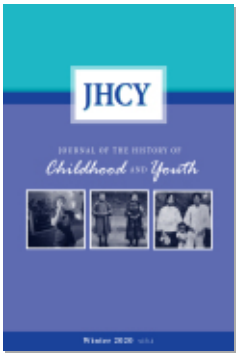
Homeschool/School-Home: Defining Your Place in the British World, 1900-1924



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HOMESCHOOL/SCHOOL-HOME: DEFINING YOUR PLACE IN THE BRITISH WORLD, 1900–1924

On June 13, 1924, 420 school-age children from the Parents' Union School, an English-based homeschool organization begun in 1894 under the auspices of the Parents' National Educational Union (PNEU), traveled to Wembley to take in the Empire Exhibition.[1] According to the PNEU secretary, Henrietta Franklin, the children had been prepared over the past school term to act as models of engaged and purposeful viewing who fulfilled their "duty as citizens" by taking in the exhibition. She described other exhibition visitors as "wandering around . . . with lack-lustre eyes, not knowing what to look at"—calling them out for a lack of purpose and engaged presence in their visit.[2] For Franklin, the exhibition was an opportunity for the children both to learn about the British Empire and to demonstrate engaged citizenship to the other exhibition visitors. By positioning the children as both learner and teacher, Franklin made an interesting claim about the role of children, for whom the Empire Exhibition was not only an opportunity for learning from the exhibition but also for demonstrating what they had learned about the British world beyond the confines of Great Britain itself.

The educational project of the Parents' Union School was to provide a homeschool curriculum that promised not only a high-quality education, but also a British identity to largely middle-class families living abroad in all parts of the British world—an area defined by different kinds of political, economic, and cultural spaces dominated by British populations.[3] Besides offering a curriculum heavy in English literature and history, the organization also worked to form strong bonds between the students and their home country. To accomplish this, the home office solicited and published letters from schoolchildren living abroad, asking them to describe their lives, to give them an opportunity to assert and solidify their sense of British identity and belonging. The publication and display of these letters offered children

within Britain an opportunity to observe how the nation extended beyond the British Isles.

The texts created in these exchanges represent something of an exhibit themselves. Curated by children defining the British world as they understood it and their place in it, these collections of letters simultaneously endorsed and undermined the lessons that adults worked to impart about what it meant to be British and allowed the children themselves to become the experts in their physical, social, and cultural spaces. In doing so, the children of the Parents' Union School complicated late imperial British understanding of belonging and identity by defining the British world as sites of both regular life and exotic adventure.

CHILDREN AS EXPERTS IN THE BRITISH WORLD

Increasingly, historians have recognized the British Empire as a space of much more diversity than the term "empire" implies and have recommended the term "British world" as more reflective of both "sites of formal and informal empire and those countries with a British majority as well as a substantial British minority among their citizens." Celebrations of Empire Day, literary and artistic works, and the growing popularity of foods and goods from the empire provided regular reminders that Britain and its people were connected to something much bigger than a small island or two in the northern Atlantic. The British world was at once "fluid and adaptable as well as nodal, relying on interconnections between settlers and across colonies and nations, usually but by no means always via the metropole." Within this scholarship, children play an increasingly important role; appearing as students studying the empire, migrants moving to the empire, and family members living in the empire.[4]

The expansion of the British world in the nineteenth century coincided with a transformation from viewing children as "little more than the property of the father" to a "citizen or potential citizen" whose health and vitality was crucial to the strength of the nation and empire. Given this, parents, medical professionals, and politicians felt anxious about the experiences of white British children living in the British Empire, whose racial identity could be questioned if they did not gather the correct "cultural attributes and academic credentials." Cultural attributes might include the right accent or correct behavior, while academic credentials focused on attending the proper schools—almost always boarding schools in Great Britain.[5]

Although the literature about the importance of children is growing, these accounts often position children as objects and not agents. Some children were moved around the empire because of emigration schemes, while others were

sent back to Britain to attend boarding school. But children were also future leaders and how they conceived of the British world—not just what they were taught about it—matters. Historians are now paying new attention to the ways that children "identified as agents in the construction of colonial societies who developed their own ways of understanding and engaging with one another." Or, as Shirleene Robinson and Simon Sleight argue in their edited collection, *Children, Childhood and Youth in the British World*, "children's *own* imperial networks can also be shown to have played a role" in connecting the British world.[6]

