

# Charlotte Mason Educational Review

*A quarterly online educational review for the Charlotte Mason Learning Community*

Volume 3 Issue 1

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**Jennifer Spencer discusses narration from her masters research**

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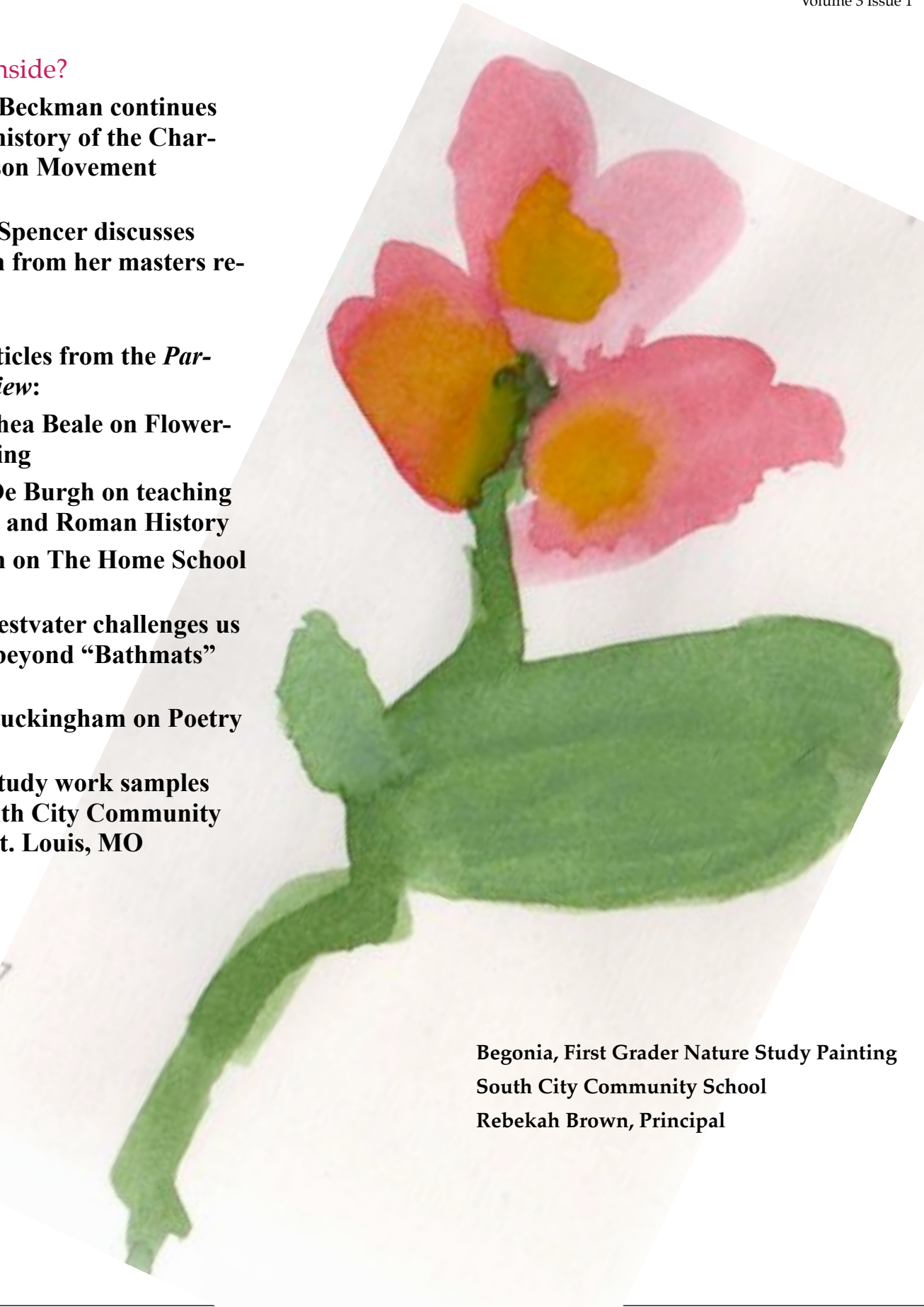
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*C M E R*

**Charlotte Mason**  
Educational Review

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**Jennifer Spencer**  
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**Cover photo courtesy of the South City Community School, St. Louis. MO. Principal,  
Rebekah Brown and Board Chair, Valerie Barclay**

*The Charlotte Mason Educational Review* is a publication of ChildLightUSA and is intended for individuals interested in the educational philosophy and pedagogy of Charlotte Mason, the 19th Century British educator. The views expressed or implied in this publication are not necessarily official positions of ChildLightUSA. You may contact ChildLightUSA at: [editorCMER@gardner-webb.edu](mailto:editorCMER@gardner-webb.edu). Generally, this publication will be distributed via the Internet. © 2008 by ChildLightUSA. All rights reserved. Authors who publish in this journal retain their own copyright. Please contact the author for permission to use his or her materials.

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**The *Charlotte Mason Education Review* is indebted to  
[Gardner-Webb University](#) for its continued support.**

## From the Editor

Welcome to the Spring 2008 edition of the *CMER*. I hope you enjoy reading it over the next several months. Please feel free in your busy day-to-day lives to email your comments, ideas or a thought you would like to share.

There is a small new section in this issue of the *Review*. At the end we have a few samples of student nature study drawings. These are from South City Community School in St. Louis, MO and our thank you goes to Principal, Rebekah Brown for providing these work samples. The *Review* appreciates the students and faculty for sharing some student work samples with us. This is a small beginning to a section in which we wish to exhibit student work samples. This, the editors hope, will provide teachers and parents another way to see into the educational philosophy of Charlotte Mason. If you would like to contribute samples of your students' work, please contact Jennifer Spencer ([spencerjw1@charter.net](mailto:spencerjw1@charter.net)) or Laurie Bestvater ([bestvaters@gmail.com](mailto:bestvaters@gmail.com)).

In this issue Dr. Beckman writes more on the history of the Mason movement in the United Kingdom especially the Charlotte Mason College. All of us can look forward to his continued research and study in this area and hopefully we can look forward to his sharing his knowledge with us.

Since our general theme this year is "instruction," there are three articles on teaching included in this issue from the *Parents' Review*. Dorothea Beale writes on "Teaching Flowers." Included is an article by Mason on "The Home School." Finally, from the *Parents' Review* there is an article by Professor de Burgh on the teaching of ancient history.

In the spring semester of 2007, Jennifer Spencer completed at Gardner-Webb University her final product for her Master's in Elementary Education on retelling or narrating in her classroom. Read her article, which is a scaled down version of her master's research on narration. And, to Deani Van Pelt, there must go a huge thank you for helping to edit a large research project into a medium sized article. What is truly fun for me about this paper and this young educator is that we are preparing the next generation of Mason scholars.

Laurie Bestvater sent an article back in the winter for me to read and it was so thoughtful and conveyed such an important idea that it was impossible to resist publishing it. She writes "on the fear of bathmats." I'll let you figure this one out by reading it for your own enjoyment and reflection.

Poetry was such an important topic in a Mason school. For that reason and because it is an area of beauty that is needed in our lives, there will be a section in each issue of the *Review* that shares some new idea(s) about poetry. This time Bonnie Buckingham has shared some of her favorite books and poets. If you love poetry and want to share some ideas, suggestions for books and authors, please send your ideas to Bonnie Buckingham at [thebuck@mindspring.com](mailto:thebuck@mindspring.com).

We are glad to bring you the *Review*. If you get a chance and if you like the journal, be sure to say a thank you to the various editors for their behind the scenes, quiet work that goes unnoticed, but which is very important. Without their work it would be impossible to bring you this *Review*. Your response let's us know whether or not we are doing a good job, bad job or if you would prefer that we make some changes. We want to bring you an excellent journal, so share with us your ideas, thoughts, or comments.

ChildLightUSA began a blog last February. The blog is part of an overall plan to give you access to the ideas and practices of Mason. On 24 April as I write there have been over 5400 hits on the blog. Our hearts desire is that it will be used by God to bless all of you. Let us know if it is helpful.

Get that cup of tea, if you haven't, and sip and read for a while.

Warm regards,

Carroll Smith

### *Watchout!*

#### *for these learning opportunities*

1. New weekly blogs. Hopefully they will promote discussion among faculty, co-ops and parents. Blogs are posted usually over the weekend.
2. A new monthly mp3 file for further discussion among parents, faculty and co-ops.
3. Preconference workshop on teaching math in the upper elementary and lower middle school on 11 June.
4. Conference on the evening of 11 June through mid-afternoon on Saturday, 14 June.
5. June Conference schedules are posted on the home page of the ChildLightUSA website.
6. Of course, the quarterly publication of the *Review* - next one will be in July.
7. Fall workshops held by Perimeter Schools. Check with Bobby Scott if you are interested.
8. Tentative plans are being made for a Spring 2010 trip to Ambleside, England to visit the Lake District where Mason lived and worked. Plans will be announced by Fall 2009.

# *Charlotte Mason College (1938-1960) – The Struggle Stateward*

by **Dr. Jack Beckman**

## *Part One*

### *Abstract*

The last two Principals of the College – Joyce van Straubensee and Mary Hardcastle - would see themselves embroiled in an inevitable forward motion – a movement that would lead Charlotte Mason College into the State system of teacher training. Both traces in the historical archives as well as voices of Old Teachers attest to the uncertainty and turbulence of these times, communicating a growing fear that Mason's life work would be forever changed and diminished. In three journal articles the narrative journey will follow this struggle toward State recognition and control.

Miss van Straubensee was on the business side of things – she came from a military family and was very practical. Whereas, dear Miss Hardcastle had her head in the clouds quite a lot – she was the philosopher... Miss Hardcastle was the thinker and Miss van Straubensee was the doer.<sup>1</sup>

Now we come to it... Straub inherited a problem. The PUS was losing numbers and becoming more and more mixed with trained and untrained teachers in its schools. And the College had been losing students for years, so fewer teachers graduated to supply the dwindling PNEU schools... and the State looked more promising to teachers for salary and status. Straub took the only course available... it was the State or nothing.<sup>2</sup>

### *I. Introduction*

What had begun in 1892 as the House of Education, Charlotte Mason's experiment with intending teachers, reached its zenith by the late 1920s. Her applied philosophy of education inscripturated in six books inspired a realised pedagogy of curricula and associated schools with an attempt to infiltrate the rising State system. Hundreds of Charlotte's devotees acted as missionaries dispensing an educational faith founded upon a biblical interpretation of theological principles regarding the nature of the learner, the nature of knowledge, and the relationship of teaching and learning. Intending teachers read and narrated Charlotte's books, plied their craft in the Practising School which implemented the PUS programmes, timetables, and twice yearly examinations, and were themselves involved in an atmosphere of teacher-learner reciprocity. Most graduates faithfully took their places in PUS home schoolrooms and the growing market of schools coalescing around her method. Her work had acknowledged the inequities of the 1862 Reform Act, and in some measure had addressed these same inequities in the wide curriculum of programmes and timetables with its focus upon the learner and knowledge over examinations and information. The demand for young ladies trained under Mason's principles remained steadfast in the years prior to 1934; the PUS and PNEU home schoolrooms throughout the Empire resolutely employed the teacher/governesses sent out from the College. Supply and demand were consonant commodities. The sustainability of the College was based upon this mutual relationship, and yet as we have noted, circumstances of economy, population, and State pedagogy conspired after 1934 to open the way for a trajectory leading to the College's ultimate dissolution in 1960 as a vehicle for Mason's educational gospel. Charlotte's modest empire was unable to assuage the multiple attacks upon many fronts unlike its vast competitor, the State educational machinery.

Moreover a new breed of intending teacher blended into the ranks after Miss Cholmondeley's resignation in 1937, and these were not content with a single unrecognised House of Education certificate:

Whilst coming from a PNEU background myself, I did not want my opportunities narrowed as a teacher. The House of Education certificate was only good in the PNEU schools... if you taught in the local schools, you were considered uncertificated and got a lower salary. Even in the Gloucestershire schools, where some were still using the programmes, if I had taught there... I would have been paid less. And those teachers weren't even trained in the method! I thought that was unfair of them.<sup>3</sup>

As the model slowly diminished after 1934, the *Parents' Review* and *L'Umile Pianta* advertised fewer and fewer positions for new graduates within the frame of the PUS.<sup>4</sup> Potential candidates for the House of Education elected instead to train in the grant-aided State training colleges whereby a recognised certificate with its guaranteed salary and superannuation was the probable outcome. The various strands of circumstance – diminution of teacher need and pupil numbers within the PUS, intending teachers' desire for State certification, and the fee-paid status of the College – intertwined to set a stranglehold on the College. How would the training centred as it was upon the canon and method of Charlotte Mason survive in light of matters which touched more upon fiscal reality than philosophical truth?

This was the question found ringing in the ears of the Ambleside Council as it met 16 March 1937 to consider the application of Miss Joyce van Straubenzee for the post of Principal of the House of Education.<sup>5</sup> In the history of the College after Miss Ma-  
It was 1938; both the War and the ensuing social changes in its wake would soon catch up with Miss Mason's legacy.  
 son's death, there were those who sought to enshrine the model with a view to the memory and work of the Founder. Miss Par-  
 ish, an avid and orthodox devotee, fought the machinations of progressives on the Ambleside Council to keep things as they were in Mason's heyday. On her side were the combined benefits of a full College and thriving PUS for graduates to gain posts, and thus under her regime we saw the effects of taxonomic drift checked – rather in terms of legalistic practice over the spirit of the model. With Miss Cholmondeley the seeds of accommodation to Mason's model were sown as the Ambleside Council progressives maintained a stance of moving with the times and making entreaties towards the State. Unfortunately for Miss Cholmondeley there was no longer the power of numbers in the College or a guarantee in the PUS for posts to become available for graduates. The matter of sheer survival of the College was now on the agenda. It was 1938; both the War and the ensuing social changes in its wake would soon catch up with Miss Mason's legacy.

The next three journal articles seek to explore the life and work of the College through the two last CMT<sup>6</sup> Principals – Joyce van Straubenzee and Mary Hardcastle. What began as a series of accommodating though generally principal moves under Miss Cholmondeley – potential engagement of graduates with the Royal Society of Teachers, modifications to the training scheme, and an optional third year with practice outside the PUS – found concrete application under Miss van Straubenzee. Theory would inextricably become practice as the College adjusted itself to an image made not in the likeness of its creator, but in that of the State. We shall moreover witness the birth pangs of this new image as the college went through its most painful term beginning in 1949. The College, by then an admixture of devotees and State adherents in Staff and students, undertook the administration of a dual-track intending teacher training made up of separate courses of study, practice teaching, and examinations leading to the granting of two certificates – PNEU and State. Although this dual-track model was both a trial devised by the Ministry of Education and the University of Manchester and implemented as a method of phasing in the incipient State model already agreed upon by the Ambleside Council, the ripple of feeling amongst those still devoted to Miss Mason's ideals and practices may be felt to this day.<sup>7</sup> What was considered a 'phasing in' for the State was in actuality a 'phasing out' of Miss Mason's realised pedagogy.

Upon Miss van Straubensee's complicated resignation in 1954, it was left to Miss Mary Hardcastle as her successor to complete the task of assimilation into the State system. As a former student of the College, then Bursar in 1923 and later Vice Principal under Miss van Straubensee, Miss Hardcastle took the College through to its ultimate association with the Westmorland LEA in 1960. At this point, the College and its characteristic philosophy and method ceased to be. 'No more CMTs were trained. The PNEU schools were already drifting away... The PNEU was dying a slow death. Charlotte Mason's time had come and gone.'<sup>8</sup>

## *II. Miss Joyce van Straubensee – Principal, 1938-1954 – From House of Education to Charlotte Mason College*

Having graduated from  
tion in 1923 and served  
tising School in 1924,  
zee returned to Amble-  
pointment to an inde-  
Bath. A realist from a  
forebears, she reviewed  
College, then accepted  
tenure began 1 January  
1954. A combination of

**She stepped into a minefield... and I believe she was the only person who could have taken us through those difficult years.**

pragmatism, and compromise hallmarked Miss van Straubensee's leadership over the College; one in which the overriding concern was for the continuing existence of the institution at any cost.

