

Seattle University

ScholarWorks @ SeattleU

Manuscripts, ca. 1921-ca.1966; n.d., Edwin
Mortimer Standing

Series II: Literary Productions, ca. 1919-1979;
n.d.

July 2022

Box 09, Folder 17 - "Montessori's 'Conversion'" (E.M.S.)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/standing-manuscripts>

Recommended Citation

Standing, Edwin Mortimer, "Box 09, Folder 17 - "Montessori's 'Conversion'" (E.M.S.)" (2022). *Manuscripts, ca. 1921-ca.1966; n.d., Edwin Mortimer Standing*. 68.

<https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/standing-manuscripts/68>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Series II: Literary Productions, ca. 1919-1979; n.d. at ScholarWorks @ SeattleU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Manuscripts, ca. 1921-ca.1966; n.d., Edwin Mortimer Standing by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ SeattleU.

Montessori's "Conversion"

"My Conversion"

Mont

Mc

14

Dr. Montessori was a scientist and had a scientific approach to the problems of education. But she was much more than a scientist, and was keenly conscious of those individual and supersensible values which obtain in the spiritual world.

In her experience, which is described below exactly as she related it once to the Editor, we see how these super-scientific values became more vividly real to her as her personality developed under the influence of religion.

"On my way to work at the ^hospital at that time I used to pass a certain Convent. I was often enthralled at the beautiful music. One day I called and I made the acquaintance of the Reverend Mother, and this was the beginning of a friendship which lasted for many years. At that time I was very interested in ^ppsychology, but not particularly interested in religion. It was through the instrument of this nun that I was persuaded to ^make a ^hretreat at their convent. I entered into it purely from a ^ppsychological and ^ppedagogical point of view but came out of it a new person.

"At this time I was working at a ^hospital in Rome and had about sixty patients under my charge. It was that ^hretreat which brought to light my subconscious self, and my unconscious and unrepented sins.

"It happened in this way. There was a young girl of 12 years of age in the ^hospital with a tubercular abscess in her brain which caused a semi-paralysis and other minor effects. It was, medically speaking, a very interesting case. She was one of my sixty patients, and I was ^making a special study of her case, which was a very rare one.

"It was on the second day of my ~~Retreat~~ that the great thing happened. I was under a priest, who has since become one of my best friends and I had been doing the second meditation on life and death. Suddenly I realized that I was dead. I had met hundreds of people in my life, but suddenly it was borne in upon me that in my dealings with these I had been without charity. In particular with this little girl. I had treated her and thought of her simply as a case. I had looked forward to writing ~~of~~ fine Thesis upon it, to give a lecture upon it to the Faculty, and had studied her case with this object in view.

" Now, suddenly I realized with horror the awful nature of my relationship to her. She was dead now and I saw her shining and beautiful in Heaven next to our Lord. I was covered with shame and humiliation. At that moment, too, I saw a vision of the justice of God. I seemed to see all the people in world (it seemed somehow to be taking place in the Austrian sea). Some had presents to give in return as offerings for their sins. These offerings were the injustices they had suffered and their troubles and misfortunes. I too, had my package of these, and offered them up as some slight compensation for my sins and they were accepted. I can remember everything about this experience to day as vividly as it was then. It was evening, and I was undressing and about to go to bed in my large cell when suddenly I saw it all. I flung myself in my bed and wept and wept, all the night until morning came and the ~~p~~riest came to say Mass at the Convent. In this peculiar vision I had, I saw this young girl's face perfectly with all its features. I saw her bed, her sheets, the window by the bed and all such details of this scene, as if it were a reality.

" This young girl was destined to play a profound part in my

life. She died and I was to examine her brain in a post-mortem. But chemicals had dissolved the tumour, and I never completed my ~~re~~search.

"But it is strange how things work out. There was a certain Professor in the ~~me~~ medical faculty of the ~~u~~ university, under whom I was working, who I had invited to study the case with me. It was through my visit to him over this case when I first began to study it, that I began to be interested in nervous diseases and took up the study of defectives. This led to study of ~~te~~ pedagogy and educational ~~te~~ psychology; and this to my ~~re~~ retreat under the Jesuits (the spiritual exercise) and this to my conversion."

Dr. Montessori, as she related these experiences - it was in 1927, at least twenty years after they happened, was profoundly moved by her recollection and the tears came to her eyes as she described them.

M!

Maria Montessori was a true daughter of the Catholic Church, and never doubted its divine nature nor the unique authority that went with it. Here is an example of her attitude as expressed to an important member of the hierarchy through whom that authority is exercised

M I

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER BY MARIA MONTESSORI TO HIS EXCELLENCY
CARDINAL POMEILI - 1917

→ insert.

The aim of the letter from which these extracts are taken was to interest the Cardinal and through him the Pope, in the formation of a White Cross Movement which would be devoted to the welfare of war-victim children, making use of the beneficent effects of the Montessori Method as revealed in its application to the Messina earthquake victims, and elsewhere.

She writes:

"My aim is not to interest Your ^{Eminence} ~~Excellency~~ in my method of education, nor in the disputes and criticism to which it has given rise, but ^{to} ask you to consider all this by comparison of no importance: my aim is to declare to you that whatever error may have been found in it I am ready to correct it, because I believe that all the truth is in the Catholic Church, and that whatever is contrary to it is certainly an error, the repercussion of which would fall back on the destiny of humanity.

"Nevertheless I believe that not only in my sentiments is there nothing against the truth of the Church, but if there has appeared in any of my writings anything which seems against it it is an error of expression, an involuntary error which I would immediately withdraw. Furthermore I am convinced that it is precisely my religious faith which had inspired me in my method, which I had indeed taken from the Church.

"I believe that this method of education is an instrument placed by God in my hands; and that God showed me ^{the} instrument and placed it in my hands for His own ends."

About a quarter of a century later Montessori gave a series of lectures (organized by the Editor who was present) on the teaching of religion at the Westminster Cathedral Hall, London, S.W. 1;. At one of these lectures presided over by His Reverence the Bishop of Bella, Montessori spoke to this effect, "For over a quarter of a century I have worked for the Catholic education of children, but I am well aware that without the approval of Your Lordship and the hierarchy to which he belongs all my efforts would be of no avail."