Recognizing children's agency is not so easily accomplished, however, as both source material and interpretative challenges exist. First, it can be difficult to find sources that present a child's voice rather than an adult voice reflecting on their childhood. Even when these sources are found, how do we interpret the value of the words of a child? One easy interpretative strategy is to position the child's words in contrast or comparison with the thinking of adults. Historian Mona Gleason refers to this as "a binaried interpretive framework." The real difficulty in this is that it denies a child's agency from the outset, imagining their words and ideas as important only to the extent that they contrast or intersect with adults'. In the letters written by and to the schoolchildren in the Parents' Union School, there is an opportunity to move beyond binary comparisons to examine how the children created their own community, in which they were the experts, and created a picture of the British world by children and for children through their writing. In her examination of children's letters published in local newspapers between 1876 and 1914, Siân Pooley argues that children were anxious to take on the role of expert because, while schools emphasized facts, there was also space for experience as "an equally legitimate basis for knowledge." Recognizing their exchanges as meaningful opportunities for children to interpret their own world opens up a new way to think of children as historical actors, but it brings with it significant interpretative challenges in terms of authorship, audience, and intent.[7]

The voices of the Parents' Union School's children are captured in letters written at the request of the home office. Though often short, the letters are quite tricky to interpret. Even the simplest question—who wrote this letter—is challenging to answer. Because no information exists about the creation of the letters, it is impossible to know how independently children wrote their letters. It certainly seems likely that these letters were written with some parental oversight, judging by the age of some of the letter writers (as young as age six) and the stakes of child-rearing in the empire, so the sentiments expressed might represent those of the parents as much as the children. In sending the letters, the children became evidence that the Parents' Union School could deliver what it

promised. It seems likely that parents would have wanted their children to put their best foot forward in depicting themselves and their families. Perhaps the true author of a particular letter might be some confluence of child and parent or child and older sibling or child and governess.[8]

Another question the letters raise is that of audience. Historian David A. Gerber argues, while describing immigrant letters, that the audience for a letter plays an important part in its formulation, as the "mutual creation of two correspondents"—writer and recipient. In this case, the receiving organization, the PNEU, certainly acted as one participant in the composition of these letters. They requested the children write the letters, thus suggesting and perhaps even constraining what the children might choose to write about. The home office also presumably made choices about which letters to print. Sadly, the letters from the children have not survived in their original form, so it is impossible to know what might have disqualified some letters from print or to what extent the letters were edited in some form or fashion. It does seem likely that expectation also came to bear on the letters. The home office and parents expected these letters to correctly identify their children as fully British. Children living in the empire recognized the importance of at least outwardly meeting the expectations of demonstrating Britishness to their parents. Since they wrote the letters as part of their participation in the Parents' Union School, one can surmise that they also wanted to demonstrate their best work to the people who might one day grade their end-of-term exams. The conversation in which these letters engage is crowded with participants, both named and unnamed.[9]

The external audience remains equally complex and raises questions about intent. Initially, the PNEU requested that the children write the letters so they could be displayed for other children to read. The first audience was mostly children, though some adults would have also read the original letters, hanging on the walls at one of the children's gatherings for the Parents' Union School's children in Britain. Subsequently, some of the letters were printed in the monthly *Parents' Review*, the official journal of the PNEU, thus offering a second audience—adult members of the PNEU. This is a very different audience that likely had distinct expectations in reading the letters. The adults were looking to find out how well the Parents' Union School had delivered on its educational promise. These readers figure the children writers as objects, whereas, for other children, the letter writers were likely viewed as individuals.[10]

Despite these issues, the published letters remain useful and intriguing sources and are frankly delightful. They likely represented the best examples from the perspective of the Parents' Union School, making the ambiguity in

them all the more interesting. Despite the ways that these children probably understood what was expected of them, the letters still exhibit a wrestling with expectations of how they demonstrate their contribution to building the British world and their own sense of belonging and home. The letters provide a glimpse into how the children experimented with different ways of fitting in and fashioning themselves as students and citizens.

THE PARENTS' UNION SCHOOL

The Parents' Union School grew out of the PNEU, an educational organization founded by Charlotte Mason in 1887. Mason was an experienced teacher who made a name for herself in the 1880s through the publication of her book *Home Education* (1886). Within a few short years, the parents' union boasted a very elite group of supporters representing the vanguard of educational thinking and politics in the late Victorian era. Supporters included Dorothea Beale, principal of Cheltenham Ladies' College, and Frances Buss, headmistress of the North London Collegiate School, both strong advocates of girls' education. The Countess of Aberdeen, Ishbel Gordon, elected president of the International Congress of Women in 1893, spoke regularly with others about the PNEU and its educational aims. One of Mason's biggest supporters and organizers was Henrietta Franklin, daughter of Samuel and Ellen Montagu, one of the leading Anglo-Jewish families of the day, who advocated for women's suffrage and girls' education. These connections were key in spreading Mason's ideas and, according to Stephanie Spencer, "underpinned the success of the enterprise." It was Franklin's efforts that helped shift the society from a local organization to a national one and expanded the scope of the organization's work to include a journal, the *Parents' Review*, edited by Mason; a teacher and governess training college called the House of Education (officially opening in 1892); and the Parents' Union School, a homeschool organization.[11]

