assistant, both of whom had been students of Charlotte Mason. My other great joy was the careful study of the pictures of a different artist each term. Of course education must be shared between home *and* school; so equally memorable are the visits to London with my mother to seek out the original pictures of the artist that I had been studying. These pictures have remained lasting “friends” to me when I visit the National Gallery or other galleries. Equally important were the weekend trips into the country, my father and I sharing an interest in butterflies, caterpillars, and wildflowers. My Nature Note Book, which I still keep, brings back many special memories.

When I left school, I wanted to become a teacher; so at eighteen I started my three-year training at Charlotte Mason College. When I finished my course, I taught in three different PNEU schools, gaining valuable experience. Then in 1963 I was asked to apply for the job of Head Teacher of a PNEU school near Windsor. I remained in that position for twenty-eight years, a wonderfully rewarding and challenging time, seeing the school grow and develop. I always regarded the school as my “family,” and I am still in touch with many of my former students and teachers.

Many of the PNEU schools started in a very small way, being almost a home schoolroom. Eton End was just one of these. My predecessor (also a Charlotte Mason teacher) had been asked in 1936 to start a school for the children of the teachers at Eton College. During the first two years the school was in a room of the vicarage in Eton. Then Miss Johnstone (the Head Teacher) and her mother were able to buy a Victorian house just a mile away. This was their home as well as their school. The school is still on this site, buildings have been added, and an adjoining field has been bought; so there is still plenty of space for all forms of games as well as wild space for nature walks.

When Miss Johnstone retired in 1963, I followed her as Head Teacher. I always employed good, well-qualified teachers (Charlotte Mason trained teachers were not available), but when I confronted them with the curriculum, they were amazed at the amount that the children would be learning and the breadth of the subjects. They were afraid they would not be able to cope, but they soon saw the “feast” laid before the children and themselves and were grateful for the stimulation of so many interesting subjects.

In 1991 I retired from Eton End myself, but I still visit the school regularly, by invitation. Recently at the end of school year assembly, I was pleased to hear my successor in her words of advice to the graduating girls use the words of the school motto, the motto that Charlotte Mason gave to all PNEU schools: “I am, I can, I ought, I will.”

During my last term at Eton End, I had a visitor to the school—Mrs. Rosemary Moore from South Carolina. She was in England visiting schools, having read Charlotte Mason’s books. When she realized I was retiring, she asked if I would visit the United States, as she was hoping to set up a Charlotte Mason school, and perhaps I could help and advise her. This was a very busy time for me, and I agreed with her suggestion without giving it much thought. But Rosemary persevered, and in October 1992 I visited America for the first time. I spent three weeks there, and it was exciting to be involved in the birth of a new school. I had thought my teaching career was over, little realizing what my American trip would lead to! My annual trips have been exciting and rewarding times, visiting a number of schools that are basing their work on Charlotte Mason’s ideas, spending about a week in each, mainly giving demonstration lessons and talking with teachers and parents. But my main role is to give help and encouragement.

I can talk with experience and confidence, making people realize that Charlotte Mason’s philosophy really is right for the present time and for the future. I have had so many children passing through my classrooms. I continue to hear news of many of them, all leading interesting and worthwhile lives. They are all so grateful for the broad education they received—within a caring atmosphere where each child was respected as an interesting individual. I did not just educate the elite or gifted; we had a wide range of ability, but *all* students achieved and felt good at their own level. I have met many parents and teachers who have made a brave decision to opt out of public education, having the conviction that this is right for the children. I can assure you that it will be rewarding.

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I am sure that this book will be a help and encouragement to many teachers and parents who are seeking further guidance. It is Charlotte Mason's deep Christian convictions and her real understanding of children that make her philosophy so right for the twenty-first century as well as for her own times. This is not a rigid form of education but one conveying enduring values and knowledge.

EVE E. ANDERSON, *former Headmistress*
Eton End, Old Windsor, England, 1998

Preface

By Elaine Cooper, General Editor

At first glance, the reader may feel somewhat overwhelmed at the task of foraging through this tome. We prefer to think we have been thorough in our treatment of the subject at hand. Some or many of the ideas in this philosophy of education may be new to you. It is our purpose to present a fresh way of thinking about the parent and child, the home and school, the learner and the teacher. Many who read Susan Schaeffer Macaulay's book *For the Children's Sake* were moved to write asking for ways of implementing the vigorous ideas presented in that little classic. Their main questions were:

“What does a Charlotte Mason education look like in *this* century?”

