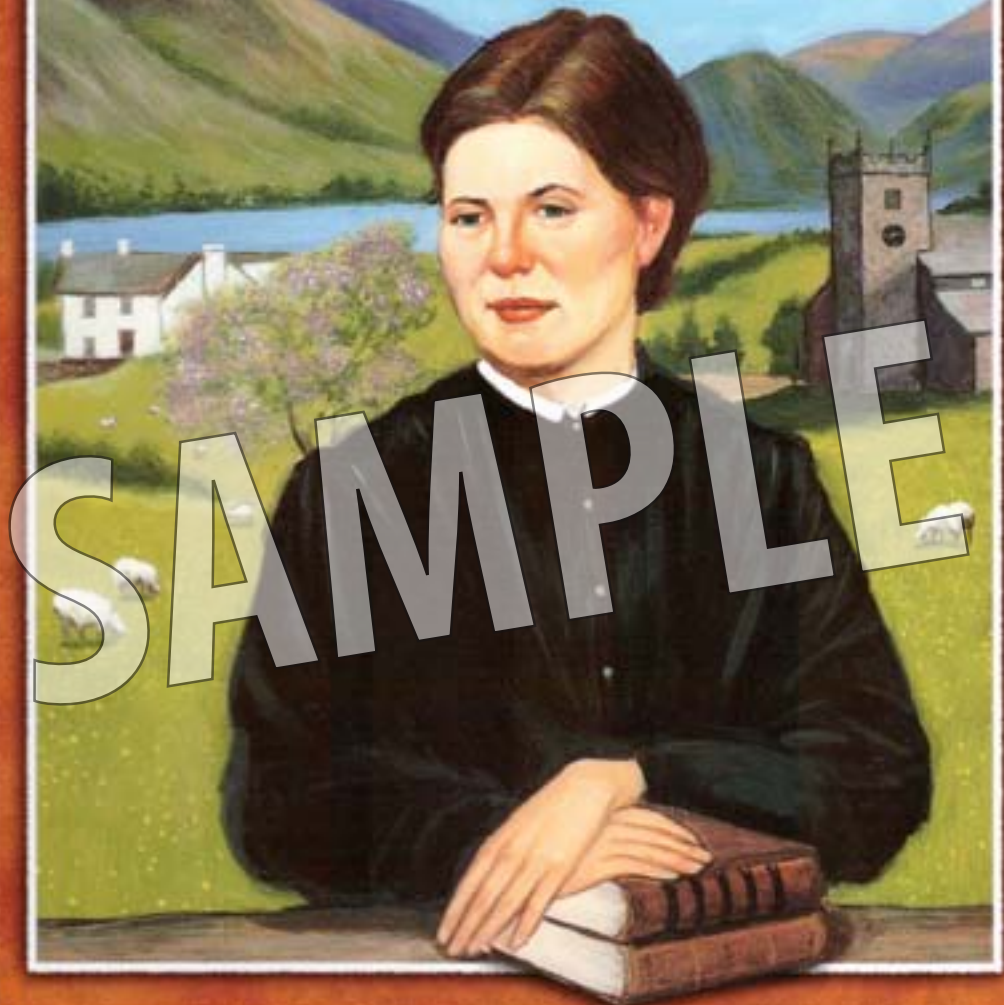


A
Charlotte Mason
COMPANION

Personal Reflections on
The Gentle Art of Learning



KAREN ANDREOLA

WHAT HOME EDUCATORS ARE SAYING ABOUT THE CHARLOTTE MASON METHOD:

"The kind of education I wish I'd had in my childhood!"

"I've always wanted the love of knowledge to be at the heart of my children's education. I now feel reaching this goal is possible."

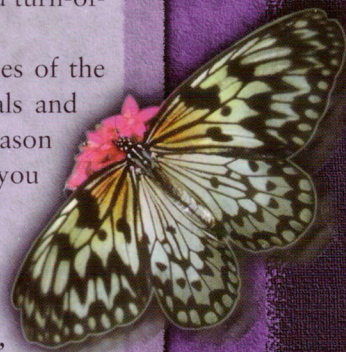
"... what I've thought a Christian education should be but couldn't articulate."



