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## Box 07, Folder 37 - "I First Meet the Dotteressa" (E.M.S.)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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I first met the Dottoress in Barcelona in 1921 and until she died in 1952 was in constant touch with her collaborating in one way or other. When one tries to single out the most dominating feature in her character it is difficult to do so for though her genius had many facets they were so harmoniously combined none seemed to dominate. She was for instance almost unbelievable original and fecund in her ideas. I have heard her lecture hundreds of times - ~~very often~~ but never heard her repeat a lecture even if it was on the same subject as she had lectured before many times. Always each lecture was an event with something quite new in it. Of her it could be said more than anyone

Age could not wither nor custom stifle her infinite variety. As is common to persons of genius in any sphere she seemed to see problems as though envisaged from an extra dimension, and as is often the case with such persons she seemed to direct her course of life by a mysterious ~~compass~~ compass not known to ordinary people. Or perhaps it would be better to say that with her there was in a singular degree "a divinity that shaped her ends rough hew them how she might."

Thus for instance, though she is known in every country of the world for her work in education as a young woman as she often said she would rather be anything than a teacher.

And in fact ~~she~~ after probing other possibilities she decided to become a doctor of medicine. At that time it was an unheard of thing in Rome for a woman to study for a medical degree. But she was a person of an iron will and eventually overcame every obstacle. It was at this time that she obtained an interview with Signor Bacelli the Minister of Education and he informed that it would be quite impossible for her to attend the medical school at Rome University. Undeterred she rose from



her seat thanked the minister for her excellent lunch and swept out of the room saying with a quiet emphasis "I know I shall be a doctor of medicine" - leaving him quite flabbergasted. But she was right. Eventually the matter was taken to the vatican and the reigning pontif Leo XII remarked that he saw no impropriety in a lady preparing herself to help humanity.

This incident was typical of her: once she decided on doing what she thought was right difficulties did not exist for her. Once she got permission to study medicine her difficulties in this sphere were by now menas over. It was not though proper for a girl to do her dissections in the class of men students so she had to do them alone ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ with the corpses - a macabre setting for a young student. This and a continued petty persecution by the men students at the University so wore down her nerves that one day she decided to give it all up. And then a curious thing happened. After having made up her mind to abandon her project she was making her way along across the Pincio Park in Rome. As she went she passed a beggar woman with a small child of about 2½ years of age. The woman begged for alms and Montessori gave her some and then she looked at the child. This tiny creature had a bit of coloured paper in its hands and was looking at it with all the content of her little soul. "I can't explain it," said the Dottoressa - this was in a private conversation - but there was something in that little child and its concentrated and joyous expression as it looked at that bit of coloured paper that it seemed to unlock something deep down in my subconscious and as a result I determined to persist in my medical studies. "This was, of course years before she had any idea that she was going to enter the sphere of education but it seems to indicate - what Socrates would call a daemonic influence - showing that she was already, deep down in her subconscious, intimately - one might almost say - mystically in rapport with soul of the small child.