

MISS MASON'S LETTER TO THE OLD
STUDENTS AT THE ANNUAL MEETING,
1918.

July 3rd, 1918.

MY DEAR "BAIRNS,"

I am very glad that you are meeting in London, if only a few of you can manage it. Please invite me to be in your midst, for we are called to great work, and the more we are of one heart and one mind the better. Besides, I am so much attached to and so proud of you dear people that I desire to be with you in the spirit if not in the flesh.

Travelling is not easy for anyone just now, and perhaps unnecessary travelling is not right, so I have not been surprised to have no applications for "Fairfield" from old students. You are all doing what is right—that is, either spending your holidays at home, and helping in some sort of war work, or staying to be of use in your posts. That is the chief thing we all desire in these days, to be of use, and you will like to know that I receive many assurances from your dear "Postesses" of your bright, good-tempered usefulness in a thousand ways. Many a household where the father is "at the front," the maids "on the land," is cheered and helped by your gaily, capability, and readiness for all sorts of work. One student tells me that she "grooms" the pony!

Another thing that I am grateful to you for is that you stay where you are. I know that the temptation to give up teaching and take to War work is very great. You felt that in your pleasant schoolrooms, in your happily ordered lives, you are not putting up with enough to be really doing "your bit." But you know our old saying, "Nothing can act but where it is," and our task is to find full scope where we are for all the service-ability that is in us. I am enclosing a passage from "The Heart of Alsace" on this subject, which expresses all that I feel as to the importance of educating *two or three* children.

"A class of thirty to forty pupils; to the teacher they are almost an anonymous crowd. There is a curriculum to be carried out, marks to be given, discipline. Teachers and pupils meet and part. The years pass, and soon make them strangers.

"Two pupils. The teacher lives with them. He becomes their friend. He divines their thoughts, their reticences. He gives lessons, but he also converses with them, seated on the corner of the table. In this way ties are formed that last a life-time, and it is a joy to meet again later those to whom one has given the best of oneself." *The Heart of Alsace*, by B. VALLOTTIN.

Then our work is extending so wonderfully in all directions that you may well feel that you are doing *national* work in helping us. A while ago we had a little ceremony, the planting of an oak to celebrate our fiftieth elementary school. That was

the intention, though really the schools numbered over seventy—10,500 children doing our work, programme by programme.

We want to spread the great *happiness* of our work among all the children in the country, rich and poor, and in every neighbourhood there are opportunities of making our principles known. If anybody feels that she has not spoken on the subject to her "postess," I think she should not put off doing so. This time of war anxiety is the very time to turn people's thoughts to a subject of as great importance. Yes, fully as great, for we may not rest till we have "built Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land," and some of us work from the trenches and some from the schoolroom.

If you are not clear how to set about outside work of this sort (some of you have done great things already) write, of course, to Miss Parish!

Another way in which you have already helped the College enormously, and in which I am begging for your further help, is in finding us students.

The present capital class of juniors consists almost entirely of old pupils, or sisters, or cousins, or friends of former students. Indeed, that is how the College has always been supported. "Ye are our epistle." The post brings every week more than enough applications to supply the Second-year Students, and each of these, whether in school or family, opens the prospect of delightful work; so it is a pity to say we have no one for such a post or for such a time. So please send us all the nice girls you know. I know you fill your pupils with the idea of being trained, and very nice students they make. Girls of every class are looking for work, so I think you need not fear that your girls belong to a class which does not undertake *paid* work. That is not the case. I heard this morning from a friend who told me that her under-gardener is the grand-daughter of a viscount. Children are better worth while than cabbages—*pace* the Food Controller!

One thing more. I think you should prepare yourselves to speak, whether on our principles, our work, or the College. The *Parents' Review* gives information from time to time.

I should like to tell you what pleasure your loyalty to each other, and to the College gives me. Whether you are still employed in our great work, or are married, with babies of your own, or are otherwise engaged. We are all one body still.

I should like to tell you what is to me the spiritual note of this most distressing war. "Thy kingdom come" is, I think, more the *motif* of this than of any war the world has seen. The "Order of the Day" is, for each of us, *Service* for others. We are all "in the Services," service *in* our work as well as outside our work, and in order to service, *Discipline*.

I wonder may I tell you of two little *daily* prayers that I find helpful, both as to service and discipline: "Grant that I may both perceive and know what things Thou wouldst have me to do, and also, may have grace and power faithfully to perform the same," and "Bring every thought of my heart into subjection to the obedience of Christ." This has grown into a very long

10

L'UMILE PIANTA

letter, and yet I have not half told you of all my love for you, and of all my interest in your very various work.

Wishing you a very happy meeting, I am your always affectionate friend,
CHARLOTTE M. MASON.

MOTHERS IN COUNCIL.

DEAR EDITOR,

May I tell you, quite shortly, how I have made "going to church" interesting to David, aged six years? During the week, each day, we read over a few verses of the two lessons for the next Sunday, and try to grasp some living thought from them: and each evening, to finish his short prayer, I read over the coming Collect. Then when Sunday comes he is ready to follow and take an intelligent interest in the service.

I did not begin to take him to church until he could read, so that he could follow the service, and this he does most intently, using his own prayer book, which is a precious possession given to him last birthday.

May I congratulate some one on the idea of having a corner in the *PIANTA* for "Mothers in Council."—Yours truly,

M. ROTHERA.

DEAR EDITOR,

I have been thinking over Mrs. Morton's article on "Religious Education and Custom," and although I have not time to sit down and answer it thoroughly, I feel I must put down a few of my thoughts on paper, for this is a subject which I esteem of great importance. I apologize for the inadequacy of the remarks which follow. They are really the notes of one without experience.

Is the present formal worship in itself not the result of accumulated soul experience?

Just as our national attitude is the result of our nation's history, our spiritual, or rather, theological attitude is influenced by its history.

The vices of our age are those of lack of control. Do we want to leave young children to the "unfetteredness that their particular age-spirit demands"?

