

'Home Education' Series

VOLUME I.

Home Education

By

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A fresh transcription from the FIFTH EDITION



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This edition published 2017
By Living Book Press
147 Durren Rd, Jillyby, 2259

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National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:

Creator: Mason, Charlotte, author.
Title: Home education / Charlotte Mason.
ISBN: 9780648063353 (paperback)
Series: The home education series : bk 1.
Subjects: Home schooling.
Education--Parent participation.

habits are those which the mother takes no pains about, but which the child picks up for himself through his close observation of all that is said and done, felt and thought, in his home.


Habits inspired in the Home Atmosphere.—

We have already considered a group of half-physical habits—order, regularity, neatness—which the child imbibes, so to speak, in this way. But this is not all: habits of gentleness, courtesy, kindness, candour, respect for other people, or—habits quite other than these, are inspired by the child as the very atmosphere of his home, the air he lives in and must grow by.

I.—THE HABIT OF ATTENTION

Let us pass on, now, to the consideration of a group of mental habits which are affected by direct training rather than by example.

First, we put the *habit of Attention*, because the highest intellectual gifts depend for their value upon the measure in which their owner has cultivated the habit of attention. To explain why this habit is of such supreme importance, we must consider the operation of one or two of the laws of thought. But just recall, in the meantime, the fixity of attention with which the trained professional man—the lawyer, the doctor, the man of letters—listens to a roundabout story, throws out the padding, seizes the facts, sees the bearing of every circumstance, and puts the case with new clearness and method; and contrast this with the wandering eye and random replies of the uneducated;— and you see that to differentiate people according to their power of attention is to employ a legitimate test.



A Mind at the Mercy of Associations.—We will consider, then, the nature and the functions of attention. The mind—with the possible exception of the state of coma—is never idle; ideas are for ever passing through the brain, by day and by night, sleeping or waking, mad or sane. We take a great deal too much upon ourselves when we suppose that we are the authors and intenders of the thoughts we think. The most we can do is to give direction to these trains of thought in the comparatively few moments when we are regulating the thoughts of our hearts. We see in dreams—the rapid dance of ideas through the brain during lighter sleep—how ideas follow one another in a general way. In the wanderings of delirium, in the fancies of the mad, the inconsequent prattle of the child, and the babble of the old man, we see the same thing, *i.e.* the law according to which ideas course through the mind when they are left to themselves. You talk to a child about glass—you wish to provoke a proper curiosity as to how glass is made, and what are its uses. Not a bit of it; he wanders off to Cinderella's glass slipper; then he tells you about *his* godmother who gave him a boat; then about the ship in which Uncle Harry went to America; then he wonders why you do not wear spectacles, leaving you to guess that Uncle Harry does so. But the child's ramblings are not whimsical; they follow a law, the law of association of ideas, by which any idea presented to the mind recalls some other idea which has been at any time associated with it—as glass, and Cinderella's slipper; and that, again some idea associated with it. Now this law of association of ideas is a good servant and a bad master. To have this aid in recalling the events of the past, the engage-

ments of the present, is an infinite boon; but to be at the mercy of associations, to have no power to think of what we choose when we choose, but only as something 'puts it in our head,' is to be no better than an imbecile.

Wandering Attention.—A vigorous effort of will should enable us at any time to fix our thoughts. Yes; but a vigorous self-compelling will is the flower of a developed character; and while the child has no character to speak of, but only natural disposition, who is to keep humming-tops out of a geography lesson, or a doll's sofa out of a French verb? Here is the secret of the weariness of the home schoolroom—the children are thinking all the time about something else than their lessons; or, rather, they are at the mercy of the thousand fancies that flit through their brains, each in the train of the last. "Oh, Miss Smith," said a little girl to her governess, "there are so *many* things more interesting than lessons to think about!"

Where is the harm? In this: not merely that the children are wasting time, though that is a pity; but that they are forming a desultory habit of mind, and reducing their own capacity for mental effort.

The Habit of Attention to be Cultivated in the Infant.—The help, then, is not in the will of the child but in the *habit of attention*, a habit to be cultivated even in the infant. A baby, notwithstanding his wonderful powers of observation, has no power of attention; in a minute, the coveted plaything drops from listless little fingers, and the wandering glance lights upon some new joy. But even at this stage the habit of attention may be trained: the discarded plaything is picked up, and, with 'Pretty!' and dumb

show, the mother keeps the infant's eyes fixed for fully a couple of minutes—and this is his first lesson in attention. Later, as we have seen, the child is eager to see and handle every object that comes in his way. But watch him at his investigations: he flits from thing to thing with less purpose than a butterfly amongst the flowers, staying at nothing long enough to get the good out of it. It is the mother's part to supplement the child's quick observing faculty with the habit of attention. She must see to it that he does not flit from this to that, but looks long enough at one thing to get a real acquaintance with it.

