3
Miss Mason at Ambleside

I
The *House of Education*

Charlotte was approaching her fiftieth year when, in 1891, she left Bradford and moved to Ambleside. For the first few months she lived with Mrs Fleming at Belle Vue, busy with lecture tours and with the administration of the young P.E.U.s. In Ambleside and elsewhere she was now known as 'Miss Mason', just as her contemporaries were 'Miss Nightingale' or 'Miss Beale' to those who were not their intimate friends or relations.

Miss Mason this year announced in the *Parents' Review:*

> We are prepared to begin the work of our *House of Education* with a six weeks' summer session in lovely Ambleside. Two considerations have determined the choice of place. First we wish to combine a delightful summer holiday with valuable work. Next we desire, by means of field work under able leaders, to give such knowledge of the physical geography, geology, meteorology, botany and natural history of the Lake Country as parents should be prepared to give their children concerning the neighbourhood of their own homes. We invite women who are or are likely to become the mothers, sisters, aunts, governesses, friends or neighbours of little children to embrace this short and quite inexpensive course of training, which definite outdoor work in lovely country should make very pleasant.
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> This first summer session of the House of Education will, we hope, be made the occasion of an informal summer meeting of our friends. Many well-wishers to the *Parents' Review* and the Parents' Educational Union have expressed a wish to meet and discuss ways and means to help forward the work they have at heart. We propose a most pleasant

> place of meeting. Mothers who come with their families would be able to take up a considerable part of the training course, and some of the lectures and the field work may prove attractive to the gentlemen of the family. All the work of the session will be definitely practical; lectures, classes, demonstration lessons and field work bearing on the training and teaching of children, and we believe that all will be found attractive. . . . Arrangements will be made for excursions. . . . In the evenings, musical recitals, conversaziones, etc., will give opportunities for conference as well as for social intercourse.
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> It is desirable that this opportunity should be taken to spread the interest in the work. We hope that friends will induce *their* friends to come, so that our 'summer meeting' may lead to many new centres of work. . . . The session is to begin on Monday, 3rd August.

The following month the editor writes:

> Our *summer session* must, we regret, be postponed to another year. We have received offers of valuable help and charming invitations, but our announcement came out unavoidably so late that many of our friends had already made arrangements for the summer. . . .

This is the first indication that Miss Mason had chosen Ambleside for her work. The choice was a courageous one. The Lake District, with its waters, its small roads and quiet valleys, seemed, in those days, far away from the stream of life. It was a place in which families could happily spend their summer holidays, leaving the train at Windermere and travelling on for five miles by horse-driven coach. But what of the winters with their abundant snow, the rain, the distance from London? Charlotte Mason had known this land of mountains for twenty-six years. Her love of walking and of all living, growing things had given her intimacy with the countryside. She chose Ambleside knowing that close at hand were sources of refreshment and delight necessary to all great enterprises.

There was a second reason for her choice. For many years men and women of great gifts had been attracted to the district. For a conference at the college in 1905 Miss Mason wrote a prologue to a play given by the students. It was in verse to show that

> Lake dwellers know
> That Poesy and Education go
> Together hand in hand; that either sundered,
> Droops, languishes and dies bereft of other.

The idea of the play was 'to associate the great names of the valley with the conference, especially to underscore our belief in the humanities as an essential part of education.' The verses refer to Matthew Arnold, Wordsworth, Harriet Martineau, S.T. Coleridge, Faber, Arthur Hugh Clough and his sister, 'Christopher North', and Dr Arnold.

Memories of these well-known writers were still living when Miss Mason first knew Ambleside. She believed that the district would always attract people of active mind and talent and would never become a spiritual backwater. At another conference she speaks of Ambleside as 'an unwalled university all dedicate to plain living and high thinking.' It is 'precisely the site for our training college, abounding as it does in sources of spiritual inspiration.' Here was the place for a House of Education surrounded by a countryside worthy of love and of intimate knowledge.

The name which Miss Mason gave to the home of her work was chosen after much thought and discussion with Mrs Dallas Yorke. 'Household life as a means of culture,' she wrote later, 'is much to be preferred to college life.' Miss Mason hoped to establish a *house,* whose inmates would be devoted to *education.* But how can education be defined? In *Parents and Children,* where this question is considered, she answers: 'The poverty of our thought on the subject of education is shown by the fact that we have no word which at all implies the sustaining of life.'[1] The aim of a House of Education would be to sustain life. 'The House of the Holy Spirit' would more exactly express the truth but might be misunderstood, but education *is* the work of the Holy Spirit, therefore 'House of Education' would be a true name for the whole work carried on beneath one roof. In the autumn the idea of a new training for women took shape. Miss Mason described it in the *Parents' Review:*

> A gracious vision we have rejoiced in these three years past and she is now near taking form. Her face is kind, sincere and full of purpose. She is devoted to children and understands all nursery duties in health and sickness. She can sing and draw and tell a great store of tales. She has a quiet eye and a warm heart with the firmness of one who speaks with authority. She knows the names and songs of birds, can tell the names of some of the flowers, some of the stars. She speaks pure English undefiled. She does not teach the children science but she trains in them the seeing eye. This 'gracious vision' understands the laws of habit, knowing that habits make for character and character rules destiny. She knows the laws of a child's well-being and development; seeing him as a person, one and indivisible, she prefers

1. Education from Latin *educare,* to nourish.

to have entire charge of him under his mother. There is no gulf fixed between nursery and schoolroom but there is a gradual easy progress in the first steps of learning.

But who is this vision? She shall be called an adopted aunt, for children call all near friends of their parents 'uncle' and 'aunt.' And where is she to be found?

