

Simply Charlotte Mason presents

Charlotte M. Mason

# Self-Knowledge

**Ourselves, Book 1**  
Youth Edition

With additional material by  
Sonya Shafer





Have you ever had an idea flit across your mind and thought to yourself, “Where did that come from?”

**It's time to get to know what's happening inside you.**

In this book you will explore the country of Mansoul—all of your powers of thinking, knowing, loving, judging, appreciating, willing, and achieving. You will learn about the beautiful and noble possibilities that exist within you. You will also discover the dangers that assault your soul and try to hinder you from making the most of yourself.

Then armed with that knowledge, the next time an idea flits across your mind, you will be able to capture it, take a good look at it, and determine whether it is a friend or a foe—whether it is going to help you or harm you.

In other words, you'll know how to become the best version of yourself that you can possibly be.

That's the power of Self-Knowledge.

*Simply*  
**Charlotte Mason**  
*.com*

# Self-Knowledge

Ourselves, Book 1, Youth Edition

by Charlotte M. Mason  
With additional material by Sonya Shafer

This Simply Charlotte Mason edition of *Ourselves, Book I*, presents authentic and accurate page replicas of Charlotte Mason's original work. Some rearranging has been done to make this Youth Edition more useable to the young person. In particular, the Preface to *Ourselves* and the Introduction to Book I, written to the parent, have been moved to the back of the book and can be found in the Parent Notes section.

Page replicas taken from *Ourselves* (Volume 4 of the Original Home Schooling Series)

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London, England

Self-Knowledge—Ourselves, Book I, Youth Edition

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# A Note to the Reader

You are about to embark on a grand adventure! Throughout this book, you will be exploring a great and beautiful country, yet it is also a country full of dangers and enemies. This is not a country that you can buy a ticket and take an airplane to. It is a country that travels with you wherever you go. It is the country *within* you. We will be calling it Mansoul.

Getting to know that country within you—self-knowledge—is a lifelong discovery. It requires the ability to “pause the action,” as it were, and think about *why* you are doing or saying or feeling the way you do. When you can figure out the why, you will be able to make the best choices in life.

Your guide on this grand adventure will be Charlotte Mason. She will point out the wonderful and beautiful parts of Mansoul, and she will caution you against the enemies and dangers. Charlotte is a wonderful person to have as your guide, for she believed that you have great potential! She will not talk down to you, nor treat you as a child. She believed that you are smart enough to think about important ideas and that now is the time to lay them before you, because the choices you make now will determine what kind of person you become.

Here’s a tip. Don’t try to read this book as you would a light novel. Take your time and read thoughtfully. The ideas of Self-Knowledge are meant to be pondered. Most readings are only a couple of pages, so you can take it in small bits and think through it as you go.

You will notice some cultural differences as you go along, because it was written in England at the beginning of the 1900s. Now, don’t make the mistake of dismissing the book just because it is old! This is a goldmine of helpful ideas to guide you in your discovery of yourself—the land of Mansoul within you. It’s just that some of the phrases Charlotte used and some of the events she mentioned

might be unfamiliar to you. Look in the sidebar for helpful notes along the way.

This will not be light reading, but it will be extremely valuable reading if you take your time and fully engage your mind on the ideas you are reading about. Read a sentence or a paragraph, then try to put it into your own words before moving on. The more you read and think about what you read, the easier it will become. At the end of each reading, you will find Points to Narrate and Discuss with your teacher or parent. See how many of those points you can remember without looking back. You can write down your answers or just talk about them.

Self-Knowledge is about realizing all of the potential you have within you—both for good and for ill—then taking that knowledge and making the best choices. Charlotte will present high standards, ideal attitudes and actions, because she wanted you to become the very best version of yourself that you can possibly be. Are you up for the challenge? Let's begin the adventure.

# A Little about Charlotte Mason

Perhaps you have heard your parent or teacher mention Charlotte Mason in connection with your schoolwork. This might be a good time for a formal introduction.