Is little Margaret fixing round eyes on a daisy she has plucked? In a second, the daisy will be thrown away, and a pebble or a buttercup will charm the little maid. But the mother seizes the happy moment. She makes Margaret see that the daisy is a bright yellow eye with *white* eyelashes round it; that all the day long it lies there in the grass and looks up at the great sun, never blinking as Margaret would do, but keeping its eye wide open. And that is why it is called daisy, 'day's eye' because its eye is always looking at the sun which makes the day. And what does Margaret think it does at night, when there is no sun? It does what little boys and girls do; it just shuts up its eye with its white lashes tipped with pink, and goes to sleep till the sun comes again in the morning. By this time the daisy has become interesting to Margaret; she looks at it with big eyes after her mother has finished speaking, and then, very likely, cuddles it up to her breast or gives it a soft little kiss. Thus the mother will contrive ways to invest every object in the child's world with interest and delight.



Attention to 'Things'; Words a Weariness.—

But the tug-of-war begins with the lessons of the schoolroom. Even the child who has gained the habit of attention to *things*, finds *words* a weariness. This is a turning-point in the child's life, and the moment for the mother's tact and vigilance. In the first place, never let the child *dawdle* over copy-book or sum, sit dreaming with his book before him. When a child grows stupid over a lesson, it is time to put it away. Let him do another lesson as unlike the last as possible, and then go back with freshened wits to his unfinished task. If mother or governess have been unwary enough to let the child 'moon' over a lesson, she must just exert her wits to pull him through; the lesson must be done, of course, but must be made bright and pleasant to the child.))

Lessons Attractive.—The teacher should have some knowledge of the principles of education; should know what subjects are best fitted for the child considering his age, and how to make these subjects attractive; should know, too, how to vary the lessons, so that each power of the child's mind should rest after effort, and some other power be called into play. She should know how to incite the child to effort through his desire of approbation, of excelling, of advancing, his desire of knowledge, his love of his parents, his sense of duty, in such a way that no one set of motives be called unduly into play to the injury of the child's character. But the danger she must be especially alive to, is the substitution of any other natural desire for that of knowledge, which is equally natural, and is adequate for all the purposes of education. ★

Time-table; Definite Work in a Given Time.

—I shall have opportunities to enter into some of these points later; meantime, let us look in at a home schoolroom managed upon sound principles. In the first place, there is a time-table, written out fairly, so that the child knows what he has to do and how long each lesson is to last. This idea of definite work to be finished in a given time is valuable to the child, not only as training him in habits of order, but in diligence; he learns that one time is *not* 'as good as another'; that there is no right time left for what is not done in its own time; and this knowledge alone does a great deal to secure the child's *attention* to his work. Again, the lessons are short, seldom more than twenty minutes in length for children under eight; and this, for two or three reasons. The sense that there is not much time for his sums or his reading, keeps the child's wits on the alert and helps to fix his attention; he has time to learn just so much of any one subject as it is good for him to take in at once: and if the lessons be judiciously alternated—sums first, say, while the brain is quite fresh; then writing, or reading—some more or less mechanical exercise, by way of a rest; and so on, the programme varying a little from day to day, but the same principle throughout—a 'thinking' lesson first, and a 'painstaking' lesson to follow,—the child gets through his morning lessons without any sign of weariness.))

Even with regular lessons and short lessons, a further stimulus may be occasionally necessary to secure the attention of the child. His desire of approbation may ask the stimulus, not only of a word of praise, but of something in the shape of a reward to secure his utmost efforts. Now, rewards should be

dealt out to the child upon principle: they should be the natural consequences of his good conduct.

A Natural Reward.—What is the natural consequence of work well and quickly done? Is it not the enjoyment of ampler leisure? The boy is expected to do two right sums in twenty minutes: he does them in ten minutes; the remaining ten minutes are his own, fairly earned, in which he should be free for scamper in the garden, or any delight he chooses. His writing task is to produce six perfect *m*'s: he writes six lines with only one good *m* in each line; the time for the writing lesson is over and he has none for himself; or, he is able to point out six good *m*'s in his first line, and he has the rest of the time to draw steamboats and railway trains. This possibility of letting the children occupy themselves variously in the few minutes they may gain at the end of each lesson, is compensation which the home schoolroom offers for the zest which the sympathy of numbers, and emulation, are supposed to give to school work.