That is just what we are about to disclose. . . . The raw material exists in happy abundance in the shape of good women, refined, educated, capable, doing nothing or doing the wrong thing for them, because they have not found their life work. As many of these as will come to us we shall be prepared to receive into training in the middle of January 1892, and by the following December we hope to supply what we expect to be a large demand for 'aunts.' We hope that in time the *House of Education* will be prosperous enough to be incorporated as a public institution. In the meantime we begin with a day of small things. We begin on the sound principle that the work shall be self-supporting. . . . We are arranging to combine very great economy with perfect efficiency. The work of the *House of Education* is to begin in Ambleside. . . .

Ambleside is far from London but in view of that fact there is much to say. Students will be impressed with the great natural beauty round them, will find a country rich in wild flowers, mosses, ferns, birds, 'stones.' They will have opportunities of observing every change brought about by the procession of the seasons. They will learn to know and love the individuality of great natural features, mountain, pass, valley, watershed, lake, river-system, waterfall. . . . Considerations of economy and convenience are not less obvious. Excellent lodgings abound here, to be had at comparatively low rents, except during the 'season' when we shall have our long vacation. Ambleside is so small a town that we know each other here. . . . A year's training with board and lodging may be accomplished for the small sum of £30. (Ten shillings a week will meet the cost of lodging and living.)

The value of training in giving impulse and direction, as well as knowledge and power, can hardly be overstated. . . . The 'Principles of Education' is a wide subject; the course to be taken up is indicated rather fully in *Home Education.* . . . The differences however between merely reading an educational work and being trained on the principles laid down in the work are as the difference between seeing a light and being kindled at a flame. Our object is to kindle the – if we may adapt a phrase – enthusiasm of childhood, which makes all work of teaching and training heart-service done for God. We ask our

readers to help us to find the right students for the *House of Education.* By December 1892 we hope to be able to supply teachers whether for the nursery only, or for the schoolroom only, or for both, and for pupils of all ages. Probably some of our students will hold certificates of high qualifications before they come to us.

In October 1891 a letter in the *Manchester Guardian* has the following paragraph: 'At Ambleside a "House of Education" is being opened, in which ladies may be trained as nurses. There is said to be a great opening just now for ladies able to take charge of children, and many educated women would find the occupation more congenial than that of teaching.'

Miss Mason comments:

This is quite true. Already we have applications for tante ('aunt') when she is ready at whatever salary the 'House of Education' thinks it right to fix. We have secured capital quarters – boarding-house, lecture hall and classrooms. But the training is not for 'tante' only but for ladies preparing to be governesses to older children, and last, but not least, for those whose 'call' may be to become mothers or aunts. Apply to the Editor, Ambleside, for particulars.[2]

II
First students

The *Parents' Review* for February 1892 states that 'the *House of Education* has begun work. . . .' Here is the account of her year at Ambleside given by Violet Parker, one of the first students:

My first recollection of Miss Mason was in January 1889 when my mother and I were invited to meet her at the vicarage, Forest Gate. Our friends the Rev. Edward and Mrs Wynne had lately moved from Manningham, Bradford, and Mrs Wynne had told us how Miss Mason, in order to raise needed funds for their church there, had given a series of talks on educational matters. These had appeared in book form as *Home Education.* A year or two later the 'House of Education' was opened. Three other girls and myself were the first students.

How well I remember that night of 15th January 1892. A cold but lovely drive by coach from Windermere to Ambleside: trees heavily laden with snow on one hand – a black lake on the other, a mysterious

2. The idea of training nurses was soon given up and the course at Ambleside became a preparation for the teaching and care of children of school age.

and wonderful fairyland to our delighted eyes. At the end of our journey – on arrival at Ambleside there was a warm welcome from Miss Mason who so soon won our hearts. Whatever our surroundings might have been, we should have been happy merely to be with her!

We were at Fairfield House for three months, then when Springfield became vacant either Miss Mason or my mother took it. . . . My mother furnished it and managed it for some time until she found it too much for her; then Miss Mason bought the furniture and my mother moved to Walton Cottage. At Springfield Miss Mason's room was the large one at the top of the stairs on the right. I loved being there and so enjoyed the yellow poppies which came up everywhere. It was such a pretty walk over the stile across the fields to church. Miss Mason took Miss Beale that way. Dr Schofield also visited her there. . . . In those days Miss Mason devoted nearly all her time to us and we spent our mornings with her at Mr Fleming's Lecture Room[3] in the village where were excellent classrooms for our purpose; she was able to go for walks with us or for excursions by road or lake. I well remember when she came for a row with us. She usually went with us to Mrs Firth's weekly 'picture talk' – so much appreciated. How we delighted in everything, but Miss Mason was far from strong and often greatly overtaxed herself for the work's sake. Upon more than one occasion she had to fight serious illness but I cannot remember her ever referring to herself.

As I look back what impresses me most about Miss Mason was, I think, her extraordinary power of getting the best out of everybody and of making 'the lion lie down with the lamb.' She seemed by some magic to eliminate causes of discord, but these seldom occurred in the atmosphere of peace and content which she created. By her presentation of the good, that which was bad and ugly simply ceased to exist. I think Miss Mason's outstanding quality was her intuitive understanding . . . she was often almost uncanny in her judgment of character. . . . But her humility (in spite of her power), combined with her urgent desire for the person's good, brought out the best in those who were associated with her.

In those days the House of Education course lasted only one year and it came to an end all too soon. To have been associated for only nine months with such a mind and heart was a privilege one looks back upon with gratitude all one's life.

Miss Mason gave everyone the fullest scope possible to act for themselves, thereby inducing to the uttermost the use of latent power. In some cases one was hardly aware of it until an occasion

3. Later the Y.M.C.A. Hall.

called it forth. She also possessed that delightful and enviable faculty for finding exactly the right person for any given job (special work). Many and various were the subjects in our time-table, but best of all were those lessons learned by contact with her.