The organization's popularity spread in the twentieth century, in part because of the increased attention to imperial politics and places. Mason's educational organization was one of many looking to influence Britain's young people to become future empire builders by promoting imperialism and patriotism, including Robert Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts. Mason promoted a special connection between her organization and the Boy Scouts. In a 1910 interview, when asked "How did the Boy Scouts start?," Baden-Powell is said to have replied:

> Oh well! I believe it was largely due to—whom shall we say?—a Field Marshall's governess. It was this way. The Brigadier-General, as he was at that time, was riding to his homes after a field day when from the branches of a tree overhead his little son called to him: "Father, you are shot; I am in

> ambush and you have passed under me without seeing me. Remember you should always look upwards as well as around you." So the General looked upwards and saw not only his small son above him, but also, near the top of the tree, the new governess lately imported from Miss Charlotte Mason's training school at Ambleside.

According to Baden-Powell, when he later heard this story from Edmund Allenby (the brigadier-general mentioned above) it became the impetus for *Scouting for Boys*, beginning the Boy Scout movement. In an effort to prove its veracity, the House of Education even tracked down the governess in question twenty-one years later. Curiously, despite this supposed connection, the Parents' Union School did not encourage its students to join the Boy Scouts, but rather to participate in Parents' Union School scouting patrols, organized along their own unique lines. While the organization was engaged in the imperial and patriotic thinking of the day, they preferred to offer a complete package to families—school and scouting, for example—rather than send children to other groups whose work might complement the efforts of the Parents' Union School.[12]

Local branches of the PNEU opened up across the British Empire, often focused on spreading the word about the Parents' Union School. The first official PNEU branch in the colonies opened in Adelaide, South Australia, in 1899. Its founder, Mrs. Kelsey, reported that "over a dozen joined when the first meeting was held" and that she planned to arrange "afternoon meetings for young governesses, with a view to helping them both in their work and studies."[13]

The connection to Baden-Powell and the imperial interest in the Parents' Union School is unsurprising considering the imperial focus of the PNEU and the moment of its growth. At its inception, the PNEU focused internally, with particular attention to issues of class and education, but after 1900, the organization served an increasingly imperialist purpose. This shift, and the historical context in which it happened, presented a unique opportunity for the organization. For the nation, militant suffragettes, a disastrous war in South Africa, restless and activist workers demanding greater rights, debates about Home Rule, and shifting political philosophies posed a serious challenge—defining what it meant to be British in light of these events proved difficult. Mason's PNEU offered one answer. Thus, its focus was rarely limited to just the education of children but on how such instruction could be used to develop stronger citizens for a reinvigorated Britain, proving especially relevant for families living outside Great Britain itself.[14]

Most white British families living in various parts of the British world expected that their lives would be dominated by long periods of separation while children were sent back to boarding schools in Britain relatively early

in their education to insure their character development and identity formation apart from the perceived detrimental environment and atmosphere of the empire. M. Hope Wiseman, a 1905 graduate of the House of Education, pointed out that native nurses might be devoted, but their "affection is very animal and the habits children learn are often objectionable and leave their mark in later life." Additionally, there were fears about the impact of hot climates on children's physical development. Parents who decided against separation, as Elizabeth Buettner has shown, risked their children's racial and national identity appearing questionable. Conveniently, the Parents' Union School offered a ready solution to the problem of separation by providing an organized home-school curriculum that parents or a governess could direct from any geographic location and that would inculcate a white, British identity in its students.[15]

The Parents' Union School was not unique in offering home-based education. Despite the slow growth of a state-mandated educational system in England, Christina de Bellaigue notes that the high levels of literacy "testify to the longevity of a vital educational culture that did not depend on formal schooling" and instead point to the impact of "differing ideas and practices of home education" throughout the nineteenth century. The Parents' Union School set itself apart from previous home education experiences with the standardized nature of its curriculum. Each term, families overseas received a packet with books and reading schedules. For example, Form III of Mason's *School Education* (for children ages twelve to fifteen) included the following subjects:

> Bible Lessons and Recitations (Poetry and Biblical passages); English Grammar, French, German, and Latin; Italian (optional); English, French, and Ancient History (Plutarch's *Lives*); Singing (French, English, and German songs); Writing, Dictation, Drill, Drawing in Brush and Charcoal; Natural History, Botany, Physiology, Geography; Arithmetic; Geometry, and Reading.

