

February 17, 2009 Meeting
Volume I -- Home Education by Charlotte Mason
Preface to the 'Home Education' Series

The educational outlook is rather misty and depressing both at home and abroad. That science should be a staple of education, that the teaching of Latin, of modern languages, of mathematics, must be reformed, that nature and handicrafts should be pressed into service for the training of the eye and hand, that boys and girls must learn to write English and therefore must know something of history and literature; and, on the other hand, that education must be made more technical and utilitarian--these, and such as these, are the cries of expedience with which we take the field. But we have no unifying principle, no definite aim; in fact, no philosophy of education. As a stream can rise no higher than its source, so it is probable that no educational effort can rise above the whole scheme of thought which gives it birth; and perhaps this is the reason of all the fallings from us, vanishings, failures, and disappointments which mark our educational records.

Those of us, who have spent many years in pursuing the benign and elusive vision of Education, perceive (2) her approaches are regulated by a law, and that this law has yet to be evoked. We can discern its outlines, but no more. We know that it is pervasive; there is no part of a child's home life or school work which the law does not penetrate. It is illuminating, too, showing the value, or lack of value, of a thousand systems and expedients. It is not only a light, but a measure, providing a standard whereby all things, small and great, belonging to educational work must be tested. The law is liberal, taking in whatsoever things are true, honest, and of good report, and offering no limitation or hindrance save where excess should injure. And the path indicated by the law is continuous and progressive, with no transition stage from the cradle to the grave, except that maturity takes up the regular self direction to which immaturity has been trained. We shall doubtless find, when we apprehend the law, that certain German thinkers--Kant, Herbart, Lotze, Froebel--are justified; that, as they say, it is necessary to believe in God; that, therefore, the knowledge of God is the principal knowledge, and the chief end of education. By one more character shall we be able to recognise this perfect law of educational liberty when it shall be made evident. It has been said that The best idea which we can form of absolute truth is that it is viable to meet every condition by which it can be tested. This we shall expect of our law--that it shall meet every test of experiment and every test of rational investigation.

Not having received the tables of our law, (3) we fall back upon Froebel or upon Herbart; or, if we belong to another School, upon Locke or Spencer; but we are not satisfied. A discontent, is it a divine discontent? Is upon us; and assuredly we should hail a workable, effectual philosophy of education as a deliverance from much perplexity. Before this great deliverance comes to us it is probable that many tentative efforts will be put forth, having more or less of the characters of a philosophy; notably, having a central idea, a body of thought with various members working in vital harmony.

Such a theory of education, which need not be careful to call itself a system of psychology, must be in harmony with the thought movements of the age; must regard education, not as a shut off compartment, but as being as much a part of life as birth or growth, marriage or work; and it must leave the pupil attached to the world at many points of contact. It is true that educationalists are already eager to establish such contact in several directions, but their efforts rest upon an axiom here and an idea there, and there is no broad unifying basis of thought to support the whole.

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread; and the hope that there may be tentative efforts towards a philosophy of education, and that all of them will bring us nearer to the magnum opus, encourages me to launch one such attempt. The central thought, or rather body of thought, upon (4) which I found, is the somewhat obvious fact that the child is a person with all the possibilities and powers included in personality. Some of members which develop from this nucleus have been exploited from time to time by educational thinkers, and exist vaguely in the general common sense, a notion here, another there. One thesis, which is, perhaps, new, that Education is the Science of Relations, appears to me to solve the question of curricula, as showing that the object of education is to put a child in living touch as much as may be of the life of Nature and of thought. Add to this one or two keys to self knowledge, and the educated youth goes forth with some idea of self management, with some pursuits, and many vital interests. My excuse for venturing to offer a solution, however tentative and passing, to the problem of education is twofold. For between thirty and forty years I have laboured without pause to establish a working and philosophic theory of education; and in the next place, each article of the educational faith I offer has been arrived at by inductive processes; and has, I think, been verified by a long and wide series of experiments. It is, however, with sincere diffidence that I venture to offer the results of this long labour; because I know that in this field there are many labourers far more able and expert than I--the angels who fear to tread, so precarious is the footing!

But, if only pour encourager les autres, I append a short synopsis of education theory advanced (5) in the volumes of the Home Education Series.

The treatment is not methodic, but incidental; here a little, there a little, as seemed to me most likely to meet the occasions of parents and teachers. I should add that in the course of a number of years the various essays have been prepared for the use of the Parents National Education Union in the hope that that Society might witness for a more or less coherent body of educational thought.