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She stepped into a minefield... and I believe she was the only person who could have taken us through those difficult years. If we had had a softer person as Principal, the College would have closed before the War. As it was, and because of her hard work, the life of the College was prolonged.<sup>9</sup>

She was a tyrant... but one you respected. I can't say I liked her much, but the College survived because of Straub. She kept the trickle of CMTs going into the PUS into the 1950s. I credit her with not only saving the College, but helping keep the PUS, which was also dying... alive for a time.<sup>10</sup>

With the full backing of the Ambleside Council, Miss van Straubensee created within the College structures necessary to both attract and capture State recognition. The realisation that the narrow and uncertificated training historically provided in the College was meeting resistance even from committed PNEU followers gave her the impetus to proceed on two major fronts. Firstly, the one-year graduate course would evolve into a full-fledged three-year training. This would address the original concerns of the RST, but Miss Straubensee was aiming higher than mere registration of her graduates. No less than full recognition of the College by its affiliation to a University leading to Ministry of Education accession and assimilation would suffice in her machinations. This trajectory of affiliation and recognition was the second objective to which she aspired, and it would be aggressively pursued until achieved. The dilemma in this plan was how to maintain the integrity of Mason's ideals and method whilst raising the academic standards of the students to the level of the Intermediate exam of the London University and expanding the practice teaching into local schools?<sup>11</sup> 'This one thing caused you to love or hate Straub. The old lions vilified her for compromising Miss Mason's work... the young lion's applauded her courage. Who was right? It wasn't always clear.'<sup>12</sup> Reflecting on this conundrum, Professor de Burgh, the College's external examiner for over twenty years, penned his thoughts in a letter to the Ambleside Council in December 1937:

I believe that the House of Education is at present doing something unique in the training of women teachers, and doing it efficiently. The unique thing it does is this, I believe, precisely what Miss Mason spent her life for – a training in character in those who will bear responsibility with children, plus such intellectual equipment as will back up the influence of character and personality. What girls learn at Ambleside now is not to ignore or forget the ancient pieties.... The intellectual side is broad and always intelligently presented; but it does not cut deep. This is where I'm going to be frank. If you are thinking of competing in academic standards with other Universities and Colleges, you'll have to scrap your Staff and buildings, or be content with a third-rate reputation. Whereas you are first-rate at what you are doing now.<sup>13</sup>

In an increasingly specialised teaching world, Charlotte Mason's generalised 'wide curriculum' was seen as less intellectually sufficient in comparison to similar courses of study. The quaintness of a training focussed upon character, personality and 'ancient pieties' did not resonate well in a vocation coveting professional and intellectual status, particularly with those who were in official positions of power.<sup>14</sup>

As a manoeuvre symbolic of both impending transformations and hopeful aspirations, Miss van Straubenzee in January 1938 received the Council's approval to amend the name of the House of Education to Charlotte Mason College. This

Late in 1938, concerned British parents in the PUS were frantically contacting Ambleside for places in the Practising School.

decisive step intended to communicate to the PNEU and official powers the approaching agenda of change agency upon the horizon. Heralded by Professor de Burgh as a positive initial ploy, he wrote this in the December 1938 examination report of the students:

I should like to say that, knowing the College as I do both in Miss Mason's later years and as it is today, I am sure that it is steering the right course between the extremes of conservatism and of innovation, preserving the principles so soundly established at its formation and applying them in new and changing fashion to meet the altered conditions of recent times. This is just what Miss Mason would have done herself had she been living, and what she would have wished her successors to do after her death.<sup>15</sup>

Those 'recent times' to which Professor de Burgh referred were the rumblings of War on the Continent. Late in 1938, concerned British parents in the PUS were frantically contacting Ambleside for places in the Practising School. By War's beginning the numbers had jumped from nearly 50 to 100, as the Lake District seemed to be safe from the dangers of impending bombing.<sup>16</sup> Moreover for the first time a fee was charged for students in attendance, and this combined with a rise in number at the College to 51, upending a budget deficit into modest profits during the war years. By 1941, several other buildings were purchased to house pupils not only from the PUS, but also from Elementary schools in Liverpool and surrounding areas. This influx of children made for long hours and trying times:

There were Staff who stayed down in the Practising School all the time... some of the students also did over and above. We had to deal with homesick children who were naturally more interested in news from Mum and Father than reading and maths. Fortunately, and this is where Charlotte Mason shined, we took the children out for long walks and let them run and play... most of them did not care that food was rationed... as long as the afternoons were free to play...<sup>17</sup>

Keeping up with our studies and sleeping down in the Practising School was hard enough without having to deal with large numbers of evacuated children. I remember one time late at night... the Warden was having his nightly walk-through for the black-out... He quietly knocked on the door of Fairfield, and when the Matron

came to the door in her nightgown, he said, ‘Madam, do your children know there is a War on?’ Well, what had happened is that some of the boys from Liverpool, not PUS, had stolen some candles... and the light from the candles shown through the black-out curtains... and they were playing cards.<sup>18</sup>

Intending teachers and older students of the Practising School worked side-by-side in the College garden and in the raising of hens. ‘When it got really cold... Straub kept the hens in her own room to keep them from freezing.’<sup>19</sup> Rationing made for interesting and unusual fare as was reported by Miss van Straubenzee in her 1942 Principal’s Report to the Council:

We are unable to give the students extra milk this winter owing to the rationing but we have been able to purchase very large supplies of Bemax at very reduced prices so this excellent food was served daily to all students and staff during the Winter term.<sup>20</sup>

Long hours, food, and ters notwithstanding, the training, modifications, unabated. tional third posed to the June 1939, vated by

Yet during the 1940s, the perspective of students, once good-naturedly mocking of the controlling residential aspects of the College and the course of study, began to sound more trenchant in tone...

rationing of fierce wint- standing, with modi- continued An o p- year, pro- Council in was acti- 1941 yet

with few takers. Offering two tracks, an academic course specialising in four subject areas and leading toward the Intermediate Arts Examination or a cultural course in which the student chose two subjects of personal interest, the optional third year became in 1945 a mandatory aspect of the training.<sup>21</sup> The constancy of the method with its reliance upon Mason’s exemplars in the use of her books as primary tools of training, the wide and generalised curriculum, a realised pedagogy in the programmes and timetables, and teacher-learner reciprocity was visible both in College documents and prospectuses<sup>22</sup> and to intending teachers. The features of change and accommodation rather than removing or replacing the characteristic aspects of Mason’s method were functioning as additions to the existing course of study as it had been passed down. Foundational transformations of ultimate consequence would not occur until 1949. Nancy Williamson, a 1929 graduate, came back to the College in 1941 to lecture in English and Nature Studies, and her reflections upon the training at that time seem to read from the 1904 Synopsis:

The ethos of the College hadn’t changed that much... although with the War, things were bigger and busier... What had marked me as a student in 1929... and I’ve never forgotten this, is ‘as with the child, so too the teacher.’ And this fits right along the lines of Miss Mason’s philosophy doesn’t it? First, the personhood of the teacher... then follows the big three – atmosphere, discipline and life. We absorbed these from the training and then took them with us as teachers... It came from the books, the rambles in the Lakes, relations amongst staff and students... and the lovely wide curriculum.<sup>23</sup>

Yet during the 1940s, the perspective of students, once good-naturedly mocking of the controlling residential aspects of the College and the course of study, began to sound more trenchant in tone:

We were young women, for goodness sake... and the whole thing felt like a girl’s boarding school. While the rest of the world was growing up, we felt like children in the nursery... all those rules.... And I wasn’t the only one who felt that way, but one didn’t say anything because of the Staff and students who were so PNEU.<sup>24</sup>

It wasn't until later that students got to practice in local schools and break away from the PUS programmes and method learnt in the College. Don't get me wrong, I loved the PNEU and its approach, but students... were beginning to want something broader.<sup>25</sup>

The problem of the PUS programmes and timetable, a central application of Mason's realised pedagogy, had been addressed on several fronts over the years. At each of the Old Teachers' Conferences since the 1920s, the issues of a crammed syllabus and how teachers might modify the content or book choices came to the fore. State Elementary teachers in the Gloucestershire experiment, not trained in the method, had to cope with insufficient funding to purchase the many books on the syllabus leading to frustration. Official bodies such as the Royal Society of Teachers and the Ministry of Education attacked the narrow and prescriptive nature of the programmes as restricting the teacher to a singular method. Increasingly, devoted workers in the PNEU such as Miss R.A. Pennethorne, PUS School Visitor, noted the pitfalls of the programmes with wistfulness:

The 1904 Synopsis explained the child as both a person with efficacy and innate ability to learn and as a being in need of various habits designed to bring order and structure to the child's life.

The young graduate teachers employed in the larger schools to-day do not want to be restricted to a fixed programme; neither as a rule do the Elementary schools.... The time may come when we ought very seriously decide whether our fixed programme does help most effectively to get the children of the State to share in the rich man's table of literature and life.<sup>26</sup>

Mr Household in this same meeting of Council concurred with Miss Pennethorne's estimations noting that the programmes 'were an undoubted handicap' in some cases, and wondered whether teachers might have in hand specimen programmes from which to create their own.<sup>27</sup> What was at stake in some minds, particularly Miss Pennethorne and Miss Kitching, was no less than Miss Mason's applied philosophy expressed in the realised pedagogy: 'it is the principles and ideas behind [the programmes] which cause a chosen body of material to be offered for the children's opportunities.'<sup>28</sup> A commitment to and understanding of Mason's ideology constrained their educational faith to hold intractably that the programmes were an essential and coherent application of principles espoused in *Home Education* and the 1904 Synopsis. And on the level of intending teacher, these lessons were not lost in the course of training.<sup>29</sup> Looking back to their training after the War years, the programmes helped convey a particular view of the teacher to novice trainees:

The role of the teacher was to guide, to open doors... present pupils with the books and the ideas would flow. Let them [the children] do the work without too much teacher talk. Keep the lessons short and encourage the children to think about the ideas in the book. Narration, yes, after each lesson... The syllabus came from applying Miss Mason's philosophy to what... needed to be learned by the students. It tied the person of the child to the science of relations in the form of a curriculum. The timetable gave you the skeleton and the programmes fleshed it all out... but we had the freedom to modify the curriculum, and there were lots of books on the syllabus to choose from. And children weren't stifled by it – there had to be some structure to learning. Every pupil

brought something different to the programme – no two narrated the same or saw the books exactly the same way. It was structured... but there was freedom too.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, the programmes reinforced a particular view of the child as a learner. The 1904 Synopsis explained the child as both a person with efficacy and innate ability to learn and as a being in need of various habits designed to bring order and structure to the child's life. This balance between the nature of the learner and the need for habit formation found its way into a syllabus which valued both structure and liberty in a kind of controlled freedom. A child without the requisite habits of attention, imagination, reverence, obedience, or allegiance grew up to bear 'insidious fruit' and spoiled potential. The course of study in the PUS was a pedagogical tool operationalising Mason's philosophical tenet describing the child. In later negotiations with both the University of Manchester and the Ministry of Education after 1945, the realised pedagogy would receive singular attention in becoming another bargaining piece leading to recognition.



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#### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Anne Hawkins. CMC 1940. Respondent B11.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Quinn. CMC 1945. Respondent F19b.

<sup>3</sup> Respondent D13. CMC c. 1930s.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the listing of PUS schools in the *Parents' Review*, Vol. LI, No. 2 (February 1940) shows 153 schools on the register, whilst Vol. LVII, No. 6 (June 1946) delineates 127 schools in the Union. Whilst the accuracy of these demographics may be suspect in light of the PUS's laxity in record-keeping, they do indicate a trend downward.

<sup>5</sup> Extraordinary Meeting of the Ambleside Council, 16 March 1937. Box CM36. Armitt Archive.

<sup>6</sup> CMT or Charlotte Mason trained teachers. This refers to those intending teachers who graduated from the College with the House of Education or Charlotte Mason College certificate.

<sup>7</sup> Throughout this period, document and testimony exude an almost 'hoping against hope' attitude that Miss Mason's principles might be spared in some tangible form within the State parameters. Certain animosity towards Miss van Straubenzee may be found in the Old Teachers' Association to this day.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Wood. CMC 1959. Respondent D35.

<sup>9</sup> Eva Hall. CMC 1940. Respondent C20a.

<sup>10</sup> Betty Wharton. CMC 1938. Respondent A2.

<sup>11</sup> Inman, J. (1985). *Charlotte Mason College*. Winchester: Cormorant Press. Page 33.

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Wigan. CMC 1948. Respondent C21.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Essex Cholmondeley's final Report to Council dated 3 January 1938. Box CM35. Armitt Archive.

<sup>14</sup> See for example, the Rev. Costley-White's report of 14 July 1937 in which he lamented the fact that 'the RST was of the opinion that the standard of intellectual and general attainments did not come up to requirements; they also pointed out that the other training colleges had a three-year course as against the Ambleside two... Steps should be taken to amend these deficiencies.' Minutes of the Ambleside Council dated 14 July 1937. Box CM35. Armitt Archive.

- <sup>15</sup> Minutes of the Ambleside Council dated 6 July 1938. Principal's Report on Charlotte Mason College in which Miss van Straubenzee quotes from Professor de Burgh's examination report. Box CM35. Armit Archival.
- <sup>16</sup> Doreen Gladstone. CMC 1940. Respondent C29.
- <sup>17</sup> Rosemary Petherham. CMC 1940. Respondent D33.
- <sup>18</sup> Respondent D14. CMC 1940s.
- <sup>19</sup> Patricia Kenworthy. CMC 1943. Respondent D32.
- <sup>20</sup> Inman, J. (1985). *Charlotte Mason College*. Winchester: Cormorant Press. Page 37. See also Ambleside Council Minutes for 1942, 'Principal's Report.' Box CM36. Armit Archival. Bemax was a wheat germ derivative also used to supplement the diets of farm animals.
- <sup>21</sup> Straubenzee, J. (c. 1940). *PNEU Teaching as a Career for Girls. Training and Prospects*. Pages 6 and 7. Box CM11. Armit Archival.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid. Pages 2 and 3. 'Charlotte Mason's Home Education series is carefully studied throughout the training; "Home Education" by the first year students only, "Parents and Children" by those on their second year of training, "School Education," "Ourselves" and part of "An Essay Towards a Philosophy of Education" by all' (Page 2).
- <sup>23</sup> Nancy Williamson. CMC 1929. Respondent 3.0.
- <sup>24</sup> Respondent D14. CMC 1940s.
- <sup>25</sup> Respondent D15. CMC 1940s.
- <sup>26</sup> Ambleside Council Minutes for 31 January 1939. 'Miss Pennethorne's Report to Council, July 1938 to January 1939.' Box CM36. Armit Archival.
- <sup>27</sup> Ambleside Council Minutes for 31 January 1939. Box CM36. Armit Archival.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid. 'Miss Pennethorne's Report to Council, July 1938 to January 1939.'
- <sup>29</sup> Until 1949 the population of intending teachers, though becoming blended, remained pervasively aligned to the PNEU. Of the 18 interviewed in the sample representing the years 1949 to 1961, 12 taught in PUS schools for some portion of their vocation. Ten of the 12 came from PUS backgrounds themselves. Many of these had similar testimonies to that of Doreen Gladstone (CMC 1940. Respondent C29) upon entry into College life: 'We were sort of young and naïve then and didn't know much about the history of education or educational philosophies or theories – and we took it all in. We did do a bit about people like Froebel and Pestalozzi and so on, but very little – and it was always comparing them with Charlotte Mason and how wonderful she was – we just accepted it... We were just taught that Charlotte Mason was right – full stop. It wasn't until much later that I saw there was truth in her ideas and method of teaching.'
- <sup>30</sup> Margaret Longbourne. CMC 1941. Respondent B13. This sentiment was reflected generally in many respondents' testimonies. The structure of the programmes fulfilled for them the necessary practical applications of Mason's realised pedagogy. Nonetheless, those intending teachers coming from non-PUS backgrounds, expressly after 1945, had different notions

## Coming Soon - A trip to Ambleside, England

Watch for information coming this Fall 2008 on a trip in the Spring of 2010 to visit Ambleside, England. There is much to see and do: Visit the Charlotte Mason College. See the beautiful Lake District that Mason enjoyed so much. Visit the homes of William, Mary and Dorothy Wordsworth. Attend church where Mason attended church and much much more. College Credit will be available.

