



# Charlotte Mason: Hidden Heritage and Educational Influence

*Margaret A. Coombs*

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As the acknowledged founder and philosopher of the Parents' National Educational Union (PNEU), Charlotte Mason (1842–1923) was revered by her followers as a saintly Madonna figure. She died in 1923 at the peak of her fame, having achieved mythic status as the Principal of her House of Education and wide recognition after the introduction of her liberal educational programmes into state schools. Yet her early life and heritage remained shrouded in mystery. Drawing upon insubstantiated sources, the official biography released in 1960 confused rather than illuminated Charlotte's background, contributing to several enduring misapprehensions.

In her new and definitive biography, Margaret Coombs draws on years of research to reveal for the first time the hidden backdrop to Charlotte Mason's life, tracing the lives of her previously undiscovered Quaker ancestors to offer a better understanding of the roots of her personality and ideas. Coombs charts her rise from humble beginnings as an orphaned pupil-teacher to great heights as a lady of culture venerated within prestigious PNEU circles, illustrating how with determination she surmounted rigid Victorian class divisions to achieve her educational vision. A thorough analysis of Charlotte Mason's educational influences and key friendships challenges longstanding notions about the roots of her philosophy, offering a more realistic picture of her life and work than ever accomplished before.

With a growing following in the USA and Australia, Charlotte Mason's ideas have a clear relevance to the continuing educational debate today. Admirers of her philosophy and scholars of the history of education will find much to enthral and instruct them in these pages.

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