

## Charlotte Mason and the Bradford and Gloucestershire projects

[PP: CM]

From 1915 to her death in January 1923 Charlotte Mason was convinced that the educational philosophy, and the teaching methods and supporting materials (large quantities of them) that had been developed under the auspices of the PNEU since the early 1890s were about to become the foundations of the school curriculum in the whole of England, and maybe beyond. That at least was her hope, and for these seven years and more she had good reason to think that it might happen. In fact all who knew her at the time (she was 73 in 1915) were convinced that her various illnesses before 1915 were largely banished by her new enthusiasm. She had some powerful supporters; the project was tested with considerable success in schools in and near Bradford and in the county of Gloucestershire; by 1922 the signs looked favourable; but then the project foundered. The story is worth telling. Many of the key figures in the project were talented people, whose ideas about education found favour among many of their contemporaries, and for that reason alone this episode in educational history is worthy of record. But so are the complexities of educational progress and the reasons why good ideas sometimes founder.

In this paper I shall concentrate largely on the people involved in this story rather than on the details of the PUS system and materials, though these were of course crucial to the successes outlined here. In this particular story the individuals concerned and the roles they played were the essence of the story. They were in fact few, and this does at least allow a fairly detailed case study to be compiled.

So no more here than just a single paragraph about the PNEU and the PUS/PRS. CM's philosophy, with its focus on the individual child was indeed something of a revolution in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. CM herself had experienced both at the Davison School in Worthing and at the Bishop Otter College in Chichester the government's policy of payment by results, as assessed by a visit, usually annually, by one of the government's inspectors (usually called, as they still are, HMI, Her Majesty's Inspectors), who concentrated almost solely on pupils' abilities in reading, writing and arithmetic; it was on these assessment that the government's grant to the school for the next year was assessed. CM first expressed her educational ideas in print in her book *Home Education (1886)*, which was based on a series of lectures she had given in Bradford as part of a fund-raising effort at St Mark's church, Manningham, a suburb of Bradford, for the building of a new Parochial Institute and Sunday School. CM was at the time working at the school run by her college friend Lizzy Groveham in Manningham, and Manningham was her local parish church. In the next few years CM developed teaching methods and whole teaching programmes to deliver her

philosophy. These methods and teaching programmes encompassed all subjects from 5 to 13, and included recommended books and materials. In 1888 she and several friends and supporters set up in Bradford the PNEU, and in 1890 the *Parents' Review*, a monthly journal on education, was first published. Branches of the PNEU proliferated across the country, and CM herself spent much of her time travelling to these PNEU branches to give lectures on her ideas. The secretary of the London branch, by far the biggest branch, was Henrietta Franklin [PP], from a distinguished Jewish family, and she became CM's closest ally and friend. From 1894 'Netta' in effect organised the whole PNEU from her London home. To serve the many families and schools that wished to follow CM's philosophy the PUS (The Parents' Union School) was set up, based in the college set up in Ambleside in 1892, and sending materials and teaching programmes around the country. This was organised by Elsie Kitching, CM's great friend and devoted helper. The result was that by the beginning of WW1 in 1914 there was a whole educational industry, distributing teaching programmes and offering a whole assessment structure, with much of the marking done by CM herself, for the schools and families who paid their dues. There was thus by 1914 a whole system in full operation, serving several hundred schools and individual parents who were home-schooling their children.. And CM had long been convinced that this system was just as relevant to state schools as it was to the privileged few. She had been expressing this idea in various forms for some years, under the title 'A Liberal Education for All'.

And in 1915 a rather unexpected opportunity arose to put this idea into reality.

[PP: Lienie]

Emeline Steinthal, Drighlington, and Miss Ambler [PP map]

In 1915 Emeline (Lienie) Steinthal lived near Ilkley, in the beautiful countryside of Wharfedale just a few miles from Bradford. The following short biography gives some details of how she became so involved in the work of Charlotte Mason.

#### Emeline (Lienie) Steinthal (1856-1921)

Emeline (Lienie) Steinthal (née Petrie) was a founding member of the PNEU who lived at the time in Bradford. She was herself from Rochdale in Lancashire. In 1882 she married Francis Frederick Steinthal, a wool merchant whose family had come from Frankfurt in Germany to live in England in 1844. Lienie was a talented artist and sculptor, and regularly exhibited her works in local and national galleries.