“What in the world was the PNEU?”¹

“How can I be sure my child is *really* learning when there is such an emphasis on reading ‘living books’?”

“And in any case, what *are* ‘living books’?”

“What about the three R's?”

Several of us have come together to try to offer some answers to these questions. Three of the major contributors bring years of experience in the classroom. All three have been principals of schools. As a result the guide will reflect their particular perspectives on their calling as educators. We offer *no technique*, but rather the simple proposition that children are best educated through careful relationships on the part of the adults—the parents and teachers—who are themselves in a lifelong process of learning and subject to the same duties and freedoms within a Christian worldview. Beyond that, each parent, teacher, or school needs to make thoughtful application of the many ideas presented in the following pages to the specific concerns and goals particular to their situations. In this guide are many practical suggestions and resources from which to choose.

We would like to draw attention to several historical observations that shape the context of this book. The first is that great educators of the past have often made strikingly similar observations about children, the way they

behave and learn. So any current and serious approach to education falls within a long tradition of prior thinking, questioning, and practice. We also know, however, that the great ancient, literate civilizations of the past, both Western and Eastern, educated only a small elite of their populations to function as priests/scribes, tax collectors, and lawyers—that is, those who would communicate and perpetuate the religions, cultures, and economies within which they lived.

Secondly, as we look back to the classical period, we notice that while the Greeks and Romans contributed vital insights and asked profound questions regarding the nature of man,² the purpose of education and law, the best organization of society, and the role of aesthetics in personal and civic life, teachers were not conferred with any social status, and their character or reputation was of no great consequence in the education of Greek children. The Romans, however, were distinct in their emphasis on virtue in both private and public behavior. They strongly emphasized the importance of nurturing virtue within family life. However, both societies also cultivated many unhelpful concepts about what confers worth and value to the individual. Their notions of heroism and *paideia* (the upbringing of children) never addressed, for example, the fact that they functioned essentially as slave societies.

Lastly, we are struck by an entirely different view of man presented in the Bible in ancient Israel—namely that men and women are made in the image of God. The significance and ramifications of being human rested simply on this premise and was in stark and striking contrast to the surrounding cultures of the time. These cultures viewed only a few select kings, pharaohs, and other rulers as possibly made in a god's image. (For example, Alexander the Great declared himself a god, and later some Roman caesars and emperors did too.)

This biblical revelation of human origin and identity was further defined by the great commandments revealing God's character and man's right relationship to the one true and living God. Consequently, every person in ancient Israel was responsible to *know* the law and to *act* upon it. This law (later perfectly embodied and lived out in Jesus Christ) was to be treasured within the hearts and minds of *all* age-groups, through teaching, reading, memorization, festival, and ritual—to be passed on faithfully from generation to generation (Deut. 6).

The child was part and parcel of this reality. Children enjoyed a special place in the learning and commemoration of God's dealings with the nation. The Hebrew child's right to life, unlike in many other cultures, was protected by law. This heritage of a living culture and sacred view of the person formed

the backbone of much of Western society until more recent times. It is the bedrock of any thinking about Christian education.

The Hebrew perception of the person and of human behavior was radically different from that of surrounding nations (then and now). Other peoples believe, for example, that a person's worth is primarily achieved through being either an honorable soldier, highly educated, athletically superior, gifted in speech or looks, vastly wealthy, or, best of all, all of the above. Thus most children remained insignificant, ignorant, small, and powerless and could be treated or shaped in a variety of ways, depending on the ends to be achieved. They enjoyed no inherent status.

While *When Children Love to Learn* affirms the value of good and great achievements in a wide variety of fields, this book soundly rejects the view that a child's ultimate worth lies in either intelligence, material circumstances, what he or she *might* become through grooming or talent, or anything else except in this remarkable fact—that he or she has been made in the image of a personal and infinite God and is especially confirmed by Jesus: “. . . of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14). “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, . . . Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:1-3).

Charlotte Mason was unequivocal on the most crucial starting point of education—that the child is born a *person*. This pillar of her thought is balanced by another: “We allow no separation to grow up between the intellectual and ‘spiritual’ life of children, but teach them that the Divine Spirit has constant access to their spirits, and is their continual Helper in all the interests, duties and joys of life.”