I am in perfect agreement as to the dangers of formalism, but does not time prove worth? Let us rather add to the spiritual aspect of our hereditary possessions, and detract nothing.

Have not all the various reformers in turn, seeking to advance by protesting against form, come back to some kind of form in the course of fifty years or more. For example, the Wesleyans, the Presbyterians, the Moralists, such as are written of in Fielding Hall's *Soul of a People*.

I quite agree that much variety is necessary for children's prayers. When teaching, one of my "postesses" used to be with her children every morning and evening for their prayers, and encouraged them wonderfully, letting them choose certain things, and not insisting on one given form. Part of the evening

215pl emc42

~~SUPPLEMENTARY LETTER~~ (11/11)

~~MISS MASON ON THE MONTESSORI SYSTEM~~

~~TO THE EDITOR OF "THE TIMES"~~

T
Sir,—May I remind your readers of a curious educational experiment which was tried some hundreds of years ago in the city of Kranconopolis? An inquiring citizen had been greatly struck by the performances of a man who, having lost both his arms in childhood, had made up for the absence of fingers by making use of his toes. This man, being something of an artist, painted pictures, and also wrote, knitted, carved with his toes, and his work, of whatever kind, was better than that of most persons with hands.

Our observer perceived in this circumstance the educational principle that Nature invariably hastens to make good a deficiency by increased and compensating activity in some other organ. He reasoned thus:—

“Progress in any art is the result of concentrated attention; children with hands do not get on with their writing because it is easy to write with the hand and they do not attend. Suppose we teach them to write with their toes: that is much more difficult and more novel; their attention will be secured and their progress should be admirable.”

This idea caught on: the Kranconopolites, who loved to hear of some new thing, hastened to his support, and several Toewriting schools were established. Children of from two to six were the best scholars because their muscles were flexible; also, they were interested in their toes, and the carefully graduated exercises, with bodkins, toothpicks, skewers, entertained them greatly. It was necessary, of course, to tie their hands behind them because otherwise the children would use their fingers; but with this precaution the progress made was so remarkable that many people went to see, and Toewriting schools were established in several neighbouring States. The children learned to read and to write at the same time because their observant and carefully trained

teachers found that they were less restless when engaged in the effort of learning to read; but no distractions, song or tale or the like, which did not advance Toewriting, directly or indirectly, were admitted.

The children's progress was, as I have said, remarkable; they were fully a year in advance of other children when they went to ordinary schools; nor was this all. The gentle attentions they received from many visitors gave them a pleasing easy carriage; moreover, the toes when used as instruments required some care, the children were accustomed to walk delicately and acquired dignity of movement. In fact, Toewriting was held to be one of the important scientific discoveries of that age, and the schools easily outrivalled the hitherto popular "Tasting Schools." People said, Tasting nice things is a sort of bribery after all, isn't it?

May I clear myself from any suspicion of writing flippantly of a serious and noble endeavour? The discriminating article on "The Montessori Method," in *The Times Educational Supplement* of November 6 encourages me in an attempt to divest the principles involved in this interesting method from meretricious adjuncts, such as the pleasing deportment and personal cleanliness of the children. Given, a pleasant room adapted to their comfort, and friendly visitors who give respectful consideration to their doings, and children will behave with ease and frankness; if the school be desirable to children and parents and cleanliness be made a condition of admission they will be clean. America has long known how to make free American citizens out of the motley crowds of little aliens who present themselves at her school doors, and her methods are practically identical with those of Dr. Montessori; the delightful spontaneousness of those Italian children is evidenced in every English nursery and cottage home as well as in our holiday schools; and certainly, no child under six should go to school unless with full freedom to run or squat or lie face downwards if the mood seize him.

Several years ago I wrote to an educational journal about the possibility of roof schools to be used (except in bad weather) for quite young children, and it still seems to me that long hours in the open with twice as much time given to play as to work is what children require. In Germany, as we know, six is the school age, and the child has the proud knowledge that he has made a step in life and has entered

It is
necessary
to

upon an eight years' course; but the little children at home sometimes get in the mother's way and are packed off to some small dame school known as a kindergarten. Perhaps the flat roof of the big school would be a better expedient.

But—

“ Me this uncharted freedom tires,
I feel the weight of chance desires,”

is as true for young children as for the poet, and for the rest of us. We must have the ease of habit, the discipline of habit, to save us from the labour of many decisions in an hour as to “which foot comes after which!” To make a cult of liberty in our schools would be to bring up a race of vagabonds. As for a long school diet of geometrical forms and coloured tablets, Dickens has told us all about it in his tragic picture of the young Gradgrinds at school, a passage we should do well to learn by heart.*

But it is not the pretty manners of the children nor the freedom under compulsion which mark the Montessori schools that attracts educationalists everywhere, so that we hear of 70 such schools established in Switzerland alone. We all endeavour ourselves to secure these ends, and we owe gratitude to Dr. Montessori for showing us a way. But let us be honest; these children can read and write by the time they are four or five, while with us eight is the usual (and desirable) age at which these accomplishments are mastered. We run away with the fallacy that reading and writing are education, not as they truly are, mechanical arts, no more educative than the mastery of shorthand or the Morse Code, and we think we see the way to add two or three years to the child's school life by getting this primary labour over at an early age. But here is no new thing.† We are told that young boys in a Russian Ghetto learn Hebrew very quickly, because there is nothing else to learn. This is the secret that all trainers of animals, acrobats, musical prodigies, are aware of; secure concentration by shutting off all other pursuits and interests, and you can get young children to do almost anything; their minds will work of necessity, and it is possible to direct their work into one channel. A child of five may read Greek,

* Omitted from *The Times* letter for want of space.

† Cf. Professor Vambéry's early life and *The Land of Promise*, by Mary Antin.

115P4cmc42

compose sonatas, or read and write, if you secure that his efforts are directed into one channel.