Miss Florence Rankin was trained at the House of Education (Springfield) from January to December 1894. Following is an extract from her nature notebook:

13th June. Went to Sweden Bridge by the beck jumping over the stones. We found lovely meadow crane's-bill growing in profuse clumps by the stream and further on the finest globeflowers I have seen. Further still and on the boggy banks very fine mountain primroses, and butterwort as well as purple orchises and many butterflies-meadow browns, fritillaries, orange tips, etc. We soon arrived at Scandale Bottoms which runs into sheepfolds. It is a very lonely desolate place hemmed in on either side by rugged mountains devoid of herbage and bounded at the end by Dove Crags. There was no sound but the bleating of many sheep and the rippling of streams that unite to form the Scandale Beck.

We scrambled over Dove Crags with great difficulty – it was very lonely on the top and we tried many peaks before we came upon the splendid valley that leads down to Brother's Water. On the top of the crags we found a great deal of crystal which we put in our pockets. The view was so magnificent I shall never forget it. We scrambled down the precipitous rock which is covered with bilberry and had some horrible tea at the Brother's Water Inn. Then as we had seen the last coach go by while we were up in the clouds we had to trudge back by the Kirkstone Pass. Its aspect is remarkably dreary and uncanny and we were not sorry to see trees and houses again as we approached Ambleside in the sunset.

Miss Kitching remembered that

in Miss Rankin's time and for many years afterwards there were no motors, no bicycles, no buses, only some private carriages. The students travelled to and from Windermere station, and as far as Keswick on a half-term holiday, in a four or six-horse old family coach, sitting on top with luggage inside. The driver wore a scarlet coat and grey hat, and the man at the back had a long horn which the students used to try to blow. There were a few charabancs that could

be hired, two-or four-horse, in the season and these were sometimes used for half-term excursions. Eighteen hundred and ninety-six saw the first bicycles in Ambleside.

How full these early days at Ambleside must have been with the care of a household of students, their lectures and training, the children's work to supervise in the school and, every day, the many letters to dispatch by which the union had to be held together. Miss Mason continued her lecture tours; there is a long list for 1892, including two courses of lectures, each lasting a week, which she gave at the Polytechnic, London. These were addressed to children's nurses.

Miss Mason was making many new friends; they came to her meetings bringing others with them, for, one friend writes, 'as a speaker she was quite unique, never wrote her lectures down, nor can I remember a single note.'

Dr Helen Webb, that wise and witty physician, became a firm friend and spoke at many gatherings of parents. 'Why small things matter,' one of her papers, is as fresh and useful today as it was so long ago.

At this time Lady Aberdeen, among her many other endeavours, was publishing a home paper for working people. Miss Mason prepared a special edition of its numbers for the use of P.E.U. members. She announced in April 1891: 'Our readers will be glad to know that at last we have a magazine for cottage reading. *Onward and Upward* is a quite charming penny monthly magazine edited by Lady Aberdeen. . . . Here mothers will find wise counsels as to the bringing up of their families.'

There was much correspondence in connection with the *Parents' Review.* The early numbers cover a large field of knowledge, and writers for these interesting papers must be found. Miss Mason contributed an article each month especially written for parents. In 1892 these were appearing under the title' Parents and Children,' and when four years later she published a book of this name, some of these articles were included.

The magazine was unable to pay its way at first; it had no fund on which to draw and went through considerable financial difficulties. It was saved, however, by support generously given by its readers. The editor when inviting a contribution confessed that the payment for it could only consist of the certainty of a circle of interested readers. Articles were seldom withheld and the early numbers of the *Parents' Review* are full of vitality. Charlotte Mason was a most courteous editor. Her respect for an author's choice of word, his proportions and paragraphs, prevented editorial cuts and adjustments. If alterations were necessary the author was invited to make them himself. Thus the *Review* was launched successfully on its long career to occupy 'an outpost in educational thought, not tempting to

publishers, not tempting to capitalists, not tempting to the general public, but possibly demanding the strenuous support of all who are in sympathy with such teaching as it affords.'

A glance through the list of authors who wrote in the early numbers of the *Parents' Review* shows that Miss Mason called for contributions from friends old and new, from Miss Trevor at Bishop Otter College, from Mrs Epps, Mr Rooper, Mrs Steinthal ('Aunt Mai'), Mr Burrell. The names appear of men and women well known in wider circles, of Oscar Browning of Cambridge University fame, and of L.T. Meade, the popular writer of girls' school stories. There were articles too by leaders in the Churches, for each number contained support for the religious basis of the union.

III
The Parents' Educational Union

The Parents' Educational Union had made steady growth in London. The report for 1892 shows that 'national' had been added to its name and that this small tree of thought was producing new branches in many parts of England and overseas. It was on its way to 'overspread the country with a great national educational league of parents of every condition.' 'Some day,' Miss Mason wrote in a letter to a friend, 'we hope to see each branch a sort of centre for the spiritual (including intellectual) profit of all classes in the neighbourhood.'

The union was held together by a central council with an executive committee of which Dr Schofield was the chairman. Lord and Lady Aberdeen became presidents of the P.N.E.U. in 1892 and held this office for many years. Miss Mason acted as secretary. Each branch was left free to organize itself and to make its own by-laws; each sent a yearly report on its activities to the central council.

'A broad unifying basis of thought' supported the whole union. The movement might have become one of the many which sprang up in the cause of childhood. The name 'educational' gave a wider scope, for education is a lifelong process and is concerned with persons of all ages. Charlotte Mason describes the basis of thought behind the union as a tentative effort in education 'having more or less the characteristic of a philosophy; notably having a central idea, a body of thought with various members working in vital harmony. . . . The body of thought upon which I found is the somewhat obvious fact that the child is a *person* with all the possibilities and powers included in personality.'[4] To the members of the union the 'broad unifying basis of thought' was only more or less apparent,

4. Preface to *Home Education.*

but they went vigorously to work. They endeavoured to bring up their children on definite principles and to make these known to others. As lecturer, as secretary and as editor Charlotte Mason worked incessantly, labouring 'without pause to establish a working and philosophic theory of education.'