Lienie had four children: Paul Telford (1883); Dorothea (1884); Francis Eric (1886); and Paul (sic) Cuthbert (1888). She was living in Manningham, a

Bradford suburb. In 1887 she read in a newspaper article about the publication of *Home Education* by Charlotte Mason, and discovered that Charlotte actually lived in the next road in Manningham. She contacted CM, they met and formed a friendship that lasted until Lienie's death in 1921.

In the summer of 1887 Lienie's drawing room at 2 Walmer Place was the setting for the meeting where the 'Parents' Education Union' (later to be the 'Parents' National Education Union') was formed. There were around a dozen people there. (Margaret Coombs tells the story more fully in *Charlotte Mason*, 2015, 151-155.)

For the next three decades Lienie was active with the PNEU and also at the House of Education in Ambleside, where she frequently taught art classes. She had for many years before been involved with schemes to improve the lives of deprived children in Bradford, and this included teaching art in local schools and running art courses for teachers. It was in one of these that she met Miss Ambler, the headmistress of Drighlington Elementary School with its 350 pupils.

[PPs: Drighlington: map and 3 pictures]

Drighlington Elementary School seemed eminently suitable for a project that Lienie initiated there in 1914, as an expression of CM's philosophy of 'A Liberal Education for All'.

Drighlington was a coal-mining village about four miles from Bradford, in an area of considerable social and economic deprivation (much of the film *Brassed Off* (1996), a tragicomedy dealing with the effects of the miners' strike of 1984-85, was filmed in the area). Lienie started to use the PUS schemes of work with younger children in the school in 1914, and with the help and encouragement of the enthusiastic headteacher, Miss Ambler, a team of capable teachers and the support of Mr A. C. Coffin, the West Riding Director of Education, the scheme was soon successful and quickly spread to other schools nearby. CM herself was enthused, and quickly planned a strategy: **Agnes Drury**, science lecturer at the House of Education, was asked to help with the project: and **Ellen Parish** (at the time Organising Secretary of the PNEU) and **Helen Wix** (her Assistant) also visited schools to offer advice on PUS methods [PP: **Agnes Drury, Ellen Parish, Elsie Kitching; also Essex Cholmondeley**]. By the end of 1916, when CM saw the exam results of the Drighlington children, CM wrote to Lienie: 'It is a phenomenon & as far as I can discover the world has not seen the like, bless the dear woman & her staff & her children! . . . I want you to write to the Times Ed. Supt [*The Times Educational Supplement*] about it all. They [the TES] are running a series of articles on "a necessary revolution" & we must show them what we have done in Drighlington.' The school was actually visited in 1917 by H. A. L. Fisher, a member of the Board of

Education, Oxford historian, and instigator of the 1918 Education Act (the 'Fisher Act').

The project quickly expanded to schools in Bradford and Leeds (about 15 schools by 1918, at least as many more later), and as many again scattered across the country who had heard of the project from reports in the educational press.

The reasons for the success can be identified from what teachers themselves are recorded as saying at conferences:

- The programmes themselves, which were very well organised and supported, and had of course been in use for at least 25 years within the PNEU;
- The conferences that were a major feature for teachers involved in the project. These were held in different locations, mainly in Lienie's home near Ilkley, but also at the college in Bingley.
- The regular support and visits from Lienie, Ellen Parish, Helen Wix and others.
- The extensive use of books and materials (e.g. in art)
- . . . and, a major reason for many teachers, the contrast with what had gone before.

There are numerous letters between CM and Lienie in the archive, and a few from Miss Ambler. For CM this was proof that 'A liberal education for all' did really work.

Horace Household and Gloucestershire [\[PP map\]](#)

[\[PP: Horace Household\]](#)

Horace Household was Director of Education for Gloucestershire – a very different place from Drighlington, though with equal poverty and deprivation, but of a rural sort.

Horace W. Household (1870-1954)

Horace Household was Director of Education for Gloucestershire from 1903 (when his title was actually 'Secretary for Education') to 1936. In November 1916 he read a PUS pamphlet describing the work done in Drighlington Elementary School by **Emeline (Lienie) Steinthal** with Miss Ambler and her staff. And Horace Household was impressed. By 1917 he had introduced the PUS schemes into primary schools in Gloucestershire, starting with five schools but quickly extending the scheme to other schools in the county. In May 1920 Mr Household went to Ambleside to plant a young oak tree to celebrate 50 Gloucestershire schools joining the PUS (see Margaret Coombs, *Charlotte Mason*, 2015, 238); soon after the number of schools reached 70, and it was not long before many more of the primary schools and some of the secondary schools in the county were involved at various levels in the project.