Charlotte Mason (1842–1923) was a British teacher who invested her life in improving the quality of children’s education. She didn’t just go along with the traditional methods of learning that were used in the schools of her day. Instead, she thought long and hard about how children learn best and what kinds of things are the best food for their minds. Then she incorporated her ideas into her classroom with her own students—and saw them flourish.

Over time, more and more parents and teachers in England adopted her methods and ideas about education. So Charlotte spent the rest of her life training them to give their children good habits, great books, and guided discovery of the world around them.

You may have used some of her methods in your own schoolwork. Rather than dry textbooks that present only facts, Charlotte encouraged us to use literary-style books that tell the story and make the subject come alive. And rather than giving a list of questions to be answered about the text, Charlotte wanted us to narrate, or tell back, in our own words everything we can remember from the reading; for once you can do that, you can continue to educate yourself about anything for the rest of your life.

Charlotte was also a firm believer in giving students a wide variety of subjects, for she realized that there is much more to life than just reading, writing, and arithmetic. So students who use her methods enjoy art, music, handicrafts, nature study, foreign language, poetry, Shakespeare, singing, history, geography, Bible, and more.

Perhaps most importantly, Charlotte taught that the goal of learning is not just to know a bunch of facts or to achieve a certain grade or even to graduate from high school or college. No, the goal of learning is to grow as a person.

That's one reason she wrote the book you are now holding: *Self-Knowledge*. She wanted you to learn these ideas about yourself, so you can grow into the very best version of you!

*“Character is the result not merely of the great ideas which are given to us, but of the habits which we labour to form upon those ideas.”—Charlotte Mason*

# Ourselves

## Book I.—Self-Knowledge

“Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,  
These three alone lead life to sovereign power,”  
—TENNYSON.

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### INTRODUCTORY

#### CHAPTER I

##### THE COUNTRY OF MANSOUL

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##### Reading 1

**The Riches of Mansoul.**—“Do ye not like fair londes?” says King Alfred; and he answers himself: “Why should I not like fair londes? They are the fairest part of God’s creation.” And of all the fair lands which God has made, there is no country more fair than the Kingdom of Mansoul.

The soil is, almost everywhere, very fertile, and where it is cultivated there are meadows, corn-fields, and orchards with all manner of fruit. There are, too, wild nooks, with rippling streams bordered by forget-me-nots and king-cups, places where the birds nest and sing. There are hazel copses where you may gather nuts, and there are forests with mighty trees. There are wildernesses, too, marshy and un-

“Londes” is an Old English way of pronouncing “lands.”



lovely, but these only wait for good and industrious hands to reclaim them and make them as fertile as the rest of the country. Deep under the surface lie beds of fuel to be had for the working, so that in that land there need never be a cold hearth-stone. There are many other mines, too, where diligent workers find, not only useful and necessary metals like copper and iron, but also silver and gold and very precious stones. When the workers are weary they may rest, for there are trees for shade and shelter, and pleasant playfields. And you may hear the laughter of the children, and see them at their sports.

**Its Rivers and Cities.**—There are rivers, broad and deep, good to bathe in and to swim in, and also good to bear the ships which carry those things produced by Mansoul to other countries far and near. Upon these rivers, too, sail the ships of many lands, bringing passengers and goods. There are busy cities in Mansoul; and these, also, are pleasant places; because, though there are factories where men work and make all manner of things for home use or to be sent abroad, there are also fair and beautiful buildings, palaces of delight, where are gathered the treasures of Mansoul,—galleries of precious and beautiful pictures painted by the great artists of all countries, statues of the heroes that are had in reverence there, halls with organs of noble tone which can roar like the thunder and babble like a child, and all manner of musical instruments. To these halls great musicians come and play wonderful things that they have made; the people of Mansoul listen, and great thoughts swell in them, and everyone feels as if he could get up and go and be a hero.

