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Box 07, Folder 13 - "The Beginning: A Catholic Beginning" (E.M.S)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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THE BEGINNING
A CATHOLIC BEGINNING

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Half a century ago - on Nov 10th 1910 , to be exact - a small but impressive ceremony took place in a room in a house in the Corso Vittorio Emanuel , Rome , just at the corner by the little piazza of Santa Maria Nuova . This room had been converted into a private chapel and Mass was celebrated there daily . On this particular occasion after the Communion four ladies knelt before the altar ^{and} whilst the Priest held up the Blessed Sacrament they solemnly repeated altogether the following words :

"Before the majesty of God I desire to consecrate myself to the service of the Catholic Church , offering myself as a holocaust to Jesus Christ Our Lord . I desire to follow the path of His divine will , embracing my sweet cross with the intention so truly to live that - if it be His will - the Church of Christ , in a reformed humanity , may triumph amidst the splendour of civilization "

Such ~~was the beginning of the~~ ~~Montessori Movement~~ : The house was Dr Montessori's own dwelling and the kneeling figures were Maria Montessori herself and the innermost trio of her followers . Such was the real beginning of the Montessori Movement , though at that time very few persons were aware of it ; and for that matter have been since . It had ~~the appearance~~ much more the appearance of being the beginning of a Religious

than of the beginning of a new educational method - a point to which we shall return later on .

Their leader , Dr Montessori , was already before this a dedicated soul , dedicated to the dissemination of the new and wonderful revelation which had been vouchsafed to her by "The New Children " (as they came to be called) - pledged to the placing before the eyes of the world those higher qualities in childhood which had unfolded themselves before her wondering eyes in that slum tenement holding in the Via Giust , Rome .

This is not the place to describe those happenings which , even to-day , read more like a fairy tale than a sober scientific description (actually it was both) but rather to note the effect upon the young doctor and lecturer on Anthropology at the University of Rome .

~~XXXXXXXX~~ To cite her own words , taken from the Secret of Childhood :

"It took time for me to convince myself that this was not an illusion . After each new experience proving the truth I said to myself , 'I won't believe yet ; I' ll believe next time " . Thus for a long time I remained incredulous , and at the same time deeply stirred and trepidant . How many times did I not reproach the children's teacher when she told me what the children had done of themselves . 'The only thing that impresses me is the truth I would severely reply . And I remember the teacher ~~wxxkx~~ answered without taking offence , and often moved to tears , 'You are

right When I see such things I think it must be the
holy angels who are inspiring these children *

One day , in great emotion , I took my hart in
my two hands as though to encourage it to see the heights
of faith , and I stood respectfully before the children say-
ing to myself 'Who are you then ~~KxK~~ Have I perhaps met wie
with the children who were held in Christ's arms and to
whom the divine words were spoken 'I will follow you , to
enter with you into the Kingdom of Heaven .

And holding up the torch of faith I went on my way ."

It was on this - or some similar occasion - that one of Mont-
essori's friends , entering the room unnoticed , found her
standing entranced watching the children with a sort of
reverent awe and murmuring to herself "Io mi Vuoto ! Io
mi Vuoto " (I dedciate myself)

*Julius
+ Corneil*

The whole incident - which was to me so striking - seemed to be taken by the rest of the occupants of the crowded tram as something quite ordinary and to be taken for granted .

We have said that the Montessori movement then was born and grew up in a Catholic atmosphere . But actually it was something much more definitely in touch with the spirit of Catholicism than just that . When Dr Montessori realised ~~something~~ - which she did very early on - something of the amazing revelation of the possibilities ^{of development} hitherto unknown that had been hidden for so many centuries in childhood , and with it the immense power and responsibility which had been placed in her hands so unexpectedly she felt almost stunned by the weight of the task which she felt lay before her .

It was at this time - right at the beginning - that she gathered around her a little circle of devoted followers and shared with them her vision of things to come . They and Montessori herself became dedicated souls and formed themselves into a little group that was not unlike a religious order . They are all Catholics and all realised ~~that~~ the importance of the work which was just beginning and the immense possibilities that lay ahead . They were vividly conscious that this was much more than just a new educational method , but that there was here the releasing of immense powers for good or evil .

A young Priest from the Vatican city was chosen as their adviser : and every day at Montessori's request he came and celebrated Mass in Dr Montessori's house . She herself used to prepare the altar (and incidentally pay for the priests transport