IV
Parents' Review School

Miss Mason's life story is closely interwoven with children and young people. Since that first vision, seen by a small child from a window, children were deeply rooted in her love and respect; her years of teaching had brought them to her and her friendships had given her the joy of family life. Her early friends were married, so their children became her friends. Mrs Fleming at Ambleside and Mrs Groveham at Bradford had welcomed her help in their schools on her frequent visits.

Many of the instances of children's sayings quoted in her books came directly from her own experience or that of her friends.

'In her personal relations with her friends' children and those she met in the village there was a reverence and courtesy which one recalls as one of the most beautiful experiences of life. Her sense of humour, too, helped her to understand children,' wrote a friend, remembering a first visit to Ambleside. Her daughter remembers that Miss Mason always seemed genuinely pleased to see her and other children and was never preoccupied.

> She radiated affection and gaiety [she continued] and showed a quick interest in many things, such as nature, plants, flowers, people, books, household and school affairs, and (I nearly said most of all) in anything amusing. She had a splendid sense of fun and loved to hear a good story. She often invented special names for her friends and liked to chaff the 'dear people' around her but never in a way that left the least sting. I think children appreciated the serene happiness of her temperament. She never seemed to have 'moods' and although her cares and responsibilities must have been great one never saw her in the least depressed.

When the House of Education came into being, students had the advantage of practical experience with children. Parents in Ambleside were invited to send their small boys and girls daily to the Lecture Room in the village, where the students taught them free of charge. In this small beginning the Practising School, Fairfield, came to life. Later on older girls

came as boarders to the homes of Mrs Parker and Mrs Clendinnen, where the students took it in turn week by week to live with them and care for them under their hostesses. This handful of children formed a small section of the 'Parents' Review School' to which Charlotte was giving so much thought and in which she took so deep a delight. The first records of the school (later to become the Parents' Union School) date from September 1891. In June of this year the editor describes in the *Parents' Review* a unique school:

> The pupils shall go to school and be taught at home at one and the same time and have the twofold advantage of school discipline and home culture. A scheme of work and a timetable for the term will be sent; accompanied with conditions which should secure prompt, punctual and definite work and ample leisure. At the end of a term the children will be examined upon the work of the term. . . . The regulations will be framed with a view to safeguard children from worry and give them the habit of taking examinations as a matter of course. This opportunity to compare with others and to work up to a common standard will, we believe, be welcomed by all home teachers, whether parents or governesses, however well qualified and however much at liberty to give full attention to their children. . . .
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> One condition we must make is that parents who avail themselves of the 'P.R. School' shall be (or become) subscribers to the *Parents' Review,* as some guarantee that they are themselves making a study of the principles of education.

In 1892 there were sixty-five families at work in the P.R. School eagerly following the programmes devised by Charlotte Mason, enjoying the books chosen by her and the activities she suggested. It is difficult to realize the joy and delight which came into many a dreary schoolroom with these programmes from Ambleside. 'I well remember my lessons,' writes one of the first pupils, who entered the school in September 1892. (Her home was a large country house, her parents absorbed in country pursuits.) 'It was an absolute God-send to an only child and I remember too my thrill over the exams and what lovely books they recommended.'

It was fortunate that a printing office was established in Ambleside. Mr Middleton's small firm was one of the main stays of the work for very many years, printing not only programmes and examination questions but, at first, all the circulars and leaflets for the union. 'For the first few years the programme consisted of a single sheet and a hundred copies for each class. At the same time papers were also appearing for the Parents' Union

mothers' course,' writes Mr Middleton. 'The office records show that for a time this correspondence course for mothers bade fair to outrun the progress of both school and college.'

V
Mothers' Education Course

The Mothers' Education Course (M.E.C.) makes a first appearance in the December *Parents' Review,* 1891. The writer of a recent article had alluded to the' students' of the *Review.* Charlotte accepts this, and with a creative touch interprets it as a feeling that is gaining ground

> that education demands more than mere reading. You read an article and forget it; you study a subject, and either reject, or make your own, a life possession, the thought of the author, with its practical bearings. Many mothers feel that they are the better in body and mind for the mental activity that nothing but definite study affords. We are making arrangements for a course of study on education – a three years' course – with monthly questions.

For a small fee to cover postage members of the course were examined periodically on their reading in the *Home Education Series*. There must have been many questions from these young parents (surely the fathers asked some of them). It is hard to realize in our day of a popular press how difficult it was for parents to come by practical advice on educational matters. Thinking back to these years one of her friends remarks that 'Charlotte Mason put the psychological teaching of the day, often to be found only in heavy and difficult tomes, into language which all could understand, and added her own interpretation of the laws of habit formation, inspiration of ideas and the ways of the reason and the will.'

The Mothers' Education Course consisted of Syllabus I and II with examination papers for each. The questions for these papers still appear at the end of each volume of the *Home Education Series* as a help to study and to indicate points which the author considers significant. The M.E.C. continued usefully for twenty-three years. It came to an end with the war difficulties of 1915, when mothers had no leisure for study.

From the first idea of a parents' union in 1887, what steady growth had come to life. To Charlotte Mason it was all one work, one 'body of thought' taking form. At Springfield with her students and friends around her she watched and guided the ever-growing activities that were coming into usefulness. She saw their interdependence and possibilities. The branches of

the union brought new members, sent interesting papers to the *Review.* The *Review* stabilized and informed the members, the Parents' Review School brought employment to the students from Ambleside. These went out all over Great Britain creating fresh interest in the theory and practice of teaching at Ambleside. Quietly and steadily the work was going forward and outward. Charlotte told her readers that 'we should be a strong educational body and our mission is *propagation.*' This is exactly what was coming about in the early nineties, for a 'propaga' is a layer or branch laid down to root.