Leaving out the pretty manners, the personal neatness, and the rapid progress of the children in the fundamental arts of reading and writing, because these are ~~pretty~~ generally attained by similar means — the friendly notice of cultivated people, moral suasion, and concentration on a single end — what principles are left for our imitation? ~~X~~ fail to discover a principle, but only a practice — that of learning the contours of letters and other forms by touch instead of by sight. It is hard to see why the less accurate and active of the two senses should be used by preference; and the blindfolded children feeling for form remind one of the famous verdict —

1 cmc/s

“Whenever Nose puts his spectacles on,

By daylight or candlelight, Eyes should be shut.”

The reader tries “touching” the handiest objects which offer an outline, his own mouth or nostril for example, and after much patient touching he produces no resemblance at all unless as he is betrayed into one by memory. But possibly if he were to “touch” given objects for so many minutes each time, day after day and month after month, he might at last be able to draw a mouth or write an “m.” At first the act of touching is tiresome, but it becomes soothing and a rather sensuous state is set up; one is a little hypnotized, and the photographs of both Italian and American children in the act of touching seem to show that a ~~hypnotic~~ state has been induced.

Sucha
y

We know that ~~hypnotic~~ suggestion is used in some Continental schools to further the work of education; and here, conceivably, we get the key to the sudden attainment of the art of writing so delightful to read of. But this way danger lies; the too facile child becomes the facile man whose will power has become weakened, whose brain exhausted, until he is little capable of self-direction. The very fact of inducing in eager and active children the habit of continuous “touching” would seem to indicate that undue influence has been exerted, whether through the mere act of touching or through the agency of an external will.

It is claimed that “the relief of the eye by continuing and developing the sense of touch” is a valuable educational asset; but it is well to inquire first whether the definite practice of this sense is safe. The blind man learns to read

by touch, and if this "method" is to be carried into schools for older children we shall all need books for the blind; but the blind man's will is not practised upon, because his strong purpose goes with his "touching" effort and nullifies any hypnotic effect of the act. We cannot put children or ourselves into his condition, and why should we? The eye is strengthened by light and natural use and enfeebled by darkness and inertia.

The Montessori method is one effort among many made in the interests of "scientific pedagogy." ~~I don't believe there's no such a (thing).~~ ~~Would Betsy Prig say it? Would she be right if she did?~~ ~~I think so, although every advance we make is towards Scientific Pedagogy.~~ ~~What we are saying is, practically, "Develop his senses, and a child is educated; train hand and eye and he can earn his living; what more do you want?"~~ But a child so trained is not on a level with the Red Indian of our childhood; his senses are by no means so acute, and the Red Indian grew up with song and dance, tale and legend, and early developed a philosophy, even a religion.

The Montessori child has no such chances; he sharpens a single sense, to be sure, at the expense of another and higher sense, but there is no gradual painting in of a background to his life; no fairies play about him, no heroes stir his soul; God and good angels form no part of his thoughts; the child and the person he will become are a scientific product, the result of much touching and some seeing and hearing; for what has science to do with those intangible, hardly imaginable entities called ideas? No, let him take hold of life, match form with form, colour with colour; but song and picture, hymn and story are for the educational scrapheap.

We are all very grateful to the gracious Italian lady who has shown that courtesy and consideration reveal the dignity and grace that belong to all children, that the rights of children include the right of freedom in self-education, and that every human being is precious and worthy of honour, especially while he is a child. But I am inclined to think that all our indebtedness falls under these three heads, and that the elaborate and costly apparatus, the use of touch rather than sight and the exclusive sensory development are mischievous errors.

The contention goes deep. Is man a material being whose brain secretes thought as his liver secretes bile, or is Brother

Body the material and spiritually informed organ of a non-material being, of whom it has been said:—

4c

"Darkness may bound his Eyes, not his Imagination. In his Bed he may ly, like Pompey and his Sons, in all quarters of the Earth, may speculate the Universe, and enjoy the whole World in the Hermitage of himself" ?

The person who educates a child must act upon one or other of these premisses; there is no middle way, and there is no detail so trifling but it must be ordered according to one or other of these fundamental principles. The one is the method of scientific, the other that of humane, pedagogy. The cultivation of the organs of sense and of muscular activity belongs to both, but the *rationale* is in each case different. To take a single example, the scientific pedagogue (awful designation!) lets a child sort multitudes of tablets into colours and shades of colour, with a dim faith that perhaps his brain will be occupied in secreting delectable thoughts about various and beautiful coloured objects. The humane teacher, who has his own psychology, knows that the child with tablets is mentally paving the school-room, the street, the town, the whole world, with little squares of colour. Therefore, if he decide to teach at all what children learn incidentally, he gives a child leaves and flowers, beads, patches of silk and velvet, things carrying associations and capable of begetting ideas; and the child does not pave streets, but does "a stately pleasure dome decree," where are "gardens bright with sinuous rills and sunny spots of greenery." The humanist knows that the immediate lesson is a fragment of material which a child uses to aid him in speculating the universe, and that therefore a lesson is profitable only as it lends itself to thought and to imagination. An artist entrusted with the woodcarving and sculpture in a great building complained to me that he could not find men with any initiative to work under him. "How shall I do this?" "Do it as you like." But no way that he likes presents itself to the man. He has been brought up on a mental diet void of ideas.