**Its Books and Playgrounds.**—There are libraries, too—such libraries ! containing every book of delight that ever was written. When anybody sits down to read, the author who made the book comes and leans over his shoulder and talks to him. I forgot to say that in the picture-galleries the old painters do the same thing; they come and say what they meant by it all.

There is no city in Mansoul so built up but there is plenty of space for parks and cricket-grounds, playing-fields and places where people meet and are merry, dance and sing. Nobody need be poor in Mansoul; and if anybody is poor, neglected, and stunted, it is for a reason which we shall consider by and by.

*Cricket-grounds* refers to where the game Cricket is played.

**Its Churches and its Delectable Mountains.**—The best treasures of the country are kept in the fairest of its buildings, in its churches, which are always open, so that people may go in and out many times a day to talk with God, and He comes and speaks with them. But, indeed, He walks about everywhere in the land, in the workshops, in the picture-galleries, and in the fields; people consult Him about everything, little things and great, and He advises about them all.

Much remains to be said about Mansoul, but I think I have left out the chief thing—the ‘Delectable Mountains,’ where people go that they may breathe mountain air, gather the lovely mountain flowers, and brace their limbs and their lungs with the toilsome delight of climbing. From the top, they get a view that makes them solemnly glad; they see a good deal of Mansoul, and they see the borders of the land that is very far off. They see a good deal of

Mansoul, but they cannot see it all, for a curious thing is, that no map has been made of the country, because a great deal of it is yet unexplored, and men have not discovered its boundaries. This is exciting and delightful to the people, because, though here and there Mansoul is touched by another such country as itself, there are everywhere reaches which no man has seen, regions of country which may be rich and beautiful.

**Points to Narrate and Discuss**

- Explain what a soul is.
- Describe how a soul is like a beautiful land.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PERILS OF MANSOUL

#### Reading 2

What do you recall about Mansoul?

**The Government to Blame.**—You are thinking, I daresay, what a rich and beautiful country Mansoul must be! But, like most other lands, it is subject to many perils. Unlike most other lands, however, Mansoul has means of escape from the perils that threaten it from time to time. In other countries, we hear the government blamed if poor people have not bread, and if rich people are annoyed by the crowing of a cock. This is usually great nonsense, but it is not nonsense to blame the government of Mansoul for the evils that occur in that country, for it has large power to prevent those evils. How the country is governed you shall hear later. Meantime, learn something of the perils which may overtake poor Mansoul and all that are in it.

**Peril of Sloth.**—Perhaps the most common evil is a sort of epidemic of sloth that spreads over the whole country. The scavengers sit with heavy eyes and folded arms, and let refuse and filth accumulate in the streets. The farmers and their labourers say, ‘What’s the good?’ and fail to go out with the plough or to sow the seed. Fruit drops from the trees and rots because no one cares to pick it up.

The ships lie idle in the harbours because nobody wants anything from abroad. The librarians let their books be buried in dust and devoured by insects, and neglect their duty of gathering more. The pictures grow dim and tattered for want of care ; and nobody in the whole country thinks it worth while to do anything at all.

Sometimes the people still care to play ; but play without work becomes dull after a time, and soon comes to a stop. And so the people, whatever be their business in Mansoul, sit or lounge about with dull eyes, folded arms, and hanging heads.

**Peril of Fire.**—Another risk that Mansoul runs is that of great conflagrations. Sometimes an incendiary will land at one of its ports from some foreign country, perhaps with the express purpose of setting fire to what is best in Mansoul ; but perhaps a man sets fire to things by accident because he does not know how inflammable they are. The fire once begun, the wind carries the flames over many miles of country ; noble buildings, precious works of art, farmsteads with stacks of corn, everything is consumed, and ruin follows the track of the fire. Sometimes these fires arise in Mansoul itself. I have told you that the country has great beds of underlying fuel. Here and there inflammable gases break out on the surface, and a spark, dropped in the region of these gases, is sufficient to cause a wide conflagration. But Mansoul ought to be as careful as people in Switzerland are when a hot wind called the *Föhn* blows, and orders are issued that everyone is to put out his fires and lights.