In fact by 1927 in Gloucestershire 270 (out of 422) schools were using PUS materials, and by the time HH retired it was nearly 400. Horace Household was indeed a keen supporter of Charlotte Mason's principles and of the PNEU. In 1921 he joined the Executive Committee of the PNEU, becoming chairman in 1922, and he remained a firm supporter of the PNEU for the rest of his life.

Horace's son Geoffrey, incidentally, was a successful and prolific writer of thrillers. His book *Rogue Male* was made into a film. How far he was influenced by his father's enthusiasm for PUS methods is unfortunately not recorded.

### [PP: Slad and Slad school]

By chance we have a pupil's eye view account of life at Slad school, a small village school in the rural heart of Gloucestershire, about three miles north-east of Stroud. Laurie Lee, a well known English poet and writer, was born in the village and attended Slad School from 1918 to the late 1920s, and his schooldays get a whole chapter in his book about his childhood *Cider with Rosie* (1959; a film of the book was made in 1998). A few lines give the flavour of life in the 'Big Room' at Slad School as Laurie Lee remembered it:

'Miss B, the Head Teacher, . . . was a bunched and punitive little body and the school had christened her Crabby. We were all afraid of Miss B; she spied, she pried she crouched, she crept, she pounced – she was a terror.

Each morning was war without declaration; no one knew who would catch it next. We stood to attention, half crippled in our desks, till Miss B walked in, whacked the walls with a ruler, and fixed us with her squinting eye . . . We said the Lord's Prayer . . . but scarcely had we bellowed the last Amen than Crabby coiled, uncoiled, and sprang, and knocked some poor boy sideways.

One seldom knew why; one was always off guard, for the punishment preceded the charge.'

Needless to say, Slad School was not in the PUS project! Though it may indeed have been one of the reasons why Horace Household was so keen to introduce PUS methods in as many Gloucestershire schools as he could manage!

The Gloucestershire Local Education Authority organised regular conferences for teachers to promote and develop the PUS project, and in the early years of the project there were frequent visits to schools involved in the project from Helen Wix and Ellen Parish, who advised on PUS methods. In fact, though Helen Wix's actual job at the time was Assistant to Ellen Parish as Organising Secretary of the PNEU, she seems to have spent much, perhaps most of her time in Gloucestershire schools. There is no doubt that the project was a success, as material, including

pupils' examination scripts, in the CM archive shows, and teachers were very enthusiastic about it.

Other local education authorities, encouraged by Mr Household's success in Gloucestershire, also experimented with PUS schemes, including parts of London and the county of Leicestershire. (See MC, 2015, 230-238).

The success of the project, as in the Drighlington project, was largely due to the programmes themselves, the personal support of the Directors of Education, the conferences for teachers which were very popular, the support given by Helen Wix and Ellen Parish, the use of good books and materials, and the contrast with what had happened before.

### So why did the projects not spread across the country?

There is no doubt that the two projects were by any measure successful. So why did the PUS methodology not spread as CM had hoped? There were two main reasons: firstly, the key personnel:

1. **Lienie Steinthal** died suddenly of a heart attack on 7 August 1921. She had continued to be a key figure in the Drighlington project, constantly visiting schools, offering her expertise in the arts, and joining in all the conferences. Her death was a great blow to the project.
2. This same year **Ellen Parish** had been appointed by CM as Deputy Principal of the College, with the prospect of following CM as Principal. Though she did continue to take some part in the Drighlington schools, CM's declining health meant that Ellen was in effect running the College as well as caring much of the time for CM. [PP: **Ellen Parish, Agnes Drury, Essex Cholmondeley, Elsie Kitching**]
3. **Helen Wix** in January 1921 became a school inspector (HMI), based in the county of Leicestershire. She was in fact from Sydney in Australia, had taken the Ambleside Certificate in 1903, and had had varied teaching experience before working for the PNEU. Her links with PNEU continued, since later, in 1929, she became the first headmistress of Overstone School near Northampton, which was founded by Mrs Esslemont and Netta Franklin in memory of Charlotte Mason. The school quickly became one of the best known PNEU schools.
4. Then of course in January 1923 **CM herself** died.

That left the projects bereft of central advice and support. Miss Ambler at Drighlington seems to have kept things going quite successfully for a while, and Horace Household certainly supported the project in Gloucestershire and indeed expanded it until his retirement in 1936, but unfortunately thereafter even in



Gloucestershire the scheme soon came to an end, at least as far as support from the county was concerned.

