



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,  
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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in practical working for twenty-one years, and nearly 1200 scholars have passed through it; the schools belonging to the Society of Friends, who are ever in the forefront of educational reforms, where at Saffron Walden, at Penketh, Ackworth, and other towns, the principle is in most successful working.

At our own doors the Secondary Day School attached to the Battersea Polytechnic, of which a most interesting account may be read in the "Special Report" issued by the Education Department 1896-7, written by the Principal, Mr. Sidney H. Wells, who from being a doubter has come by practical experience to be a most enthusiastic believer in the advantages of mixed education. And finally the school at Ellerdale Road, Hampstead, opened by the King Alfred School Society, mentioned by Mrs. Franklin, where co-education is one of the essential reforms which the Society is pledged to carry out.

MRS. FRANKLIN remarked that though most mothers would certainly, in their heart of hearts, prefer day schools to boarding schools, there are certain practical questions to be considered. Children educated in London must be subjected to conditions of life and climate, to the wear and tear caused by distance, and the time spent in getting to and fro, which could be devoted to recreation and leisure if they were at boarding school.

Those parents, too, who lived at a distance from good day schools, or in isolated country houses, would find it almost impossible to bring up their boys without boarding schools. The girls might indeed be put in the *Parents' Review* School and have a trained governess, but boys need the companionship which can only be gained at school. If therefore we wish to bring about that combination of home and school training which we all desire, the only solution would be for parents to congregate in certain healthy country districts, and though mothers might like such arrangements it would be an impossible one for most fathers.

As regards the question of games, Mrs. Franklin did not think that girls and boys above nine years of age could play games together. Although a strong advocate of games for girls, and the founder of a club for that purpose, she felt sure that all college girls would deprecate playing with boys, and

quoted the ex-captain of the Newnham Hockey Club, who said that in such cases the boys either played down to the girls or the latter got the worst of it. Mrs. Franklin therefore considered it desirable in co-education that girls should have a separate play-ground and play among themselves.

MRS. SPENCER CURWEN did not think that the fact of having to work under a man would be objected to by women teachers, in fact, it might be found preferable as there was a tendency among women, as heads, to become tyrannical. She thought that boys and girls might play together with advantage up to the age of 14, after which age the greater physical weight of the boy alone made it impossible. Mrs. Curwen said that we are frightened at the idea of co-education because it is new, but read a letter describing the work of Craigmore College, Stroud, where it has been tried for over ten years, "in spite of the strait jacket of prejudice which even the most advanced woman still wears beneath her flowing 'Liberty' robe." Mrs. Curwen concluded her remarks by the suggestion that mothers and fathers should put before their children the ideal of the Divine-human.

REV. F. S. COLMAN considered boarding schools as very necessary, especially to those who could not possibly get their children educated as they wished in the country, and who must therefore continue to look to boarding schools as a field of teaching for boys, if not for girls. Mr. Colman added that much had been said which would make us hope for the improvement of our present system of education, and which would make us all think and do a little something towards the solution of those problems and the removal of those difficulties. He thanked Mr. Garrod for his paper, which had been most interesting.

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H. D. GELDART, ESQ., ON

NATURE WORK AT THE HOUSE OF EDUCATION.

MR. GELDART: The subject on which I have been asked to speak to you is, "The Nature Work at the House of Education"; and you will perhaps allow me to explain that when

your committee did me the honour to propose that I should do so, my first feeling was to decline, not from any want of appreciation of the compliment implied in the request, but because it seemed more my place to do my own little share of the work than to talk about the work itself; of the earlier stages of which I see, living at the opposite corner of England, nothing whatever. Of the process and the progress of the teaching I am entirely ignorant, and am only acquainted with the result as embodied in the *Nature Note-Books*. But when I found that it was Miss Mason's wish that I should accept the invitation, I felt that the deep respect with which I regard her, both personally and on account of what she has done and is doing at the House of Education, made it quite impossible to refuse.

The *Nature Note-Books* were first begun in February, 1893, at Miss Hodgson's suggestion, who having been asked by Miss Mason to try to make the students as keen observers, as true lovers of, and as conversant with Nature as she herself is; hit upon the plan of making each student keep an illustrated note-book, modelled somewhat on the lines of note-books which she had herself been in the habit of keeping for her own purposes. Every student has to keep one, and when her time is up at Ambleside her book is sent to me for perusal. Each book practically lasts one year, though I believe that some students have filled three in two years, and as at present arranged the student chooses whichever of her books she thinks the best to be sent; of course in the majority of cases it is the latest, but not always, and there are sometimes references to "what I did in my other book."