Emulation.—As for emulation, a very potent means of exciting and holding the attention of children, it is often objected that a desire to excel, to do better than others, implies an unloving temper, which the educator should rather repress than cultivate. Good marks of some kind are usually the rewards of those who do best, and it is urged that these good marks are often the cause of ungenerous rivalry. Now, the fact is, the children are being trained to live in the world, and in the world we all *do* get good marks of one kind or another, prize, or praise, or both, according as we excel others, whether in football or tennis, or in picture-painting or poem-

making. There are envyings and heart-burnings amongst those who come in second best; so it has been from the beginning, and doubtless will be to the end. If the child is to go out into an emulous world, why, it may possibly be well that he should be brought up in an emulous school. But here is where the mother's work comes in. She can teach her child to be first without vanity, and to be last without bitterness; that is, she can bring him up in such a hearty outgoing of love and sympathy that joy in his brother's success takes the sting out of his own failure, and regret for his brother's failure leaves no room for self-glorification. Again, if a system of marks be used as a stimulus to attention and effort, the good marks should be given for *conduct* rather than for *cleverness*—that is, they should be within everybody's reach: every child may get his mark for punctuality, order, attention, diligence, obedience, gentleness; and therefore, marks of this kind may be given without danger of leaving a rankling sense of injustice in the breast of the child who fails. Emulation becomes suicidal when it is used as the incentive to intellectual effort, because the desire for knowledge subsides in proportion as the desire to excel becomes active. As a matter of fact, marks of any sort, even for conduct, distract the attention of children from their proper work, which is in itself interesting enough to secure good behaviour as well as attention.

Affection as a Motive.—That he ought to work hard to please his parents who do so much for him, is a proper motive to bring before the child from time to time, but not too often: if the mother trade on her child's feelings, if, 'Do this or that to please mother,' 'Do not grieve poor mother,' etc., be brought too

frequently before the child as the reason for right doing, a sentimental relation is set up which both parent and child will find embarrassing, the true motives of action will be obscured, and the child, unwilling to appear unloving, will end in being untrue.

Attractiveness of Knowledge.—Of course, the most obvious means of quickening and holding the attention of children lies in the attractiveness of knowledge itself, and in the real appetite for knowledge with which they are endowed. But how successful faulty teachers are in curing children of any desire to know, is to be seen in many a school-room. I shall later, however, have an opportunity for a few words on this subject.

What is Attention?—It is evident that *attention* is no 'faculty' of the mind; indeed, it is *very* doubtful how far the various operations of the mind should be described as 'faculties' at all. *Attention* is hardly even an operation of the mind, but is simply the act by which the whole mental force is applied to the subject in hand. This act, of bringing the whole mind to bear, may be trained into a *habit* at the will of the parent or teacher, who attracts and holds the child's attention by means of a sufficient motive.

Self-Compelled.—As the child gets older, he is taught to bring *his own will* to bear; *to make himself* attend in spite of the most inviting suggestions from without. He should be taught to feel a certain triumph in compelling himself to fix his thoughts. Let him know what the real difficulty is, how it is the nature of his mind to be incessantly thinking, but how the thoughts, if left to themselves, will always run off from one thing to another, and that the struggle and the victory required of him is to fix his thoughts upon

the task in hand. 'You have done your *duty*,' with a look of sympathy from his mother, is a reward for the child who has made this effort in the strength of his growing will. But it cannot be too much borne in mind that attention is, to a great extent, the product of the educated mind; that is, one can only attend in proportion as one has the intellectual power of developing the topic.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of this habit of attention. It is, to quote words of weight, "within the reach of every one, and should be made the primary object of all mental discipline"; for whatever the natural gifts of the child, it is only in so far as the habit of attention is cultivated in him that he is able to make use of them.

The Secret of Overpressure.—If it were only as it saves wear and tear, a perpetual tussle between duty and inclination, it is worth while for the mother to lay herself out to secure that her child never does a lesson into which he does not put his heart. And that is no difficult undertaking; the thing is, to be on the watch from the beginning against the formation of the contrary habit of *inattention*. A great deal has been said lately about overpressure, and we have glanced at one or two of the causes whose effects go by this name. But truly, one of the most fertile causes of an overdone brain is a failure in the habit of attention. I suppose we are all ready to admit that it is not the things we *do*, but the things we *fail to do*, which fatigue us, with the sense of omission, with the worry of hurry in overtaking our tasks. And this is almost the only cause of failure in work in the case of the healthy schoolboy or schoolgirl: wandering wits hinder a lesson from being fully taken in at the right


moment; that lesson becomes a bugbear, continually wanted henceforth and never there; and the sense of loss tries the young scholar more than would the attentive reception of a dozen such lessons.