4c

A great danger threatens the country and the world. We are losing faith in ideas, and substituting practices for principles. ~~As I have said in former letters to the Times,~~ the note of popular education to-day is contempt for knowledge and for the books in which the knowledge of mankind is lodged. "Education by things" is boldly advocated, re-

ardless of the principle that things lead only to more and more various things and are without effect on the thoughts and therefore on the character and conduct of a man, save as regards the production or the examination of similar things. A boy may turn out accurate and workmanlike models in cardboard or carpentry; if he is a neat and careful boy to begin with, these qualities help him in his work; but if he have learned against the grain to turn out good work, the acquired characters will influence only the particular work in question. Handicrafts add to the joy of living, perhaps to the means of living, but they are not educative in the sense that they influence character. Therefore a child should not do handwork (like the ordering of cubes and cylinders in sizes, or tablets in colours, for example) that is not either beautiful or of use. Because a child is a person, because his education should make him more of a person, because he increases upon such ideas as are to be found in books, pictures, and the like, because the more of a person he is the better work will he turn out of whatever kind, because there is a general dearth of persons of fine character and sound judgment, for these and other reasons I should regard the spread of schools conducted on any method which contemns knowledge in favour of appliances and employments as a calamity, no matter how prettily the children may for the present behave. Knowledge is the sole lever by which character is elevated, the sole diet upon which mind is sustained.

~~I am, Sir, yours obediently,~~

~~CHARLOTTE M. MASON.~~

Ambleside

Usp8anc42

53

"Religion is not the product of a fantastic imagination; it is the greatest reality, the only truth for the religious man. It is the fount, the support, of his life. The man who is not religious is certainly not one lacking in imagination, but rather lacking in inner poise. In comparison with the religious man, he is less serene, less strong in misfortune, and not only that, but he is more vacillating in his own ideas. He is weaker, more unhappy, and in vain does he cling to his imagination in order to construct a world outside the bounds of reality." II

It is not easy to follow Dr. Montessori's argument, indeed, it is probable that to offer a coherent argument was not part of her intention in the article on "The Imagination in Childhood," which appeared in the last issue of the "Educational Supplement." I gather with pleasure that she repudiates the "materialistic" notion that "the life of the individual reproduces the life of the species," and, therefore, the child is a little savage. Also it is good to know that the Dottressa has considered our Lord's estimate as to the exalted estate of children, and she has probably noted the three prohibitions which should guide our attempts to educate, "offend not," "despise not," "hinder not" (i.e., "suffer") the children. In a word, the "don't" which is our favourite instrument in governing children—because we behave as the greater to the lesser—is imposed upon ourselves, we as the lesser being required to "become as little children."

Now, is not the dominance of imagination in children precisely one of the points on which we must be "converted"? We too, have imagination, "in general, the power or process of producing mental pictures or ideas" (Encyclopaedia Britannica), but our imagination is in abeyance; we seldom give ourselves the trouble to produce mental pictures or ideas; and perhaps, if we may presume to guess darkly, one of the Divine purposes in the war is to enable us to figure to ourselves how others suffer and think, feel, and act. We have been pursuing civilization in lieu of education, and the result is a curious stolidity out of which the war may rouse us, but at what a price! But we have the children always with us, and the war may teach us how to educate them; we may come to perceive that children are born persons; that all the elements of peculiar personality are latent in the child in arms; that the little person is a spiritual being in a fleshly vesture; the body must be sustained and comforted, and so must the spirit or mind or soul, whatever we may call that which is non-material.

Before he can speak the babe gathers ample food for his spiritual nurture; presently, "his whole vocation is endless imita-

Dr
Montessori

MSp9cm042
50
~~205~~

tion," and he waits on us for whatever his life requires; he still lives in the realm where all things are possible, and to be brought up against our limitations too suddenly hurts him; then let him "Ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross"; let him learn life through the transfiguring medium of the fairy tale. But how is the fairy tale better than the tale of Tom and Harry who had each a cake sent to him at school? Simply because in the fairy tale all things are possible and strange things come to pass. What if these things are not true? The children know perfectly the difference between the kingdom of make-believe and the arid realm of fact; when they confuse the two it is often because their diet of make-believe is so limited that they figure to themselves facts otherwise than as they are; they have met so and so, whom they have not met, who said thus and thus; in fact, they "tell lies!" but their fault is not so shocking as it looks; for necessity is laid upon them to get out of the confines of use and wont. Is it perhaps the element of infinity in children that makes the fairy-tale world necessary? However it is, we need not be alarmed, for these tales make for righteousness, for the punishment of the evil-doer and the praise of them that do well.

There are excellent mediocre people who do not exercise the process or possess the power of seeing those things which are invisible, but all our great men and women have found this way to distinction; historians, poets, painters, explorers, politicians, conquerors—all alike have seen the things invisible. Even mathematicians, most exact of men, play like children at "Let us suppose"; as for proof, demonstration,—“There is a growing feeling that it is better to give results without proof rather than to offer proofs in which all the difficulties are glossed over, and which afterwards have to be abandoned as unsound.”*

We make two prime mistakes; we place children in a category by themselves instead of regarding them as persons like the rest of us; and we parcel off the elements of personality into imagination and a dozen other components, when spirit and matter are all we need take account of. We know pretty well what to do with body; spirit, mind, is apt to be inarticulate, and we must fall back on the analogy of body as our most convenient guide. "Brother Body" demands a good deal: activity, rest, food, air—these things and more are necessary, and not the finest poem that ever was writ will feed a hungry child. Mind has just such claims, and no external activity, be it making a pattern,

* Preface to "A School Algebra," by H. S. Hall.

dancing a minuet or making a "shell," brings mind its due and proper aliment. The food of mind, a daily bread as necessary as that of body, is precisely those "mental pictures or ideas" which imagination produces; and for this reason, children must have the mind-stuff which they can transmute into such pictures or ideas; nothing external serves the purpose. I am not bold enough to say with Mr. Chesterton, "Hans Anderson or Hell," but I do venture to say that the mind which does not feed on poetry, history, fiction, travel, all the treasures that are bound up in books, on pictures, on the beauty of a sunset or a flower, such a mind may be acute and alert, but it does not dwell in heavenly places.