VI
Elsie Kitching

A new friendship came into Miss Mason's life at Springfield. One of the students who entered the House of Education during its second year of work was Miss Winnie Kitching. Her home was in Bognor. In 1893 Miss Mason had work to do at Bishop Otter College, Chichester, and in order to be within reach of it she stayed with the Kitching family. Winnie's sister Elsie was living at home. She had passed her Intermediate Arts examination at the Ladies' College, Jersey, and had come to Bognor to join her family in a poor state of health, feeling that life held no future for her.

Miss Mason walked daily into Chichester and on her return in the evenings she wrote her letters, the two sisters helping her most happily. On the last day of her visit, Mrs Kitching took Miss Mason into her confidence about Elsie's future. 'What am I to do with her?' 'Let me have her,' said Miss Mason. 'Let her come to Ambleside with me.'

Elsie travelled to Ambleside and found there her life's work: 'my real life began then,' she said. She helped the students in Latin and mathematics, and soon she was keeping the books and records of the school, the college, the mothers' course and the *Parents' Review,* helping with the correspondence and with the daily details of work. Her life became completely devoted to Charlotte Mason and her work. She shared in all that came of joy, of difficulty and endeavour, bringing to each demand on her energies a swift response, a sturdy strength of character and a fine spiritual discernment.

Miss Kitching gives her own account of her first year at Ambleside:

> I first had the privilege of knowing Miss Mason in 1893. I had been teaching for three or four years, and working at the same time for the London University examinations. My sister had been trained at the House of Education (Sept. 1892-July 1893) and in the summer of 1893 Miss Mason came to stay with us for a week at Bognor in Sussex. My sister was going to a post in Ireland in the autumn, and both she and I

had the privilege of doing a little secretarial work for Miss Mason while she was with us. My mother was not at all anxious that I should go on to take the final examination for a degree and I gladly accepted Miss Mason's invitation to go back with her to Ambleside in September 1893.

After years of high school work the life at Ambleside seemed to me to open a new world of hope and possibilities. Miss Mason at that time carried on the whole of the work of the P.N.E.U., the Parents' Union School, and the House of Education at Springfield, where there were thirteen students in residence. Eight students lived at Kelsick House in the village, with two other members of the staff, and three lived at Walton Cottage. The college work was carried on in the Lecture Room in the village; the students were in the gallery of the hall, while the hall itself was used for the small Practising School, for music and for the students' drill. The Parents' Union School was worked entirely from Springfield, where we examined all the papers ourselves, as well as preparing the programmes and examination papers.

After dictating the letters in the morning, Miss Mason would go to the Lecture Room and spend the rest of the morning there with the students, giving them lectures on the theory and practice of education. There was a mistress for music and class singing, another for languages – the students learned elementary French, German and Italian – and another for nature study and handicrafts. The Latin, mathematics and some English teaching fell to me. We had no London office in those days, so that the propaganda work was done by Miss Mason herself, and later by one or two friends such as Mrs Steinthal and Mr Henry Perrin and Dr Helen Webb. Miss Mason continued to lecture up and down the country as she had done before the Parents' Union School and the House of Education were started, and the intercourse which this brought her with many people secured friends for the union and contributors for the *Parents' Review.*

VII
The visit to Florence

The winter of 1893 brought with it a long period of illness for Miss Mason. Shortly after Miss Kitching's arrival the news came of the death of Miss Brandreth. She had been a close friend for many years, the one who perceived most clearly the central fact of Miss Mason's life. 'From the first of my knowing you,' she had written, 'the *rest* to me was your taking life, each and all of its daily perils, as sent, and continually attended to by the sender.' Her death was a severe bereavement and may have contributed

to Miss Mason's illness, for it came at a time when there was much work and responsibility to shoulder. A rest of three months was necessary. Miss Scholefield, one of Miss Mason's students at the Bishop Otter College, took over the House of Education while Mrs Steinthal conducted the affairs of the Parents' Union School and edited the *Parents' Review.* This was heavy work, to which she brought great insight and ability. Mrs Steinthal had become one of the organizing secretaries of the P.N.E.U., able to help and advise parents from her own experience in teaching her children in the P.U.S. Later she was to give much time to making Miss Mason's teaching more widely known in different fields of work, both as member of the Yorkshire Ladies' Council of Education and as organizing secretary of the Mothers' Union in the Diocese of Ripon. An artist, Mrs Steinthal carried on for years a Saturday morning art class for elementary schoolteachers in Bradford, and it was among the members of this class that she found the pioneer for the first P.N.E.U. state school in 1913.

It was during the spring of this year that Miss Mason visited Italy with Mrs Firth and her daughter. Two years before, Julia Firth had been introduced to her in a letter. 'She and Ruskin were friends of long standing; she translated *Ulric* for him and was deeply read in all his ethical and educational thinking.' Miss Mason shared her deep interest in pictures and her conviction that delight in art should be open to all. She held that 'the power of appreciating art and producing to some extent an interpretation of what one sees is as universal as intelligence, imagination, nay speech, the power of producing words. But there must be knowledge, and, in the first place, not technical knowledge of how to produce, but some reverent knowledge of what has been produced.'[5]

Mrs Firth could give this knowledge. From 1892 to 1908 the students were invited weekly to her home in Ambleside. There they learned to look at and to delight in reproductions of great masters, sometimes as many as twenty-eight by one artist, while Mrs Firth would read most beautifully Ruskin's comments on the pictures. Miss Mason often went with the students, and when in 1893 she visited Florence with Mrs Firth, Ruskin's teaching was in the minds of both. Dr Helen Webb describes how she came across them standing by Giotto's tower: 'Together we studied his beautiful medallions. I shall always especially associate with them that of the woman weaving on the 100m which Ruskin copied when he revived hand weaving in the Lake Country.'