The *Nature Note-Book* may be said to consist of three parts, which we will take in order of importance.

First, a Diary of Observations, some original, others derived from what Miss Hodgson has brought to the students' notice, very often during their walks together. These Diaries contain descriptions of the plants, insects, birds and other animals seen, and records of their habits; lists of plants found, with their times of first appearance, flowering and seeding. These lists were at first kept monthly, and I believe the largest number of wild flowers ever found in one month was just under two hundred. These lists were in the earlier years of the *Note-Books*, scattered about throughout the Diaries at

uncertain intervals, taking up much space which could be very ill spared. They were in this form useless for comparison, without a great deal of reference to and fro. They are now kept in a tabular form, showing at a glance the work of the whole term or even of the whole year.

There are many descriptions of the treasures which Mr. Boyle shows the students in his wonderful garden, where, judging by the diaries, an immense variety of plants from many parts of the world are gathered together.

Then there are the excursions to places of interest, such as Furness Abbey, Humphrey Head on Morecambe Bay, Keswick or Helvellyn. All these are fully described, often with racy notes of the various things seen and found, and accounts of the very good time which the students have had of it.

And these Diaries are not kept in term-time only; during their vacations those of the students who take real interest in Nature work, go on noting down what they see, and draw many flowers and insects which they do not meet with in the Lake District. They also make interesting original observations. I will give an example. One student noticed during a very severe frost that the blackbirds were reduced to such straits for food, that as some of them died of hunger the survivors actually ate up their remains. I have seen several times blackbirds and thrushes reduced to starvation by hard weather, but I never before heard of them turning cannibals.

Second in importance to the Diaries come Lecture Notes. These are notes of the lectures given by Miss Hodgson on many subjects. We have had, for instance, Pitcher Plants with their traps for insects, founded on Professor Geddes; Mosses, from Mr. Justice Fry's charming little book; Studies of Animal Life, from Professor Thomson; Mammals of Great Britain, from Lyddeker; Gall Insects, Trap-door Spiders, and many others. These notes not unfrequently give really good resumés of the subjects lectured on. They are very interesting, as showing the bent of the different students' minds; the way in which one, or perhaps two only, out of the number will have caught some one particular point which has escaped all the rest; and also by showing how much a student's notes will improve as they go on, beginning in a comparatively disconnected sort of way, and by-and-by

settling down to well thought out and clearly expressed summary, fairly covering the ground gone over. There are sometimes, but not often, capital little essays apart from the lectures, on subjects which seem to have caught the fancy of a student. This last Christmas there was a very pretty little account of the voyage of the "Challenger," and also an essay on "Diatoms."

We now come to the third and last part of the Books, and I am not quite sure that I am right in putting it last, and that is the Drawings with which they are illustrated. These fall into two divisions—original drawings illustrating the Diaries, and copies or diagrams illustrating the Lectures. The original sketches are almost invariably brush-paintings in water-colours without outline, a method which catches the "gesture," as Mr. Ruskin calls it, and general character of a plant better than drawing with a point or with a hard outline. Of course these drawings can only be considered as sketches, there is no time for really finished work; finish comes afterwards, when the student has left Ambleside, and presumably is able to give more time to each drawing; and that it does so come we know from books which we have seen and which have been kept by ex-students, who have developed a much more finished style. Still I have often had really good sketch-portraits of wild plants, giving a thoroughly good idea of the whole plant.

Insects, too, are often painted in a very spirited way and very successfully, and so in a few cases are shells. As a rule the weakest drawings are those of birds' eggs, not but what here and there a student has succeeded really well with them. I once had the pleasure of giving a student distinction for drawing plants, insects from life, and birds' eggs, all exceedingly well; but too often misled as I believe by plates in cheap hand-books, which are really only diagrams, they are drawn in an entirely impossible position, as if the egg were standing on its smaller end on a level with the eye. Of course an egg never stands on either end so long as it is whole, and if it were laid on a table below the level of the eye with the small end towards the artist, he would not be able to see the distinctive markings which are almost always clustered round the larger end, and besides, he would be let in for very difficult conical foreshortening.

