

PREFACE TO
HOME EDUCATION
ADAPTED EDITION

Based on the original works of Charlotte Mason
This version has been lightly modernized
for clarity and accessibility.



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Preface to the Home Education Series

The current state of education, both at home and abroad, feels rather unclear and uninspiring. There is much discussion: science should be a key part of education; Latin, modern languages, and mathematics need reform; nature study and handicrafts should help train the eye and hand; students must learn to write well and therefore must know something of history and literature. At the same time, others insist education should be more technical and career-focused. These are the practical cries of the day.

Yet, for all this, we lack a unifying principle, a definite aim—indeed, a philosophy of education. As a stream cannot rise higher than its source, no educational effort can surpass the ideas that inspired it. This, perhaps, explains the many failures, losses, and disappointments that have marked our educational history.

Those of us who have long pursued the vision of Education see that her paths are governed by a law—one we’ve yet to fully name. We sense its outline and know it is ever-present, influencing every part of a child’s home and school life. This law sheds light on the worth—or lack—of countless educational methods. It not only guides us but gives us a standard by which all educational efforts must be measured. It is a generous law, embracing whatever is true, honest, and good, restricting only where excess may harm. It guides us continuously, from infancy through maturity, preparing the child for self-direction in adulthood.

When we grasp this law, we may find confirmation in the thoughts of Kant, Herbart, Lotze, and Froebel—who assert that belief in God is essential. ^{*1} If so, then the knowledge of God must be the highest knowledge, and education’s chief purpose.

We will recognize this perfect law of educational freedom by one more test: that it withstands every experiment and rational test. Because we haven’t yet received this “law,” we often turn to thinkers like Froebel, Herbart, Locke, or Spencer. But we are left unsatisfied. Is this unease perhaps a divine discontent? We would welcome a practical and effective philosophy of education to relieve our confusion.

Until such a great discovery comes, we may expect many partial efforts—attempts at philosophies, each offering a central idea and a living, coherent framework of thought.

Such a theory need not claim to be a system of psychology. It must resonate with the spirit of the age, recognize education as an essential part of life—not a separate realm—and connect the child meaningfully with the world. Many educators are already trying to create this connection, but their efforts often lack a strong, unified foundation.

¹ *Kant, Herbart, Lotze, and Froebel were 19th-century German philosophers whose ideas influenced educational theory. While Charlotte Mason references them for their belief in a divine foundation for education, she does not endorse their broader philosophies, which often diverge from orthodox Christian teaching.*

Though it may seem bold, the hope that these efforts may bring us closer to a true educational philosophy encourages me to offer my own. The central idea is simple: the child is a person, complete with all the potential and powers that personhood implies.

Many ideas flowing from this truth have been explored here and there by educators and are held loosely by common sense. One idea, perhaps new, is that **Education is the Science of Relations**—that education’s goal is to connect a child with as much of life, nature, and thought as possible. Add to this some tools for self-knowledge, and the student enters life with a sense of purpose, habits of self-management, and a wide array of interests.

Why do I offer even this tentative solution to the educational question? First, I have spent nearly forty years developing a thoughtful and workable theory of education. Second, every principle I offer has come through careful observation and has been tested in many settings.

Still, I offer these conclusions with real humility, aware that many are more qualified than I—the “angels who fear to tread” this difficult ground.

Yet, if only to encourage others, I include a brief outline of the theory that has emerged from my work in the Home Education Series. These ideas are presented incidentally throughout the volumes, in response to the needs of parents and teachers. They were developed over years of work with the Parents’ National Educational Union, which I hope may serve as a witness to a coherent and living 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**

They come into the world whole—complete individuals with all the capacities of personhood.

2. **They are not born either good or bad, but with possibilities for both**

Each child has potential for good and evil, shaped by influences and choices.

3. **Authority and obedience are foundational principles**

Authority on the one hand, and obedience on the other, are natural and necessary in education.

4. **But the personality of children must be respected**

These principles must be limited by a deep respect for the child as a person. No use of fear, undue influence, or pressure on natural desires is permissible.

