

## Foreword to the Third Edition

Mason died in 1923 and the first edition of *The Story of Charlotte Mason* was published in 1960 by the Charlotte Mason Foundation. The original authors, Elsie Kitching and Essex Cholmondeley, had worked together on the biography limited by not having full knowledge of biographical details. When in 1955 Miss Kitching died at the age of 84, the pen was passed on to Miss Cholmondeley to complete the biography. This she did with some misgivings, but with great sensitivity to the person, work and life of Charlotte Mason.

The book was published and read by teachers, parents and others within the PNEU, the Charlotte Mason College Association (CMCA) and *The Parents' Review* communities. It is not clear how many copies were printed, but it became less available as the Parents' National Educational Union (PNEU) schools declined or became independent prep schools. The World-wide Education Service (WES) took over the PNEU and continued to send out correspondence courses to families abroad and at home. A new, modern outlook for mass educational provision was taking hold in Britain and the influence of Charlotte Mason receded into the background.

In the early 1970's a young mother interested in education, Susan Schaeffer Macaulay, was looking desperately for a school in her locality that could address the educational needs of her young family. The children were wilting in unimaginative local schooling. Finding out about a PNEU school in the downland village of Compton, West Sussex, she sent her children there and was astonished at the difference it started making to the whole family. Discovering that Charlotte Mason was the visionary behind the PNEU, Susan devoured Mason's educational writings. Together with her husband, they contacted the PNEU office in London to find out more, only to hear from Joan Molyneaux, the last departing Secretary that '*They had come too late*'. Large numbers of books, papers and records had been

thrown away in the interests of 'modernising' the PNEU/WES for the more secular society that was emerging.

However, inspired to pass on the seminal ideas and life-affirming work of Charlotte Mason within its original Christian framework, Susan wrote a book called *For the Children's Sake*. It was published in 1985 by Crossway Publishers in the US. Remarkably, it has never been out of print since, as it has led to an extraordinary groundswell of interest in Mason's educational vision within a new and unimagined audience of parents and teachers, mostly in North America but elsewhere too. To meet this growing interest a reprint of *The Story of Charlotte Mason* was needed. A small educational charity, Child Light, had been formed to promulgate the ideas and work of Mason and after consultation with the Committee of the CMCA, the necessary permission was given in 2000.

Now again in 2021, there are not enough copies to meet continuing demand. A new generation worldwide is searching for an education that respects the personhood and development of the child within a clear framework, and one that points to a straightforward, but deeply satisfying enjoyment of life and learning. *The Story of Charlotte Mason* is thus an important book for understanding the thoughts, work and life of a remarkable late Victorian educator, a fine thinker and a much-loved friend, teacher and colleague. Written by those closest to her, *The Story* describes, like a fine painting, the colours, contours and creed of its principal subject in such a way as to make one quietly grateful for such a radiant life and legacy as hers.

The silence that surrounded Charlotte Mason's family background and early life is undeniable and difficult to make judgements about. The possibility exists that initially, Mason herself did not have full knowledge about the events surrounding her parentage and illegitimate birth, a social disaster in Victorian England, and one from which her parents would want to protect her, with less than full disclosure and consequently a secluded upbringing. She clearly states on page 2 of *The Story*: '*I had no brothers and sisters, and both parents were also only children, so I had no first cousins, and I think I was a rather lonely child and got into the habit of not talking much.*' Is she referring to a child's memory of her early life? '*Memories*' is footnoted as being published in *The Parents' Review* Vol 1 but on examination this appears not to have been the case. How we come to interpret this memoir is problematic. In other words, was it only later that she had to come to terms with the realities and difficulties of being the thirteenth child of an elderly Quaker father and Catholic mother, as Margaret Coombs was to discover?

Her book *Charlotte Mason: Hidden Heritage and Educational Influence* brings meticulous research to bear on Mason's unknown family background

and difficult early circumstances. This valuable research has given a much clearer focus on Mason's life and actually magnifies her achievements within the prejudices of her time. It is also very helpful in setting out the late Victorian cultural, educational and social background of Mason's life overall.

The inability of Kitching and Cholmondeley to find out certain biographical details was due to the fact that Mason never told them and they knew that some of her personal papers, which they might have hoped to access after her death, had actually been destroyed. What Coombs was able to discover has been through her tireless travels to Liverpool and Ireland to consult with curators of modern, state-of-the-art, detailed genealogical and census records.

Following her death, the remaining Mason and PNEU Archives were stored in various parts and places, including in slightly haphazard uncatalogued boxes in the storeroom of the old Ambleside Public Library where they did not receive much attention. It was also where Susan Schaeffer Macaulay and I browsed through the treasure trove before it was taken and properly housed in the late 1990's in the newly completed Armitage Museum and Library on the site of Low Nook, near Scale How.

In making these two biographies available, The Lutterworth Press has made a significant contribution to Charlotte Mason studies. While some intriguing uncertainties remain for us to ponder, they are not perhaps, in the long view, of the essence in evaluating the life and achievements of Mason.

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Cambridge, 2021