"The consequence of truth is great; therefore the judgment of it must not be negligent."--Whichcote

1. Children are born persons.
2. They are not born either good or bad, but with possibilities for either good or evil.
3. The principles of authority on the one hand and obedience on the other, are natural, necessary and fundamental; but
4. These principles are limited by the respect due to the personality of children, which must not be encroached upon, whether by fear or love, suggestion or influence, or undue play upon any one natural desire.
5. Therefore we are limited to three educational instruments--the atmosphere of environment, the discipline of habit, and the presentation of living ideas.
6. By the saying, Education is an atmosphere, it is not meant that a child should be isolated in what may be called a 'child environment,' (6) especially adapted and prepared; but that we should take into account the educational value of his natural home atmosphere, both as regards persons and things, and should let him live freely among his proper conditions. It stultifies a child to bring down his world to a 'child's' level.
7. By Education is a discipline, is meant the discipline of habits formed definitely and thoughtfully, whether habits of mind or body. Physiologists tell us of the adaptation of brain structure to habitual lines of thought--i.e. to our habits.

8. In the saying that Education is a life, the need of intellectual and moral as well as of physical sustenance is implied. The mind feeds on ideas, and therefore children should have a generous curriculum.

9. But the mind is not a receptacle into which ideas must be dropped, each idea adding to an 'apperception mass' of its like, the theory upon which the Herbartian doctrine of interest rests.

10. On the contrary, a child's mind is no mere sac to hold ideas; but is rather, if the figure may be allowed, a spiritual organism, with an appetite for all knowledge. This is its proper diet, with which it is prepared to deal, and which it can digest and assimilate as the body does foodstuffs.

11. This difference is not a verbal quibble. The Herbartian doctrine lays the stress of education--the preparation of knowledge in enticing morsels, presented in due order--upon the teacher. Children (7) taught upon this principle are in danger of receiving much teaching with little knowledge; and the teacher's axiom is, 'What a child learns matters less than how he learns it.'

12. But, believing that the normal child has powers of mind that fit him to deal with all knowledge proper to him, we must give him a full and generous curriculum; taking care, only, that the knowledge offered to him is vital--that is, the facts are not presented without their informing ideas. Out of this conception comes the principle that,

13. Education is the Science of Relations; that is, that a child has natural relations with a vast number of things and thoughts: so we must train him upon physical exercises, nature, handicrafts, science and art, and upon many living books; for we know that our business is, not to teach him all about anything, but to help him make valid, as many as may be of

'Those first born affinities,
'That fit our new existence to existing things.'

14. There are also two secrets of moral and intellectual self management which should be offered to children; these we may call the Way of the Will and the Way of the Reason.

15. The Way of the Will.--Children should be taught

(a) To distinguish between 'I want' and 'I will.'

(b) That the way to will effectively is to turn our thoughts (8) from that which we desire but do not will.

(c) That the best way to turn our thoughts is to think of or do some quite different thing, entertaining or interesting.

(d) That, after a little rest in this way, the will returns to its work with new vigour.

(This adjunct of the will is familiar to us as diversion, whose office is to ease us for a time from will effort, that we may 'will' again with added power. The use of suggestion--even self suggestion--as an aid to the will, is to be deprecated, as tending to stultify and stereotype character. It would seem that spontaneity is a condition of development, and that human nature needs the discipline of failure as well as of success.)

16. The Way of the Reason.--We should teach children, too, not to 'lean' (too confidently) 'unto their own understanding,' because of the function of reason is, to give logical demonstration (a) of mathematical truth; and (b) of an initial idea, accepted by the will. In the former case reason is, perhaps, an infallible guide, but in the second it is not always a safe one, for whether that initial idea be right or wrong, reason will confirm it by irrefragable proofs.

17. Therefore children should be taught, as they become mature enough to understand such teaching that the chief responsibility which rests on them as persons is the acceptance or rejection of initial ideas. (9)

To help them in this choice we should give them principles of conduct and a wide range of the knowledge fitted for them.

These three principles (15, 16 and 17) should save children from some of the loose thinking and heedless action which cause most of us to live at a lower level than we need.

18. We should allow no separation to grow up between the intellectual and 'spiritual' life of children; but should teach them that the divine Spirit has constant access to their spirits, and is their continual helper in all the interests, duties and joys of life.

The 'Home Education' Series is so called from the title of the first volume, and not as dealing, wholly or principally with 'Home' as opposed to 'School' education.