Despite the breadth of subjects covered in a year (with the aid of thirty-five books!), Mason designed the entire curriculum to be covered in six-day weeks of three-and-one-half hours per day, with half an hour of that time set aside for "drill and games" and "no preparation or home work in any of the classes." At the end of each term, students took a series of written exams that asked them broad narrative questions to be answered based on the term's reading. Once completed, the exams were sent back to the home office to be reviewed, scored, and returned to the families living abroad.[16]

The method and pace certainly appear exhausting, but children at the time reported enjoying the method of learning. Shelia Ormond (age eleven) commented, "We have lessons all the morning, and I find them quite nice. I like

history best." Anne Henson (age not provided) described her school work as "jolly." The system was not without its imperfections—when mail was slow, books or exams might not arrive—and people often followed the curriculum piecemeal depending on the expertise of the governess or parents. British author Penelope Lively, who followed the Parents' Union School curriculum during her childhood in Egypt, remembers arithmetic as a "tricky area," because "sooner or later we reached the summit of Lucy's [her nanny's] education in basic mathematics." Despite this, she, like Anne Henson, describes the experience as "jolly good."[17]

Regrettably, the administrative records of the Parents' Union School have not survived, making it unclear exactly how many children were enrolled at any one time and from where each of these children hailed. Occasional hints of the reach of the school do exist. In 1892, Essex Cholmondley, Mason's first biographer, reported that there were sixty-five families enrolled in the Parents' Union School. The 1918 annual report claimed 800 families were enrolled. In 1920, the *Parents' Review* claimed 20,000 students, and, by 1948, the annual report recorded that "it is quite impossible to answer" how many children were following the curriculum.[18]

The Parents' Union School offered a remarkable promise to families living in the British world by endeavoring "to secure a common standard attainment, so that the home-taught child shall be equal to the rest when he goes to school," whether that next school was secondary school or university. For the home-taught child in the empire, this equality referred not only to educational attainment but also to national and racial identity. In light of the concerns surrounding children's development in the empire, this promise offered the formation of a particular identity that would leave their children positioned to become the next generation of empire builders. A little postage and hands-on involvement in their children's education could keep families together, and, even more significantly, create a bond tying various parts of the British world to one common identity. From Mason's perspective, a curriculum rich in English history and literature would necessarily result in a patriotic white British citizen, committed to empire, monarch, and church. Of course, the reality of what was delivered and to whom was much more complicated. David Cannadine, Jenny Keating, and Nicola Sheldon's study on the teaching of history in twentieth-century England demonstrates how such optimistic assumptions tend to be quite fraught because a particular sort of education or curriculum is not a guarantee of a particular sort of understanding of the past or future citizen. The children's letters thinking about where and how they locate home demonstrate for us in earnest detail why.[19]

CREATING HOMES IN THE BRITISH WORLD

The PNEU and the Parents' Union School hosted children's gatherings as a way to remind children of the array of homes all over the world where children carried out their schoolwork. Because of the geographic breadth of the school, the leaders of the PNEU and Parents' Union School believed it necessary to teach the students to see themselves as a part of a common school and national family. In 1912, the first of at least three children's gatherings was held in England. Children able to travel to Winchester were invited to attend the conference where they would take lessons together, tour local sites, and participate in a history pageant, in which children dressed in costumes representing different ages of British history. The gathering was meant to create a strong sense of community among the Parents' Union School students, but it was also a crucial opportunity to showcase the organization's accomplishments. Student work was displayed, and the local community was invited to observe the lessons. Although the children living abroad would not be able to attend the gathering unless they happened to be in Britain, it served an important purpose for them as well, inviting them to assert and affirm a sense of belonging.

To garner their involvement, Henrietta Franklin sent letters to families living all over the world, asking children to send photographs of themselves, a letter, and a piece of paper with "Greetings from Owalion, Central India" or wherever they might be living. She planned to hang the letters, pictures, and greetings on a screen in the gathering hall. Franklin intended the colonial children to be "represented while the Gathering is taking place. I am so anxious to bring the home children and the colonial children into touch with each other, and I also want them to understand that the [Parents' Union School] work is being carried out not only in England but in practically every English speaking part of the world." Franklin framed this project in terms of benefits for children based both in England and in the colonies, who would each see the Parents' Union School as an organization bringing the empire and nation together. In so doing, however, she emphasized the distance separating the two groups of children. Her terminology—the "home child" living within Great Britain and the "colonial child" living in the empire—positioned British children living in the empire as distant and even outside the national home. In the report after the gathering, its purpose was framed more narrowly in terms of the colonial children: "The Parents' Union School now numbered some 1,500 children working all over the English-speaking world, and such a gathering as this would help the children to realize the abstract idea of their membership of this large school."[20]

By March 1912, children had begun to respond to Franklin's call and some of their letters, including ones from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, and