# Improved reading comprehension through retelling

by Jennifer Spencer

## Abstract

*The purpose of reading is to construct meaning from text (Brown & Cambourne, 1987, p. 9), yet many children have difficulty comprehending what they read even if they can pronounce all the words on the page. Traditional comprehension questions help, but they tend to focus on the lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. It has also been argued that traditional questions produce too much information for the student (Mason, 1925b, p.257-8). Ideally, children should be able to evaluate information as they read in order to discern what is important, organize it, and then present it to others (Benson & Cummins, 2004, p.22). So how do we get children to this point? Some feel the answer lies in retelling. This study was designed to determine whether reading comprehension can be significantly improved by teaching children how to effectively retell what they have read.*

*This paper begins with my purpose for the investigation and a description of the current paradigm of education. A discussion on brain research regarding learning and memory is then followed by an explanation of how retelling fits into the picture. Three different models of retelling are described and compared. The first model is that of Charlotte Mason, an English educator who is best known for her book series on educational theory and practice published in 1925. The second model comes from Hazel Brown and Brian Cambourne, whose research on the topic was published in 1987. The third model comes from Vickie Benson and Carrice Cummins (2004), who expanded on the work of Brown and Cambourne in 2004. The empirical study portion of this work includes a description of the hybrid program I implemented with my class of fifteen students and the results I obtained.*

## Background

Years ago, before I ever heard the name "Charlotte Mason," I was a second grade teacher in a public school. The reading program we used looked a lot like the ones I remember from my own primary school years: thick hardback anthologies which were most often paired with small decodable books. You probably have your own

memories of round robin reading sessions followed by a list of questions put forth by the teacher (which I later discovered came not from her, but from the margins in her teacher's edition!). When I grew up, I also used those questions found in the margins of the teacher's edition, along with comprehension tests which were given after re-reading the same story for a week. I remember thinking

...even when using progressive teaching methods, the tendency to rely on traditional comprehension questions for assessment is still strong.

how insipid some of the questions were, and I was very frustrated at having to spend an entire week preparing my students to answer them. Finding Mason and her writing on narration was a liberating experience for me in that regard.

The teaching of language arts has, thankfully, progressed somewhat as teachers have embraced ideas such as whole language, whole literature, and literature circles (to name but a few). However, even when using progressive teaching methods, the tendency to rely on traditional comprehension questions for assessment is still strong. This is understandable, since the standardized tests that play such a huge role in education today use this format. Teachers and administrators seem to be reluctant to stray too far. So when I had the opportunity to research an area of education, I decided to try to find current research that supports the ideas behind narration. I also wanted concrete evidence that narra-

tion works and is a viable alternative to comprehension questions.

## Current Brain Research

The field of brain research is still in its fledgling stage, but new technologies have provided scientists with more information than ever before about how the brain learns. In her book, *Brain Matters*, Patricia Wolfe (2001) states that the brain is bombarded with a tremendous amount of information every second. It discards 99% of this information almost immediately because it is not needed (p. 80). What is not discarded stays in the working memory for about eighteen seconds, without rehearsal, before being discarded (p. 94).

If the information is rehearsed or is personally significant to the individual, it goes on to the long term memory, which

is fairly permanent but not always completely accurate (p. 77). In order for teachers to prevent information from being discarded, they must use strategies for learning which follow one or more of five possible paths to the long-term memory: semantic (understanding words), episodic (associated with location), procedural (repetition of movement), automatic (conditioned response triggered by a stimulus), or emotional (feelings). Of these paths, the semantic, which many teachers rely heavily upon, is the least effective, while the emotional takes precedence over every other path to long-term memory (Sprenger, 1999, p. 50-55).

The implication that emotional engagement may hold the key to long-term retention could be because there is a shorter distance from the place in the brain where information is initially processed to the place where emotions are stored than to any other storage area. In addition, emotionally charged events or ideas are “stamped with extra vividness” (Wolfe, 2001, p. 105). Teachers can enhance learning through emotions by using such strategies as acting things out, building models, using real-world problems and situations, using graphic organizers, utilizing discovery learning,

listening to guest speakers, and taking field trips (p. 109).

In addition to soliciting emotion, helping students make connections is an important aid to facilitating learning. Researchers have estimated that the working memory can hold about seven items at a time as it decides whether to discard them or send them on to long-term memory, however, if the learner can organize the incoming information into chunks by making connections, the working memory is able to handle much more (Wolfe, 2001, p. 98). In other words, while you cannot increase the number of items the working memory can process at a time, you can make those seven items larger through chunking. It has even

been argued that the major difference between experts and novices in a field is that experts tend

Whatever activities are chosen by the teacher, the key to long-term retention seems to be allowing students to wrestle with problems themselves and act on the information in their own ways.

to organize information into much larger chunks because of experience (Wolfe, 2001, p. 100). Charlotte Mason (1925a) called this phenomenon the “Law of Association” and compared connecting new information with previously-learned material to forging “links in a chain to draw [a] bucket out of a well” (p. 157), meaning that connections help students retrieve stored information when it is needed.

While it is important to link new information to that which has been previously learned, the mind makes the strongest links between new information and relevant personal experiences (Wolfe, 2001, p. 105). Therefore teachers should help students learn to develop their own mind ‘webs,’ in which pieces of data are related to one another and to experiences instead of randomly scattered. They should also have students interact with material in ways that are physical and concrete instead of abstract (Caine, Caine, McCintic, & Klimek, 2005, p. 5). Authentic problems and tasks, projects, simulations and role-plays can be very effective (Wolfe, 2001, p. 140-146). Using graphic organizers, peer teaching, summarizing, and paraphrasing can also enhance the construction

of relationships (Sprenger, 1999, p. 65). Whatever activities are chosen by the teacher, the key to long-term retention seems to be allowing students to wrestle with problems themselves and act on the information in their own ways. The teacher must not pre-digest material for the students. Charlotte Mason (1925b) warns that, “We err when we allow our admirable teaching to intervene between children and the knowledge their minds demand” (p. 247). Trying to tell or explain relationships (or chunks) to others is ineffective. Students must make these connections on their own. In the words of Patricia Wolfe (2001), “...the person doing the work is the one growing the dendrites” (p. 187).

Brain researchers have also found that the atmosphere of the classroom can be a powerful predictor of student learning. Caine, Caine, McClintic, and Klimmek (2005) define the optimal atmosphere for learning as a state of “relaxed alertness”. This means that students should feel challenged without feeling threatened (p. 4-5). They also write that learning is enhanced through social interaction, emotional connections with information, and an ability to see patterns (p. 4). Sprenger (1999) agrees, writing that dendrites in the brain grow best when students are allowed interaction with peers and are active explorers in an enriched environment (p. 14). The absence of threat is important, as tension makes the body release cortisol, which inhibits brain function (p. 27). Teamwork and social learning reduce tension in students (p. 28). But there are other benefits to peer teaching as well. Peer teaching allows for rehearsal of information. It also increases student accountability, which leads to better attention to material. Finally, it increases student ability to organize information mentally (Wolfe, 2001, p.186).

## Rationale for Retelling

It has been established, then, that educators are to value active engagement of students, emotional and experiential relevance, the forging of connections, student interaction, and a relaxed yet

challenging atmosphere. How does retelling accomplish all of these? Retelling has its roots in Constructivist theory, which states that true learning can only take place when a person labors with an idea until he builds meaning for himself. According to Benson and Cummins (2004), a child’s retelling is his construction of meaning (p. 9). It encompasses not only a literal recall of story events and characters, but also allows for interpretation of theme, stylistic devices, and text structure (Brown & Cambourne, 1987, p. 9).

Retelling also forces every student to be actively engaged with the reading process. Each child has an opportunity to hear and/or read the story, and then to respond to the story either orally, in writing, or by illustration (Gudwin, 2002, p. 5). One of Charlotte Mason’s contemporaries, G.F. Husband (1924), wrote in an issue of the *Parent’s Review* that narration (retelling) demands “sustained effort from each pupil and also compels the teacher to get at the back of the mind of all scholars,” while “oral questions must be of a lighter type and only the answers to one or two can be dealt with” (p. 22). In the same article, he writes that, in using traditional comprehension questions, all the real thinking is done by the person asking the questions. If the

child himself must supply both the question and the answer, then he must be actively engaged and build his own relationships (Husband, 1924. p. 21). In short, one cannot retell what he does not know (Mason, 1925b, p. 257-8).

During the retelling process, students are allowed ample opportunity to interact with one another. While sharing and comparing retellings, students are exposed to the original text, their own retellings, and their peers’ retellings (Brown & Cambourne, 1987, p. 9). As discussed earlier, this rehearsal of information with a high level of engagement is a good way for material to be stored in the long-term memory, making retelling a very effective strategy for learning information from content areas such as science or history. Expressing information to others in one’s own words allows children to take ownership of concepts (Cambourne, 1995, p. 188). It allows the reader to try

If the child himself must supply both the question and the answer, then he must be actively engaged and build his own relationships (Husband, 1924. p. 21).

out ideas, make suggestions, and self-correct in an atmosphere of low anxiety. Since people interpret what they read differently, sharing with peers helps students expand their thinking and build “shared meaning” (Goodman, 1982, p. 306). As students interact with a text and each other, they are using their own background, experiences, and vocabulary to understand and interpret the text (Goodman, 1982, p. 302) while helping to enhance each others’ background, experiences, and vocabulary.

Another benefit to the retelling method is that students are required to use a complex and metacognitive thought process. There is a continual shift of focus between the whole text, individual words, and interpretations of phrases.

Readers develop flexibility as they learn to alternate from skimming to deep engagement with text and from global to molecular levels, as the need arises (Brown & Cambourne, 1987, p.9, 11).

Research has shown that retelling leads to significant gains in comprehension. One study found that sequencing, story structure, and language complexity increased after just eight weeks of retelling (Morrow, 1985, p. 656). Teachers who have tried it in their classrooms have said that retelling helped them pinpoint specific strengths and weaknesses, which aided them in communication with parents about student progress (Botel, Luna, & Broderick, 2000, p. 11). Even students who were interviewed about their experience with retelling said that they were more confident readers and better understood what they read than before learning how to retell. They also indicated that it helped them learn and pronounce new words and solve problems, and that such deep interaction with the texts helped them understand how to achieve certain effects in their own writing (Brown & Cambourne, 1987, p. 10). Researchers especially tout the benefits of using retelling with

less proficient readers, since it requires the learner to focus attention on organizing and restructuring the text in a holistic way (Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, & Heathington, 1988, p. 892). Botel et al.(2000) suggests that retelling can be a comfortable place to start for reluctant writers (p. 7). In regard to testing, a positive correlation was found between improvement in retelling and improvement in comprehension (Morrow, 1985, p. 657).

Yetta Goodman (1982) stated that, while no post-reading procedure offers a complete picture of comprehension, retelling does allow the least amount of constraint (as compared with other methods) on representing what the child has comprehended (p. 302). In addition to including all of the elements necessary for long-term retention of knowledge, researchers and instructors have noticed some very happy coincidences. For example, interacting frequently with a variety of texts promotes incidental learning of text structure, vocabulary, and conventions (Brown & Cambourne, 1987, p. 110). Some teachers have used retelling to improve student comprehension of math word problems and seen a

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dramatic improvement in student performance (Pinzker, 2001, p. 36). Children were better equipped to pick out the important information and to understand more complex problems than before (Monroe, Black, & Buhler, 2002, p. 7). Teachers have also reported some very practical benefits to using retelling in their classrooms. It is easy to prepare and easily adaptable for many learning abilities. It also beautifully integrates all of the language arts with a minimum of teacher effort (Brown & Cambourne, 1987, p. 9). Finally, using retelling can help students learn the habit of attending to what they read (Mason, 1925c, p. 179).

### The Ideas of Charlotte Mason

Charlotte Mason was an educator from the turn of the last century whose writings on educa-

tional philosophy, theory, and practice are relevant to the topic of retelling. Her fight against the testing culture that was sweeping her native England is mirrored in the dismay of many twenty-first century educators in America. She spoke fervently against the rigid traditional English classroom structure, favoring instead a nurturing atmosphere where children were allowed “freedom within the pasture” to actively explore the world in which they lived. However, students were held accountable for their learning through a method she called “narration.” And of the three methods described in this paper, hers is most certainly the simplest. The following description is a synopsis of Mason’s remarks on the subject of narration from *School*

*Education* (1925c, p. 179-181) and *Home Education* (1925b, p. 231-233).

As soon as children are able to speak, they eagerly tell about events they have experienced or witnessed to anyone who will listen. Mason urged educators to harness the power of this natural language function in school. Her developmental approach to retelling began with listening to the tales of very young children when they appear and encouraging elaboration. Once the child reaches the age of about six, he is ready to begin orally retelling stories. Mason was insistent that parents and teachers should choose books carefully, making sure to use only those that are deeply interesting and of literary value. She also believed that texts should be original and unabridged, and that large works be taken in their entirety, not in an excerpt format.

Teachers of six-year-olds should begin by orally reading classic fairy tales, Bible stories, or animal stories. Since the attention span of a child this age is short, Mason recommended reading two or three pages (or one episode from the book), and then asking the child to orally retell what he remembered. The next day, the teacher and children

would talk briefly about what was previously read before taking up where they left off. As students got older, they began to read stories and nonfiction text for themselves while continuing to narrate orally. Mason waited until the skills of writing were automatic (usually around the age of nine) before asking children to write their narrations. Older students narrated information from their content area books as well as literary pieces. Mason’s approach was based on the developmental level of each individual student and relied heavily on a teacher’s ability to observe students and make judgments about when a child was ready for the next phase of narration.

One of Mason’s unique elements was her insistence that narration take place after only *one* careful reading. It was her belief that much time is wasted in classrooms because of

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constant review made necessary by inattention, and that the habit of attention can be strengthened through training the mind to attend the *first* time. Once careful attention became the standard for her students, they were able to cover much more in a school year than their peers in traditional classrooms. To be confident that the learning taking place was not merely short-term memorization, students completed a comprehensive exam at the end of the term that consisted entirely of narration. Instead of merely having to match or recognize answers, students had to tell or write what they knew about a given topic in their own words and relate it to other topics of study. These exams truly did get at the back of the students’ minds so that the teacher could see exactly what had been internalized by the child.