End of Preface

Preface to the Fourth Edition

My attempt in the following volume is to suggest to parents and teachers a method of education resting upon a basis of natural law; and to touch, in this connection, upon a mother's duties to her children. In venturing to speak on this latter subject, I do so with the sincerest deference to mothers, believing that, in the words of a wise teacher of men, "the woman receives from the Spirit of God Himself the intuitions into the child's character, the capacity of appreciating its strength and its weakness, the faculty of calling forth the one and sustaining the other, in which lies the mystery of education, apart from which all its rules and measures are utterly vain and ineffectual." But just in proportion as a mother has this peculiar insight as regards her own children she will, I think, feel her need of a knowledge of the general principles of education, founded upon the nature and the needs of all children. And this knowledge of the science of education, not the best of mothers will get from above, seeing that we do not often receive as a gift that which we have the means of getting by our own efforts.

I venture to hope that teachers of young children, (11) also, may find this volume of use. This period of a child's life between his sixth and his ninth year should be used to lay the basis of a liberal education, and of the habit of reading for instruction. During these years the child should enter upon the domain of knowledge, in a good many directions, in a reposeful, consecutive way, which is not to be attained through the somewhat exciting medium of oral lessons. I hope that teachers may find the approach (from a new standpoint), to the hackneyed "subjects of instruction" proper for little children at any rate interesting and stimulating; and possibly the methods which this fresh standpoint indicates may prove suggestive and helpful.

The particular object of this volume, as a member of the 'Home Education' Series, is to show the bearing of the physiology of habit upon education; why certain physical, intellectual, and moral habits are a valuable asset to a child, and what may be done towards the formation of such habits. I beg to acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr Carpenter's Mental Physiology for valuable teaching on the subject of habits contained in some two or three chapters of that work. Also, I would renew my grateful thanks to those medical friends who have given careful and able revision to such parts of the work as rest upon a physiological basis.

I should add that some twenty years ago (1885) the greater part of this volume was

delivered as 'Lectures to Ladies,' in which form the papers were originally published (1886) under the title which is still retained. (12)

Lectures VII. and VIII. and the Appendix of the original volume have been transferred from this to other volumes of the Series. The whole has been very carefully revised, and much new matter introduced, especially in Part V., 'Lessons as Instruments of Education,' which now offers a fairly complete introduction to methods of teaching subjects fit for children between the ages of six and nine.

The rest of the volume attempts to deal with the whole of education from infancy until the ninth year of life. C. M. MASON Scale How, Ambleside. 1905

PART I -- Some Preliminary Considerations

Not the least sign of the higher status they have gained, is the growing desire for work that obtains amongst educated women. The world wants the work of such women; and presently, as education becomes more general, we shall see all women with the capacity to work falling into the ranks of working women, with definite tasks, fixed hours, and for wages, the pleasure and honour of doing useful work if they are under no necessity to earn money.

Children are a Public Trust.--Now, that work which is of most importance to society is the bringing up and instruction of the children--in the school, certainly, but far more in the home, because it is more than anything else the home influences brought to bear upon the child that determine the character and career of the future man or woman. It is a great thing to be a parent: there is no promotion, no dignity, to compare with it. The parents of but one child may be cherishing what shall prove a blessing to the world. But then, entrusted with such a charge, they are not (2) free to say, "I may do as I will with mine own." The children are, in truth, to be regarded less as personal property than as public trusts, put into the hands of parents that they may make the very most of them for the good of society. And this responsibility is not equally divided between the parents: it is upon the mothers of the present that the future of the world depends, in even a greater degree than upon the fathers, because it is the mothers who have the sole direction of the children's early, most impressible years. This is why we hear so frequently of great men who have had good mothers--that is, mothers who brought up their children themselves, and did not make over their gravest duty to indifferent persons.

Mothers owe a 'thinking love' to their Children.--"The mother is qualified," says Pestalozzi, "and qualified by the Creator Himself, to become the principal agent in the development of her child; ... and what is demanded of her is--a thinking love ... God has given to the child all the faculties of our nature, but the grand point remains undecided--how shall this heart, this head, these hands be employed? to whose service shall they be dedicated? A question the answer to which involves a futurity of happiness or misery to a life so dear to thee. Maternal love is the first agent in education."

We are waking up to our duties and in proportion as mothers become more highly educated and efficient, they will doubtless feel the more strongly that the education of their children during the first six years of life is an undertaking hardly to be entrusted to any hands but their own. And they will take it up as their profession--that is, with the (3) diligence, regularity, and punctuality which men bestow on their professional labours.

That the mother may know what she is about, may come thoroughly furnished to her work, she should have something more than a hearsay acquaintance with the theory of education, and with those conditions of the child's nature upon which such theory rests.