HIS LONG-AWAITED BOOK on Charlotte Mason's philosophy by well-known speaker and columnist Karen Andreola provides a wealth of insight, practical advice, and narratives illustrating how the ideas of the famed turn-of-the-century educator actually work in "real life."

With warmth and humor, Karen weaves together her own stories of the joys and struggles of the educational life and Charlotte's high ideals and firmly-held principles. Her years of homeschooling "the Charlotte Mason way" are clear and compelling evidence that this method works! As you explore in these pages what Karen calls "the gentle art of learning," you will discover how to:

- recognize a "living book,"
- use narration,
- teach reading, spelling, and composition,
- appreciate great art, classical music, poetry, Shakespeare's plays and Dickens' novels,
- keep a Nature Notebook (for science),
- take part in hero admiration (for history),
- establish helpful habits,
- create a loving home atmosphere,
- welcome moments of "Mother Culture" to supply ourselves with needed enthusiasm for our daily tasks.



IN 1987, WHILE LIVING IN BROMLEY, ENGLAND, Karen Andreola began extensive research in the area of elementary education and reforms in preparation for educating her children at home. After returning to the United States, in 1989 she and her husband Dean began the Charlotte Mason Research & Supply Company with the republication of the classic six-volume Original Homeschooling Series by Charlotte Mason. Her feature articles have appeared in Mary Pride's Practical Homeschooling Magazine, Homeschooling Today, and the Parents' Review. She is author and editor of several books, including Beautiful Girlhood. Prior to her marriage, Karen attended The Boston Conservatory of Music and taught classical dance.



CHARLOTTE MASON
RESEARCH & SUPPLY
— COMPANY —

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Personal Reflections on
The Gentle Art of Learning

KAREN ANDREOLA



CHARLOTTE MASON
RESEARCH & SUPPLY

**A Charlotte Mason Companion
Personal Reflections on The Gentle Art of Learning
by Karen Andreola**

ISBN 1-889209-02-3

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Printed in the United States of America

To my family

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Foreword to the Original Home Schooling Series

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CHARLOTTE MASON founded her “House of Education” in Ambleside, in the heart of the English Lake District, in 1892. “It is far from London,” she wrote at the time, “but in view of that fact there is much to be said in its favour. Students will be impressed with the great natural beauty around them, will find a country rich in flowers, mosses and ferns. They will learn to know and love the individuality of great natural features mountain pass, valley, lake and waterfall.” The “House of Education” is now the principal’s house, “Springfield,” and I am writing this foreword in the room that was Charlotte Mason’s own living room. I look out of the window and can confirm all its attractions.

Charlotte Mason came to Ambleside when she was nearly fifty, and the college was to be the main focus of her life’s work from then until her death in 1923. Hers was no simple success story. Her early childhood is obscure, and she seems never to have wished to elucidate it. She was probably brought up by her father, a Liverpool merchant who, it seems, went bankrupt and then died when Charlotte was still in her teens. Aided by friends of her family, Charlotte became a pupil teacher in Birkenhead and then attended a training college for teachers in London from 1860 to 1861. After qualifying, she taught in an infant school in Worthing, Sussex, until 1873. She then obtained a post on the staff of Bishop Otter Teacher Training College, Chichester, where she lectured in elementary school teaching method. The college was in the forefront of educational thinking in its dedication to the principle of education for all—including girls. W. E. Forster’s Education Act of 1870, which provided for elementary schools to be set up across the country, was still fresh and needed trained teachers to implement the promises. The Bishop Otter College certainly influenced Charlotte Mason’s thinking, but, for reasons that are difficult now to disentangle, in 1878 Charlotte felt dissatisfied with her work, left the college, and went to live with friends in Bradford in Yorkshire.

Apparently with financial help from these friends (she was certainly never rich), Charlotte began to write. In 1880 she published a series of books on the geography of England, which were well received. But it was her book *Home Education*, published in 1886, that sparked off the most interest. In it one can certainly see the influence of other educational thinkers of the nineteenth century, particularly the child-centered views of Pestalozzi and the artistic ideas of John Ruskin. What Charlotte Mason added was a practical, down-to-earth perspective that showed how one could actually set about and do it. Her style and her exposition were homely, both in the sense that she

wrote in an easy, intelligible way, and in the sense that she stressed the influence and responsibility of the home. She also wrote from a firmly held evangelical perspective.

