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Box 11, Folder 43 - "It might interest us to know the conditions under which..." (E.M.S.)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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a It might interest us to know the conditions under which these two different natures manifest themselves. Those which produce the tendencies belonging to the superficial nature are those which generally exist. One must realise that to awake the ones, belonging to the deeper nature, one could not have made a pre-established plan, because they were unknown and therefore no one could set out in search of them. It was necessary that for causes not entirely due to chance, these manifestations should get the possibility to appear. To understand what happened one must have a vision of two different processes to arrive at psychological knowledge. One is research. This involves a psychologist who wants to investigate a certain aspect and sets out to do so. He knows beforehand what he wants and proceeds in his investigation by one method or another.

The other is discovery. Discovery concerns something which though already in existence, for one reason or another has remained hidden from human consciousness. In this case it was the discovery of the deeper nature of the child; for, when the right conditions

It will help to clarify our discussion
for this point, we quote from an
article written in _____ by Dr. M., &
reprinted ^{recently} ~~very~~ in the "Communications -
to official bulletin of the A.M.I.

We will give to quotation at some
length, even tho' it may contain certain
repetitions. here & there,

then comes quote - inset $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch

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were established, the result was the spontaneous appearance of characteristics which revealed not a portion but the whole personality. I must affirm once again that they were not the consequence of a determined and pre-established plan of education. They were not the outcome of any fixed method. On the contrary, what is called the Montessori Method resulted from the discovery of tendencies which previously had had no possibility of permanent manifestation. People insist that I made the method, but this is not so. Certainly I had my part in it; but allow me to illustrate what happened by a comparison.

perhaps I may be permitted

We might compare what took place to the process which evolves in a photographic camera where there is a sensitive plate. Upon the latter the picture of an external object is impressed. Obviously there must be a certain sensitiveness in the plate in order that this image may remain impressed, but the image is not created by the plate. It is the image of an object which has its own form, its own characteristics. I was the plate. My preparation had made me receptive, and I will admit that in me there was also a camera prepared. In myself, I may say, there was a certain mechanism which was prepared, a scientific mechanism. But the fact remains that the psychological picture, which may be permanently registered or not, has nothing to do with the machine. It is not the machine that creates the object, it registers its image. This image formed in the plate is but a photograph of something that exists. In this case it was the hidden nature of the child. I mean to say that while this deeper nature of the child might not have been visible to everyone, this does not mean that the deeper nature came to exist owing to me, because I, who happened to be the machine registered it. It is a complete whole which has its own spontaneous existence. The phenomena therefore do not depend for their existence upon the one who discovers them. It is only the recognition of the facts that depends upon the discoverer's power of perceiving them.

One who discovers electricity has not created electricity. What the discoverer has the power to do is to reproduce the conditions for the repetition of the phenomena he has seen. He does so because he understands what produces them.

This is what happened to me. Once first seen, these psychological phenomena could not be passed by. They made such an impression upon me that I was filled with the desire to see if

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it was possible to have them repeated.

I am certainly not the only one who has seen and has been touched by this type of phenomena. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of unknown people must have seen them. I wish to quote the example of two who are famous in the field of pedagogy. Pestalozzi is one of them. In his school at Stanz he saw similar phenomena. In his writings he describes them more or less as follows.

He writes that he saw children performing a piece of work with an astonishing spirit of love. He could not have been capable of setting the children to do it, because he could not even have imagined it was within their possibilities. Pestalozzi marvelled to see these children working and working with such intense joy and making progress so astounding that he could not have deemed it possible. As a modest person who recognised that fact that he had nothing to do with these marvellous results, he wrote that he, Pestalozzi had no part in producing them, *and* wished to make other people understand that there was an unknown nature in the child.

As a matter of fact Pestalozzi saw these phenomena only once. They were a passing phase in his school and he did not see them again. But they remained impressed in his soul, he wrote about them in the endeavour to share the new faith he had gained but he did not know how to reproduce them. So we have the phenomenon, the discoverer, but the discoverer had no power to reproduce the phenomenon, probably due to the fact that he lacked the necessary scientific preparation.

The same may be likely for the case of Tolstoi; *an* ~~the~~ other famous educator. In his school in Russia, he saw children of illiterate and indigent peasants, who seemed by heredity impervious to school learning, suddenly set aflame with enthusiasm for study. The children forgot that they were hungry and only thought of study. Then this phenomenon disappeared and Tolstoi was unable ever to reproduce it although up to his death this remained his main aspiration.

Such events, distant in history though they are one from the other, give us proof that these revelations of the children are natural phenomena, which generally remain unseen and unknown. This also proves to us that if they remain hidden and unseen, there

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must be certain conditions which are adverse to their manifestation. ~~The~~ Children, ~~that is~~, are generally in conditions that allow only fleeting glimpses of the manifestation of the phenomena of this deeper nature. Moreover the conditions under which such phenomena can manifest themselves are unknown.

It was partly due to chance, partly to my scientific preparation and previous work which had made me sensitive to receive spontaneous psychological manifestations, that brought me to recognize and reproduce the conditions that allow these manifestations. Since then my endeavour has been to incorporate this deeper nature in the realm of education.

I should like to tell you the conditions in which its manifestations first took place. This first institution housed about forty children of poor illiterate parents: itinerary sellers of flowers for example or porters, etc. These parents were nearly always away from their homes in search of work, so that during the day the children were abandoned to themselves. When we first gathered them together they had all the characteristics of children in similar conditions: they were timid, afraid of everyone, liable to hide themselves as soon as they saw a stranger.