Ceylon, were published in that July's *Parents' Review*. The letters indicated the children's names but no ages or grade levels, and children offered their own descriptions about the places they lived. Eleanor Barton from Fareham, New Zealand, sent a picture of a "little native berry which grows in the bush" and her sister, Aline, supplied a drawing of "one of our prettiest native birds sitting on the branch of a Kowhai tree." Annette Baron sent a picture of two birds, explaining that "Maoris wear them in their hats." Fred Price, living in Kingston, Ontario, focused on the unusual animals in the forests, including black bears and moose. Price is also one of few children to make any mention of indigenous peoples. In fact, he counts it as something of an achievement that he has lived in an area with "lots of Indians" and wonders if the home children have "ever seen one."[21]

The emphasis in the letters on plants, animals, and landscape is reflective of two influences. First, the curriculum of the Parents' Unions School placed particular importance on nature study. With access to different animals and plants, it is easy to imagine that the children were keen to impress their schoolmates with their unique offerings. Second, and more importantly, as the work of Tom Griffiths and John Mackenzie has shown, one way to claim imperial space was through hunting—both literally hunting animals and also collecting objects, which "was seen as a refined and educated form of hunting." In their letters, the children curated virtual collections of what they had seen and perhaps even brought home in their pockets after a day's exploration. In their descriptions, many mimicked the actions of their parents in hunting, collecting, and classifying the flora, fauna, and animal life around them. This, then, was a practice of empire building, within the reach of both boys and girls.[22]

If the British world was a place of adventure, it was also a place with ample opportunity to demonstrate pluck and courage—the very characteristics that fitted the British for empire building. Adventure and danger often went hand in hand, according to the children. The Kennion children, Iris and Wilfred, sent detailed descriptions of their family's travels in India in 1912. Wilfrid asked and was permitted at a picnic to make a fire, which quickly got out of control—"the whole grass caught fire." Fortunately, everyone "got stones and threw them on it, and at last we got a can of water and poured water on it and stopped it." Based on the exploits related in their letters, the Kennion siblings spent their days outside playing and exploring (and getting into all manner of trouble!) with only their governess, Miss Denny, for company. Nancy Irvine, only eight years old, reported in her 1912 letter how a bush fire gave her the responsibility of "driv[ing] the animals away, but they got so frightened they ran round and round. At last I got them out [of the barn]. . . ."[23]

The stories related in the letters, rooted in the physical environment, imagine an empire that is based on a natural world needing to be tamed. Whether the danger stems from exotic animals or harsh conditions, the children represent themselves as engaged in the process of domesticating the wilderness—a key aspect of building an empire. In part, the letters demonstrate the children doing this same work in way that was available to them given their age and abilities. It is tempting to read the letters in this light alone, but, while to our modern eyes there might be a certain exoticness to the stories, another reading is also possible. Perhaps their tales were not so different from the stories their Parents' Union School mates might have related from the English countryside. There, too, children might have had responsibilities on family farms to care for animals or contribute to the work of maintaining the natural environment. The British world for these children was simultaneously a space of exotic adventure and mundane work.

Casual observances of the children are quaint, but they also illustrate the complexity of their understanding of home and belonging, as well as the distance that separated them from Great Britain. In her 1912 letter, Phoebe Barker said, "I would much rather live in India than in England" despite having opened her letter by expressing her regret that they would not be "coming home this year, as I should so much have liked to join you at Winchester." Her comments likely reflected the language her parents used and expected of her, but she felt differently. Her wish to be in England seems less reflective of a desire to live in England, but more a sense of disappointment at missing out on the fun of the conference. Beatrice Irvine, from Melbourne, demonstrated her distance from England in 1912 through her lack of knowledge. She asked, "Are English sparrow's eggs blue? The sparrows' eggs here are creamy, speckled with brown, but Wordsworth's poem, 'The Sparrow's Nest,' begins:—Behold within the leafy shade / Those bright blue eggs together laid.' Mother thinks that it might be a hedge sparrow's eggs." In fact, the details that the children provided about their experiences in some ways only served to emphasize the difference in their lives from those of the home children. They might have all been doing nature studies, but for the colonial child, the plants were vastly different. Children in the English countryside could have provided their own stories about finding a snake near a local pond, but they lacked the dangerous punch of finding and killing a poisonous snake with a hockey stick as the Kennion children had. Even the physical arrangement of the letters, hanging on the wall of the Winchester Cathedral, acted to emphasize the distance between the English and colonial geographies of the respective children. While many colonial children wished that they might attend the conference, none expressed any longing for Britain

as home—in fact, they seemed to be quite at home in the empire beyond Britain. For all the ways that the Parents' Union School promised parents a child fully embodying their British identity, the children displayed a much more complex understanding of their individuality as British citizens, for whom home could be somewhere other than Britain itself.[24]