The book turned out to be a kind of educational “Dr. Spock” avidly bought by women anxious to ensure the best possible upbringing for their offspring. The need was real, especially among middle-class women of modest means. Education was a subject of much debate and discussion, which had led to the Education Act of 1870, though the reality of primary education all too often was but the palest reflection of Pestalozzi, Ruskin, or even W. E. Forster. Many concerned parents, perhaps more particularly concerned mothers, were looking for something better. Charlotte Mason’s *Home Education* offered it. It explained how parents could—and should—provide their children with a broad, stimulating, even exciting education, far removed from the common diet of so many elementary schools of the day.

The book sold well and in influential circles. Very soon the Parents National Education Union (PNEU) was established, with the bishop of London as its first president. Miss Beale, a formidable protagonist in the fight for women’s education, was an early member of the organization, as was Anne Cough, the founder of Newnham College, Cambridge. Branches were set up in many major towns and cities, and by 1890 the organization had its own monthly magazine, “The Parents Review,” edited by Charlotte Mason herself. Charlotte had quickly become a leading authority on early childhood.

In 1891 Charlotte came to live in Ambleside. A friend of her student days, Selina Healey, had lived in Ambleside, and Charlotte had visited her and had gotten to know the Lake District well. She loved the area, particularly the quiet town of Ambleside. When she moved into Springfield, she was sure she had found the ideal place to train governesses for young children.

So, in January 1892, the House of Education was established. There were four students. Two years later, with thirteen students, the college moved into Scale How, a beautiful Georgian house across the main road from Springfield on a hill amid the trees with fine views of the town and of Loughrigg across the Rothay valley.

Charlotte saw children as thinking, feeling human beings, as spirits to be kindled and not as vessels to be filled. And she demonstrated how it could be done. She believed all children were entitled to a liberal education based upon good literature and the arts. These were in her own day radical thoughts and practices, certainly not just confined to Charlotte Mason, but few of her contemporaries had the sheer practicality that she displayed. The practicing school attached to the House of Education took in local children with no payment; Charlotte firmly believed that her liberal education ideas were applicable to all children regardless of class, status, or ability, and she put her ideas into practice, as she always did.

The college flourished, never larger than fifty students in Charlotte’s own lifetime, but with a reputation out of proportion to its size. By the 1920s the PNEU had established several schools as well as a correspondence school, run from Ambleside, which sent out lesson notes and advice on educational matters to parents and governesses.

Charlotte died on January 16, 1923; by then she was the object of deep veneration within the movement. She was buried in the churchyard at Ambleside, close to the graves of W. E. Forster and the Arnold family. Educationists flourished—and died—in Ambleside.

— John Thorley, Principal
Charlotte Mason College, 1989

Preface

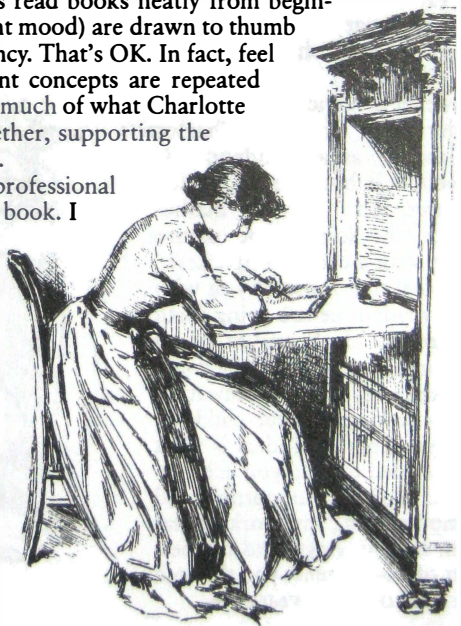
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MY PRAYER is that this book will provide the encouragement and information that mothers need who wish to give their children a Charlotte Mason-style education. I've tried to provide a broad range of Charlotte Mason's philosophical and practical ideas. However, to more fully comprehend her working philosophy of education, I invite you to seize the odd and quiet moment to read Charlotte's own writing. *Companion* is not meant to replace the reading of *Home Education*, or any of her other volumes. I do not claim to condense Charlotte's wonderful work into my own writing, making it a "C. M. in a nutshell." My heroine does not fit into a nutshell any more than she fits into the pages of this book. Instead, I welcome you to consider Charlotte's principles of education—what I call her "gentle art of learning"—as you read my humble opinions and examples of those principles.