The Schoolboy's Home Work.—In the matter of home work, the parents may still be of great use to their boys and girls after they begin to go to day-school; not in helping them, that should not be necessary; but let us suppose a case:—'Poor Annie does not finish her lessons till half-past nine, she really has so much to do'; 'Poor Tom is at his books till ten o'clock; we never see anything of the children in the evening,' say the distressed parents; and they let their children go on in a course which is absolutely ruinous both to bodily health and brain power.



Wholesome Home Treatment for Mooning.—Now, the fault is very seldom in the lessons, but in the children; they *moon* over their books, and a little wholesome home treatment should cure them of that ailment. Allow them, at the utmost, an hour and a half for their home-work; treat them tacitly as defaulters if they do not appear at the end of that time; do not be betrayed into word or look of sympathy; and the moment the time for lessons is over, let some delightful game or story-book be begun in the drawing-room. By-and-by they will find that it is possible to finish lessons in time to secure a pleasant evening afterwards, and the lessons will be much the better done for the fact that concentrated attention has been bestowed on them. At the same time the custom of giving home-work, at any rate to children under fourteen, is greatly to be deprecated. The gain of a combination of home and school life is lost to the

children; and a very full scheme of school work may be carried through in the morning hours.

Rewards and Punishments should be relative Consequences of Conduct.—In considering the means of securing attention, it has been necessary to refer to discipline—the dealing out of rewards and punishments,—a subject which every tyro of a nurse-maid or nursery governess feels herself very competent to handle. But this, too, has its scientific aspect: there is a *law* by which all rewards and punishments should be regulated: they should be the natural, or, at any rate, the *relative consequences* of conduct; should imitate, as nearly as may be without injury to the child, the treatment which such and such conduct deserves and receives in afterlife Miss Edgeworth, in her story of *Rosamond and the Purple Jar*, hits the right principle, though the incident is rather extravagant. Little girls do not often pine for purple jars in chemists' windows; but that we should suffer for our wilfulness in getting what is unnecessary by doing without what is necessary, is precisely one of the lessons of life we all have to learn, and therefore is the right sort of lesson to teach a child.



Natural and Educative Consequences.—It is evident that to administer rewards and punishments on this principle requires patient consideration and steady determination on the mother's part. She must consider with herself what fault of disposition the child's misbehaviour springs from; she must aim her punishment at that fault, and must brace herself to see her child suffer present loss for his lasting gain. Indeed, exceedingly little actual punishment is necessary where children are brought up with care. But this happens continually—the child who has done

well gains some natural reward (like that ten minutes  in the garden), which the child forfeits who has done less well; and the mother must brace herself and her child to bear this loss; if she equalise the two children she commits a serious wrong, not against the child who has done well, but against the defaulter, whom she deliberately encourages to repeat his shortcoming. In placing her child under the discipline of consequences, the mother must use much tact and discretion. In many cases, the *natural consequence* of the child's fault is precisely that which it is her business to avert, while, at the same time, she looks about for some consequence related to the fault which shall have an *educative* bearing on the child: for instance, if a boy neglect his studies, the *natural* consequence is that he remains ignorant; but to allow him to do so would be criminal neglect on the part  of the parent.

II.—THE HABITS OF APPLICATION, ETC.

Rapid Mental Effort.—The habits of mental activity and of application are trained by the very means employed to cultivate that of attention. The child may *plod* diligently through his work who might be trained to *rapid* mental effort. The teacher herself must be alert, must expect instant answers, quick thought, rapid work. The tortoise *will* lag behind the hare, but the tortoise must be trained to move, every day, a trifle quicker. Aim steadily at securing quickness of apprehension and execution, and that goes far towards getting it.

Zeal must be Stimulated.—So of application. The child must not be allowed to get into the mood

The Whole Duty of a Child.—First, and infinitely the most important, is the habit of *obedience*. Indeed, obedience is the whole duty of the child, and for this reason—every other duty of the child is fulfilled as a matter of obedience to his parents. Not only so: obedience is the whole duty of man; obedience to conscience, to law, to Divine direction.

It has been well observed that each of the three recorded temptations of our Lord in the wilderness is a suggestion, not of an act of overt sin, but of an act of *wilfulness*, that state directly opposed to obedience, and out of which springs all that foolishness which is bound up in the heart of a child.