At the next gathering, in Whitby in 1920, one home child gave voice to the distance between the two groups of children represented in the Parents' Union School. Eva Lawrie, a fourteen-year-old girl attending a Parents' Union School in Edinburgh, wrote about the conference, "It was so nice hearing about our schoolfellows abroad, from all parts of the world. I think it gave us a good idea of how the [Parents' Union School] is all over the world, not just in our own little country." For Lawrie, the letters demonstrated the connections that the school had formed across the empire. For the conference organizers, Lawrie's reflections must have been a thrill, suggesting the success of their goal of bringing the two groups of children together. More than the organization's success, though, her letter indicates the level of influence that the children had on one other. Their observations changed the attitudes of other children in the organization in terms of how they viewed the British world. By hearing from the children and by reading their letters, Lawrie's vision of the connectiveness of the British world changed. [25]

The children also used their letters to correct assumptions about the empire and take on the role of expert. By claiming their experiences as equally important to book knowledge, the students could construct themselves as erudite. Writing in 1920, Mauddie Waddington, age eleven, offered to share the empire by sending anyone interested "a little scorpion." Jane Eliza, also writing in 1920, chastised her fellow students by noting, "I hope you do not think there are tigers and elephants round every corner, as there are not. You have to walk a great many miles in big jungle in order to get one."[26]

The letters also emphasize ordinary experiences of childhood that children living abroad and those living in Britain likely shared. Sheila Ormond's letter emphasized the routine of her life. She rode horses and swam, attended lessons in the morning, and sewed in the afternoon, even fitting in time for some philanthropy by "making a set of clothes for the poor children." George Turner, age twelve, living in the Transvaal, admitted having "never been to England," but went on to describe a childhood not unlike boys his age in Britain—shooting doves, ducks, and pheasants. Granted, he also described the discovery of a cobra living among the books in the library. Here, the children are not only experts; they also work to normalize the British world, making it a place more familiar and thus its inhabitants more fully British.[27]

What is evident in the letters is that the children felt a sense of belonging to where they were, but it is important to remember that it was always a mediated space and almost always a white space. Jane Eliza Hasted, though "sad and very home sick for Madras, which I love more than anything," might have lived in India, but she did not live the life of an Indian in India; she lived the life of an Anglo-Indian.[28] Perhaps postindependence India would not have been a place that she felt any sense of belonging, either. In their letters, the children do not identify the privileges of their racial identity. Their vision of home in the British world was a space populated by people who looked and lived like them, which undoubtedly contributed to their sense of acceptance. Despite the fact that all of these children lived in places that were not supposed to be "home" to some extent, they clearly felt at home. The Parents' Union School lessons, coupled with their experience growing up in a place other than Britain, helped these children imagine an identity that at once connected them to the empire and nation; they could more easily perceive an affiliation, and the children in Britain could more readily envision a rapport with them.

CONCLUSION: HOMESCHOOL / SCHOOL-HOME

For children living in the British world, the dissonance between where they lived and where they were supposed to imagine their primary home / allegiance to be created a complex sense of identity, regardless of the goals of the educational curriculum. For some of the children, never visiting Britain made it hard to conceptualize Britain as home, but for others, their lives in the British dominions created alternative homes with which to identify. They viewed the empire as an open space of adventure and beauty (and danger), but for them, this was not something to be overcome—it was what defined home. For this group of children, the Parents' Union School created connections tying the various nodes of the British world together, emphasizing a network of global connection and giving them a sense of belonging and a place of expertise.

In her analysis of colonial childhood memoirs, Rosalia Baena argues that for children living throughout the British world, their primary experience is a "constant feeling of not belonging anywhere." Baena's texts are autobiographies and memoirs written by adults reflecting back on their childhoods lived in a variety of imperial spaces, which makes them very different from the letters of the Parents' Union School children. Though their letters demonstrate the same dichotomy and ambiguity about how they view Great Britain, they do not impart a sense of not belonging. Quite the contrary, in fact—they assert a strong sense of fellowship, where they could feel simultaneously at home in the British world and the British nation.[29]