During this visit to Florence Charlotte received a deep and living impression of the frescoes on the wall of the Spanish Chapel attached to the Church of Santa Maria Novella. In *Parents and Children* she devotes a chapter to them, calling it 'The Great Recognition.' These frescoes by

5. *An Essay towards a Philosophy of Education.*

Simone Memmi and Taddeo Gaddi[6] show the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the mind of men. Within His light are the Apostles and the prophets, and below, centrally enthroned, sits St Thomas Aquinas. Above him float the figures of the seven virtues. In a row at the foot of the picture, beautiful in dignity and alertness, sit the fourteen 'knowledges' or sciences, accompanied by their greatest exponents.

Miss Mason follows Ruskin's interpretation of the frescoes,[7] describing them as 'a harmonious and ennobling scheme of education and philosophy.' Then turning to the figures of the sciences her thought goes out to the many relationships and activities of human life in the past and in her own times. Above all she thinks of 'the intellectual life, the development of which in children is the aim of our subjects and methods of instruction.' Education, she sees, is at present divided into 'religious' and 'secular' and so is common thought which makes education secular, entirely limited to the uses of this visible world.

> The great recognition that God, the Holy Spirit, is Himself personally the imparter of knowledge, the instructor of youth, the inspirer of genius, is a conception so far lost to us that we should think it distinctly irreverent to conceive of the divine teaching as co-operating with ours in a child's arithmetic lesson, for example. But the Florentine mind of the Middle Ages went further than this. It believed, not only that the seven liberal arts were fully under the direct outpouring of the Holy Ghost, but that every fruitful idea, every original conception, whether in Euclid, or grammar, or music, was a direct. inspiration from the Holy Spirit, without any thought at all as to whether the person so inspired named himself by the name of God, or recognized whence his inspiration came. All these seven figures [under the liberal sciences] are those of persons whom we should roughly class as pagans and whom we might be lightly inclined to consider as outside the pale of divine inspiration. It is truly difficult to grasp the amazing boldness of this scheme of the education of the world which Florence accepted in simple faith.
>
> This is the key to the whole education of each boy and girl. Practical discernment and knowledge of everyday matters, the discovery of the secrets of nature, the great inventions, every conception of beauty or truth and their expression – all have one history, each must have been a great idea when it first made a stir in the mind of the man, woman or child who conceived it.

6. At present considered to be the work of the Florentine artist Andrea di Bonaiuto.
7. *Mornings in Florence.*

What practical bearing has the recognition of the power of the Holy Spirit for parents and teachers? By co-operation, His light can be present in the course, say, of a grammar lesson.

> The immediate point is that the teaching of grammar, without pedantry and without verbiage, is, we venture to believe, accompanied by the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit. . . . We are told that the Spirit is life. . . . Let all the thought we offer our children be *living* thought; no mere dry summaries of facts will do; given the vitalizing idea children will readily hang the mere facts upon the idea. . . . Let their books be *living* books, the best that can be found in liberal supply and variety. . . . No neat system is of any use. . . . Let the teacher remember the necessity of keeping alive in thought; it is only so far as he is intellectually alive that he can be effective in the wonderful process we glibly call education.

Naming the college the House of Education, Charlotte built this 'great recognition' deep into the foundations of the students' life and training there. It formed the special teaching of Whitsunday afternoon. A reproduction of the frescoes had its place in a central position for all to live with. The students called it the 'creed picture,' coming slowly to understand how not only every increase in knowledge and power came by the Divine Spirit, but also the way of using the things and opportunities of daily life – the way to handle a microscope, the moment to choose for a word of praise or rebuke in school. Charlotte Mason showed that this recognition resolves the discords in each person's life between claims of the intellect, of the aesthetic sense, and of religion: 'There is space for free development in all directions and this free and joyous development, whether of intellect or heart, is recognized as a Godward movement. Various activities with unity of aim bring harmony and peace into our lives.'

VIII
Henrietta Franklin[8]

Charlotte, as active as before her illness, returned to Ambleside to carry on the work in all its aspects. Early in 1894 at Springfield she first met Mrs Franklin. Henrietta Franklin in London had been shown a copy of the *Parents' Review,* had read it from cover to cover and had decided to join the union.

8. The Hon. Mrs Franklin, C.B.E., daughter of Lord Swaythling, married Mr E.L. Franklin in 1885.

> I at once felt that the P.N.E.U. was the one 'cause' which appealed to me. Though still a young woman, I had married so early that I already had children approaching school age. . . . I was determined to learn all I could and to help others to avoid those first mistakes which so often mean tears and sorrow. Circumstance made it possible for me to make a pilgrimage to Ambleside and Miss Mason at once admitted me to her friendship and taught me so much. . . . She introduced me to the delights of open windows and fresh air and of the country when it rains. She shared with me, as through her work and writings with thousands of others, her own love of the beautiful in literature, poetry, art and nature. . . .

Mrs Franklin many years later described her first impression of Charlotte Mason: 'I felt that I was in the presence of real greatness, as I did this year with Albert Schweitzer. . . . Our minds seemed to "click" . . . she used to call me her "Chela."'

The development of the P.N.E.U. is so inextricably entwined with the name of Mrs Franklin that it is interesting to discover the first activities of its organizer and honorary secretary. They are detailed in the *Parents' Review* from 1894 onwards. During the spring of 1894 Lady Isobel Margesson continued to take the lead in London as honorary secretary of the Belgravia branch. In February 'the most important event has been the establishment of a central office in London in a convenient situation where our secretary, Miss Ethel Forsyth, can be consulted daily on the work of the union and on the best methods of extending and strengthening its operations. . . . It is hoped that the work of the society, which has now outgrown the possibilities of voluntary services . . . will become of increasing usefulness to parents and teachers.'