by way of

It seems to me that Dr. Montessori indicates an important truth when she associates, if only to scorn the association, imagination with religion; (I should not myself speak of "cultivating the imagination" but of feeding a spiritual hunger); that she does so ~~under~~ protest is comprehensible to us whose children are not nourished on fond fables vainly imagined, the legendary lives of the Saints. But we do not abstain from bread because it is sometimes adulterated, but insist on the standard loaf. In like manner we nourish our children on "the sincere milk of the Word," and they delight in their sustenance; the village school child who tells how "the heavens opened and out popped an angel" had used that power to produce mental pictures which we call imagination or genius or original thought; and without such exercise of the power we possess, no religion, true or false, can exist. We must be able to see those things which are invisible, or how can we lift up our eyes to God? Imagination is, like faith, the evidence of things not seen; indeed, is not faith the supreme effort of imagination wherein she stretches her wings, compels her powers to produce mental pictures, or ideas, of the things eternal? Would we describe the aim of our Lord when He "taught daily"—we ask, was it not to teach men the reality of things unseen, the unreality of the things they laboured for? To this end He used every munition by which the case-hardened imagination of man is successfully attacked, symbol, tale, legend, such consummate poems as that beginning, "Consider the lilies of the field." Mere circumstantial or accidental truth did not come into the question; a tale of the imagination served to hold the essential truth, and we do not stop to inquire whether a certain man did or did not go down to Jericho.

When the writer of the article in question tells us that "an apostle . . . has recourse to the feelings and not to the imagination," we must pause to consider; if we confine "feelings" categorically to pleasure and pain, our hearts echo St. Francis Xavier's words, "Not for the sake of gaining Heaven or of escaping hell," not for any motive of self-interest are we drawn to God. But there is a popular and not inexact use of the word; "Ah! who shall teach us how to *feel*?" is the burden of Matthew Arnold's searching lament for Wordsworth; now, feeling in this sense arises only from that process whereby a mental picture is produced from the imagination which *sees into* life and finds deep meaning in its passing shows.

In a word, it is not a question of neglecting or fostering "the imagination," but of due education, a liberal education for every child of every class, whereby his mind shall be nourished year by year on such food for the imagination as is convenient for his age; thus illusions and superstitions shall fall and lie like last year's leaves; but only illusions; never shall he part with any form of words beautiful and complete enough to embody a living truth. ~~Words are elusive; it is possible that Dr. Montessori and I mean the same thing, but even so, I think it is important that we should aim at expressing such truth as we know with approximate exactness in view of that "necessary revolution" which some of us see already in progress.~~

I am, Sir, truly yours,

CHARLOTTE M. MASON.

ubplemc42

PARENTS' REVIEW

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE
FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Vol. XLIII. No. 9.]

[SEPTEMBER, 1932.

A SUGGESTION AS TO THE MAKING OF A BRITISH PEASANTRY*.

By THE LATE CHARLOTTE M. MASON.

THE question of unemployment continues to sit on the nation like a nightmare, and even we who have our meat cannot eat it in gladness in the present distress; nor is it England only that suffers under the "unemployment," which seems to have come to stay, and is no longer to be regarded as a consequence of hard weather. Continental countries are suffering as much as we; but it is possible that we have an enormous pull over the rest of Europe in that a way of dealing with the evil is open to us which is not available elsewhere.

No doubt a rich, civilised and Christian country can find a remedy for a widespread distress, and various remedies have been suggested, but all of them are inadequate and temporary; while the relief we look for must be adequate, permanent, less remunerative than work to be had in the open market but more full of hope and possibilities; must be carried on under efficient direction and control, and must not interfere with the general labour market.

[* This paper was written in 1910 ~~and has had no revision since.~~ —ED.]

for a meeting of the British Constitution Association

Now we, alone among European nations, have it in our power to organise and develop work that shall give such relief because we alone are relatively without a class of the community on which the prosperity of a nation must in the last resort depend, viz., that "bold peasantry, their country's pride," which we believe, though now destroyed, may be supplied; I say "supplied," because, though it is true that more persons are employed in agriculture in England and Wales than in any other single occupation, yet these are farmers and farm labourers, and are not properly peasants.

Permanent unemployment is, no doubt, partly consequent upon manufacturing industry. Given, that a machine does the work of ten or twenty men, eight or eighteen of those men fail to get that natural provision which their country should afford. A couple of centuries of splendidly successful manufacturing industry have left among their results the vastly increased prosperity of the country, and the permanent unemployment of an increasing number of working men. It is a distressing thing to go into such a county as Perthshire, for example, and see wide stretches of fields under first-rate cultivation, and to be reminded that half a dozen labourers with the aid of agricultural machinery do the work that should have employed scores. But we cannot put the clock back; agricultural and manufacturing machinery has come to stay, and our part is rather to make, and make room for, efficient men under existing conditions.

The problem before us appears to be the Creation of a Peasantry, that is, roughly a class of men who shall support themselves and their families by their own agricultural labours, and shall neither earn nor pay wages. This class forms the major part of the population of most continental countries, and it is a class practically non-existent in England. We must concern ourselves with the creation of a Peasantry, under certain conditions: viz. that,—(a) during the process of creation they will require a subsidy for their support, (b) but they should be largely self-provided from the first, (c) should work under efficient control and direction, and, (d) should be aware that they are working for their own advancement.

The first necessary step is to form an organisation that shall include the whole country, and shall be supported partly by the State, and partly by the several Municipalities and County Councils.

Where shall we get the raw material for the manufacture of the British peasantry we have in view?

A SUGGESTION AS TO THE MAKING OF A BRITISH PEASANTRY. 563

Let us concede that three per cent. of the population are in the condition of permanent unemployment and we get a measurable and manageable factor to deal with. We must in the first place define permanent unemployment. Let us say that the man who, for the last six months, has gone about looking for work and has not found more than casual ill-paid jobs for two days out of the six, is "unemployed." We need not here consider the man thrown out of work by some *impasse* in his particular trade, and who has an allowance from his Trade Union or his Friendly Society. We leave him to profit by the removal of the surplusage of labour. The unemployable is also out of count; we may leave his case to the consideration of the Poor Law Commission. Our business is, for the moment, with the decent labourer, artisan, or what not, who can't get work. The man who gets only a chance job now and then is the man to be enlisted for training as a peasant, not he who is out of work owing to some temporary cause, nor the man who hates work too much to offer himself for the experiment. Eliminating the two classes of the casually unemployed and the unemployable, we should still have to deal with probably three per cent. of the population.