Miss Mason was profoundly Christian, rooted in Scripture and immensely practical. This is what gives her philosophy and practice its unique combination of “form and freedom” (a phrase Dr. Francis Schaeffer used to describe the proper tension between the reality of moral law on the one hand and individual freedoms and creativity on the other). She drew her view of human beings and especially of children from Holy Writ: “And first let us consider where and what the little being is, who is entrusted to the care of human parents. A tablet to be written upon? A twig to be bent? Wax to be moulded? Very likely; but he is much more—the Bible shows the deepest insight into what is peculiar to the children in their nature and estate. . . .”³

She studied widely and wisely. She was able to harness many truthful

observations and practices written by previous thinkers on education and accept them as part of the common grace given to all people. She was sharp in rejecting the false ideas of child-centered “freedoms” popularized by Rousseau and followers of the Romantic movement and was not sentimental or idealistic about children. Her attitude was realistic but patiently loving. She was equally clear in her exposure of adults who lord it over children merely on the grounds of a child’s dependence and ignorance. She maintained that people need to be careful not to use children to fulfill adult agendas.

Miss Mason herself did not leave many personal notes or diaries. Her written legacy is contained primarily in the six volumes of her educational philosophy and practice, and also in her six volumes written as a meditation on the Gospel of St. John entitled *The Saviour of the World*. She opposed any adulation of herself, but focused attention instead on the body of work she felt she had been given to do “for the children’s sake.” This was her unbending goal. She wanted all children to know about their heritage of being made in God’s image—sinful obviously, but nevertheless able to enjoy to their own best ability in a fallen world and in many diverse life circumstances, the life-giving relationship with God through the Savior and the Spirit, and also relationships with others, nature, art, and music.

This guide attempts to follow a tradition of giving serious thought to what Christian education *today* means for *all* children everywhere, to enable them to be learning for life and everlasting life. This is education for a purpose and not as a status symbol. Of course it means having skills to earn a living, but it also means glorifying God and enjoying Him forever (The Shorter Catechism, 1647).

Neither is this book offered as a monument to an exceptional person but rather as a continuing record of life-giving education flowing from the source of biblical Christianity. We hopefully share with our readers, along with all the practical aims implicit in this guide, the belief that we are in trust to do our utmost in providing the best education for all.

Our crying need today is less for a better method of education than for an adequate conception of children—children merely as human beings, whether brilliant or dull, precocious or backward. Exceptional qualities take care of themselves and so does the “wanting” intelligence, and both of these share with the rest in all that is claimed for them in the following chapters. Our business is to find out how great a mystery a person is *qua* person.⁴

Notes

PREFACE

1. PNEU stands for Parents' National Education Union, formed by Charlotte Mason for the advancement of her teaching principles and practices. The object of the society was the study of the laws of education as they apply to the four aspects of education—the physical, mental, moral, and religious upbringing of children. Her immediate and lifelong work was always, in the first place, for parents and children. (Essex Cholmondeley, *The Story of Charlotte Mason* [London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1960]. The book is currently available from Ambleside School, 106 S. Edison St., Fredericksburg, TX 78624, 830-990-9059, and from Child Light, P. O. Box 59, Petersfield, Hampshire GU32 3YL, England.
2. “Man” is used generically, representing all of mankind, i.e., man, woman, boy, and girl.
3. Charlotte Mason, *Home Education* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1896, 1930).
4. Charlotte Mason, *A Philosophy of Education* (London: J. M. Dent, 1954; Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1989), 80.

CHAPTER ONE

THE VALUE OF CHARLOTTE MASON'S WORK FOR TODAY

1. The book about the school is titled *Summerhill* by A. S. Neil.
2. *De rigueur*—roughly translated as the *only* way for something to take place, socially obligatory.
3. From her official obituary in *The Times* in 1955: “As private secretary to Miss Mason and secretary to the House of Education and to the Parents' Union School, she played a part second only to Miss Mason in building up the PNEU movement.” From her friends: “How much more could we, who knew and loved her, add!”
4. From “Children Up to School Age and Beyond” by Elsie Kitching. Booklet published by the PNEU.
5. Elizabeth Raikes, *Dorothea Beale of Cheltenham* (London: Archibald Constable, 1908).