### Other Models for Retelling

Hazel Brown and Brian Cambourne (1987) are Australian educators. In their book, *Read and Retell*, they describe the methods they used to bol-

ster reading comprehension in a whole-language classroom. In contrast to Charlotte Mason, this team implemented a model of retelling using photocopies of short reading passages instead of whole books. Students were also allowed multiple readings of a passage. Their procedure is as follows (p. 32-34):

- 1) Prepare:
  - a. Immerse students in the topic to be covered for several days in order to build background knowledge.
  - b. Make a copy of the passage for each student.
  - c. Fold the paper so that only the title is showing.
- 2) Predict:
  - a. After looking at the title, students write 1-2 sentences on the back of their sheets predicting what the passage will be about.
  - b. Based on this prediction, students write a list of words or phrases they might expect to encounter in the passage.
  - c. Students read their predictions aloud.
  - d. Each student then makes a comment on someone else's prediction.
- 3) Read:
  - a. Orally (by the teacher or students) or silently
  - b. Students should be able to read the passage as many times as they need to.
- 4) Retell:
  - a. Students are asked to write the story for someone who has not read it.
  - b. They are not allowed to look back in the passage.
- 5) Share and Compare:
  - a. Students read their retellings to a partner.

- b. Students ask one another the following questions:
  - i. What did you include in your retelling that I did not? (and vice-versa)
  - ii. Why did you choose to include (or omit) this bit?
  - iii. Do you think I muddled or changed anything that alters the meaning?
  - iv. Did you use any words different from the passage that mean the same thing? (paraphrasing)
  - v. If you could take part of mine to include in yours, which part would you take?

The Benson and Cummins' model (2004) moves students through four distinct stages of retelling with various levels of scaffolding.

While this method is a little more structured than Mason's, the authors stress that their classrooms were relaxed and pleasant during retelling activities. The above procedure could take from one to several days to complete, depending on the topic being read. Brown and Cambourne recommend that the passages alternate between fiction and nonfiction, easy and more difficult, predictable and not predictable, etc. They also note that both oral and silent reading be paired with both oral and written retelling.

Vicki Benson and Carrice Cummins (2004), two Louisiana educators, knew that the ideas of Brown and Cambourne (1987) were good in theory, but were frustrated in the implementation of their retelling model. In *The Power of Retelling*, they write that their results were less-than-stellar because their students had not mastered foundational skills necessary in order to write a good retelling. These authors suggest that, while oral retelling is a natural function, written retelling is developmental and should be taught explicitly in an incremental way. Students must be shown how to organize information so that the retelling is complete and cohesive and not merely a collection of random facts. They also note that written retellings are very different

from oral retellings in that they must be able to be understood out of context by someone who is not familiar with the story. Like Mason (1925a, b and c), their program uses quality whole literature instead of copied reading passages. However, the stories used are short picture books instead of episodes in a novel. There is also very little mention of using retelling with nonfiction text.

The Benson and Cummins' model (2004) moves students through four distinct stages of retelling with various levels of scaffolding. These stages are "Pretelling", "Guided Retelling", "Story Map Retelling", and "Written Retelling". The beginning stages have students relying on pictures or props at first in order to support them in their retelling. Then they move into using graphic organizers to help sequence, tie ideas together, and organize thoughts. Finally, students are ready to write cohesive narrations which include not only plot, but characters, setting, theme, personal connections, and interpretations.

When all four stages have been mastered, one story per week will be read for retelling using the following procedure, which is similar in many ways to the Brown and Cambourne (1987) model:

1. Predict plot and vocabulary
2. Share and compare rationales for predictions
3. Read the story (orally or silently)
4. Confirm/Disconfirm predictions
5. Complete the Go! Chart (graphic organizer)
6. Share and compare categories
7. Retell the story

### Description of My Program

Each of the three methods of retelling previously described have their merits and their limits. My objective was to take the best ideas from each, based on current research, and develop a hybrid program that might optimize results. I began with the Benson and Cummins model because I liked the explicit and incremental instruction of foundational skills necessary for writing good retellings. I also liked the fact that these authors value the inclusion of connections to other texts and prior knowledge in student retellings. I decided to move my students through the four stages of retelling as

described in *The Power of Retelling* using picture books.

I also value Charlotte Mason's belief that children should read works of classic literature in their entirety and retell episodes daily. Since the curriculum for fourth grade in my school contains this element, I included it in my program as well. Mason's idea that one careful reading should be sufficient was appealing because of her insistence that it strengthens the habit of attention. This I also included in my model.

Finally, Brown and Cambourne used short photocopied reading passages of both fiction and nonfiction. Since students often have more difficulty comprehending pieces of nonfiction, I thought this element would be valuable. Also, even if one does not agree with the current emphasis on standardized tests, students still must take them. These short passages would be ideal practice in silent reading comprehension.

The challenge then was to create a cohesive program using all of these elements. For this, I drew on my background in early childhood education. I decided to develop thematic units around the novels in my school's curriculum which included related picture storybooks, nonfiction trade books, and related fiction and nonfiction reading passages from a comprehension test practice resource. To track the progress of my students' retelling abilities, I also developed rubrics for both fiction and nonfiction retellings.

Two units were used during this study, which lasted twelve weeks. The first was built around the novel *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell (1971). The second was created around *Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls (1961). As we read the books aloud together chapter by chapter, I would call on students to orally retell each episode. We then recorded our retellings in comic strip form, where children illustrated the chapter and wrote a short caption. We also completed the Benson and Cummins Go! Chart on our wall as we went through the books. (Using sticky notes instead of writing on the chart paper made it possible to change our predictions, connections, etc. as we went along.) At the end of each novel, students were asked to use their comic strips to write a retelling of the story. These writings were assessed using a rubric.

While we were reading these novels, we were also reading nonfiction trade books that were related to the theme. For *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, we read about otters, oceans, shells, Indians of the Pacific Islands, and sea life. During *Where the Red Fern Grows*, we found books about dogs, the Ozark Mountains, raccoons, and hunting. After reading, we would display the information using various graphic organizers. As per the Benson and Cummins model, these began with much modeling, and teacher support was gradually decreased until the children could create or complete the organizers on their own.

Fictional picture books that fit with each unit and retelling stage were also read aloud each week. After spending one week on Pretelling, I used these books to gradually move my class through the four Benson and Cummins stages.

Finally, students were given one reading passage per week during most weeks of the study to use as Brown and Cambourne recommended, with the exception that students were only allowed one careful reading. These passages were taken from a teacher resource called *Reading for Understanding: Grades 3-4* (Flikkema, 2002) and 5-6 (Wallaker, 2002). Both fiction and nonfiction passages were chosen to fit with the themes of the units. Student retellings were assessed using rubrics developed with RubiStar Rubric Maker for Teachers.

To investigate the correlation between this program and overall reading comprehension levels, I administered Tests One and Two from the Ekwall-Shanker Reading Inventory (Shanker & Ekwall, 2000). Test One is a graded word list, used to help the administrator determine where to begin Test Two. Test Two consists of passages which alternate between being read orally and silently by the student. These passages are followed by a set of ten comprehension questions asked orally by the test administrator. Using these tests, it is possible to determine the student's independent, instructional, and frustrational reading levels.

## Results and Conclusion

After only twelve weeks of using this program, my students came up an average of two grade levels in reading comprehension, as measured by the Ekwall-Shanker test. This is significant for the Mason community because these were students who had been in a Mason school since kindergarten and were very familiar with narration. I thought it was interesting to note that, individually, this gain was fairly consistent whether a student was below, at, or above grade level at the beginning of the study. The results of this project suggest that there is a positive correlation between learning to retell effectively and improving reading comprehension.

In analyzing each component of my program, I felt that the least effective piece was the written retellings about a photocopied passage, as used by Brown and Cambourne. The students seemed to think it drudgery. Even though the topics were related to the units being studied, the passages seemed irrelevant and stilted. To be fair to these researchers, I did not use the passages they published in *Read and Retell*, because I thought it would be more beneficial for the passages to be related to our topics of study. Still, I think the Charlotte Mason and Benson and Cummins models were much more natural because they used real literature. Students

After only twelve weeks of using this program, my students came up an average of two grade levels in reading comprehension, as measured by the Ekwall-Shanker test.

were already familiar with Mason's process of orally retelling the sequence of events from an episode after one careful reading, so this came easily for them. What Benson and Cummins added was the higher-level thinking skills. The star of this program has to be the "Go! Chart." At the beginning of my study, the students seemed indifferent to the chart, except for idle curiosity about the large expanse of paper hanging on our back wall. As I read our novels aloud, I modeled the thinking process for making predictions and connecting what was happening in the story with things that we had read about in other stories or things that had happened to me personally. After a few days, the students began to timidly share their thoughts

and write them on sticky-notes to be hung on the chart. As we continued the story, they would add to or change what they had written before. It took about two weeks for my class to be transformed from a group of passive listeners to a group of excited, active participants in the reading process. It became a friendly competition to see who could piece together the clues and correctly predict what would happen next. Since the completion of the twelve-week program period, I have continued to use this element. Our current novel, *Crispin and the Cross of Lead* by Avi (2004), is so full of twists and turns it usually keeps my students guessing right up to the end. This class had the whole plot unraveled about a third of the way into the book, and are ecstatic to see their predictions being confirmed.

The Go! Chart also helped my students develop their written retellings. At first, retellings were skimpy, scattered, and plot-driven. By the end, students were including predictions, connections, interpretations, generalizations, and in-depth character and setting descriptions. This is probably because the rubrics I used held them accountable for such things, but it demonstrates a deeper level of thought and understanding than was previously shown.

Those of us who practice the philosophy and methods of Charlotte Mason already use narration and intuitively understand its value. My hope is that readers of this article will feel reaffirmed and empowered by seeing that this method is being substantiated in contemporary mainstream research. Teaching our students how to narrate completely, insightfully, and cohesively equips them with tools for connecting and organizing knowledge and language in a way that will benefit them throughout their school years and their lives.

#### *About the Author*

Jennifer Spencer has taught eleven years in public, private, and home schools. She is currently a fourth-grade teacher and the assistant director of The Village School of Gaffney in Gaffney, South Carolina. She holds a baccalaureate degree in early childhood education and a masters degree in elementary education, and she is currently pursuing a doctoral degree. If you would like to view this project in its entirety, including rubrics, lesson plans, and student samples, you can reach the author

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# FLOWER-TEACHING.

By Dorothea Beale

Taken from *The Parents' Review* Volume III 1892/3 pages 267-278

Note: Greek words and Bible reference that were illegible are marked with ??.

The Editor of the *Parents' Review* has asked leave to print the collection of "Daisy Poems," made for the *Cheltenham Ladies' College Magazine*; and at her request I write a few introductory words.

There is surely nothing in Nature of greater educational value than flowers. Children take a wonderful delight in them. I know one who was taken to a Zoological Gardens when she was about three. She was a London child, and had never seen growing daisies. She could not be induced to look at the strange animals, but threw herself on the grass, crying: "Daisies, daisies!" and to this day, more than half a century after, the memory of those first flowers which she gathered and brought to her home is a delightful memory. To her the first sight of the delicate crane's-bill, of a magnificent spike of black mullin, are like Wordsworth's vision of the "cloud of golden daffodils."

The love of flowers should be fostered in all--there is a kind of botany suitable for every age. The shape, the colour, the ever-changing form of the plant, first develops the love of the beautiful, later the observing faculty is cultivated, and the sense of order when the child is led to count the petals, stamens, &c., and to form classified collections, to name the different kinds of leaves, and to trace their shapes. It is important, however, not to weary children with hard names, but let them learn the popular ones which appeal to the imagination, as the fox-glove, the columbine, &c.

And I would ever associate science and poetry. For this purpose we have formed in Division III. class-books, to which each child has contributed one page. Each has laid out on a large sheet of paper her plant, named the different parts, sought for some poem about her flower, and copied it in. Then the different sheets have been bound together into one volume.

Those who are a little older, join our botanical club, to which they subscribe. The club makes country excursions, the members write papers, and they sometimes treat themselves to a lecture from some distinguished professor. At our last Field Club *conversazione* we had specimen glasses, with all the wild flowers,

eighty in number, which the members had been able to procure, and the name and place were given where each was found. Professor Lloyd Morgan lectured.

The elder girls study rather the physiology of plants, watch processes under the microscope, and learn to look with reverent eyes on the marvellous transformations of organic life.

Surely it is not possible to do this without also feeling that the visible is but the phenomenon of the invisible. It was thus that the Vedist philosopher began his teaching:

*Father.*--"Fetch me a fruit of Nyagrodha tree. Break it. What do you see there?"

*Son.*--"These seeds, almost infinitesimal."

*Father.*--"Break one of them. What do you see there?"

*Son.*--"Not anything, sir."

The Father said: "My son, that subtle essence which you do not perceive, of that very essence this great Nyagrodha tree exists. Believe it, my son. That which is the subtle essence, in it all that exists has itself. It is the True, it is the Self, and Thou, O, Ivetaketu, art It."

Or, as our own poet has expressed it:

"Flower in the crannied wall,  
I pluck you out of the crannies;  
Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,  
Little flower--but if I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is."

And so as we "consider the lilies," we feel that they are "sacraments," outward signs of the inward and spiritual. I may perhaps quote from my own address on the formation of our Guild; for certainly our emblem has enabled us to grasp some spiritual truths:

The love  
of flowers  
should be  
fostered in  
all--there is  
a kind of  
botany  
suitable  
for every  
age.

"Inasmuch as things that are in any sense organic or spiritual live, not by outward planning and arrangement, but by the animating thought, by the power of the ideal, we have chosen a symbol which should express the ideal of our Guild. We first thought of a Britomart locket or medal, but one soon felt that even a poet's ideal, however thoughtful, may be exhausted, that it lacks the vitality and suggestiveness of those wonderful hieroglyphics--*Ἡ ποδείματα τῶν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς*--the sacraments of nature, the living ideas fresh from God's hand. These are like an ever-flowing fountain of beautiful thoughts. They speak, too, a universal language, they breathe a music which comes out of the depths of the Unseen, and unite in one communion those who are separated by merely articulate words. And so we thought of the Lord's words about the lilies, of their beautiful forms and their wonderful teaching.

"Who can understand the mystery of growth? What is that untiring, that unresting energy, by which the lilies work, though they toil not! Does the seed arise by its own inward power? Nay, the life is there, but it needs the baptizing sunlight; then when the heavenly influence is borne upon the wings of the mediating aether (the invisible, the all-pervading, within which the music of creation sleeps), it touches the living seed, and thrills the earnest heart, which, trembling to the heavenly music, rises from the grave, and clothes itself with beauty, 'for God giveth it a body.' And then begins a redemptive work--a work from which it cannot cease whilst it lives; with glad, increasing energy it draws ever more and more of the dead things into the stream of life, and purifies everything corrupt, and clothes these, too, with beauty; it images that eternal life that is ever working, yet ever resting.

"We have chosen a flower, planted in our meadows with no niggard hand, which grows freely and costs nothing, but which may be represented in various ways, or made into a badge with a special meaning for the initiated. Our open daisy is the emblem of the soul that cometh to light--closed, it is the pearl of flowers, the Margaret, emblem of purity. The daisy may represent the single eye. It is the true sunflower, the real heliotrope, that stands ever gazing upward. It is changed into an image of the sun himself; it is like a censor, ever burning towards heaven, a speck of heavenly beauty, a star come down to brighten the dark places of the earth. 'It is,' writes Ruskin, 'infinitely dear, as the bringer of light, ruby, white and gold; the three colours of the day, with no hue of shade in it.' 'Golden heart and silver rays,' write Lady Welby, 'a type of prayer and praise, formed like the sun. And it opens as wide as it can--stretches open. When darkness comes, it closes, keeping itself for the sun's eyes only. Type of truth--true to its God-given nature, looking to its life-giving sun.'

Consider the lilies.

"But listen to the words of Him who is the poet's teacher. 'Consider the lilies.' Perhaps no daisy decked the pathway of our King, when He uttered these words.

"But if not, the daisy may be our lily. It shall be for us the eye by which the whole being is filled with light, the single eye that gazes steadfastly upwards, ever seeking the truth alone.

"So we want our Guild members to brighten their home whilst they have one, to bring down the sunlight into it.