Taking the population of England and Wales at 35,000,000 our first care is to divide the responsibility, that is to say, to make every group of 10,000 responsible for its relative group of unemployed, that is, at three per cent., 300 persons. Of 10,000 persons, only one-fifth, or 2,000, should be reckoned as householders, and therefore concerned with the unemployment question. In like manner, 300 unemployed would mean sixty heads of families (counting five to a family), so that the problem lies—how may 2,000 families best undertake for sixty families? The County Council affords a basis of organisation. The old parochial system of sending every man back to his own place when he fails to provide his living, indicates a way to divide the unemployed into manageable numbers. In this way, a manufacturing centre would deal only with families who had, at any rate, lived within it for several years. But here comes in what might well prove an insuperable objection; the men and their families who have become accustomed to the delights of town life will not allow themselves to be relegated to the "dullness" of the country; but it may be possible, may it not, to contrive a community life in the country which shall not be dull, with attractive features calculated to appeal to most men? Anyway nobody should be invited to join the scheme who does not do so of his own free will and pleasure.

libp4 emc42

A great city would have several City Hamlets (of sixty families each) to look after; but however large the town's population, it would still be well to divide it into groups of 10,000 (2,000 householders), and the unemployed into groups of 300, i.e., about sixty families. Thus we should get $\frac{35,000,000}{10,000} = 3,500$,

centres of employment for the unemployed, more or less answerable for 210,000 families, or 1,050,000 persons.

Let us conceive the map of England duly and regularly be-sprinkled with 3,500 red dots, each denoting a centre of employment for 300 of the unemployed; the question is, how are these persons to be maintained? We must give up the idea of self-supporting, and substitute that of partially self-supporting, hamlets: for though the city or county-hamlet cannot maintain itself, it must from the first provide some definite part of its costs. The three possible sources of immediate supply are:—A State Grant, a County Rate, a System of County Credit Banks prepared to advance regulated loans at three per cent. interest.

What claim should be made on each of the 2,000 householders belonging to a divisional group? Probably a house rate of say, 6d. in the £ at most, but more likely 3d. for reasons which will appear later. Now 6d. in the £ would be 10s. a year per householder paying a rent of £20 and would amount to £1,000 a year for each group of 2,000 householders, taking for convenience the average rental at £20.

As there would, no doubt, be in each divisional group many persons rated upon a higher rental or valuation of house or house and estate, and as the amount to be raised by the rate is limited to £1,000 from 2,000 persons, some reduction of rate,—or the amalgamation of the funds of the several groups in a county, so that the richer divisions would help to bear the burden of the poorer—would be necessary. This source of relief and existing reserves for "Unemployment" might reduce the rate so much that 3d. in the £ would suffice. For the rest we must look to the State; and here is a case in which the State should help with the more confidence because the expenditure would be an outlay towards the betterment of the country by bringing from 400,000 to 2,000,000 acres under intense cultivation,—so probably an additional £1,000 for each hamlet should come from the State. In this way the Municipality or the County Council would have £2,000 a year to spend upon sixty families,—about 12/- a week for each family. The annual cost to the State for the estimated number of unemployed would thus be £3,500,000; but it may be

J. 16p5emc42

that a moiety or some part at any rate of this sum is already ear-marked for the relief of unemployment.

It is true that the nation is most unwilling to have its burdens increased, whether in the way of rates or taxes: but is not the increase I have indicated nominal? The unemployed are supported, must always be supported, by the community; what I advocate is more economic and profitable expenditure, which would deliver the nation from the wearing incubus of "Unemployment," and create a class whose non-existence in the body politic is greatly to be deplored. I have placed the several subsidies of State and Municipality or County Council at an unnecessarily high rate, as probably in both cases there are already funds in hand reserved for "Unemployment," which would reduce the subsidy to be still raised to half the amount indicated; for example, the £3,211,280 now spent in out-relief should be, in part, at any rate, available.

From the State or from County or Municipal Rates, the peasant of our creation gets a weekly wage of 12s., the rate of wages for farm labourers in Essex, for example, but somewhat under the average rate, for the kind of work which I shall indicate. Each colony of sixty peasants (300 persons) should be planted upon say, one hundred acres of land. To quote Essex again, farms are now letting at £1 an acre, so we shall probably be safe in allowing for £1 5s. an acre, that is, £125 annual rent for the hundred acres. But the peasants who work the farm will want a shed, implements, dressings, seeds, etc., matters which will entail an immediate outlay of, say, £225. This must be borrowed from the Credit Bank (on the security of the future crops?) and the interest would add another £6 15s. to the rent, which would thus stand at, say, £132. It is allowable to suppose that the normal yield for seventy acres (let us reserve thirty acres for purposes to be detailed later) under co-operative and intensive cultivation, will pay the rent of the land, interest on loan for implements, etc., the upkeep of the land at the initial cost of the various crops and will allow a margin, say of £9 per peasant, by way of profit, that is the seventy acres should yield:—

Rent and interest on loan, £132

Peasants' increment £540 = £672,

a total yield that is, of some £10 an acre, a modest return for land under intensive cultivation.*

It would rest with the municipal body of each centre of population to secure land for the required settlements, and there would probably be little difficulty in securing the land at a

*Turnips will yield £15—£17 an acre on poor enough land.

usual rent, and under promising conditions, if the duty of doing so were in the hands of properly constituted authorities. Land owners would often be willing to let for this purpose outlying fields, abutting perhaps on a railway line.