The central office took over the lending library of the Belgravia branch and its Natural History Club with its annual exhibitions. The committee of this branch became the new central committee with Lady Isobel as honorary secretary, using the office as her headquarters. The union was going forward in several directions. Much interest was shown by English people overseas as well as by members of other races. There were many new branches. A body of voluntary speakers was established from among the members and friends to give lectures on subjects connected with the training of children. But a crisis was approaching; in the summer the name of Lady Isobel Margesson appeared no longer.

One of the perplexities of educational work is the keenness of its workers to use all sources of inspiration regardless of the principles from which they spring. Lady Isobel and some of the committee wished to show that the followers of Herbert Spencer, Pestalozzi, Froebel and the P.N.E.U. were all

working together. They decided to revise the constitution of the P.N.E.U. in order to establish this co-operation. Miss Mason strongly opposed this decision. She obtained legal advice and circulated a leaflet to each member of the committee stating her view. Then she called a meeting to discuss the matter. At the end of the leaflet Miss Mason points out that clauses (1) and (2) of the 'objects' of the P.N.E.U.

> sufficiently indicate the lines the union was designed to follow. . . . They cover all earnest educational effort, while care was taken to avoid limitations which would hinder the advance of science; especially that most serious of all hindrances, the docketing the union with any given name or names. We hold that education as a science must ever maintain a tentative attitude. The moment she frames a stereotyped creed represented by any given name or names of the past or present, she becomes formal and mechanical rather than spontaneous and living. The effort to define or limit in matters too broad and deep to be expressed in a definition or represented by a name is the history of all division whether in religion or education.

There was a stormy meeting of the committee; Lady Isobel and many keen members forsook the union. This was a bitter blow to Charlotte. She calls this year one of growth in depth for the union, but alas,

> it was a time of sifting. Our principles were called into question, investigated, reaffirmed and most cordially embraced by many who had in the first instance accepted them as a matter of course. We came out of rather painful experiences strengthened and refreshed, with enthusiasm quickened and numbers increasing, and, what is more, the addition of some of the most enthusiastic and successful workers on our executive committee. . . . The central principles and objects of the union remain of course intact.

Mrs Franklin was one of these enthusiastic workers. Her name soon appears as honorary secretary of the new Bayswater branch which steadily comes to the front in London. Its activities are many. 'A course of ten lectures is being delivered by Dr Helen Webb at 9 Pembridge Gardens. [This was Mrs Franklin's home.] The following courses have been arranged: Christmas holiday lectures for children over eight. . . . A small carpentering class. . . . A student of the House of Education will give a course of lessons in drawing and brushwork. . . . Miss Charlotte Mason will read a paper on P.N.E.U. principles. . . .' Other speakers and lectures are announced.

There is also a notable letter at the end of the year: 'It may interest your readers to know that the little class working in the Parents' Review School is succeeding very well. . . . This was started with the object of combining the methods of the P.R.S. with the advantages of school life and companionship. At present it is conducted by one student from the House of Education but we hope as our members increase to be able to engage another. H. Franklin.' Here is the beginning of the first P.N.E.U. school. It was formed by the children of a few families working together, as were so many others in later years.

Later on Mrs Franklin 'is at home at 9 Pembridge Gardens on Thursday mornings to see members and explain the work.' 'A reading circle will be started in the first week of October. *Home Education* and other educational and psychological books will be read. It will be free to all P.N.E.U. members.' 'During the Christmas holidays excursions to places of interest in London have been planned for children of nine upwards, under guidance of a lady lecturer.'

Charlotte visited Mrs Franklin at Pembridge Gardens for the first time this autumn (1894) and spoke at several meetings. Mrs Franklin shortly after visited Ambleside. She watched the students and the children at work and took part in their walks and handicrafts. She was also shown all over 'the new house,' Scale How, later to become the college.

Charlotte's visits to Mrs Franklin became 'the annual festival for all the household.' Here she met many distinguished people, including Sir Robert Morant and Mr Rudyard Kipling, who realized her humility of mind, together with the power of her educational philosophy. Here too she enjoyed the company of the boys and girls of Mrs Franklin's family. Thus year by year the friendship deepened into a close companionship in educational endeavour, linked by almost daily letters.

IX
The move to Scale How

Scale How! Dr Helen Webb was at Springfield in September (1894) paying

> my first never-to-be-forgotten visit to Miss Mason . . ., The day after my arrival Miss Mason took me across the road to view the big house on the hill which she thought of moving into, so as to have all her students under one roof and make a worthy home for the House of Education. As we walked up the drive the sun shone brightly, and in front of the house we stopped and turned round to gaze on Loughrigg and Wansfell, with Windermere between, and said to each other: 'Just think, Wordsworth stood here and looked at all that.' We went all

> over the house, up and down and into every corner, and decided with the architect, who met us there, about the few alterations and improvements which would be needed. Altogether we planned for a beautiful future. . . . Another day Miss Mason took me to Keswick on the top of the mail-coach with four horses, a leisurely vehicle from which one had plenty of time to see everything. That day I had a wonderful lesson in 'sight seeing,' as Miss Mason understood it. And what delightful fun we had and how much enjoyment out of all kinds of little everyday trifles!

This house on the hill, Scale How, is a large grey house of Georgian proportions, backed by hilly country which rises to the heights of Fairfield. Its grounds are adorned with splendid trees – beech, oak, Scotch fir and chestnut; in spring many wild daffodils then, as now, covered the grassy slopes of the garden. Wordsworth's niece Dorothy, 'the beautiful Mrs Harrison,' married Mr Benson Harrison in 1825 and some years later the family came to live at Green Bank, as it was then called. After Mrs Harrison's death Green Bank was put up for sale. Charlotte saw its possibilities, its ample space and living room. The House of Education at present dispersed here and there in Ambleside could, she thought, carry on its work under the one roof of Scale How.