Perhaps, like myself, you don't always read books neatly from beginning to end, but sometimes (in a less patient mood) are drawn to thumb through and follow the dictates of your fancy. That's OK. In fact, feel free to do so, because the most important concepts are repeated (similar ingredients in a different dish). So much of what Charlotte proposed interrelates and works well together, supporting the central theme of living an educational life.

I was excited about commissioning a professional artist to do a portrait of Charlotte for this book. I think such a colorful one as this has been needed for some time. The background depicts the Lake District in Ambleside, England, where Charlotte spent so many of her days teaching teachers, answering letters, walking the hills, and reading Sir Walter Scott (all of his novels, on a rotating basis). The original oil painting is hanging in our house.

Much of my work for Charlotte Mason Research & Supply Company is in opening, sorting, and answering hundreds of pieces of mail. In answering this mail, I try to promote the wonderful words of Charlotte and minister with encouragement. However, due to the



amount I receive, I have found it impossible to answer these queries in adequate detail. In this book I have attempted to answer the questions I am most frequently asked—hopefully in much greater detail than my handwritten letters permit.

Although I strongly believe Charlotte's philosophy and method work well in the high school years, this book introduces you to them within the context of the elementary school years. I have finished laying a Charlotte Mason foundation during the elementary years of my eldest daughter and have begun to see the fruit of it in our high school experience. With a little modification, Charlotte's philosophy and method can carry over to high school work. Perhaps this will be the theme of *A Charlotte Mason Companion, Volume Two*.

A Charlotte Mason Kit for Each Grade Level

The most frequently-asked question is whether there exists a full curriculum course based on the Charlotte Mason method that would carry a parent through all the subjects that Charlotte advocated in a manner that holds true to her method. Ahhh . . . wouldn't this be a dream come true? But from Charlotte's writings I sense that she believed a PNEU education really doesn't boil down to one particular set of books, set of pictures, set of music tapes, etc. It has to do with students forming relationships with these things, whether they are part of a curriculum or not. Somehow her ideal dwindles just a little when we confine it to a set course.

Many of you already know that Charlotte adjusted and adapted her course from year to year. But a course must be obtained by each Charlotte Mason-minded person. Some of us piece together a course of our own choosing. Others follow an established course and tailor it to suit more of a Charlotte Mason philosophy.

However a curriculum is chosen, it is undertaking it with Charlotte's philosophy as a foundation that somehow imbues the books, the pictures, the music, the mathematics, the science and nature study, with a certain brightness.

I feel that those of you who have written me are going forth toward an ideal, unsure of all the turns and twists in the road, but sure of the kind of education you wish to give your children. And your personal ideal is what I have tried to help you achieve. Thank you for supporting and complimenting my work. It has been encouraging—and the best part of all—to meet you through the mail over the years. ➡





Chapter One

.....

What Drew Me to A Charlotte Mason Education

IT HAS BEEN SOME YEARS since I first read Susan Schaeffer Macaulay's book, *For the Children's Sake*. It has been the most helpful book in forming my own philosophy of education of all those I have read, and I have referred to it often since that first reading. What intrigued me from the first was Mrs. Macaulay's repeated mention of the work of Charlotte Mason, a 19th-century British educator who was instrumental in founding a chain of parent-controlled schools, called the Parents' National Education Union (PNEU). I learned that she had also positively influenced many families to employ her early education and child training methods in their own homes. I wanted to know more about this amazing woman and her work with children.

Consequently (and not a little, no doubt, as a result of my oft-voiced yearning to learn more about Charlotte), my husband, Dean, acquired copies of Charlotte's original writings. Believing they should be made available to the Christian world, in 1989 he asked Tyndale House to publish them. They did, and the result is the six-volume set entitled *The Original Home Schooling Series*. Since that time I have been trying my best to put into practice with my own children all the wonderful things I've read about. And I've been enthusiastically sharing what I've been learning with other mothers who have also been drawn to Charlotte's philosophy and method. I am thankful to Susan Macaulay for putting me in touch with Charlotte's sound, sensible, and wholesome educational philosophy.