Obedience no Accidental Duty.—Now, if the parent realise that obedience is no mere accidental duty, the fulfilling of which is a matter that lies between himself and the child, but that he is the appointed agent to train the child up to the intelligent obedience of the self-compelling, law-abiding human being, he will see that he has no right to *forego* the obedience of his child, and that every act of disobedience in the child is a direct condemnation of the parent. Also, he will see that the motive to the child's obedience is not the arbitrary one of, 'Do this, or that, because I have said so,' but the motive of the apostolic injunction, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, *for this is right.*"

Children must have the Desire to Obey.—It is only in proportion as the will of the child is in the act of obedience, and he obeys because his sense of *right makes him desire to obey in spite of temptations to disobedience*—not of constraint, but willingly—that the habit has been formed which will, hereafter, enable the child to use the strength of his will against

his inclinations when these prompt him to lawless courses. It is said that the children of parents who are most strict in exacting obedience often turn out ill; and that orphans and other poor waifs brought up under strict discipline only wait their opportunity to break out into license. Exactly so; because, in these cases, there is no gradual training of the child in the *habit* of obedience; no gradual enlisting of his *will* on the side of sweet service and a free-will offering of submission to the highest law: the poor children are simply bullied into submission to the will, that is, the *wilfulness*, of another; not at all, 'for it is *right*'; only because it is convenient.

Expect Obedience.—The mother has no more sacred duty than that of training her infant to instant obedience. To do so is no difficult task; the child is still "trailing clouds of glory . . . from God, who is his home"; the principle of obedience is within him, waiting to be called into exercise. There is no need to rate the child, or threaten him, or use any manner of violence, because the parent is *invested* with authority which the child intuitively recognises. It is enough to say, 'Do this,' in a quiet, authoritative tone, and *expect it to be done*. The mother often enough loses her hold over her children because they detect in the tone of her voice that she does not expect them to obey her behests; she does not think enough of her position; has not sufficient confidence in her own authority. The mother's great stronghold is in the *habit* of obedience. If she begin by requiring that her children always obey her, why, they will always do so as a matter of course; but let them once get the thin end of the wedge in, let them discover that they can do otherwise than obey, and a woeful struggle

begins, which commonly ends in the children doing that which is right in their own eyes.

This is the sort of thing which is fatal: The children are in the drawing-room, and a caller is announced. 'You must go upstairs now.' 'Oh, mother dear, *do* let us stay in the window-corner; we will be as quiet as mice!' The mother is rather proud of her children's pretty manners, and they stay. They are *not* quiet, of course; but that is the least of the evils; they have succeeded in doing as they chose and not as they were bid, and they will not put their necks under the yoke again without a struggle. It is in little matters that the mother is worsted. 'Bedtime, Willie!' 'Oh, mamma, *just* let me finish this'; and the mother yields, forgetting that the case in point is of no consequence; the thing that matters is that the child should be daily confirming a *habit* of obedience by the unbroken repetition of acts of obedience. It is astonishing how clever the child is in finding ways of evading the spirit while he observes the letter. 'Mary, come in.' 'Yes, mother'; but her mother calls four times before Mary comes. 'Put away your bricks'; and the bricks are put away with slow, reluctant fingers. 'You must *always* wash your hands when you hear the first bell.' The child obeys for that once, and no more.

To avoid these displays of wilfulness, the mother will insist from the first on an obedience which is prompt, cheerful, and lasting—save for lapses of memory on the child's part. Tardy, unwilling, occasional obedience is hardly worth the having; and it is greatly easier to give the child the *habit* of perfect obedience by never allowing him in anything else, than it is to obtain this mere formal obedience by a

constant exercise of authority. By-and-by, when he is old enough, take the child into confidence; let him know what a noble thing it is to be able to make himself do, in a minute, and brightly, the very thing he would rather not do. To secure this habit of obedience, the mother must exercise great self-restraint; she must never give a command which she does not intend to see carried out to the full. And she must not lay upon her children burdens, grievous to be borne, of command heaped upon command.

Law ensures Liberty.—The children who are trained to perfect obedience may be trusted with a good deal of liberty: they receive a few directions which they know they must not disobey; and for the rest, they are left to learn how to direct their own actions, even at the cost of some small mishaps; and are not pestered with a perpetual fire of 'Do this,' and 'Don't do that!'

VIII.—TRUTHFULNESS

It is unnecessary to say a word of the duty of Truthfulness; but the training of the child in the habit of strict veracity is another matter, and one which requires delicate care and scrupulosity on the part of the mother.

Three Causes of Lying—all Vicious.—The vice of lying arises from three causes: carelessness in *ascertaining* the truth, carelessness in *stating* the truth, and a deliberate intention to deceive. That all three are vicious, is evident from the fact that a man's character may be ruined by what is no more than a careless mis-statement on the part of another; the speaker repeats a damaging remark without taking