Miss Kitching writes:

> Her nearest friends strongly advised her against taking over this heavy responsibility, for she had no capital; her only asset was a conviction that means for work would not fail if she had the courage to go on. She had an extraordinarily clear financial mind and would make important estimates on scraps of paper. One such I found, estimating the expenses, including rent, taxes and equipment, for the first year at Scale How. Unsuitable furniture which she had been obliged to take over for want of means to get anything better at Springfield was sold, and by dint of the most careful planning the minimum of furniture and equipment was provided.
>
> With all her financial power Miss Mason had a curious detachment from money and material possessions of any kind. She never worried, as many people do when resources are strained to the utmost. She would give definite thought to what was possible in order to carry out what was necessary, and then she put financial worries out of her mind. During the thirty years I lived in close contact with her, it was only with the strictest economy that she was able to carry each year through. Even those who lived with her had little idea of what thought and faith

> went to the making of the yearly budget. As far as was possible within the limited means at her disposal, Miss Mason secured things that were simple and fitting and beautiful for the students, and everyone who came in contact with her felt a sense of abounding hospitality and generosity, for what she had she gave to others; whether it was her thought and help, her own powers, or the material means which came to her hand. The plain living and high thinking which governed her life made an atmosphere in the house which could be felt, and traditions which are still dear to those who had the privilege of living near her. . . . With the help of her auditor Miss Mason kept the accounts in her own hands and each year she paid her way – *just.* When she died in 1923 she left enough money to payoff the final mortgage.

Charlotte spent the last fortnight of October 1894 in Scotland. 'The P.N.E.U. met with a singularly kind reception at Aberdeen, Perth, Broughty Ferry, Stirling, Dumbarton, Edinburgh and Glasgow. A branch was formed at Edinburgh.' Later in the year three more branches were at work at Broughty Ferry, Dunfermline and Aberdeen, but at Aberdeen the P.N.E.U. 'did not receive a cordial welcome in the local press, the articles were not written in a serious strain, but seemed to treat the matter as a huge joke . . . as a *fad.*' Nevertheless this branch equally with Edinburgh survived and had a long life of usefulness.

The move from Springfield did not take place until December. 'The House of Education,' writes the *Parents' Review,* 'has moved into a large and beautiful house, which will not only enable us to have all our students under one roof, but also to do what has long been the desire of our heart, to give a single term's training to girls (not proposing to teach) who have left school and cannot spare time for a year's course.' Early the following term (spring 1895): 'We are enjoying our work greatly in our ideal lecture-room. How we wish our readers could see the students at their desks. The pretty practising school, apart from the main building, completes the picture. We expect to take much joy in the grounds as the year goes on.'

The move to Scale How established the House of Education in Ambleside as a centre of training and of administration. In the years that followed, the Parents' Review School, the Mothers' Education Course and the *Parents' Review* continued to grow in membership and usefulness. The small group of children taught by the students in training became 'the Practising School,' later to grow into 'Fairfield School.' Visitors came to Scale How: Mrs Dallas Yorke, Miss Beale from Cheltenham. Miss Mason's articles in the *Parents' Review* were published in book form as *Parents and Children* (1896). She visited London as before to speak at meetings.

In the summer holidays of these years Miss Mason travelled to France or to Switzerland; she describes a stay in Holland and Denmark in a letter to Mrs Franklin:

> I enjoyed Holland with its many street pictures as well as its pictures in galleries. I think the Dutch have that saving grace of humour which I seem to miss among these profoundly serious and most excellent Danes. Of the various cities we have visited, I think Lübeck delighted me most, with its quaint Greek Gothic and its Memling pictures. . . .
>
> We have met nobody very interesting, but then the hour for Dutch table-d'hôte appears to be from four to seven, so we could not give up the afternoon to eating our dinner. We are in a small *pension* here; in spite of the American visitors, it is a genuine Danish interior, beautiful Danish embroideries, chiefly in two shades of blue, on the table and elsewhere. Blue Danish china to match, beautiful brass teapots and coffee-pots and urns; most notable house-wifely arrangements in every way and much Danish talk, always in a rather sad monotone. The air here is a luxury, so elastic and delicious, and the sea and the big ships within ten minutes of us. . . .
>
> You have 'done' the Dutch cities, have you not? Of most of the painters one's impression remains the same, only none but Rembrandt strikes me in quite a new way.

These active, hard-working years were not free from illness, however. Three constant conditions influence this story: lack of family relations, lack of means and lack of stable health. The first of these dating from the death of her parents brought Miss Mason a deep experience of loneliness in early life. Later a wealth of friendship carne to her, bringing companionship and support.

Lack of means, except in so far as the work paid its way, was a lifelong condition.

Lack of stable health frequently interrupted the course of daily life, though few of those who lived with Miss Mason realized her constant courage. Shakespeare's Richard III after a night of mental agony exclaimed 'Richard is himself again' and went out to the battle of Bosworth Field. Miss Mason after a period of heart trouble would say to a friend 'Richard is himself again,' facing life anew with equal courage.

Until 1897 Miss Mason was able to work as usual, but that year she was ill for a long time. In the summer she spent six weeks in London undergoing a new heart treatment which had been recommended to her by Judge Caillard, who had returned from Bad Nauheim. The following year, after

consultation with various friends who had benefited from the treatment, she decided to go to Bad Nauheim for a six weeks' course. This became a yearly visit, with which she combined a short 'nach Kur' of travel. Feeling that she owed the power to continue her work to this bath treatment, she faced the necessary expense by letting Scale How each summer.

In consultation with Dr Helen Webb her daily life at home was permanently restricted in freedom of action and independence. Miss Kitching became her hands and her feet, incredibly swift in movement and in the work she accomplished. To relieve Charlotte of her lectures and of some administration Miss F.C.A. Williams, one of her former students at Bishop Otter College, came to Scale How as vice-principal. 'Miss Williams ("V.P.") is a delightful success,' Charlotte wrote to Mrs Franklin in April 1898.

Thus befriended at home and with Mrs Franklin ever more active in London, Miss Mason entered a new way of daily life at Scale How.