This book is the result of nearly ten years of experimenting, sharing, and writing. If you have read all the issues of my *Parents' Review* magazine "for home training and culture," you will already be familiar with many of the ideas in this book. Perhaps you have read my column in Mary Pride's magazine, where I have had the opportunity to share Charlotte's findings with a wider audience. Maybe you've read some of my product reviews and endorsements in homeschool catalogs. On the other hand, everything in this book may be completely new to you. Whatever your prior acquaintance with me or with Charlotte Mason's ideas, I'd like to share with you what drew me to a Charlotte Mason education.



Living Books

One of the first things that impressed me about Charlotte was her method of using whole books and first-hand sources. At the time, my first two children were young, and we were already in the habit of taking the bus or walking to the local library, with our youngest in the stroller. (We were living in England, where walking is a normal everyday activity.) Along with illustrated story books, I also read aloud from nonfiction picture books. Therefore it wasn't difficult to carry this concept over into homeschooling in the early elementary years—those years when “whole” books normally begin to disappear to make room for authoritative textbooks.

Textbooks compiled by a committee tend to be crammed with facts and information. This dryness is deadening to the imagi-

nation of the child. Charlotte advocated what she called “living” books. Whole books are living in the sense that they are written by a single author who shares personally his favorite subject with us, and we pick up his enthusiasm. Textbooks written by one author—usually these are ones written some time ago—might make this claim, too.

Charlotte noted that very few real books were ever put into the hands of children in school. This, she thought, was a shame, since England is a land so known for its literary genius.

Narration

With living books a child gains knowledge through his own effort. He digs out facts and information, and he expresses what he has learned by clothing it in literary (conversational) language—in short, by

telling it back to you in his own words. The simplicity and thoroughness of this method of having a child narrate intrigued me. I became convinced that Charlotte was correct in her claim that narration is the best way to acquire knowledge from books. Narration also provides opportunities for a child to form an opinion or make a judgment, no matter how crude. Because narration takes the place of fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice tests, it enables the child to bring all his mental faculties into play. The child learns to call on the vocabulary and descriptive power of good writers as he “tells” his own version of the passage or chapter. My experience with using narration over the years is shared with you in later chapters.

No Homework

Another attraction of Charlotte’s philosophy is that her schools never gave homework to students under the age of thirteen. When a child follows her method, there is no need for homework in the elementary years, because the child immediately deals with the literature at hand and proves his mastery by narrating at the time of the reading. Studies have proved homework to be less effective than this form of immediate reinforcement.

Instead of homework, my children enjoy cozy evenings with good books and parental attention.

No Grades—Short Lessons

Charlotte was an idealist who created an opportunity for putting her ideas into practice. She wanted children to be motivated by admiration, faith, and love, instead of artificial stimulants such as prizes (stickers, candy, or money), competition, and grades.

As a result of Charlotte’s methods, her students retained their inborn curiosity and developed a love of knowledge that they

maintained all through their lives. The children took examinations, narrating orally or on paper from “those lovely books” that they had read during the semester. Each child learned first to acquire the habit of attention by listening to and narrating short stories, and by completing short lessons in the drills and skills. Short lessons discouraged dawdling and they encouraged the child to concentrate and make his best effort. Because the Charlotte Mason method employs whole books, narration, and short lessons, a child taught this way will try his best even though he will not be graded.

My own children love reading. “Ma, guess what?” can be heard in our house when one of the children enters the room to tell me about something new she has read silently on her own. Now—years after we began using this method—my older children are disciplined enough to do much longer lessons in subjects that they do not “take to” naturally, such as mathematics and grammar. I owe this success to Charlotte Mason, who has taught me the gentle art of teaching.

Free Afternoons

Formal lessons in the Charlotte Mason scheme of things end at one P.M. or earlier, if the children are quite young. High school students will probably need some afternoon study time, but overall the afternoon is free for leisure. This is another aspect of Charlotte’s philosophy that so easily finds its way into the modern homeschool.

Leisure for children usually means running, climbing, yelling, and so forth—all out of doors. It has been observed that boys particularly cannot flourish without this opportunity for physical activity. Handicrafts, practicing an instrument, chores, cooking, gardening, visiting lonely neighbors, observing and recording the wonders of nature may also be enjoyed during this time.

Sadly, public school children (young

and old) must endure such long lessons and long hours that they are frequently tranquilized with drugs in order to pass through the system. They ride the bus home just in time to see the sun set and do homework.