"See, too, what a prim flower the daisy it--quite a model of neatness, the centre of exquisitely formed lilies, the petals pure white, never crumpled, never out of place. And it is so persevering that it can scarcely be destroyed, and so humble and hardy that it can scarcely be hurt by storm or wind. And there is a quiet, self-respecting independence of character; you never see it turning towards other flowers; it can only look up. So we want our members to be faithful in that which is least, to be orderly, systematic, persevering, not easily beaten and discouraged, not over-careful about the world's applause or censure.

"The daisy blossoms on the grave, and tells us of the sure and certain hope, of brightness out of sorrow--death clothed upon, of life (2 Cor. v. 2).

"These are Thy wonders, Lord of Power,  
Killing and quickening, bringing down to hell,  
And up to Heaven."

POEMS ON THE DAISY. \*

(\*we regret that we have not space for the whole of Miss Beale's delightful "Daisy" anthology.)

Of all the flowris in the mede,  
Then love I most these flowris white and rede,  
Soche that men callen daisies in our town.  
To hem have I so great affection,  
As I sayd erst, when comen is the Maie,  
That in my bedde there dawneth me no daie  
That I n'am up and walking in the mede,  
To seen this floure agenst the sunne sprede.  
When it upriseth early by the morrow;  
That blisful sight softeneth all my sorrow;  
So glad am I when that I have presence  
Of it, to doen it all reverence.  
As she that is of all flow'res the flow'r,  
Fulfilled of all virtue and honour,  
And ever alike fair and fresh hue  
As well in winter as in summer new.

\* \* \* \* \*

My busie ghost, that thirsteth always new,  
 To seen this floure so young, so fresh of hewe,  
 Constrained my with so greedy desire,  
 That in my feart I fele yet the fire  
 That made me rise ere it were daie,  
 For to been at the resurrection  
 Of this floure, when that it should unclose  
 Again the sun that rose as redde as rose;  
 And down on knees anon right I me sette,  
 And as I could, this fresh floure I grette,  
 Kneeling always, till it unclosed was,  
 Upon the small, softe, swete gras,  
 That was with floures swete embroidered all.

\* \* \* \* \*

And whan that it is eve I renne blithe,  
 As sone as ever the sun ginneth west,  
 To seen this floure, how it woll go to rest,  
 For fear of night; so hateth she darknesse.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Daisy is sacred to the wife of Admetos, to  
 The great goodness of the Queen Alceste  
 That turned was into a daisie.  
 She that for her husband chose to die,  
 And eke to fo to hell, rather than he;  
 And Hercules rescued her, parde,  
 And brought her out of hell again to blisse!

\* \* \* \* \*

Her white corowne beareth of it wisse;  
 For all so many virtues had she,  
 As small florounes in her corowne be.

CHAUCER'S *Legend of Good Women*

There began anon  
 A lady for to sing right womanly  
 A bargaret in praising the daisy;  
 For, as methought, among her notes sweet  
 She said, "Si douce est la Margaret!"

*Flower and Leaf.*

The daisy and the buttercup,  
 For which the laughing children stoop,  
 A hundred times throughout the day,  
 In their rude romping summer play,  
 So thickly now the pasture crowd,  
 In gold and silver sheeted cloud

As if the drops of April showers  
 Had woo'd the sun and changed to flowers.  
 CLARE'S *Shepherd's Calendar.*

Wee, modest, crimson-tipped flower,  
 Thou's met me in an evil hour;  
 For I maun crush among the stoure  
 Thy slender stem;  
 To spare thee now is past my power,  
 Thou bonnie gem.

BURNS.

Of lowly fields you think no scorn,  
 Yet gayest gardens would adorn,  
 And grace wherever set;  
 How seated in your lowly bower,  
 Or wedded, a transplanted flower,

I bless you, Margaret.

\* \* \* \* \*

In youth from rock to rock I went,  
 From hill to hill in discontent  
 Of pleasure high and turbulent,  
 Most pleased when most uneasy;  
 But now my own delights I make,  
 My thirst at every rill can slake,  
 And gladly Nature's love partake,  
 Of Thee, sweet daisy!



Thee Winter in the garland wears  
 That thinly decks his few grey hairs;  
 Spring parts the clouds with softest airs  
 That she may sun thee;  
 Whole Summer fields are thine by right;  
 And Autumn, melancholy wight,  
 Doth in thy crimson head delight,  
 When rains are on thee.

In shoals and bands, a morrice train,  
 Thou greet'st the traveller in the lane;  
 Pleased at his greeting thee again,  
 Yet nothing daunted,  
 Nor grieved if thou be set at nought;  
 And oft alone in nooks remote  
 We meet thee, like a pleasant thought,  
 When such are wanted.

Be violets in their secret mews  
 The flowers the wanton Zephyrs choose;  
 Proud be the rose, with rains and dews  
     Her head impearling.

Thou liv'st with less ambitious aim,  
 Yet hast not gone without thy fame;  
 Thou art indeed by many a claim  
     The Poet's darling.

If to a rock from rains he fly,  
 Or, some bright day of April sky,  
 Imprisoned by hot sunshine lie

With kindred gladness;  
 And when, at dusk, by dews opprest  
 Thou sink'st, the image of thy rest  
 Hath often eased my pensive breast  
     Of careful sadness.

And all day long I number yet  
 All seasons through another debt,  
 Which I, wherever thou art met,  
     To thee am owing;  
 An instinct call it, a blind sense;  
 A happy, genial influence,  
 Coming one know not how, nor whence,

A hundred times, by rock or bower,  
 Ere thus I have lain couched an hour . . . . Wordsworth

Near the green holly,  
 And wearily at length should fare;  
 He needs but look about, and there  
 Thou art!--a friend at hand, to scare  
     His melancholy.

A hundred times, by rock or bower,  
 Ere thus I have lain couched an hour,  
 Have I derived from thy sweet power  
     Some apprehension;  
 Some steady love; some brief delight;  
 Some memory that had taken flight!  
 Some chime of fancy wrong or right;  
     Or stray invention.

If stately passions in me burn,  
 And one chance look to Thee should turn,  
 I drink out of an humbler urn  
     A lowlier pleasure;  
 The homely sympathy that needs  
 The common life, our nature breeds;  
 A wisdom fitted to the needs  
     Of hearts at leisure.

Fresh-smitten by the morning ray,  
 When thou art up, alert and gay,  
 Then, cheerful Flower! my spirits play

Not whither going.

Child of the year! that round dost run  
 Thy pleasant course,--when days begun  
 As ready to salute the sun  
     As lark or leveret;  
 Thy long-lost praise thou shalt regain;  
 Not be less dear to future men  
 Than in old time; thou not in vain  
     Art Nature's favorite.

WORDSWORTH.

TO THE DAISY.

With little here to do or see  
 Of things that in the great wor'd be,  
 Daisy! again I talk to thee  
     For thou art worthy,  
 Thou unassuming commonplace  
  
 Of Nature, with that homely face,  
 And yet with something of a grace,  
     Which love makes for thee!  
 Oft on the dappled turf at ease  
 I sit; and play with similes,  
 Loose types of thought through all degrees,  
     Thoughts of thy raising;  
 And many a fond and idle name

I give to thee, for praise or blame,  
As is the humour of the game,  
While I am gazing.

A nun demure of lowly port;  
Or sprightly maiden, of Love's court,  
In thy simplicity the sport  
Of all temptations;  
A queen in crown of rubies drest;  
A starveling in a scanty vest;  
Are all, as seems to suit thee best,  
Thy appellations.

A little cyclops, with one eye  
Staring to threaten and defy,

Sweet silent creature!  
That breath'st with me in sun and air,  
Do thou, as thou are wont, repair  
My heart with gladness, and a share  
Of thy meek nature!

\* \* \* \* \*

Bright flower, whose home is everywhere!  
A pilgrim bold in Nature's care,  
And all the long year through, the heir  
Of joy or sorrow,  
Methinks that there abides in thee  
Some concord with humanity,  
Given to no other flower I see  
The forest through!

\* \* \* \* \*

The daisy is the meekest flower  
That grows in wood or field;  
To wind and rain, and footstep rude,  
Its slender stem will yield.  
M. S. C.

That thought comes next--and instantly  
The freak is over.

The shape will banish--and behold  
A silver shield with boss of gold  
That spreads itself, some faery bold  
In fight to cover.

I see thee glittering from afar,  
And then thou art a pretty star;  
Not quite so fair as many are  
In heaven above thee!  
Yet like a star, with glittering crest,  
Self-poised in air thou seem'st to rest,--  
May peace come never to his nest,  
Who shall reprove thee?

Bright Flower! for by that name at last,  
When all my reveries are past,  
I call thee, and to that cleave fast,

Sweet flower! belike one day to have  
A place upon the Poet's grave.

WORDSWORTH.

. . . . the daisy that doth rise  
Wherever sunbeams shine, or winds do flow.  
R. NICHOLL.

Stoop where thou wilt, thy careless hand  
Some random bud will meet,  
Thou canst not tread, but thou wilt find  
The daisy at thy feet.

HOOD.--*Song*.

What hand but His who arched the skies  
And pours the dry spring's living flood,  
Wondrous alike in all He tries,  
Could raise the daisy's purple bud,  
Mould its green cup, its wiry stem,

Its fringed border nicely spin,  
 And cut the gold-embossed gem  
 That, set in silver, gleams within,  
 And fling it, unrestrained and free,  
 O'er hill and dale, and desert sod?  
 That man, where'er he walks, may see  
 At every step the stamp of God

MASON GOOD.

The daisy is the meekest flower  
 That grows in wood or field;  
 To wind and rain, and footstep rude,  
 Its slender stem will yield.

M. S. C.

Daisies quain', with savour none,  
 But golden eyes of great delight  
 That all men love; they be so bright.

OWEN MEREDITH'S *Wanderer*.

I know the way she went  
 Home with her maiden posy,  
 For her feet have touched the meadows,  
 And left the daisies rosy.

TENNYSON.

Is the sun far from any smallest flower,  
 That lives by His dear presence every hour?  
 "Dear presence every hour!" What of the  
 night,  
 When crumpled daisies shut gold sadness in?  
 They memory then, warm lingering in the  
 ground,  
 Mourned dewy in the air, keeps their hearts  
 sound,  
 Till fresh with day their lapsed life begins.

G. MACDONALD.

So the daisied meadows  
 Close their petals white  
 When the brooding shadows  
 Make the day like night,  
 For shadows may be burdens to us, when we live on light.

WALTER SMITH'S *Kildrostram*.

1. On steep green bank, or on broad green meadow,  
 Glad of the sun, content in the shadow,

Harvest white of the fairies sowing,  
 See, the daisies in the millions growing.

2. Daisies grow 'mid the churchyard grasses,  
 By white roads where the tired foot passes,  
 In smooth meadows, 'mid dew and clover,  
 'Neath the foot of the waiting lover.

3. Here, there, everywhere, old Earth raises  
 Baby faces of white frilled daisies.  
 Full-grown roses may laugh and flout  
 them,  
 What would spring-time be without them?

Oft have I watched thy closing  
 buds at eve,  
 Which for the parting sunbeams  
 seemed to grieve....Leyden

4. Not the rose does out heart most long for,  
 Not the rose is our sweetest song for,  
 But for the daisy, the star flower gleaming,  
 Through the mists of the poet's dreaming.

5. Beautiful meadows with daisies brightened,  
 Tired hearts rested and sad hearts lightened,  
 Let these be in the song I sing you,  
 In these daisies I pluck and bring you.  
 E. NESBIT.

The daisies, vermeil-rimm'd and white,  
 Hide in deep herbage.  
 KEATS.

Oft have I watched thy closing buds at eve,  
 Which for the parting sunbeams seemed to grieve;  
 And, when gay morning glit the dew-bright plain,  
 Seen them unclasp their folded leaves again;  
 Nor he who sung--"the daisy is so sweet"--  
 More dearly loved thy pearly form to greet;  
 When on his scarf the knight the daisy bound,

And dames at tourneys shone, with daisies crown'd,  
And fays forsook the purer fields above,  
To hail the daisy "Flower of faithful love."

LEYDEN.

And the poor daisy in his way  
Shall mingle in the poet's lay.  
This, lowly daisy, is thy lot;  
Say, canst thou be content or not?  
The little floweret "coloured up"  
Till rosy redness fringed its cup;  
And never has it lost the flush  
Of pride and joy, that called the blush.

ELIZA COOK.

There is a flower, a little flower,  
With silver crest and golden eye,  
That welcomes every changing hour  
And weathers every sky.

The prouder beauties of the field  
In gay but quick succession shine,  
Race after race their honours yield,  
They flourish and decline.

But this small flower, to Nature dear,  
While moons and stars their courses run,  
Wreathes the whole circle of the year,  
Companion of the sun.

It smiles upon the lap of May,  
To sultry August spreads its charms,  
Lights pale October on his way,  
And twines December's arms.

The purple heath and golden broom  
On moory mountains catch the gale,  
O'er lawns the lily sheds perfume,  
The violet in the vale.

But this bold floweret climbs the hill,  
Hides in the forest, haunts the glen,  
Plays on the margin of the rill,  
Peeps round the fox's den.

Within the garden's cultured round

It shares the sweet carnation's bed;  
And blooms on consecrated ground  
In honour of the dead.

The lambkin crops its crimson gem,  
The wild bee murmurs on its breast,  
The blue fly bends its pensile stem,  
Light o'er the skylark's nest.

'Tis Flora's page;--in every place,  
In every season, fresh and fair,  
It opens with perennial grace,  
And blossoms everywhere.

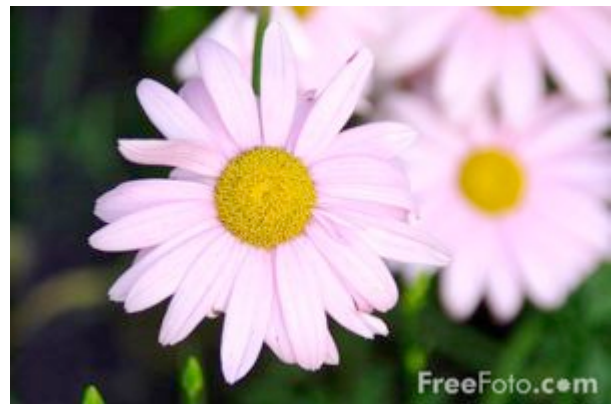
On waste and woodland, rock and plain,  
Its humble buds unheeded rise,  
The rose has but a summer reign,--  
The daisy never dies.

J. E. B. MONTGOMERY.

All thy strength from weakness won,  
Earthward when the storms may beat,  
Back up-springing towards the sun,  
Little pure-eyed Marguerite.

Lover of the earth and sky,  
Making common pathways bright,  
Towards the sun, a steadfast eye,  
Unto men a heart of light.

ANNIE JOHNSON BROWN.



# The Home School

by **Charlotte Mason**

From *Parents' Review* Vol. 3 1892-1893 P. 279-284

Every one knows that the organisation and government of a school is a nice task, calling for natural aptitude and special preparation, whether in the way of training or of experience. We should like, by the way, to take exception to experience as, necessarily, a qualification. One year of training is worth ten years' experience for the turning out of a good teacher; and that because experience means to most of us the habit of doing this or that as we are accustomed to do it: once set us going in a groove and there is no further question of right or wrong, of better or worse; we do the thing "in our own way," and years of experience make us "the same, only more so." This is why few people like to introduce middle-aged men and women to new work which requires either a docile temper or openness to new ideas and readiness to adopt improvements. We are all a little afraid of the "set ways" of experienced people. If we can transplant them from their own groove to a precisely similar groove, good and well; they will go. But how are we to know that our groove and their groove are identical, and who can be prepared for the hitches that will occur if ours be narrower or broader, deeper or shallower, than the one in which they have gained experience?