The training of Children 'dreadfully defective.'--"The training of children, says Mr. Herbert Spencer--"physical, moral and intellectual--is dreadfully defective. And in great measure it is so, because parents are devoid of that knowledge by which this training alone can be rightly guided. What is to be expected when one of the most intricate of problems is undertaken by those who have given scarcely a thought to the principle on which its solution depends? For shoemaking or housebuilding, for the management of a ship or of a locomotive engine, a long apprenticeship is needful. Is it, then, that the unfolding of a human being in body and mind is so comparatively simple a process that any one may superintend and regulate it with no preparation whatever? If not--if the process is, with one exception, more complex than any in Nature, and the task of ministering to it one of the surpassing difficulty--is it not madness to make no provision for such a task!? Better sacrifice accomplishments than omit this all essential instruction ... Some acquaintance with the first principles of physiology and the elementary truths of psychology is indispensable for the right bringing up of children. ... Here are the indisputable facts: that the development of children in mind and body follows certain laws; that unless these laws are in some 4) degree conformed to by parents, death is inevitable; that unless they are in a great degree conformed to, and that only when they are completely conformed to, can a perfect maturity be reached. Judge, then, whether all who may one day be parents should not strive with some anxiety to learn what these laws are." (Herbert Spencer, Education)

How Parents Usually Proceed.--The parent begins instinctively by regarding his child as an unwritten tablet, and is filled with great resolves as to what he shall write thereon. By-and-by, traits of disposition appear, the child has little ways of his own; and, at first, every new display of personality is a delightful surprise. That the infant should show pleasure at the sight of his father, that his face should cloud in sympathy with his mother, must always be wonderful to us. But the wonder stales; his parents are used to the fact by the time the child shows himself as a complete human being like themselves, with affections, desires, powers; taking to his book, perhaps, as a duck to the water; or to the games which shall make a man of him. The notion of doing all for the child with which the parents began gradually recedes. So soon as he shows that he has a way of his own he is encouraged to take it. Father and mother have no greater delight than to watch the individuality of their child unfold as a flower unfolds. But Othello loses his occupation. The more the child shapes his own course, the less do the parents find to do, beyond feeding him with food convenient, whether of love, or thought, or of bodily meat and drink. And (5) here, we may notice, the parents need only supply; the child knows well enough how to appropriate. The parents' chief care is, that that which they supply shall be wholesome and nourishing, whether in the way of picture books, lessons, playmates, bread and milk, or mother's love. This is education as most parents understand it, with more of meat, more of love, more of culture, according to their kind and degree. They let their children alone, allowing human nature to develop on its own lines, modified by facts of environment and descent.

Nothing could be better for the child than this 'masterly inactivity,' so far as it goes. It is well he should be let grow and helped to grow according to his nature; and so long as the parents do not step in to spoil him, much good and no very evident harm comes of letting him alone. But this philosophy of 'let him be,' while it covers a part, does not cover the serious part of the parents' calling; does not touch the strenuous incessant efforts upon lines of law which go to the producing of a human being at his best.

Nothing is trivial that concerns a child; his foolish-seeming words and ways are pregnant with meaning for the wise. It is in the infinitely little we must study in the infinitely great; and the vast possibilities, and the right direction of education, are indicated in the open book of the little child's thoughts.

A generation ago, a great teacher amongst us never wearied of reiterating that in the Divine plan "the family is the unit of the nation": not the individual, but the family. There is a great deal of teaching in the phrase, but this lies on the surface; the whole is greater than the part, the whole contains the part, owns the part, orders the part; and this being so, the (6) children are the property of the nation, to be brought up for the nation as is best for the nation, and not according to the whim of individual parents. The law is for the punishment of evil doers, for the praise of them that do well; so, practically, parents have very free play; but it is as well we should remember that the children are a national trust whose bringing up is the concern of all--even of those unmarried and childless persons whose part in the game is the rather dreary one of 'looking on.'

I.--A Method of Education

Traditional Methods of Education.--Never was it more necessary for parents to face for themselves this question of education in all its bearings. Hitherto, children have been brought up upon traditional methods mainly. The experience of our ancestors, floating in a vast number of educational maxims, is handed on from lip to lip; and few or many of these maxims form the educational code of every household.

But we hardly take in how complete a revolution advancing science is effecting in the theory of education. The traditions of the elders have been tried and found wanting; it will be long before the axioms of the new school pass into the common currency; and, in the meantime, parents are thrown upon their own resources, and absolutely must weigh principles, and adopt a method, of education for themselves.

For instance, according to the former code, a mother might use her slipper now and then, to good effect and without blame; but now, the person of the child is, whether rightly or wrongly, held sacred (7) and the infliction of pain for moral purposes is pretty generally disallowed.