Baena's analysis brings us back to a critical question: Does what the children say matter—is it historically significant? The letters are, after all, the thoughts of relatively young children (largely between the ages of six and twelve) at a single moment on a particular March or June afternoon in 1912 or 1920—perhaps making them seem too transitory to be of any importance. I would argue that the letters are in fact historically significant because they demonstrate that despite parents' overwhelming effort to impose a particular identity and attitude, children articulated their own understandings of their selfhood and sense of belonging. Whether these attitudes lasted until adulthood or simply represented a fleeting moment of childhood is beside the point. To discount the letters for these reasons would be to deny the children the very agency historians of children and youth seek to recognize. The children's articulation of rapport and sense of home point to the ways, as Ellen Boucher notes, that people "imagine themselves as members of multiple and overlapping communities, a fluidity of belonging that was especially prominent among those who lived in the context of empire." The letters of the Parents' Union School's children demonstrate lives lived at the nexus of empire and nation and of belonging and exclusion in a British world of remarkable complexity and variety. Although the Parents' Union School sought to embody the nation for its students, this was a fraught and complex project. The organization presented itself as a school that could stand for the national home—a school home. In fact, though, for the children, the school was a conduit that offered one possible understanding of home, while their experiences in the British world offered another.[30]

Even as children, they appreciated the complications. Residing in Fareham, New Zealand, in 1912, the Barton sisters, Annette, Aline, and Eleanor, expressed how they would "love to be with you at the [Parents' Union School] Gathering at Winchester. But we are much too far away." Since they could not attend, they were "learning the hymns so that we can sing them at the time of the Gathering." In their minds, this act was intended to embody a connection with their fellow students, but even this was complicated, for, as Aline Barton noted, "when you are singing them we shall be asleep." Perhaps, however, this was not intended to bemoan the distance that separated them, but to recognize the ways the ties to home could be nurtured even across different time zones and that it was possible to hold multiple understandings of home at once.[31]

NOTES

1. The Parents' Union School began as the Parents' Review School, which began enrolling homeschool students in 1892 and was renamed in 1907. For a brief history of the organization's development, see George K. Behlmer, *Friends of the Family: The English Home and its Guardians, 1850–1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 146–60 and Christina

de Bellaigue, "Charlotte Mason, home education and the Parents' National Educational Union in the late nineteenth century," *Oxford Review of Education* 41, no. 4 (2015): 510–17. Charlotte Mason's educational organization continues today as the World-wide Education Service (http://www.weshome.com/home-education-history/).

2. "The Children's Gathering at Wembley," *Parents' Review* 35, no. 8 (1924): 564–5.

3. A sample of work on the British world includes Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, eds., *The British World: Diaspora, Culture, and Identity* (London: Frank Cass, 2003); Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, eds., *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods, and Capital in the British World, c. 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Kent Fedorowich and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire, Migration, and Identity in the British World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

4. Shirleene Robinson and Simon Sleight, eds., "Introduction: The World in Miniature," in *Children, Childhood, and Youth in the British World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2. For notable texts that deal with children and their relationship to the British world, see Stephen Heathorn, *For Home, Country, and Race: Constructing Gender, Class, and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Ellen Boucher, *Empire's Children: Child Emigration, Welfare, and the Decline of the British World, 1869–1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

5. Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel, *Child, Nation, Race, and Empire: Child Rescue Discourse, England, Canada, and Australia, 1850–1915* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 3; Buettner, *Empire Families*, 74.

6. David M. Pomfret, *Youth and Empire: Trans-Colonial Childhoods in British and French Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 7. Robinson and Sleight, "Introduction" in *Children, Childhood, and Youth*, 7.

7. Mona Gleason, "Avoiding the Agency Trap: Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, and Education," *History of Education* 45, no. 4 (2016): 446–59, 448; Siân Pooley, "Children's Writing and the Popular Press in England, 1876–1914," *History Workshop Journal* 80, no. 1 (2015): 75–98, 93. The inaugural issue of the *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* provides further reflection on issues of agency and sources. See especially Peter N. Stearns, "Challenges in the History of Childhood," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008): 35–42 and Mary Jo Maynes, "Age as a Category or Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008): 114–24.

8. For a longer discussion of the value and difficulties in using letters as sources, see Buettner, *Empire Families*, 14–16.

9. David A. Gerber, *Authors of their Lives: The Personal Correspondence of British Immigrants to North America in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 7. There is some evidence that they received more letters than were printed. In the June 1936 *Parents' Review*, a collection of "Letters of Greetings from P. U. S. Children Overseas" appeared with an editorial note at the bottom of the page that said, "These are taken out of a number of others sent to represent the different cities and countries" (413).

10. Historian George K. Behlmer notes that by the late 1890s, *Parents' Review* "serv[ed] a monthly subscription of 2,300"; see *Friends of the Family*, 154.

11. Stephanie Spencer, "'Knowledge as the Necessary Food of the Mind:' Charlotte Mason's Philosophy of Education," in *Women, Education, and Agency, 1600–2000*, Jean Spence, Sarah Jane Aiston, Maureen M. Meikle, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2010): 105–25, 106. For a more detailed description of Mason and her work, see Margaret A. Coombs, *Charlotte Mason: Hidden Heritage and Educational Influence* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2015).