Popular proverbs are always right; it is quite true that experience makes fools wise; but we are not



...for it is much easier to work a class of twenty, all doing the same thing, than a school of five children in three different classes....

told that it makes them practical. The untidy woman is wise enough to know the minor miseries of an hour's hunt for a mislaid pair of scissors, a walk given up because every pair of gloves want mending, of a child kept in because three buttons are off his coat. Experience teaches, and the poor woman is no dull scholar; she could a tale unfold of the misery of disorder, the beauty of order, neatness, method, which should cure us all of transgressions in this kind. But she knows better than to say a word. For why? Experience does not help her in the very least to mend her ways. She is, and probably will be to the very end of her days, as she always has been; and this, because it is a physical law of our being that every act prepares the way for another act just like itself. A disorderly room to-day is the all but certain pledge and promise of a disorderly room tomorrow. "Sow and act, reap a habit," says Thackeray,

and that is how experience teaches--teaches you to do things evermore as you have always done them. To find out whether the experience is valuable or otherwise, is to find out how it began; how did you do the thing the first time; that is, how were you taught to do it? How were you trained? Experience added to training has its advantages, supposing we are

able to keep the fresh impulse of our training through the years.

Experience which implies the progressive effort and receptive attitude of a fine intelligence always putting itself to school, the experience of continual change and regular advance, is another matter altogether: here is no groove, no set way; such a character is all the time under training,

and is always ready for any new post, and that is why our men of foremost intellect are equal to any position that offers; there is no question of previous training, they are always under training.

But this is a digression: to return to our point, which is, that the organisation and government of a school is a task requiring special aptitude. Now if this be true of the public (including what is commonly called private) school, how much more is it true of that which is truly private--the family school, whose schoolroom is the morning-room or the study--for it is much easier to work a class of twenty, all doing the same thing, than a school of five children in three different classes.

Notwithstanding this difficulty, home teaching has its peculiar and very marked advantages--into which we will not enter here, except to say to those parents who regret deeply their inability to send their children to school, that our experience in connection with the Parents' Review School tends to show that the average home-taught child may keep well abreast of the average school-taught child. We should even say, may keep well ahead, were it not that the children in the Parents' Review School are in a sense picked--that is, they are the children of parents who take education seriously.

We have a few words to say to our parents which we believe may be of use to many other parents.

In the first place, we are very grateful for the faithfulness with which parents carry out the instructions they receive. They entirely fulfil one intention of the school, which is to bring children under a rule outside the home, but which parents adopt and make their own. The danger of strong home training is that the children grow up to regard their parents as law givers only; but to see in

their parents an example of law observing also is a very valuable bit of training form them.

And this faithful ness in parents brings its own reward. Bible-teaching, for example, is perhaps the most valuable instrument of education, not only moral and spiritual, but intellectual. The Bible is the "classics" of the children and the unlearned, the finest classic literature in the world. Some of our greatest orators and best writers owe their moving power to the fact that their minds are stored with the exquisite phraseology and imagery of the Scriptures. Now the Parents' Review School requires a good deal of Bible study. The suggestion as to method is, "Read aloud to the children a few verses, deliberately, carefully, and with just expression; require them to narrate what they have listened to as nearly as possible in the

Bible words. Talk the narrative over with them, adding all possible light from modern research and criticism.

...the habit of telling a story, giving all the circumstances in due order, adding nothing and omitting nothing,--why, this is a liberal education in itself, quite invaluable in these days, when that of speaking well, and to the point, is of far more use to both men and women than the power of writing equally well.

Let the teachings, moral and spiritual. Reach them without too much personal application." Now this is a very different thing from reading to the children Bible narratives in somebody else's words, or even telling them in one's own (no doubt excellent) style. The children are getting actual familiarity with the text; they are so sympathetic that they catch the archaic simplicity of style and diction, and their little narratives are quite charming.

Again, observe, they are to "narrate;" when, at the end of the term, examination questions reach them, it is "tell the story" of so and so. Another instruction runs, "Written composition is not to be begun until the children are in Class III. Concise orderly narrations in clear sentences must be exacted from the first." Now children have a natural talent for language: by his fourth year many a child has collected an amazingly good vocabulary, and uses his new words with a fitness which amuses his elders; children are very well

able to narrate and to narrate well; and to get into the habit of telling a story, giving all the circumstances in due order, adding nothing and omitting nothing,--why, this is a liberal education in itself, quite invaluable in these days, when that of speaking well, and to the point, is of far more use to both men and women than the power of writing equally well. There is a time for all things; there is a season of natural readiness of speech in children which teachers would do well to take at the flood, and not "get them on" to write miserably ill-spelt, ill-written, ill-expressed "compositions." As a matter of fact, it would be well that a child should not know how to express himself in writing until he is fully ten years old. The real difficulty is, set a child to write a narrative and he is out of your way, you are free to attend to other matters; set him to speak his narrative, and he claims your whole attention-- now is your time to get clear enunciation, exact statements, orderly arrangement.

Most of the parents and teachers in the Parents' Review School have been very faithful in letting the children in Classes I. and II narrate stories from Bible history, English history, and Greek history. The narratives are usually charming, affording much insight into the workings of the children's minds. If we read that Rebekah "saw a young gentleman coming across the fields to meet her and got down off her camel," &c--why that's no matter. In one or two cases the parents have asked questions which the children have answered, and this is a capital exercise, but not to be confounded with "narrating." Two or three children in Class II. have been allowed to write their answers, and that is a pity.

The educational value of Bible teaching from the literary point of view is by no means to be overlooked, but it is the last and the least of the claims the Bible has upon us. Here, and here only, have we a complete code of ethics, enforced by maxim and illustrated by example. There is probably no conceivable moral excellence which is not brought before us both by example and

precept. Generosity and meanness, sincerity and guile, simplicity and subtlety, graciousness and churlishness, the love of friend, of kin, of parent, of child, of brother; the relations between master and ser-

vant, disciple and teacher, buyer and seller, king and subject-- there is absolutely no point of morals or manners upon which in this library of sacred books we do not find infallible teaching and luminous example.

Knowing how the mind reverts to early impressions, one feels that there cannot be too much pains taken with the Bible teaching, which should be as the warp in and out of which the child weaves other knowledge and other thought.

The child who told the following tale has learnt more than the tale. He has received a moral lesson which should last him his lifetime, and doubtless will do so: "Abram said to Lot, 'We had better part, you choose a piece of land first and then I will choose one after.' So Lot looked around him and he saw a nice fruitful piece of land, and he said, 'I will have that piece.' So Abram took the piece which was left, which was not so nice. But the land that Lot chose was full of wicked people."

This is a subject too profound for the present paper, but let us say that the theology of the children derived, straight from the Bible story, is refreshing in these days of many questionings. Knowing how the mind reverts to early impressions, one feels that there cannot be too much pains taken with the Bible teaching, which should be as the warp in and out of which the child weaves other knowledge and other thought. It is pleasant to be able to say that the Bible teaching our "scholars" receive from their parents and governesses is particularly good.

Next after the Bible narratives in ethical value ranks history; and because Britain has had no Plutarch amongst its chroniclers, we must give the place of honour to Greek (or Roman) history as told in Plutarch's Lives, "to help the children to realise how personal and intimate is the relation of the individual to the State." The stories from Plutarch are extremely well told, and show

that children are able to follow the old-time moralist as he traces conduct to character and character again to conduct.

Perhaps natural history is the least successfully done of the studies set in our school, so very rarely are we told anything which the children have seen with their own eyes. Do children keep tadpoles, and silkworms, and caterpillars in these days? Very few have given us the results of their own observations. We have many capital descriptions from books, and that is better than nothing, but the very essence of natural history is that it should, so far as possible, be drawn direct from Nature. In some cases--the poverty of the teaching in this subject is very marked; a boy who tells much and well about Aristides the Just can only say of a horse that it has four legs and one head!

That boy deserves never to sit astride a horse! Flowers fare much better than animals. Wild flowers are, on the whole, well mounted and described. Surely it is not too much to expect that every boy and girl should, before the age of twelve, have formed a little herbarium of the wild flowers in their own neighbourhood, nicely pressed and mounted, and carefully described.

Of Swedish drill and calisthenics we get fairly good reports from parents; they say the children know the exercises perfectly; and do them promptly, but they do not say whether each exercise is done with due muscular effort; this is an important point; mere movement without effort will not afford the carefully graduated muscular training at which Swedish Drill aims.

In French, we have invited parents to take a bold plunge, and they have responded delightfully. "But they have never learned any French," says the surprised mother of children of eight and nine, when she is asked to have her children taught, orally, say forty lines of a French tale during a term.

However, she tries, and is surprised to find at the end of the term that the children know these forty lines quite well, and not only so, but they know the words and phrases so well that they can con-

struct other sentences with them. It is a delightful surprise to the parents to find that the children possess quite a considerable French vocabulary, and have none of the miserable insular mau-vaise honte in saying foreign words upon which the French of many of us makes shipwreck; and this, because they do not learn to read French, but learn it from the lips of one who can speak it.

We have spoken of the junior classes in the Parents' Review School, because a little notice of the work in these classes may afford useful hints to parents who do not join the school. We have not space to say much of the work of the senior classes, but just one word about the work of Class IV. may be helpful to girls studying at

Children should not be embarrassed with arrears, and they should have a due sense of the importance of time, and that there is no other time for the work not done in its own time.

home; in this class, equal work is taken in French, German, and English history and literature, and the papers in each language are worked out in that language.

Lest any mother should think on reading this paper, that it is safe to give children long hours of work, let us add a rule of the Parents' Review School which should be the rule of every home school:

"Five of the thirteen waking hours should be at the disposal of the children; three, at least, of these, from two o'clock till five, for example, should be spent out-of-doors in all but very bad weather. Brisk work and ample leisure and freedom should be the rule of the Home School. The work not done in its own time must be left undone. Children should not be embarrassed with arrears, and they should have a due sense of the importance of time, and that there is no other time for the work not done in its own time."

# The Teaching of Greek and Roman History

By Professor W.G. De Burgh

The study of history at the present day, like other studies, is marked by an increasing tendency to specialization. This is natural and necessary, but is attended by the danger that students may lose sight of the unity of history. History is studied too exclusively in periods and under separate aspects; the tendency to specialization being reflected in the character of courses of school instruction. Girls and boys leave school without a grasp of the general course of human civilization, and of the order and relationship of the great events and epochs of the world's history. Few even among educated persons have any idea of the connection between the events recorded in the Old and New Testaments and the secular history of Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Persia, Greece and Rome; or of the far-reaching significance of Caesar's conquest of Gaul; or of the place in history of Mahomet and Charlemagne; or of the historical importance of Carthage, Alexandria, Constantinople. How many readers of Dante understand why Aristotle's philosophy exercised so deep an influence on the thought of Western Europe in the Middle Ages? Hence the need of a course of school instruction in Universal History, embracing in broad outline (a) the chronological sequence of the world's history from the most remote times to the present day, and (b) the various aspects of civilization which were specially characteristic of each epoch and race, treated not as an aggregate of separate aspects (political, literary, aesthetic, social, intellectual, religious), but as moments in an organic unity of world-life. Such a course should be introduced in one of the forms towards the close of the school period, when students have reached the age, say, of seventeen. It presupposes some preparatory study of history in more elementary classes, and would serve itself as a preparation for the more detailed

study of special periods in subsequent College courses or at home. The course suggested should occupy about two hours' instruction a week throughout one school year, i.e., about 60 lectures or classes in all.

## II.

Taking Ancient History alone (i.e., from the earliest recorded Egyptian and Babylonian history to the beginning of the Middle Age), the following scheme is suggested to illustrate how this part of the subject could be treated in a course of about 25 classes, occupying the first term of a school year. The most obvious difficulty is that of omission and selection. The principle should be select what is characteristic, interesting, and of permanent importance; and rigorously exclude all else. The course on Ancient History would fall into four groups of lectures of which the first and third would be of about half the length of the second and fourth.

(A) Four Introductory lectures on the early civilization of

1. Egypt.
2. Babylonia, Assyria, and the Middle East
3. Canaan
4. Crete

The typical features to be observed would be the art and religion of Egypt, the literary civilization, commerce, and religion of Babylon, the military efficiency of Assyria, and the development of spiritual consciousness in the Hebrew race; while the fourth lecture would illustrate the results of

recent archaeological research in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean areas.

(B) Eight or ten lectures on ancient Greece. Here, again, the work of the Greeks as creators of the enduring structure of European civilisation would be the leading note, rather than the details of political history (Spartan institutions, the legislation of Solon and Kleisthenes, events of the Persian and Peloponnesian wars, etc.). The following heads are selected as of special importance.

5. The beginnings of the Greek race: the Homeric age (cr. The treatment in Murray's Rise of the Greek Epic)
6. The Polis and what it stood for in Greek life.
7. Greek trade: colonization and tyranny.
8. Greek festivals; athletic and dramatic.
9. Democracy at Athens in the Fifth Century.
10. Greek Science and thought: Socrates and Plato.
11. Alexander.
12. Aristotle- the organization of knowledge.
13. Alexandria- Hellenism in the Levant and Middle East.

The History of Greek civilisation is thus brought up to the point when it came under the sway of the Roman government.

(C.) Four lectures on the Rise of the Roman Empire (N.B. (1) Greek history does not end with Alexander, or Roman History with Augustus, as school text-books are apt to suggest). (2) The significance of the history of Republican Rome is an introductory to that of the Roman empire. (3) In roman history, politics, law, and government are primary importance.)

14. The origin and growth of the Roman State.

15. The conquest of the West: Carthage and Hannibal.

(Stress to be laid on the creation of the provinces.)

16. Roman and Hellenism.

17. The fall of the Republic (break down of the Roman city state when faced with the task of governing an Empire).

(D) Eight or ten lectures on the Roman empire.

18. The empire: Caesar, Augustus, Virgil.
19. Life under the Empire- the Provinces, Roman Britain.
20. The rise of Christianity.
21. Pagan and Christian ideals: Lucretius, Marcus Aurelius, St. Augustine.
22. The Barbarian Invasions.
23. Constantinople- the Empire and the Church in the east.
24. Mahomet and Mahometanism.
25. The Empire and the Papacy- Charlemagne.

### III.

It is obvious that everything depends on the way in which these subjects are handled by the teacher and the class. It must be remembered that the object of the course is not to teach periods of history- that will follow (or precede, or both) in due season; but (a) to indicate interesting features of the successive epochs of civilization, and (b) to furnish the requisite framework into which the knowledge of special periods and aspects can be fitted. Such a framework will be invaluable not only to the ordinary man or woman of education, but also to the prospective specialist.

Certain preliminary hints on method may be briefly summarized.

- (a) The scheme suggested can be modified freely in accordance

with the teacher's special knowledge and lines of interest. The teacher who cares about Greek art or Greek philosophy may develop these aspects and approach various of the topics above mentioned from these special points of view.

- (b) Chronological charts and maps should be furnished to and made by the class. This will make it easier for the teacher to avoid weighting lecture with dates and other detail.
- (c) Essays could be set to the class weekly, a selection of subjects connected with the previous lecture being given and the student allowed to choose the subject which interests most: such essays to be discussed with the whole class, if additional time be available.

These points are obvious enough. I come now to a matter of vital importance. It is that the history of Greece should be taught through the Greeks, the history of Rome through the Romans, and not through modern books about the Greeks and Romans. For this purpose there are two chief sources lying ready to hand, which should be made the basis of instruction in the proposed course.

First, there are the treasures of art and archaeological research- the actual records other than literary- in which the life of the ancient peoples still survives. The lectures should be freely illustrated by the lantern slides and by visits to the British Museum. Thus in group (A) lectures 1, 2, and 4 should be in the main a comment on such illustrations. The same with Greek art and architecture (lectures 5 to 8), with life under the Roman Empire and the lecture on Rome in the East (19 and 23). Schools should subscribe to the Societies for the Study of Hellenic and Roman Studies and borrow from their collections of lantern slides. Thus alone can Roman Africa and Roman Gaul be made something of a living reality to the

class. Visits to the Roman wall and Roman sites in Britain should be made wherever possible.