**Perils of Plague, Flood, and Famine.**—Sometimes there is a visitation of the plague, because

An *incendiary* is a device or attack designed to start a fire.

The *Föhn* (also spelled *Foehn*) is a strong, dry, warm wind coming off the Alps that melts snow, but it can also make any wildfires spread rapidly.



dwelling-houses, streets, and out-buildings are not kept clean and wholesome, and the drains are allowed to get into disorder.

Sometimes the springs swell in the hills, the rivers overflow, and there is a flood ; but this is not always a misfortune in the end, because much that is rotten and unclean is swept away, and lands washed by a flood are very fertile afterwards.

Again, it may happen that the crops fail, though the land has been diligently tilled and good seed sown. But neighbouring States are kind, and help Mansoul in these distressful times ; and the crops of the following year are generally abundant.

**Peril of Discord.**—Another cause of occasional misery in Mansoul is that a spirit of discord breaks out now and then among the members of the community, and becomes sometimes so violent as to lead to a devastating civil war. The servants and workmen will not obey the masters, and the masters will not consider their servants, and are at feud among themselves ; one member of the ministry chooses to attend to the work of some other member ; all useful employments are neglected, and the people are a prey to envy and discontent.

*Ministry* here refers to a government department.

I might tell you of some other causes of misery in Mansoul, but shall mention only one more, which is by far the worst that ever overtakes the State.

**Peril of Darkness.**—Lovely and smiling as the country is when it is well ordered, mists at times emanate from it, chilling, soaking mists, dense and black ; not a ray of the sun can penetrate these mists, no light, no warmth ; there is no seeing of one's way ; so that the people say, 'There is no sun,' and some of the more foolish add, 'There never was a sun

in heaven, and there never will be.' When they cannot see the sun, of course they cannot see each other, and blunder against one another in the darkness. You will say that many lands, especially low lands, are subject to blinding mists, but nowhere can they be so thick and heavy, and nowhere do they lie so long, as in the Kingdom of Mansoul. One quite exceptional thing about these mists is, that they also are largely under control of the government, especially of the Prime Minister. How this can be so I cannot fully explain here, but you will understand later.

*A Prime Minister* is the head of the government.

**Points to Narrate and Discuss**

- Explain who or what is responsible for the perils of Mansoul.
- Describe the causes and consequences of these perils:
  - Sloth
  - Fire
  - Plague
  - Flood
  - Famine
  - Discord
  - Darkness
- How might those perils apply to the soul?

Because all these things can happen to Mansoul, we must not run away with the idea that it is an unhappy country. On the contrary, it is radiant and lovely, busy and gay, full of many interests and of joyous life,—so long as the government attends to its duties.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GOVERNMENT OF MANSOUL

#### Reading 3

What do you recall about the perils of Mansoul?

**Each of us a Kingdom of Mansoul.**—I must give up attempting to talk about Mansoul in parables. I daresay you have already found it difficult to make everything fit; but, never mind; what you do not understand now you may understand some day, or you may see a meaning better and truer than that which is intended. Every human being, child or man, is a Kingdom of Mansoul; and to be born a human being is like coming into a very great estate; so much in the way of goodness, greatness, heroism, wisdom, and knowledge, is possible to us all. Therefore I have said that no one has discovered the boundaries of the Kingdom of Mansoul; for nobody knows how much is possible to any one person. Many persons go through life without recognising this. They have no notion of how much they can do and feel, know and be; and so their lives turn out poor, narrow, and disappointing.

It is, indeed, true that Mansoul is like a great and rich country, with a more or less powerful and harmonious government; because there is a part of ourselves whose business it is to manage and make the best of the rest of ourselves, and that part of ourselves we shall call the Government.