Charlotte placed an emphasis on being outdoors to observe nature. Her students kept a Nature Notebook of drawings and descriptions of their many “finds.” Noble thoughts and expressions of appreciation for God’s creation found in poetry, hymns, and mottoes also decorated these notebooks. I include a chapter on nature study because I consider it to be the foundation of all the sciences. Because I spent most of my summers outdoors in field and wood, I wanted to give my children the opportunity to enjoy and learn about the wonders of nature, too. I share in this book Charlotte’s concern for learning in the fresh air and hope to provide some ideas that will strengthen limb, lung, and intellect.

Few Lectures

I was also drawn to Charlotte’s philosophy because it doesn’t require me to give lectures. Charlotte pointed out that I need not be a certified teacher trained in the skill of giving lectures in order for my children to learn. This was a relief to me.

I have never had a formal swimming lesson, but I spent many of my childhood summers in the water without any fear of it. That thought occurred to me *this* summer as I was on my back, floating, trusting the buoyancy of salt sea water, at rest over the rolling waves of the Atlantic ocean, while my children battled the breakers and rode them into shore. I must have educated myself by watching others and doing what they did. Likewise I have never had a formal teaching lesson—neither do I have a state certification—but I find myself at rest in my teaching nonetheless. How did this come about? By trusting in the buoyancy of Charlotte’s wisdom and direction and then jumping into the water.

Through Charlotte’s method, we need not do very much teaching. Children gain the ability to educate themselves. They do not depend upon notes they have taken from a teacher’s lecture—where most of the information has been pre-digested by the teacher. With Charlotte’s superior method of narration from books, the child, at age six or seven, comments on the carefully chosen words of an author in essay form, either oral or written. Too much explaining by the teacher can be a detriment to self-education, a concept that is addressed in a later chapter.



Ideas and Culture

Children's love of knowledge is dependent upon how clearly ideas are presented to them. The mind feeds upon ideas. To quote Charlotte, "Ideas must reach us directly from the mind of the thinker, and it is chiefly by the means of the books they have written that we get in touch with the best minds."

This includes all forms of human expression, including paintings, poetry, music, dance, etc. This is why Charlotte said that the Bible and "varied human reading as well as the appreciation of the humanities (culture) is not a luxury, a tidbit, to be given to children now and then, but their very bread of life."

Charlotte's curriculum enabled children of all classes to experience books and culture in abundance, in contrast to the typical Victorian mind-set that the arts and humanities belonged only to the "well-to-do" classes.

Today, with so many pictures and art print books available, children can observe museum pieces and learn to recognize the works of dozens of artists over time just by changing what goes under the thumb tack once every two weeks or so. Our children can easily become familiar with the music of great composers by listening to cassettes and CDs, when years ago it would have been necessary for them to visit a concert hall. The chapters on music and art explain more about introducing art and music into the homeschool.

Charlotte wished to prevent dryness in her teachers and so she reminded them never to be without a good book at hand. She understood the necessity to keep reading, to keep growing in the spiritual and intellectual life. She wanted teachers to pursue cultural activities, too. I bid you do the same—to take part in Mother Culture.

Education is a Discipline

One of the challenges of homeschooling is that it is simply a new thing to think about and to do. I wanted to teach and train my children, but because I was taught and trained by institutions, teaching this new way felt rather awkward at first. Feelings of insecurity and inadequacy make for a distraught mother.

Happily, Charlotte's definition of education most surely includes a large dose of discipline. This helps the anxious mother get everything under control. What Charlotte meant by "discipline," in Victorian-day terms, is that proper education must be supported by good habits. Charlotte said,

The mother needs to acquire her own habit of training her children so that, by and by, it is not troublesome to her, but a pleasure. She devotes herself to the formation of one habit in her children at a time, doing no more than watch over those already formed.

For more of the "hows and whys" of instilling good habits, I invite you to read the chapter on habit.

Sane Education

If the above ideas sound as sane and sensible to you as they do to me, perhaps it is because Charlotte Mason hasn't been the only one sharing these "open secrets." Others are now voicing conclusions similar to those that Charlotte Mason advocated so many years ago. It is said that great minds think alike. Whatever the case, these newer voices are confirming Charlotte's ideas about what makes a well-brought-up person. ➡