Secondly, there are the literary records. These are being made even more accessible than heretofore through the Loeb translations. Every school library should contain these. Teachers should make excerpts for themselves and assist the students to do like wise. The way will have been prepared in many cases by acquaintance, at an earlier stage in the school course, with Plutarch's lives. We must rid ourselves of our prejudice in favour of modern books about the ancients. If the class use a modern text book, it should be one of rigidly small dimensions. Teachers will doubtless need a limited number of modern works on special branches of the course; such are- to give one or two examples- the excellent articles on Assyria and Babylonia, and on Egypt in the Encyclopedia Britannica (Lect. 1 and 2). Murray's rise of the Greek Epic and Schuchardt's Schliemann's Excavations (Lect. 5), Burney's Greek Philosophy from Thales to Plato (Lect. 10). But I urge that both teachers and students should rely in the main on the ancient writers. They are at once more interesting and more true. The code of Khammurabi (Lect. 2), the Old Testament (Lect. 3), Homer (Lect. 5), Herodotus, Thucydides, Aristophanes (Lect. 6 to 9), Plato's dialogues (Lect. 10), are obvious examples. Above all, Herodotus should be freely read and quoted in connection with Greek civilization. Avoid the less interesting authors: e.g., Demosthenes, the Roman writers of comedy, Livy (except for the Hannibalic war), Cicero (except the Letters). It is harder to interest the student of seventeen in Latin literature than in Greek. On the later lectures, Horace's Satires and Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles, Pliny's letters, and the confessions of St. Augustine are invaluable. Remember always that the Greeks and Romans knew their own life better than we do, and that the direct insight which their writings convey, however fragmentary it may be is the true approach to the study of their civilizations.

#### IV.

Lastly, the lecturer should emphasise the enduring work of the Hebrew, Greek, and Roman

peoples in the shaping of our modern civilizations and views of life. History is a very difficult subject; and for two reasons. To study history, we have to live in the past. It is hard enough for children to meet their parents on a common plane; much harder to meet those who lived two thousand years and more ago. Again, it is not easy to enter into the life of other peoples even among our contemporaries; witness the sense of something exotic and alien forced upon us when we try, as we all are trying now, to understand the thought and literature of modern Russia (e.g., Dostoevsky). The Greeks and Romans not only lived long ago, but were races not our own. How is this difficulty to be overcome? There are two resources at our disposal. As I have tried to show, we can learn through direct contact with the products of their activity in pottery, buildings, art, and literature. But we can also see the issues of their life in the life of the present day. There is the influence of Greece and Rome in the creeds and churches of Christendom. There is the fact that we name the chief branches of knowledge by words used by the Greeks who first drew the essential distinctions between and within the sciences (e.g., biology, ethics, lyric and dramatic poetry, tragedy and comedy): and that the use of Roman words in the field of law and institutions (e.g., Empire, province, sacrament, responsibility) indicates the enduring influence of Rome in these matters. There is the analogy between the genius of the Roman race in war and government and that of the British. There is the inheritance of the Roman empire in the east in the aspirations of the Balkan peoples (the names Roumania, Tsar, Constantine the Twelfth.) Thus ordinary men and women as well as specialist historians can learn to live in the life of the Graeco-Roman world. But they must enter that world through a study of the actual records, which, in comparison with modern writings on the subject, are at once more interesting and more true.

## Call for Student Work Samples For the *Review* and the 2008 Charlotte Mason Conference

To further our understanding of  
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and

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# On the Fear of Bathmats

by Laurie Bestvater

The barometer that is the pit of my stomach has often been a faithful guide in my educational journey. From the first flip flop of fear at being left under the eye of my graying and stern Kindergarten teacher, through the perils of the curriculum hall as a new "homeschooler," past the monolithic teachers' union temple in my community that stands as testimony of the power of the culture shaping lords of education, my uneasiness has been a constant. Clearly our educational choices are fraught with fearful consequences. Perhaps the Holy Spirit, who whispers, "this is the way, walk in it," leads also through the gut but maturity requires something more than living by feelings. Grandparents and school officials alike are relieved when we home educators can converse about educational philosophy and we ourselves are satisfied to sort these things out for ourselves, to "give a reason for the hope that is within us."

That is why I love the work of Charlotte Mason. Mason has allowed me, over the years, not only to identify and name those pit of the stomach experiences but to elucidate what children are like, what living with them is

The problem with reading Mason is it leads to more and deeper episodes of uneasiness.

like, what God and His world is like and therefore, what an education true to all these things ought to be like. Who of us, upon reading Susan Schaeffer Macaulay's seminal, providential book, *For The Children's Sake*, did not have almost a visceral reaction, an epiphany, an "ah ha moment" that changed our direction completely? We have suspected something terribly wrong with the education we witness but often, until Mason, it has remained nameless. In talking with those who are committed to Miss Mason's work, the story is often the same; stumbling onto this burning bush in the desert of education and immediately taking off our shoes, not because we deify

the bush, as it were, but rather, recognize the Fire. As Macaulay says herself, "We did not know it, but we were looking for Charlotte Mason and the historical PNEU schools that grew out of her philosophy of life and education."<sup>1</sup>

The problem with reading Mason is it leads to more and deeper episodes of uneasiness. The more I know of what she has tried to explain about children and how our Christianity relates to their education, the more I am spoiled for anything else. I've experienced this terrible restless dissatisfaction in the public schools, wider home schooling community and also in the private Christian school setting. Bear with me for it hasn't been immediately evident, to me even, why 100 or so, home school moms faithfully assembled to co-operate (co-op) in their children's education should strike me as a threat. A small Christian school of about 250 with well meaning, faithful and underpaid teachers and a patchwork of parent-donated equipment don't appear, on the surface, very dangerous but I have often left this setting discouraged and afraid of what is happening there to the children even though I am a home-schooling mother of many years, have tutored, and also taught in a Christian school. I should be at home in these venues and that, perhaps, is just the problem. My fear arises from a growing awareness of an insidious perversion of my heart that can become an oh-so-comfortable educational dwelling. I recognize a tendency in myself, (it may be in us all) after an educational achievement or revelation, to want to build a temple around it, sure that my pedagogy is now complete, the canon closed. For the purposes of illustration, I am calling the result of this desire a "bathmat education;" Mason has caused me to recognize and to name it. Her life's work was to point to an antidote.

I have no particular bone to pick with other home educators or with particular schools. I have no doubt that educational choices and reforms are born out of dissatisfaction with the status quo and a calling toward a more wholesome, integrated alternative. But reformers know

(or ought to) that human beings are sinful and restoration is an ongoing, never-ending, until-He-comes process that must acknowledge that "wide is the path to destruction and narrow the gate" to life. Our working out of our salvation (and educational theory) comes within a community and hopefully one that talks over these things together to hammer out new visions of our vocation, a daily following of the Truth who is Jesus Christ. It is in this spirit that I offer the following observations, part of a hopeful conversation.

Charlotte Mason's organizing principle, "the child is a person," is so simple on the surface that it belies its foundational magnitude.

What, in heaven's name, then, is a "bathmat education?" Imagine a great mansion where you've been invited to stay and be more of a family member than a guest...all the treasures and goods of the household and gardens are yours to discover and enjoy. The house is furnished from all over the world and no expense has been spared by your host. Beauty and comfort, a great feast of the best foods, books in a massive library are available to you and you have nothing to do but to enjoy them. As you arrive at the house, you look down and discover that you are quite dusty from your travel and ask politely to take a bath before the tour of the mansion begins. You enjoy a wonderful soak in the tub; refreshed and renewed you step out on the gloriously plush bath mat and stand dripping there...humbled by your surroundings and the luxury. You look down at your clean self and your dirty clothes lying at your feet...and decide to stay on the bath mat, rather than risk dirtying yourself again or travelling through that wonderful house in your dirty clothes. You are clean, but you never get to explore the amazing mansion your host has prepared for you. You are stuck with the bathmat alone.

There are probably as many ways to achieve a bathmat education as there are to sin and hence definition is defied but I think a bathmat is recognizable when set next to Miss Mason's conception of education being a "large room," i.e. a bathmat education can be identified by what it is not. There are many facets to CM thought and practice and we could get lost (although be well-fed) in the intricacies. Yet over and over again in her 6 volumes of pedagogy<sup>1</sup> emerge several distinctives that Miss Mason would most certainly point to as the hallway to that "large room" of education within which we hope to set

our students' feet. These six principles upon which her thought and practice rest<sup>2</sup> serve as correctives in our thinking about education, a map for the journey and ease for our internal barometers. To continually discourage us from "setting up camp" on some bath mat, Mason's posits over and over again that the child is a person, relationships are paramount, the Creation is to be studied, living ideas and books are indispensable, masterly inactivity is integral and narration is the primary method.

Charlotte Mason's organizing principle, "the child is a person," is so simple on the surface that it belies its founda-

tional magnitude. "Of course a child is a person...what did you think he was, a giraffe? and more to the point, just tell me what I am to have him study," says our inner teacher voice. However, if we consider this statement in the light of philosophy (human thinking) we find that there is deep water here. In their book Being Human, Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs define personhood for the layman as being created in "the image of God."

All the faculties of personality were present in Adam and Eve just as they are present in us. And they are present in us because they were present in them. They were creative and aesthetic, so are we; They loved and reasoned, so do we; they were moral and we are moral, they had choice and we have choice.<sup>3</sup>

While Macaulay and Barrs acknowledge that after the fall, these qualities are "impaired," they assert we are still (quoting James 3:9) essentially human; we are persons made in the image of God though now our tendency is to pollute things.<sup>4</sup> We rightly discern that we are "dusty from our travels" and need that "bath," but what emerges onto the bathmat is still a human person. We may take this for granted as Christians but surprisingly often what follows is not so commonly held, viz any practice or theory that holds a child to be anything other than a person (made in the image of God!) is to be suspect. Educational theorists and practioners, do not necessarily come right out and say they believe that a child is anything other than a person, indeed, they may not even know that that is the operating principle they are under, but clearly some teachers do treat a child as if he or she was a bucket to be filled up with facts merely. Or a sponge only meant to absorb the teacher's views.

There is a wide path to a mechanistic education that sees our children as animals, at best, that can be trained to respond to certain stimuli and behave in teacher ordained ways. Perhaps we may see children simply as future cogs in the machinery of a well functioning society. Mason would reject all such attempts as limiting the personhood of the child and call us to be content to live with the mystery of how we can really be made in the image of God.

We attempt to define a person, the most commonplace person we know, but he will not submit

to bounds; some unexpected beauty of nature breaks out; we find he is not what we thought and begin to suspect that every person exceeds our own power of measurement.<sup>5</sup>

**The education Mason described was rife with rich relationships....**

There are reasons scripture makes serious warnings about teaching ("Let not many of you become teachers...." James 3.1) If a child is a person, by definition made in the image of the Living God, our task must rightly seem immense. It is abusive to leave him on the bathmat whilst the rest of the mansion surrounds him. Miss Mason goes so far as to use the phrase, "the sacredness of personality."

All action comes out of the ideas we hold and if we ponder duly upon personality we shall come to perceive that we cannot commit a greater offence than to maim or crush, or subvert any part of person.<sup>6</sup>

Holding the child as a person, we may not give him simply a factual education bereft of informing ideas since he is not a vessel to be filled with the world's core knowledge. We can not restrict him to memory over understanding or reduce him to only a couple of activities of the mind at each stage of his development. We may not give him a child-led or child-centered education, emphasizing his self-esteem over the satisfaction of using all of his human faculties. We must not succumb to the teacher-centered unit study that entertains the child disbelieving his mind is fully able and willing to be about his own learning and predigesting what should rightfully be his own meal.<sup>7</sup> We dare not give him a behaviorist education, training through fear or force or even prize and praise.

This leads to our second distinctive: as people then, children are designed to relate. "Education is the science of relations."<sup>8</sup> The education Miss Mason described<sup>9</sup>

was rife with rich relationships-- the relationship of the person to God, person to person relationships, relationships to things "in situ," relationships of ideas to each other. "Mind appeals to mind and thought begets thought and that is how we become educated."<sup>10</sup> Real community is the rightful classroom for the child. (A bathmat generally only has room for one). How ludicrous for us as teachers to run through that fabulous mansion and excitedly bring each object and precious thing to our child on his bathmat explaining it's origin and history, creating

our own pattern of relationship to the visit!! How exhausting this is for the teacher! How pathetic for the child who would like nothing better than to absorb and touch and

consider each room on his own! A checklist arises; do I bring my student a worksheet with a Bible verse stamped on the bottom which allows him only to read about things in a pre-digested or artificial way when he could explore the Master's household himself? Do I keep him on the bathmat of my home school or church or classroom because that is approved community, filtered or arranged by me? Do I allow only "Christian materials, ideas and people" to be part of his education?<sup>11</sup>

Calvin Seerveld, in his work on aesthetics, Rainbows for the Fallen World, asserts a very Mason principle when he declares

*All creation--fish choked by mercury-swollen seas, bomb-cratered Asian land, shrubbery dying from automobile exhaust--all creation, not just we who are filled with the Holy Spirit, writes Paul to the Romans, groans with childbirth-like pains, waiting eagerly for the liberation of our bodily corporeality from sin (Romans 8:10-23). The lordship of Christ is not limited to what introverts might cherish and is not withheld from the world which Christians might lack the courage to explore. Redemption of the world is to be worldwide, cosmic--because it is all God's creation.<sup>12</sup>*

Mason's emphasis on nature study is not just about a nice walk in the British woods, not just a pretty (though optional) nature notebook to show Grandma; it is an imperative to Christian education that she upholds: It is all His<sup>13</sup> and should be observed and cherished and noticed. Brendan Manning writes, "If God is speaking, then noth-

ing else matters but listening."<sup>14</sup> I suspect this is Mason's view exactly! This then is the third distinctive, that all the natural world is there to lead us to the knowledge of our Creator. We do not divide subjects into sacred and secular but in a truly Christian education, continue "to wonder and admire."<sup>15</sup>

The fourth distinctive is like her emphasis on the created world; if we are "off the bathmat," so to speak, we emphasize living ideas and living books.

Education is a life. That life is sustained on ideas. Ideas are of spiritual origin, and God has made us so we get them chiefly as we convey them to one another, whether by word of mouth, written page, scripture word, musical symphony; but we must sustain a child's inner life with ideas as we sustain his body with food.<sup>16</sup>

Ideas are rarely found in textbooks.

They (American textbooks) are sanitized to avoid offending anyone who might complain at textbook adoption meetings in big states, they are poorly written, they are burdened with irrelevant and unedifying content and they reach for the lowest common denominator<sup>17</sup>

says Diane Ravitch, a senior official in the Education Department during the administrations of presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

Living ideas are the product of minds passionate about their subject...a fruit of the Spirit and Mason knew an education true to Christian ideals needed to allow a student direct access to other engaged minds.

Treat children in this reasonable way, mind to mind; not so much the mind of the teacher to that of the child, - that would be to exercise undue influence - but with the minds of a score of thinkers who meet the children, mind to mind, in their several books, the teacher performing the graceful office of presenting the one enthusiastic mind to the other.<sup>18</sup>

Walk down the aisles of any curriculum fair or amongst the stacks in the teacher trainer libraries. That unease is notice of something rather dark going on. We are not just

talking about a simple preference between textbooks and the books of a literary nature Mason identified as presenting ideas from an impassioned mind. It is a spiritual thing, one of the dangers that is always lurking for us as teachers; that we are, as humans, prone to hubris and legalism. Listen to Morris West in terms of all those many, many ways we have of *doing* education *to* children represented by the endless array of curricula available.