For the building of a Hamlet, the Local (or County) Credit Bank should advance, say £125 for each of the sixty cottages, the security being the cottage itself. Seeing that the labour is provided (the wage of 12/- a week begins from the moment the peasant is enlisted and the building of the Hamlet is the first work undertaken with this wage); the land secured, say on a ninety-nine years' lease, and that supervision and material are the sole costs; good cottages, each with three bedrooms, a kitchen and a scullery, should be attainable. Such a cottage is commonly estimated to cost £150. Thus we allow £25 for the unskilled labour spent on the building. Of the thirty acres we have reserved, fifteen would be devoted to building sites and cottage gardens which would allow a rood of ground for each little homestead; the remaining fifteen acres would serve as a common for the general use.

The drainage, both of hamlet and land, would probably be undertaken by the local authorities. Every family should grow its cabbages, onions, carrots, potatoes, etc., all its vegetables, and should have half-a-dozen fruit trees, some berry bushes and a flower border; a cottage garden, that is—stocked by means of a loan of £5 from the Credit Bank.

But a quarter of a rood will supply the family with, say, sixty stone of potatoes, and other vegetables in like proportion, and there will remain the produce of three-quarters of a rood wherewith to trade in the neighbouring town, at an annual profit of, say, £6. The waggon of the Hamlet going round the poorer quarters with fresh garden stuff once a week in the season, would be a welcome sight and would be likely to do a good trade, whether in street or market. A better house for the Agent, with a Co-operative store attached, would cost perhaps £350 (and should have an appurtenance of one and a half acres) to be built on a further loan at proportionate interest, charged upon the Agent himself in lieu of rent.

The building is the part of the scheme which could be put in hand so soon as the organisation is completed, and all the men are located. Their wives and families must stay where they are, receiving half the men's wages (6/- a week per family), which, on the principle that half a loaf is better than no bread, would be found to go wonderfully far in the hands of a thrifty woman, who would probably find charring or sewing to eke out the family

living. The men, messing together, and catered for by experts, would be able to live on 6-/ a week each.

To accommodate the men while the cottages are building, three good iron rooms, floored and lined, say forty-five by thirty-five feet each, should be put up in good situations; these would be mess-rooms and dormitories during the building operations, and would serve afterwards as Chapel and School House, Club House, Lecture Room, Work Room, Play Room, etc. These would cost £130 each; the three would be erected on a loan of £400,—interest (£12) to be paid by 1d. a week (per head of household) subscription.

Foremen for the work in each trade could be had pretty easily in slack times, and each man should learn as much carpentering, plumbing, glazing, painting, bricklaying, etc., as would serve his own uses, both now and should he emigrate and build for himself, but he should not attempt to acquire a trade. Bricklayers, carpenters, etc., who had enlisted in the scheme on account of unemployment, would be of great use during the building operations.

A cook for each mess-room should have had a month's training at one of Lockhart's or other cheap London eating-houses, and should preferably be one of the future residents; the others should take turns as assistants. The men should, from the first, have the chance of some overtime, at roadmaking and drainage work for example, so that they may get a little sum towards furnishing when the time comes. A road, connecting with the nearest highway, would probably be undertaken by the County Council.

Co-operation and intensive cultivation are the two working principles; and before long we should be travelling through England, and see as in Belgium, France, Germany and other European countries where spade husbandry is followed, whole families in the fields at intervals of a couple of hundred yards or so, each family on its own ribbon-like strip of land. The seventy acres should be under the plough, and no steam-worked machinery should be employed. That is for rich men who employ labour.

The addition of 210,000 acres of highly cultivated land should be a gain to the country, in the way of increased agricultural produce.

It must be borne in mind that the Hamlets are not proposed as permanent settlements; they would be like nursery plantations where the trees are planted thickly—to be thinned out by and by.

Though farming of the seventy acres lot should be a co-opera-

216p8cm42

tive industry, pains should be taken to give the men individual scope. Each cottage garden should have bee-hives, pigsty, and goat shed; and the family could also have geese and fowls, at large on the fifteen-acre common, where the goats also should feed. Domestic animals add much to the zest of life (a German peasant will describe his annual pig-killing in a quite Homeric vein!) and the possession of these should be one of the inducements by which we should hope to draw the people and keep them to this peasant life.

The goat supplies the family milk (eight pints a day for ten months of the year) with some over for the pig,—the great resource for the family for bacon, ham, salt-pork, "black puddings," sausages, and other "savouries." A £5 loan from the Credit Bank will start the domestic stock for each family.

The success of each Hamlet would depend on the character of the head man. A young man who had been House Captain or in any way in command as Monitor or Games Captain at his school would be a good candidate, for he must take this office as a command, and know how to enforce his "must" with the good-humoured, masterful fellowship of a school-boy rule. 3,500 first rate men would be wanted—pledged to fulfil a term of three years if they prove capable. They must have definite training; they must avoid big farms and modern improvements (these are for rich men) and must have a six months' travelling scholarship (perhaps the State or the County Councils would grant this) to be spent among the small peasantry of France, Belgium, Germany. They must actually see families thrive on their own spade labour, learn their ways and practices. The Factor must himself be able to drive a plough and handle a spade, for many of the would-be peasants will be ignorant of the first elements of agricultural work; but this need not discourage him; let him go to Hadleigh (the Farm Colony of the Salvation Army) and see, not the unemployed, but the unemployable, transformed into able and hearty agricultural labourers. He must also know how and where to buy seeds, plants, agricultural implements, etc.

It is to be hoped that many of the Factors would be fired with the enthusiasm of a great national service, and that there would be wholesome emulation among them as to who should succeed best with his Hamlet. It would be a noble mission, and perhaps some day the King might see well to institute a Good Service Order of Squires, for which decoration the men might contend. The position would be satisfactory in the present and hold promise for the future, as a man who had worked a Hamlet

216p9amc42

well would be eligible for many positions. If he be a Churchman, it would be well he should qualify as a Lay Reader; anyway he should be prepared to conduct the Sunday Services. He would have £150 a year, a fairly good house, an acre or two of land, and would at the same time have the satisfaction of doing philanthropic work. His salary would be the most costly item that would fall on the peasants; for everything else they would pay interest, but in this case they must, year by year, pay the capital sum, at the rate of £2 10s. a head; but the Factor is the pivot upon which the whole must turn, and the whistle is worth the cost! Here is work for the "Agenda Club," which has lately started upon a course full of promise for the country—work of enormous national value.