Some of the students when they first begin their Note-Books, are evidently quite unaccustomed to painting, but their work improves rapidly, just as it does in the Lecture Notes, and the improvement is very interesting to watch. Others are practised and well instructed in painting. I believe that one student, at all events, held drawing certificates, gained before she went to Ambleside.

The second kind of illustrations, those to the Lecture Notes, are either diagrams or copies from books. There have been among them many beautifully executed pen-and-ink copies of engravings.

The way in which the present form of Ambleside *Nature Note-Book*, with which no doubt many of us are acquainted, came to be adopted was, that in the early time there was much difference in the books used; some were large, some small; some had excellent paper, some very inferior, into which the colours sank, leaving ragged outlines; the only point in which they almost all agreed was, in being badly bound. This bad quality of paper caused a good deal of trouble in placing some of the books, because allowance had to be made for the material used. All these things being brought under notice, the House of Education provided the present pattern, which has excellent paper, good for painting upon, is firmly bound, and puts all the students on an equality, and will last, as books on which so much care and labour have been spent should do, for many years, and it is very cheap. I am told that these books are a very great success, and very largely used by others besides the students.\*

Now, perhaps you will like to know what happens to the books when they come into my hands. I take a book at random, read it straight through, making a note of everything which seems worthy of notice, good or bad, on a slip, on which is also marked every drawing which rises to the point which I call "good." To do this a drawing must be a fair representation of the thing drawn. Nothing whatever is given for mere scraps, however well executed. For example: I had two drawings of the cranberry; one, beautifully painted, of a scrap, with perhaps a dozen leaves, and one flower stuck upright, in a position in which no cranberry ever grew. Of

\* *Nature Note-Books* may be had at the Office—1s.

this I took no notice, it meant nothing and was only misleading. The other, nothing like so well painted, was a fair sketch of the plant as it trails on the ground, throwing up its flowers on small stalks, with its little rootlets at intervals, giving a good idea of both gesture and habit. This I at once marked "very good," though not nearly so attractive looking as the other.

A "good" original drawing counts one; above this there are two higher grades, "very good," which counts two, and "excellent," which counts three; but to get this last, a drawing must not only give a good idea of its subject, but it must be well executed. Sometimes it has been necessary to make an intermediate grade for drawings which just miss excellence in execution; these I call "very very good," and count two of them as five.

Mistakes are corrected as the book is read, but always in pencil, so that the student may if she pleases insert the correction in her own handwriting. I never touch any book with ink. If a student seems not to have understood any point, or there is any doubt, an explanation on a separate piece of paper is placed in the book.

When the books have all been read, the slips are compared and places given accordingly. There is rarely any question about who are the first two or three, or the last one or two. The middle places are sometimes difficult to determine. I abhor brackets. If two books come out even, they are read all over again, and the notes on the slips made from them all checked off; if equality still results, the two books are laid out side by side in a good light, and the drawings are compared until a decision is arrived at. Sometimes a book has to take a lower place than it would otherwise gain on account of blunders or bad spelling. Bad spelling of which you read in the *Parents' Review* for this month—"It is only slovenliness of observation that breeds bad spelling," I always consider when habitual, as slovenliness, and treat it accordingly.

It will give you some idea of the extent to which the work of the students has improved and increased, if you know that when I began reading these books the average time occupied by each book was about five hours, but such a set of books as were sent last Christmas took seven hours each, not counting time spent in reference to text-books on doubtful points.

The places in order of merit having been settled, and the report sent to Miss Mason, the books are returned to the students, each with a short letter, stating the class in which the book has been placed and the number in the list; and this letter is always one of as much praise and encouragement as can be fairly given, never of blame or discouragement, but pointing out the weak places in the work, and suggesting how it may be strengthened, and giving references which may help for the future. I don't believe one bit in finding fault; I take it for granted that each has done her level best, and only wants showing how to do better, and also that she means to persevere in keeping a book after she has left Ambleside. That many do so we know, as their books have been lent for exhibition.

Most of the students reply warmly to these letters, and with some of them correspondence is established, and they write to me from time to time, sometimes sending plants which have puzzled them, or asking advice as to books, &c. As an example of such correspondence, and showing the trouble which an ex-student will take, one of them, who in vacation time had drawn a vetch found near her own home and named it as a British plant, which it certainly very much resembled, but I was not satisfied as to the correctness of the name, sent to me no less than three different specimens before I could determine what I had all along suspected, that it was an alien escape.