...all idolatry springs from a desire for order. We want to be neat, like the animals. We mark out our territories with musk and feces. We make hierarchies like the bees and ethics like the ants. And

we choose gods to set the stamp of approval on our creations...what we cannot cope with is the untidiness of the universe, the lunatic aspect of a cosmos with no known beginning, no visible end

and no apparent meaning to all its bustling dynamics....We cannot tolerate its monstrous indifference in the face of all our fears and agonies....The prophets offer us hope; but only the man-god can make the paradox tolerable.

This is why the coming of Jesus is a healing and a saving

event. He is not what we should have created for ourselves. He is truly the sign of peace because

he is the sign of contradiction. His career is a brief tragic failure. He dies in dishonor; but then most

strangely, He lives. He is not only yesterday, He is today and tomorrow. He is available to the

humblest and to the highest....<sup>19</sup>

Mason's emphasis on nature study is not just about a nice walk in the British woods, not just a pretty (though optional) nature notebook to show Grandma; it is an imperative to Christian education that she upholds: It is all His and should be observed and cherished and noticed.

Mason's genius and what makes her essentially Christian,<sup>20</sup> is her recognition that we have to live with the "untidiness of the universe," as West calls it. She allows for the paradox of Christ calling for an education we would not wish to create for ourselves. She was more than willing for her students to get off of the bathmat and possibly face being sullied. She permitted them to explore the contradictions. The golden rule of her schools was, "Wherein Teachers shall Teach Less and Scholars Shall Learn More."<sup>21</sup> This brings us not to a child-led classroom but to a fifth marvelous distinctive of Miss Mason's known as "masterly inactivity." To revert to our bathmat analogy, the teacher is neither spending all her effort in keeping her student clean and on the bathmat, nor is she racing around putting together bits and pieces of the household to show the weakened child who must be content with his lot, rather this is a magnificent creature under grace that understands that "children (are)

well-equipped to deal with ideas, and that explanations, questionings, amplifications, are unnecessary and wearisome."<sup>22</sup> She knows that

The teacher who allows his scholars the freedom of the city of books is at liberty to be their guide, philosopher and friend; and is no longer the mere instrument of a forcible intellectual feeding.<sup>20</sup>

Content to "sow her seed," the Charlotte Mason teacher is able to trust the harvest to the Master. "...books of literary quality; given these, the mind does for itself the sorting, arranging, selecting, rejecting, classifying...."<sup>21</sup>

Mason's brilliance is in applying the Christian paradox to education.

This idea of all education springing from and resting upon our relation to Almighty God is one which we have ever labored to enforce. We take a very distinct stand upon this point. We do not merely give a religious education, because that would be to imply the possibility of some other education, a secular education, for example.

But we hold that all education is divine, that every good gift of knowledge and insight comes from above, that the culmination of all education is that personal knowledge of and intimacy with God in which our being finds its fullest perfection.<sup>23</sup>

In acknowledging her lack of control and real inability to teach (as we usually understand the word), the teacher reaches her zenith in terms of usefulness to the student. She or he is authentic, a co-learner, "together-with" the students, under the same authority and a character in the same stunning Drama that is unfolding all around us.

John Eldridge in his book, *Epic*, begins the prologue with Sam from *Lord of the Rings*; "I wonder what sort of tale we have fallen into?" Eldridge claims we should all wonder this as story is the nature of reality. Our lives unfold scene by scene, to really know another, you need to know his story, to know why we're here and what life is all about, we need to find our part in The Story And so, to provide an education true to the freedom proclaimed in the gospels (and no doubt, arising out of the Old Testament) we have to turn to story.<sup>24</sup>

Stories shed light on our lives.

We might know that life is a journey, but through Frodo's eyes, we see what that journey will require. We might know that courage is a virtue, but having watched Maximus in *Gladiator* or Jo March in *Little Women*, we find ourselves longing to be courageous. We learn all of our most important lessons through story, and story deepens all our most important lessons.<sup>25</sup>

As people of The Story, our true education, Miss Mason noticed, ought to be full of telling and retelling. Our Lord taught with story. The disciples learned by retelling. It's just that simple. Children are born with the pro-

As people of The Story, our true education, Miss Mason noticed, ought to be full of telling and retelling. Our Lord taught with story. The disciples learned by retelling. It's just that simple.

ensity to do this "narrating." We read worthy things, we tell them back to ourselves and others. They become ours. This is a sixth distinctive of a Charlotte Mason (dare I say "large room" or anti-bathmat if not Christian?) education: its main

method is narration. Hear Mason on the subject of this radical simplicity.

...the divine teaching on a quality which is the first condition of all successful work with children. The simple person can do anything with a little child, the unsimple loses the key and cannot force an entrance into a child's heart. When governess or nurse, aunt or uncle, even mother or father, fails to get hold of children, it is usually because he or she is a person of unsimple character. Our Lord, in His amazing discourse, full, as is all His teaching, of the philosophy of life, unfolds to us the nature of simplicity, and investigates the two causes which hinder men from living simple lives. We are unsimple, we educators, because we are insincere or because we are anxious.<sup>26</sup>

Ultimately, our forays into education need, not only this radical simplicity (her ways really do work!), but a radical faith. We do not want a "bathmat education" anymore than we want a "bathmat faith." With her sound principles Mason urges us to bring all of the power of the gospel to bear on our teaching and learning. They are His distinctives after all: personhood, relationship, ideas, creation, grace and sharing. They are gloriously "off bathmat." Charlotte knew the cure for that pit of the stomach fear and anxiety is what Christians like William Wallace have proclaimed and reasserted down through time, "FREEDOM!!" We are set loose in a mansion as big as God himself<sup>27</sup> How can we ever again settle for something smaller?



*About the Author*

I am a displaced Canadian living in NY state, a long-time Mason zealot, currently home schooling our two boys (13, 17, with a daughter just finishing college.) Comments most welcome. [bestvaters@gmail.com](mailto:bestvaters@gmail.com)

Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Susan Schaeffer Macaulay, For the Children's Sake (Wheaton Illinois .Crossway Books, 1984 ) , p.20

<sup>2</sup>Her writings are so much more than just pedagogy, rather a practical application of the gospel to living, it seems to me.

<sup>2</sup> I owe thanks to Ranald Macaulay in his short film on Mason, "Charlotte Mason for Parents" 2007. for this idea.

<sup>3</sup> Ranald Macaulay, and Jerram Barrs, Being Human: the Nature of Spiritual Experience (Downers Grove Illinois, Inter-Varsity Press, 1978) , p.14

<sup>4</sup>Macaulay and Barrs, p. 17

<sup>5</sup> Essex Cholmondley, The Story of Charlotte Mason (Hants, Child-light Ltd.,2000) ,p.221

<sup>6</sup> Charlotte M. Mason, A Philosophy of Education vol. 6 (Wheaton Illinois, Tyndale, 1989), p. 80

<sup>7</sup>Thanks to Bobby Scott, in "Four Pillars of Education: Education is an Atmosphere" When Children Love to Learn (Wheaton Illinois, Crossway Books, 2004) and for various writings on-line of Karen Glass. I do not wish to discredit my well-intentioned brothers and sisters who may be using some of these methods, rather I wish to assert that we do act upon what we believe and therefore our foundations must be examined continually in light of Scripture.

<sup>9</sup> Jack Beckman's treatment of this term in "Four Pillars of Education: Education is the Science of Relations" When Children Love to Learn (Wheaton, Illinois, 2004) is part of my thinking here.

<sup>10</sup> Note that Mason discovers and observes and describes true education from a Christian standpoint and does not particularly invent anything. When asked in her old age whether her life should be written she had no thought for it but that the work should continue. I suggest that this is a proper perspective on her life. We do not venerate the person so much as hope the work shall continue to be shared.

<sup>11</sup> Charlotte M. Mason Vol.6. p.12

<sup>12</sup> I am certainly not advocating careless supervision of our children. Miss Mason herself cautions us to be aware of the kind of play-mates/ influences we encourage.

<sup>13</sup> Calvin G. Seerveld Rainbows for the Fallen World (Toronto, Tuppence Press, 2005) pp. 33-34

<sup>14</sup> Seerveld makes a good argument that culture also falls under this understanding of man's relationship to creation.

<sup>15</sup> Source unknown

<sup>16</sup> This is not to over-emphasize general revelation over scripture. Miss Mason was fully committed to study of the Word but Seerveld and others hold that the western mechanistic world has made too little of our Lord's wonderful creation and sustaining of the same--a position with which Mason would likely agree. "Wonder and admire" was first heard in Nicole Hutchinson's workshop on teaching science at the Third Annual Childlight USA conference, June 2007

<sup>17</sup> The Story of Charlotte Mason p. 217

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/12705167> 2006

<sup>19</sup> Charlotte Mason, vol. 6, p.261

<sup>20</sup> Morris West, The Clown of God

<sup>21</sup> Some have even wondered if Charlotte Mason was a Christian! See Dean Andreola's chapter "A Living God for a Living Education" in A Charlotte Mason Companion by Karen Andreola, c.1998, Charlotte Mason Research and Supply Co.

<sup>22</sup> Mason, Vol.6. p. 9

<sup>23</sup> Mason, Vol.6.,p.11

<sup>24</sup> "Education as the Science of Relations," a paper by Charlotte Mason read to the Sixth Annual Conference of the PNEU, May 6-9, 1902, London. *The Parent's Review* 1902, 485-487.

<sup>25</sup> Nichole Hutchinson must be credited for terming a CM education as "true to what is."

<sup>26</sup> John Eldridge, Epic (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2004), p.5

<sup>27</sup> Charlotte Mason, "Simplicity" found in Cholmondley's The Story of Charlotte Mason p.275

<sup>28</sup> John Eldridge, Epic (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2004), p.5

<sup>29</sup> Charlotte Mason, "Simplicity" found in Cholmondley's The Story of Charlotte Mason p.275

<sup>30</sup> Thanks to Rev. Wes. O'Neil for his imperative to have a faith as big as God himself. From a Sunday sermon in June 2007.

# The Quiet Dust ~ Gold Dust

by **Bonnie Buckingham**

Eleanor Farjeon prefaces her book, *The Little Bookroom* with these words: “In the home of my childhood there was a room we called ‘The Little Bookroom.’

True, every room in the house could have been called a

bookroom....The room would not have been

the same without its dust: star-dust, gold-dust, fern-dust, the dust that returns to dust under the earth, and comes up from her lap in the shape of a hyacinth.” ‘This quiet dust,’ says Emily Dickinson, an American Poet—

This quiet dust was gentlemen and ladies  
And lads and girls;  
Was laughter and ability and sighing,  
And frocks and curls;

And, an English poet, Viola Maynell, clearing her ledges of the dust that ‘came secretly by day’ to dull her shining things, pauses to reflect ~~~ “But O this dust that I shall drive away is flowers and Kings, Is Solomon’s temple, poets, Ninevah. When I crept out of the Little Bookroom with smarting eyes, no wonder that its motled gold-dust still danced in my brain, its silver cobwebs still clung to the corners of my mind.”

This same early delight C.S. Lewis wrote about in his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*: “I am a product of long corridors, empty sunlit rooms, upstairs indoor silences, attics explored in solitude, distant noises of gurgling cisterns and pipes, and the noise of the wind under the tiles. Also, of endless books. My father bought all the books he read and never got rid of any of them.



From *The Little Bookroom*,  
illustrator Edward Ardizzone

There were books in the study, books in the drawing room, books in the cloakroom, books (two deep) in the great bookcase on the landing, books in a bedroom, books piled as high as my shoulder in the cistern attic....” Two of his earliest glimpses came through prose and poetry: “The first glimpse came through Squirrel Nutkin, through it only, though I loved all the Beatrix Potter books.” “The third glimpse came through poetry. I had become fond of Longfellow’s ‘Saga of King Olaf.’ fond of it in a casual shallow way for its story and its vigorous rhythms.” The title of his book is from Wordsworth’s poem:

Surprised by joy -impatient as the wind  
I turned to share the transport -Oh! with whom  
But Thee, deep buried in the silent tomb,  
That spot which no vicissitude can find?  
Love, faithful love, recalled thee to my mind -  
But how could I forget thee? Through what  
power,

Even for the least division of an hour,  
Have I been so beguiled as to be blind  
To my most grievous loss? -That thought's return  
Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore  
Save one, one only, when I stood forlorn,  
Knowing my heart's best treasure was no more;  
That neither present time, nor years unborn,  
Could to my sight that heavenly face restore.

Lewis calls it Joy. Charlotte Mason said in *Ourselves*, (p.39) “Poets and novelists paint pictures for him, while Imagination clears his eyes so that he is able to see those pictures: they fill the world, too, with deeply interesting and delightful people who live out their lives before his eyes.” It is these living pictures that feed the sense of wonder.

Open *The Little Bookroom*’s fairytale-like stories. And enjoy Farjeon’s rhymes like this one in her book *Kings and Queens*:

George I

George the First, when he was young,  
 Couldn't speak the English tongue;  
 In Hanover, where he was born,  
 He spoke in German night and morn.

George, George, in England they  
 Want you for their King to-day!  
 Say you will, with heart and soul!-  
 George, delighted, said *Jawohl!*

George the First, till he was dead,  
 Still his prayers in German said.  
 Wasn't that a funny thing  
 For one who was an English king?

Read Lewis' poems to those who never knew he wrote poetry. He wanted to be a poet but it was his prose that took wings. Here is part of his poem "To Charles Williams:"

I can't see the old contours. It's a larger world  
 Than I once thought it. I wince, caught in the  
 bleak

air that blows on the ridge.

Is it the first sting of the great winter, the world  
 waning? Or the cold of spring?

Another author who put poetry in her prose is E. Nesbit. Use some of the poetry the mother writes to the children for dictation. This from "The Railway Children." (Chapter IV: The Engine-Burglar)

Daddy dear, I'm only four  
 And I'd rather not be more.  
 Four's the nicest age to be,  
 Two and two and one and three.  
 What I love is two and two,  
 Mother, Peter, Phil, and you.  
 What you love is one and three,  
 Mother, Peter, Phil, and me.

Give your little girl a kiss  
 Because she learned and told you this.

The song the others were singing now went like this.

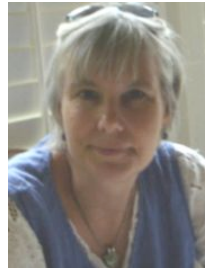
Don't forget Tolkein's Walking Songs in *The Lord of the Rings*:

*The Road goes ever on and on  
 Down from the door where it began.  
 Now far ahead the Road has gone,*

*And I must follow, if I can,  
 Pursuing it with eager feet,  
 Until it joins some larger way  
 Where many paths and errands meet.  
 And whither then? I cannot say.*

*The Road goes ever on and on  
 Out from the door where it began.  
 Now far ahead the Road has gone,  
 Let others follow it who can!  
 Let them a journey new begin,  
 But I at last with weary feet  
 Will turn towards the lighted inn,  
 My evening-rest and sleep to meet.*

You and your students will be surprised by Joy! Quiet dust, gold dust mingled into thoughts and heart. My daughter, 10, grabbed *The Railway Children* in a bookstore to find that poem and read it to me! Quiet dust! Smiling!



Bonnie lives in Charlotte with husband, Ken, and their four sons and one daughter. She can be reached at [thebuck@mindspring.com](mailto:thebuck@mindspring.com).

The nature study paintings on this page were done by kindergarten students and first grade students from South City Community School in St. Louis, MO.

Principal, Rebekah Brown



Begonia, First Grader Nature Study Painting



Gerber Daisy, Kindergarten Nature Study Painting



Ruby Lace Honey Locust, Kindergarten Nature Study Painting