Their ages ran from three to six years. The aim of collecting them was not for purposes of instruction. They were gathered together to stop them from soiling and spoiling the walls of the house. They were entrusted to me, not as a teacher, but as a Doctor, for the children appeared in need of medical care for malnutrition and similar ailments. However, I was free to educate them also if I was so inclined. Moreover I had been given means for doing this.

I will now tell you what assistants I chose. No self-respecting teacher would have accepted the task. I therefore chose a woman who had once taken a teacher's diploma, but who was a seamstress for working people, and, later, another one who had some elementary studies behind her but who was now repairing furs. Such was the environment and such were the educational workers. One thing only did I claim from these extraordinary teachers and that was that they should do exactly what I told them to do. Having no responsibility for formal teaching they did not thrust their own personalities upon the children at all. Into this environment I introduced certain criteria. For

example, the idea of making these children happy, without preventing or hindering any of their manifestations. On the contrary I asked these assistants to allow the children to act freely. I brought into this environment some furniture to the size of the children and various objects which I had already used in previous psychological work, such as apparatus for the education of the senses, and so on.

We can now see what were some of the favourable conditions for spontaneous manifestations. These children were not in any way influenced by their parents, who were away trying to make a few pennies; nor by any teacher who wished to teach them. That is to say, they were far removed from any adult who could influence them with any directive.

In this way favourable conditions came to be realised. A very rare thing, ~~Indeed;~~ because, though it is often said that parents or teachers should leave the children free, to do it really is another matter.

Then certain little facts happened which impressed me. For example, the children showed a very great love for cleanliness. They had been taught by us how to wash their hands and they went everywhere looking for opportunities to do so.

This fondness for washing hands was something extraordinary. The mothers came to tell us that when not in school the children rushed out of the house and were gone for long periods. When they went to look for them, they found them at the fountains where women were washing clothes. These complained that the children wasted all the soap they got hold of in washing their hands and then stood and contemplated them. The strangest thing was that this seemed to give the children not only great joy, but they looked around, making intelligent remarks as if they had undergone an inner awakening.

In the school we allowed them to continue to wash, and besides - we gave them something else to do. We allowed them to clean up around them in the environment. A similar success was achieved. Not only the children cleaned the objects around them with great enthusiasm but a curious thing happened: after they had cleaned the objects, they went on doing so again and again, so much that the varnish of

the furniture suffered! And this activity was accompanied by joy and further awakening of intelligence. Encouraged by this we dealt with the matter of teaching them to comb their hair and to dress themselves. This was indeed an enormous success! Having learned to button their clothes, they unbuttoned them and re-buttoned, repeating the process again and again. The same with the hair, they combed their hair, and again and again they combed it!

M.P.

These activities are difficult for a child in ordinary conditions to indulge in because we adults have a way of putting an end to useless activities. Especially then, when the child's need of activity was not understood, any mother would have said: "Now you are clean, that is enough, stop". But here in the school the children were able to carry out these activities to their full satisfaction. Their behaviour led us to become aware of a fundamental truth, namely that the child works for his own inner development, and not to reach an exterior aim and that when he has done this work he has not really developed a special ability but he has developed something in himself. Joy, the lack of timidity, growing intelligence, these were the phenomena, which manifested themselves ever more clearly as time went on. Another thing which at the time seemed strange was the need for order which developed in the children. They put everything back in its proper place. There were certain scientific instruments which were difficult for the children to handle, but when the time came for the assistant to put them away, the children tried to do it before her. She evidently did not realise the reason for this as I found out on one occasion when I happened to be present. She told the children not to touch those objects, which had nothing to do with them. I asked her to let the children do as they wanted and I saw that the objects themselves were of no interest to them; it was the order in which they were placed that interested them. Gradually we came to recognise the child's love for order and witnessed its surprising memory of the exact position of each object.

In time we came to witness what I mentioned in the beginning: the "conversion" of the child. Those children who at the beginning of the experiment had been constantly weeping no longer wept, and they had acquired a certain ease; they were no longer timid, they acted in a frank and open way. People marvelled at the fact that children of poor working people without culture behaved in such a

manner. The parents themselves not only noticed that their children's characteristics had changed, but that they had become more intelligent. So much more intelligent than before, that they asked me if I would teach them to read and write. They were so insistent that I ended by trying. This also met with success. The children were so eager for knowledge that after six months even the four years and a half had learned to read and to write and the six year olds had reached a level parallel to that of children of the second class of the elementary schools of the time.

For me and indeed for the whole world (because the press had spread the news) this seemed a miracle. But there was another event which surprised me even more. Thinking about the matter, - that children might absorb culture, little by little, was surprising but conceivable. What was inconceivable was that the children improved also in health as if they had undergone a physical cure. They had been anaemic, they continued to be ill-nourished and in spite of it their circulation improved and they became more healthy. Though at the time to me as a Doctor in medicine the fact seemed incredible, I was made to realise that certain conditions which fulfilled psychic needs had evidently also influence upon the physical body.

This first institution, this tiny embryo of which I speak, developed. Other schools were started in Italy and abroad, and it became clear that the child growing in favourable conditions not only could learn much more deeply and rapidly, not only became self-reliant and mentally healthy, but without any other special care his physical condition also became normal. So the time came when Doctors recommended our Case dei Bambini as a sort of health resort.

It was as if health and happiness of children were closely linked with the circumstances in which their personality and their intelligence developed. The children's enthusiasm for activity and for study when fulfilled, not only gave them joy but also bettered their physical conditions. So it became clear that it was not play, but the work connected with developing his inner needs, which lead the child to loftier levels both in the psychic and the physical realms.