Again, the old rule of the children's table was, 'the plainer the better, and let hunger bring sauce'; now the children's diet must be at least as nourishing and as varied as that of their elders; and appetite, the cravings for certain kinds of food, hitherto a vicious tendency to be repressed, is now within certain limitations the parents' most trustworthy guide in arranging a dietary for their children.

That children should be trained to endure hardness, was a principle of the old regime. "I shall never make a sailor if I can't face the wind and rain," said a little fellow of five who was taken out on a bitter night to see a torchlight procession; and, though, shaking with cold, he declined the shelter of a shed. Nowadays, the shed is everything; the children must not be permitted to suffer from fatigue or exposure.

That children should do as they are bid, mind their books, and take pleasure as it offers when nothing stands in the way, sums up the old theory; now, the pleasures of children are apt to be made more account than their duties.

Formerly, they were brought up in subjection; now, the elders give place, and the world is made for the children.

English people rarely go so far as the parents of that story in French Home Life, who arrived an hour late at a dinner party, because they had been desired by their girl of three to undress and go to bed when she did, and were able to steal away only when the child was asleep. We do not go so far, but that is the direction in which we are now moving; and how far the new theories of education are wise and (8) humane, the outcome of more widely spread physiological and psychological knowledge, and how far they just pander to child worship to which we are all succumbing, is not a question to be decided off hand.

At any rate, it is not too much to say that a parent who does not follow reasonably a method of education, fully thought out, fails--now, more than ever before--to fulfil the claims his children have upon him.

Method a Way to an End.--Method implies two things--a way to an end, and a step by step progress in that way. Further, the following of a method implies an idea, a mental image, of the end of object to be arrived at. What do you propose that education shall effect in and for your child? Again, method is natural; easy, yielding, unobtrusive, simple as the ways of Nature herself; yet, watchful, careful, all pervading, all compelling. Method, with the end of education in view, presses the most unlikely matters into service to bring about that end; but with no more tiresome mechanism than the sun employs when it makes the winds to blow and the waters to flow only by shining. The parent who sees his way--that is, the exact force of method--to educate his child, will make use of every circumstance of the child's life almost without intention on his own part, so easy and spontaneous is a method of education based upon Natural Law. Does the child eat or drink, does he come, or go, or play--all the time he is being educated, though he is as little aware of it as he is of the act of breathing. There is always the danger that a method, a bona fide method, should degenerate into a mere system. The Kindergarten (9) Method, for instance, deserves the name, as having been conceived and perfected by large hearted educators to aid the many sided evolution of the living, growing, most complex human being; but what a miserable wooden system does it become in the hands of ignorant practitioners!

A System easier than a Method.--A 'system of education' is an alluring fancy; more so, on some counts, than a method, because it is pledged to more definite calculable results. By means of a system certain developments may be brought about through the observance of given rules. Shorthand, dancing, how to pass examinations, how to become a good accountant, or a woman of society, may all be learned upon systems.

System--the observing of rules until the habit of doing certain things, of behaving in certain ways, is confirmed, and, therefore, the art is acquired--is so successful in achieving precise results, that it is no wonder there should be endless attempts to straiten the whole field of education to the limits of a system.

If a human being were a machine, education could do more for him than to set him in action in prescribed ways, and the work of the educator would be simply to adopt a good working system or set of systems.

But the educator has to deal with a self-acting, self-developing being, and his business is to guide, and assist in, the production of the latent good in that being, the dissipation of the latent evil, the preparation of the child to take his place in the world at his best, with every capacity for good that is in him developed into a power.

Though system is a highly useful as an instrument of (10) education, a 'system of education' is mischievous, as producing only mechanical action instead of the vital growth and movement of a living being.

It is worth while to point out the differing characters of a system and a method, because parents let themselves be run away with often enough by some plausible 'system,' the object of which is to produce development in one direction--of the muscles, of the memory, of the reasoning faculty--were a complete all-round education. This easy satisfaction arises from the sluggishness of human nature, to which any definite scheme is more agreeable than the constant watchfulness, the unforeseen action, called for when the whole of a child's existence is to be used as the means of his education. But who is sufficient for an education so comprehensive, so incessant? A parent may be willing to undergo any definite

labours for his child's sake; but to be always catering to his behoof, always contriving that circumstances shall play upon him for his good, is the part of a god and not of a man! A reasonable objection enough, if one looks upon education as an endless series of independent efforts, each to be thought out and acted out on the spur of the moment; but the fact is, that a few broad essential principles cover the whole field, and these once fully laid hold of, it is as easy and natural to act upon them as it is to act upon our knowledge of such facts as that fire burns and water flows. My endeavour in this and the following chapters will be to put these few fundamental principles before you in their practical bearing. Meantime, let us consider one or two preliminary questions. (11)