



THE ABSORBENT MIND

Maria Montessori

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by

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INTRODUCTION

THE present volume is based upon the lectures given by Dr. Maria Montessori at Ahmedabad, during the first Training Course after her internment in India which lasted up to the end of World War II. In it she exposes the unique mental powers of the young child which enable him to construct and firmly establish within a few years only, without teachers, without any of the usual aids of education, nay, almost abandoned and often obstructed, all the characteristics of the human personality. This achievement by a

being, weak in its physical powers, who is born with great potentialities, but practically without any of the actual factors of mental life, a being who may be called a zero, but who after only six years already surpasses all other living beings, is indeed one of the greatest mysteries of life. In the present volume Dr. Montessori not only sheds the light of her penetrating insight, based on close observation and just appreciation, on the phenomena of this earliest and yet most decisive period of human life, but also indicates the responsibility of adult humanity towards it. She, indeed,

gives a practical meaning to the now universally accepted necessity of " education from birth ". This can be given, only, when education becomes a " help to life " and transcends the narrow limits of teaching and direct transmission of knowledge or ideals from one mind to another. One of the best known principles of the Montessori Method is " the preparation of the environment " ; at this stage of life, long before the child enters a school, this principle provides the key to the realization of an education from birth, to a real cultivation of a human individual

from its very beginning. This is a plea made on scientific foundations, but it is the plea also of one who has witnessed and helped the manifestations of child-nature all over the world, manifestations of mental and spiritual grandeur, which form a startling contrast to the picture shown by mankind which, abandoned during its formative period, grows up as the greatest menace to its own survival.

MARIO M. MONTESSORI
Karachi, May 1949.

CHAPTER I

THE CHILD AND WORLD RECONSTRUCTION

THIS book is a link in our campaign to defend the great powers of the Child. To-day while our world is being torn apart, here and there one hears of plans being formulated for future reconstruction. One of the means which is envisaged for the purpose is education. Indeed the intensifying of education, the return to religion is recommended generally. I too feel that humanity is not yet ready to take part in the

evolution that it desires so ardently, the construction of peaceful and harmonious society, the elimination of wars. Men are not sufficiently educated to control the events, rather they become the victims of them. Although education is recognised as one of the means for the uplift of humanity, it is conceived as an education of the mind only ; some superior sort of ordinary education is still envisaged.

Philosophies and religions are said to give a contribution, it may be true, but how many philosophers are there in the ultra -civilised world of

today and how many have there been before and how many more will there be in future ? Noble ideas, great sentiments have always existed and have always been transmitted, but wars have never ceased. And if education were to be conceived along the old lines of transmitting knowledge, the problem would remain without solution for ever. Indeed, there would be no hope for the world. It is not transmission of knowledge that is required, the consideration of the human personality alone can lead us to salvation. And we hold in front of our eyes a psychic entity, a social

personality, immense in multitude of individuals, a world power that must be taken into consideration. If salvation and help are to come, it is through the child ; for the child is the constructor of man.

The child is endowed with an unknown power and this unknown power guides us towards a more luminous future. Education can no longer be the giving of knowledge only ; it must take a different path. The consideration of personality, the development of human potentialities must become the centre of education. When to begin such

education ?

The greatness of the human personality begins from the birth of man. This is an affirmation full of reality and strikingly mystic at the same time. But, practically speaking, how can one give lessons to a child that is just born, or even to children in the first or second year of life ? How can we imagine giving lessons to a babe ? He does not understand when we speak, he does not even know how to move ; so how can he learn ? Is it perhaps hygiene merely that is intended when we speak of education of small

children > Certainly not ! In modern times the psychic life in the new-born child has called forth great interest. Many scientists and psychologists have made observations of children from 3 hours to the 5th day from birth. Others, after having studied children carefully, have come to the conclusion that the first two years are the most important of life. Education during this period must be intended as a help to the development of the psychic powers inherent in the human individual. This cannot be attained by teaching because the child could not understand what a teacher would

say.

Unexploited Riches

Observation, very general and wide-spread, has shown that small children are endowed with a special psychic nature. This shows us a new way of imparting education ! A different form which concerns humanity itself and which has never been taken into consideration. The real constructive energy, alive and dynamic, of children, remained unknown for thousands of years. Just as men trod upon the earth first and cultivated its surface in

later times, without knowing of or caring for the immense riches that lay hidden in the depth, so is man now-a-days progressing in civilisation without knowing of the riches that lie buried inside the psychic world of the child and indeed, for thousands of years, from the very beginning of humanity itself, man has continued repressing these energies and grinding them into the dust. It is only today that a few have begun to suspect their existence. Humanity has begun to realise the importance of these riches which have never been exploited something more precious

than gold ; the very soul of man.

These first two years of life furnish a new light that shows the laws of psychic construction. These laws were hitherto unknown. It is the outer expression of the child that has revealed their existence. It shows a type of psychology completely different from that of the adult. So here begins the new path. It is not the professor who applies psychology to children, it is the children themselves who teach psychology to the professor. This may seem obscure but it will become immediately clear if we go

somewhat more into detail : the child has a type of mind that absorbs knowledge and instructs himself. A superficial observation will be sufficient to show this. The child of two speaks the language of his parents. The learning of a language is a great intellectual acquisition. Now who has taught the child of two this language ? Is it the teacher ? Everyone knows that is not so, and yet the child knows to perfection the names of things, he knows the verbs, the adjectives etc. If anyone studies the phenomenon he will find it marvellous to follow the development of language. All who

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