12. The New Governess up a Tree," *Daily Sketch*, newspaper clipping dated July 12, 1910, CM box 18, file CMC 127, labeled "Parents Union Schools Scouts Correspondence, notes, etc. 1910–1977," Armitt Library, Cumbria, England. Unless otherwise noted, all sources from either CM boxes or CM files are at the Armitt Library. The governess's name was K. Loveday and she was Michael Allenby's governess from September 1906 to April 1907. See letter to Miss Kitching dated May 6, 1931, CM box 18, CMC file 127. There is a vast historiography that examines Robert Baden-Powell and the Boy Scout movement, including a detailed analysis in John Springhall, *Youth, Empire, and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883–1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977). The only text I have found that mentions Charlotte Mason is Robert H. MacDonald, *Sons of Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scouts Movement, 1890–1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), but even then, his focus is on Mason's positive views of Baden-Powell's first book.

13. "P. N. E. U. Notes," *Parents Review* 10, no. 12 (1899): 816.

14. Christina de Ballaigue also notes the imperial shift in the PNEU's work after 1900 in her article "Charlotte Mason, Home Education and the Parents' National Educational Union in the late nineteenth century," *Oxford Review of Education* 41, no. 4 (2015): 501–17, 502. For an overview of the Edwardian era, see David Powell, *The Edwardian Crisis, 1901–1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

15. M. Hope Wiseman, "Environment—South Africa," *L'Umile Pianta*, September 1929, 11. *L'Umile Pianta* was the House of Education alumnae magazine. See chapters 1, 2, and 3 in Elizabeth Buettner's *Empire Families* for an overview of the discourse of separation and danger in the empire for children.

16. Christina de Bellaigue, "Home education 1750–1900: domestic pedagogies in England and Wales in historical perspective," *Oxford Review of Education* 41, no. 4 (2015): 421–29, 422; Charlotte M. Mason, *School Education* (1907; reprinted Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989), 286.

17. "Letters from P. U. S. Children Abroad," *Parents' Review* 31, no. 7 (1920): 505; "Letters of Greeting from P. U. S. Children Overseas," *Parents' Review* 47, no. 6 (1936): 414; Penelope Lively, *Oleander, Jacaranda: A Childhood Perceived* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), 73. Lively's nanny had not been trained at the House of Education, but in her role as nanny she directed the Parents' Union School curriculum; "Passed/Failed: Penelope Lively," *Independent*, January 16, 1997, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/passedfailed-penelope-lively-1283340.html, accessed online August 18, 2018.

18. Essex Cholmondley, *The Story of Charlotte Mason* (Petersfield: Child Light Publication, 2000), 44; "Annual Report," *Parents' Review* 29, no. 6 (1918): 401; *Parents' Review* 31, no. 7 (1920): 482; "58th Annual Report 1948–1949," *Parents' Review* 60, no. 2 (1949): 198.

19. "Parents' National Education Union: The Report for 1892, Together with a Brief Account of the Parents' Review, House of Education, and the Parents' Review School," CM box 11; David Cannadine, Jenny Keating, and Nicola Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History: Teaching the Past in Twentieth-Century England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 14.

20. Letter dated January 26, 1912, "P. N. E. U. Children's Gathering, 1912 Winchester. Correspondence, etc.," Charlotte Mason Box 23, file 158; "Report on the Children's Gathering at Winchester," *Parents' Review* 23, no. 7 (1912): 484.

21. "Letters from Children Abroad," *Parents' Review* 23, no. 7 (1912): 542, 546.

22. Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination and Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19. See also John McKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservatism and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

23. "Letters from Children Abroad," *Parents' Review* 23, no. 7 (1912): 544, 547.

24. "Letters from Children Abroad," *Parents' Review* 23, no. 7 (1912): 545; 547; 544.

25. Letter to the Editor from Eva Lawrie, *Parents' Review* 31, no. 8 (1920): 623.

26. "Letters from P. U. S. Children Abroad," *Parents' Review* 31, no. 7 (1920): 507; 510.

27. "Letters from P. U. S. Children Abroad," *Parents' Review* 31, no. 7 (1920): 505; 507; 506.

28. "Letters from P. U. S. Children Abroad," *Parents' Review* 31, no. 7 (1920): 509.

29. Rosalia Baena, "'Not Home but Here:' Rewriting Englishness in Colonial Childhood Memoirs," *English Studies* 90, no. 4 (2009): 435–59, 445.

30. Ellen Boucher, *Empire's Children: Child Emigration, Welfare, and the Decline of the British World, 1869–1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5.

31. "Letters from Children Abroad," *Parents' Review* 23, no. 7 (1912): 542.