The Bishop of London has told us recently that the "sole aim of education is the free development of the faculties." I venture to claim for the Nature Work at the House of Education, that it does its best to secure this aim. There are two ways of Nature teaching, which take two different lines, according to whether you want merely to teach a science, or whether you want to instruct and elevate your pupil—in other words, whether you value your subject or your pupil most. If the first be your object, you will begin with definitions and schedules and hard and fast lines, and if you succeed you may make a specialist of your pupil, keen enough within the ring-fence into which you have led him, but not of much use so far as your teaching goes beyond it, and you will run a great risk of disgusting him with the whole thing, making him anxious merely to pass an examination and then (to use

a slang term) to "chuck the whole show" for evermore; but if your object be to interest your pupil in Nature, to make an all round Naturalist of him, who shall be able to impart his own interest in Nature to younger people; then you will begin, as Miss Hodgson does, with the things themselves, instead of definitions you will give facts, you will encourage your pupil to make out for himself what he can; instead of requiring schedules you will ask for sketches of what he actually sees, and if there is any aptitude at all in him, and I believe there are very few who are really destitute of any feeling for Nature, you will have laid a sound foundation on which if it is ever afterwards wanted a structure of scientific specialism can be safely reared.

I do not suppose that anyone here will want or expect to be told or convinced of the great advantage to be gained by Nature study, of the widening of the powers of observation, and what an American author has called the "mental uplift" of it, or of the solace and relief to be derived from having a pure and elevating hobby (if you will call it so) to which to turn at intervals among the worry and trouble of necessary avocations. To quote the same author again, "every one" of your pupils "will some day need the solace and the rest which Nature Lore can give." But there is even a higher view of the subject than these, which has been summed up by a fellow-townsmen of my own in time long past, Sir Thomas Browne, who wrote, "There are two books whence I collect my divinity; besides that written one of God, another, His servant Nature, that universal and public manuscript, that lies exposed unto the eyes of all"; and it is this manuscript that Miss Mason and Miss Hodgson are teaching their students to read, that they in their turn may interpret it to their pupils.

AN EX-STUDENT OF THE HOUSE OF EDUCATION testified to the value of the teaching of Nature Lore at Ambleside, and her own experience of the great pleasure such knowledge brought with it. She thought that the Nature Note-Books were remarkable as indexes of the students' characters, and might be useful guides to parents who were choosing teachers for their children. She also gave some instances of the interest in Nature she had been able to arouse in her pupils.

MISS MASON thanked Mr. Geldart very warmly for all he had done for the House of Education.

MISS HART-DAVIS spoke of the work of the Natural History Club in connection with the Reading Branch, which, she said, was almost too large for convenience, numbering 170 members. Lectures were given in the winter on geological subjects, pond-life, &c., followed in April by excursions in the neighbourhood bearing as far as possible on the subjects of the lectures.

REV. F. S. COLMAN said that in these days of competition there was a tendency to study only such subjects as apparently "pay" best, and leave out the study of Nature, wherein he considered lay one of the elements of attaining success and happiness in life, and which could not in any way be considered waste of time. He hoped that such opportunities as were afforded by the Natural History Club, would gradually spread.

The Morning Session concluded by a meeting of local Secretaries, to which Branch Representatives and members of the Committee were invited. Many useful suggestions as to future work were made at this meeting.

#### NOTES OF MISS MASON'S LECTURE (5.30 p.m.).

At 15, Belgrave Square, W. (by kind permission of Her Grace the Duchess of Bedford), a drawing room meeting was held, at which the REV. CANON BARNETT presided. He said: "Ladies and gentlemen, when Miss Mason is about to speak to a meeting of the Parents' National Educational Union, the chairman has no other duty but to be silent and listen to what she has to say."

MISS MASON said that it gave her great pleasure to see so large an audience and to have had such a kind welcome from them, and she added, "We are all gratified to have had such a gracious reception at the house of Her Grace the Duchess of Bedford." She then began her address on

#### THE DIRECTION OF THE WILL, AND THE REGULATION OF THE DESIRES,

by impressing on her audience a fact on which she had before dwelt, viz., that the person of a human being is one and