5. We are limited to three educational tools

Education must rely on:

- the atmosphere of environment
- the discipline of habit
- the presentation of living ideas.

6. Education is an atmosphere

This doesn't mean creating a special "child-world," but using the richness of everyday life—people and surroundings—as the child's natural context.

7. Education is a discipline

This means cultivating habits, thoughtfully and purposefully—habits of mind and body that shape character.

8. Education is a life

The mind needs nourishment just as the body does. It lives on ideas, so a rich, varied curriculum is essential.

9. The mind is not a container

We should not treat the mind as a sack to be filled with pre-digested bits of information.

10. The mind is a spiritual organism

It has its own appetite for knowledge, and the ability to digest and grow from ideas—just as the body does with food.

11. This is no small difference

Some educational methods focus on the teacher's preparation and delivery. But this can result in much teaching with little learning.

12. A generous curriculum is essential

Children are capable of understanding a wide range of knowledge. We must ensure that what we offer them is vital and idea-rich—not dry facts.

13. Education is the Science of Relations

The goal is to help the child form meaningful connections with many areas: nature, people, art, books, science, and work. Our task is not to teach everything, but to help them connect with as much as possible.

14. Two tools for self-management must be offered

These are the *Way of the Will* and the *Way of the Reason*—keys to moral and intellectual growth.

15. The Way of the Will

Children must learn:

- (a) to know the difference between "I want" and "I will"
- (b) to redirect thoughts when will is weak
- (c) to distract themselves wisely
- (d) to rest the will and return to tasks with strength.

16. The Way of the Reason

Children must understand that while reason is powerful, it will support any idea we choose—right or wrong. Thus, reason is not always safe on its own.

17. Choosing ideas is a child's greatest responsibility

As they mature, children must learn to discern and choose the ideas they accept. We guide them by offering clear principles and a broad base of knowledge.

18. There must be no division between the intellectual and spiritual life

We must teach children that the Divine Spirit is always present, a helper in all of life—its work, duties, and joys.

Preface to the Fourth Edition

In this volume, I hope to offer parents and teachers a method of education grounded in natural law. Alongside this, I also speak to mothers about their duties toward their children. I do this with deep respect, believing—as a wise teacher once said—that a mother receives from God Himself a unique insight into her child's nature. She can sense both strength and weakness, and has the gift to strengthen one and support the other. This is the true mystery of education, and without it, all methods and systems fall short.

At the same time, the more a mother understands her own children, the more she will feel her need for a broader knowledge of educational principles—those based on the nature and needs of all children. Such knowledge isn't usually granted as a special gift; rather, it's something we must seek and learn through our own effort.

I also hope that this volume will be useful to teachers of young children. The years from six to nine are crucial. During this time, we must begin laying the foundation of a generous education and cultivating in the child the habit of reading for knowledge. This season

should allow the child to enter the world of learning in a quiet and orderly way—something oral lessons alone often cannot provide.

It is my hope that teachers will find this new perspective refreshing and engaging, especially when it comes to the familiar school subjects for younger children. The methods suggested here, born from this fresh viewpoint, may prove helpful and thought-provoking.

This book’s particular focus is the role of **habit** in education: how physical, mental, and moral habits can become a child’s valuable lifelong assets, and how we can help in forming those habits. I’m especially indebted to Dr. Carpenter’s *Mental Physiology*, from which I’ve drawn key insights on habit formation. I also remain grateful to the medical professionals who reviewed the portions of this work that rest on physiological foundations.

I should add that much of this volume began as a series of “Lectures to Ladies” given about twenty years ago (1885), later published in 1886 under the same title. Lectures VII and VIII, along with the original Appendix, have since been moved to other volumes in this series. The book has been thoroughly revised, with many new sections—especially in Part V, “Lessons as Instruments of Education”—which now offers a fairly complete guide to teaching children between the ages of six and nine.

The rest of the volume attempts to address education from birth to age nine.

C. M. Mason

Scale How, Ambleside

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