. . . and secondly there were contrary views from what one might call the educational establishment. Horace Household had tried in 1920 to persuade H. M. Richards, the Chief HMI at the time, that the PUS methodology would be ideal for the proposed 'continuation schools' (i.e. schools beyond the elementary; he sent CM a copy of his letter, which is in the archive), but he was unsuccessful.

But a major factor was that in the years following the First World War the national system of teacher training was also expanding rapidly, both through new teacher training colleges and by the expansion in universities of teacher training departments, where in both sectors some prominent educationists were appointed to senior positions.

Just two examples who had connections with CM illustrate the point: in the college sector one of the prime movers in the north of England was Bingley College (recently founded in 1911) with its dynamic Principal **Helen Wodehouse**, [PP] a Cambridge mathematics graduate who later became Professor of Education and head of the School of Education at Bristol (she was incidentally a cousin of the popular creator of Jeeves and Wooster, P. G. Wodehouse).

In the university sector the first teacher training unit was set up in 1891 by the flamboyant, eccentric, talented though ever controversial **Oscar Browning** [PP], (1837-1923) whom CM knew well, initially through Anne Clough, the founder and first principal of Newnham College, Cambridge, who had actually run a school in Ambleside in the 1850s and 60s. Oscar Browning read classics at Kings College, Cambridge, then taught at Eton (his old school), which he left under a cloud, returned to Kings as a history lecturer, but soon thought he would be better employed establishing a teacher training unit there (and it seems the History Department thought so too! Browning published numerous books which sold well, but they were popular rather than academic history and not in the manner favoured by most of his colleagues in the History Department). CM first met him in 1889, and both set up their teacher training establishments in 1891. CM later invited 'the Great OB', as she rather facetiously called him to her close circle of friends, to be the external examiner for the college, a task he performed until around 1914, when, already some years into his retirement, he moved permanently to sunny Italy – perhaps, some suggested, to avoid some never specified problems in England.

So there was in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century a rapidly expanding teacher training sector, headed by newly appointed college principals and professors of education. Were such people going to accept a national curriculum founded on the PUS, under the control of the PNEU and CM's small independent college at Ambleside? CM herself had unwittingly created part of the problem; she had not succeeded in having the Ambleside course accepted as a national qualification for teaching mainly because

she was unwilling to relinquish full control of the college. She was certainly made aware that if the Ambleside course was to gain recognition by the Board of Education as a nationally approved qualification for teaching in maintained schools, then the Board would require some control of the college and its courses. And so, although PUS methods had much support from several HMI, the college remained outside the national system until 1960. In the eyes of influential people in the rapidly expanding maintained sector of education in the early 1920s, including the Chief HMI, it was not seen as appropriate to base a national system for schools on the work of an independent organisation such as the PNEU. And there would indeed have been problems: would there be a national (i.e. a PNEU/PUS) curriculum? Would it be taught exclusively using PNEU/PUS methods? Would all colleges and university teacher training departments be required to teach only this curriculum? Where would the control and supervision of the system lie? Would it be the only approved system in maintained schools? And doubtless many other questions would have arisen, especially among the expanding numbers of college principals and professors of education.

And so by the later 1930s the PUS system had again become restricted to smaller independent schools and family groups – though in considerable numbers; the CM archive records well over 400 PNEU schools by the 1930s.

But to end on a positive note: CM and her ideas were well known in the educational world of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The PNEU was flourishing, and its membership, across its numerous branches across the country, included many of the great and good of UK society. *The Parents' Review*, which ran for almost 70 years from the 1890s, was a prominent educational journal and was able to commission articles from many prominent educationists and philosophers of the time. CM was a regular contributor to newspaper Letters columns, especially *The Times*. She was undoubtedly a networker, an influencer. Her ideas, especially her stress on the individual child as a person and the specific needs of each child, and the need for a wide curriculum to include history, geography, science and the arts, were well known, and there is no doubt that her influence on the educational thinking of many prime movers of the day was considerable. It is true that many other educationists of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century expressed similar ideas and exerted influence over those who made educational policy; but Charlotte Mason was among the first. If she could go into a typical primary school classroom of today she would certainly recognise much of what is going on as at least consonant with her philosophy and methods. One might well argue that there was no need to spread the PUS system across the state schools of the country. In essence, at least major parts of the job were already done.