When the cottages are ready and the women and children arrive, the Factor would find his opportunity. He must organise social life, and upon his initiative would depend the future cheerfulness and well-being of his Hamlet. The neighbouring clergy would, no doubt, come to his aid with spiritual ministrations, and the nearest town would gladly draft the children into its schools even if it were necessary to transport them to and fro. But the community life must depend on the Factor; he would see to it that a playing field was reserved out of the common, and would consider the possibilities for football, cricket, hockey. He would plan social evenings at the Club, sing-songs, recitations, little plays, and what-not,—the principle being always, that the people themselves are the entertainers (with judicious guidance); nothing would be gained in the way of attracting them to the land by providing entertainments; in this as in other ways, the Hamlet should be self-providing.

THE PEASANT'S FINANCIAL POSITION.

His Liabilities :

| | | | |
|---|-------|----|----|
| Interest at three per cent. on Advances from the Credit Bank :— | £ | s. | d. |
| House, (interest on £125) | 3 | 15 | 0 |
| Garden and animals (interest on £10) .. | | 6 | 0 |
| Furniture (interest on £10) | | 6 | 0 |
| Share of Factor's Salary (1/60th of £150) | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Annual instalment for furniture | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Interest on Club House | | 4 | 4 |
| | <hr/> | | |
| | 9 | 1 | 4 |
| | <hr/> | | |

216 p 10 cm 042

570 A SUGGESTION AS TO THE MAKING OF A BRITISH PEASANTRY.

| <i>His Assets :</i> | £ | s. | d. |
|--|----------|----|----|
| Wages, 12/- a week | 27 | 4 | 0 |
| Garden produce | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| Animal produce (sheep £2 10s., pig £2 10s., goat's milk 1/- a week for forty weeks, etc.) | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| Share of profits on farm (after deducting rent) | 9 | 0 | 0 |
| 300 hours overtime (an hour a day at 6d. an hour put on in the farm, the Factor's garden, in roads, in gardens, of neigh- bouring villages, etc.) | 7 | 10 | 0 |
| | £57 14 0 | | |

£57 14s. 0d. — £9 1s. 4d. = £49 12s. 8d. = total income.

This estimate of nearly 20/- a week is necessarily hypothetical, but 20/- a week with his house and the share he reserves of his garden would make him a fairly prosperous peasant.

I have suggested the planting of sixty peasants upon the smallest possible co-operative farm because, until the men learn something of agricultural operations, it may be as well to follow the example of the Salvation Army and allow four unskilled men in the place of one skilled agricultural labourer. At first the men will require much supervision and instruction and this cannot well be spread over a large area. But it will be well to keep in view the possibility of securing 200, or better still 300 acres for each settlement. 200 acres would allow land at the rate of three acres per peasant and 300 would allow the five acres, that is, the Small Holding upon which it is reckoned that a peasant family can subsist. But though the operations of a settlement may be enlarged to 300 acres, it might be as well to carry out the principles of co-operative work rather than individual Holdings for the sake of such of the men, former town-dwellers, as should prefer to work in gangs rather than risk the isolation of a country life.

The advantage of the scheme I have suggested is that the quantity of land may be increased indefinitely without increasing public liabilities. On the contrary, by the time 300 acres are taken in, each peasant ought to be getting £45 a year profit (at the rate of £9 an acre) and would no longer be in need of any subsidy. He would have his garden and domestic animals as before and would be able to afford his share of the Factor's rent.

26 p 11 conc 42

The success of the Hamlet would depend upon the degree in which Self-Government could be introduced. No doubt the Factor would get the men to elect a Committee while they were still in the Mess-Rooms. These would draw up rules for the government of the body and see that they were kept. A self-governed body is apt to be well governed and to have some share in the general management of the Hamlet, both financial and social, would give scope to the men's ambition, and stability to the organisation of the Hamlet.

THE PEASANT'S FUTURE.

1. He and his family may go out as qualified emigrants.
2. He and the settlement he belongs to may emigrate (after five years) and found a colony on a much larger scale elsewhere.
3. He may secure a small holding, or,
4. He may improve his position where he is, and cease to draw his subsidy (12/- a week).

If he fail after a year's trial, he and his family should be drafted into one of the Shop and Hostel establishments, which should take the place of the Castles of Indolence now dotted thickly about the country.

If he do well, he should remain at the Hamlet-settlement from three to five years.

I have tried to indicate a scheme for the relief of the unemployed which should be adequate, permanent, less remunerative than work to be had in the open market, but more full of hope and possibilities, together with pleasant living in the present; work which would be carried on under efficient direction and control, and which would not impinge on the general labour market. The elimination of wastrels, which must be brought about by other means, and the employment of the unemployed should bring within measurable distance a *Workmen's Insurance Act* which should cover casual unemployment as well as other vicissitudes.

Of course such a scheme of agricultural Hamlets would be merely a preliminary step towards the working of the *Small Holdings Act*,—but possibly some sort of training is necessary before the Act can come into general operation.

This is, I need not say, a very rough suggestion of a scheme which, in the hands of experts, might possibly take shape, and be the means of relieving the Nation of a grievous distress.

The present should for several reasons be a good time for the sort of national undertaking here indicated. The great land-

572 A SUGGESTION AS TO THE MAKING OF A BRITISH PEASANTRY.

owners are dispersing much of their land, consols are unusually low, which should facilitate the formation of Land Credit Banks, a stock of something of the same kind, and the year of the Coronation might well be commemorated by a great measure for the relief of the Public—we *all* suffer from the unemployment difficulty. Is it quite impossible that a royal rescript should, as in the case of Germany after the 1870 campaign, indicate and encourage this work?