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Box 09, Folder 48 - "The Spontaneous Intelligence of Children" (E.M.S.)

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One top + Two carbons

THE SPONTANEOUS INTELLIGENCE OF CHILDREN

Many people think that the most important part of Dr. Montessori's work was the invention of what is known as the Montessori Method of Education. ^{By} They are wrong in this, ^{as} Dr. Montessori herself often maintained, ^{that} her real work, ~~that which will~~ give her ~~an imperishable~~ place in the history of education, was the Discovery of the real child. She was able to ^{see} the real child because she put him in ^{a specially prepared} an environment, and allowed him to act spontaneously in it, ~~not transfixed by butterflies immovably~~ in one particular place ^{and thus reveal the latent characteristics hidden beneath} as was the custom in the old fashioned infant school. ^{a mask of deviations}

So, we get the traits of normality. We need not ~~go into~~ ^{discuss these} them now, ^{in detail} but rather to ^{emphasize} mention one of the most significant ^{that is} of these ^{is} that the child's mind is always working spontaneously. ^{plan} If one asks really what makes a Montessori school go, what is the vital behind it, one is bound to admit that it is the spontaneous working of the children's intelligence.

In the old type of school we could not realize how wonderful this spontaneous intelligence of children is, ^{because there was no opportunity for the child to reveal it} their power to think originally and without any stimulus. ^{But there are occasions when} ~~the child's mind is not so fixed and that is in its normal every-day life outside the school.~~ Aristotle said that the mind works by composing and decomposing things which it meets. If we watch out carefully we ^{shall notice} ~~see~~ again and again how the child's mind, without our doing anything about it, is comparing objects which ^{around it} it finds ^{and} trying to find common elements in them, "decomposing and composing" them again. The results of this work may appear to

unmistakably

us rather simple and amusing but nevertheless indicate ~~that this comparison~~, this spontaneous comparison, has been going on in the child's mind. For instance, there was a little child who was out to lunch with her mommie and for the second course there was jam tart and the child was given some of this on her plate, *She was not* ~~but wasn't~~ quite sure how to deal with it so she whispered to her mommie, "Mommie must I use the fork or may I hold it by the wood". Not a very great compliment to the cook. *In the same word* ~~Just as~~ a little child of ~~two~~ ^{2½} came up to me once with my tobacco pouch and said, "Here ~~Mr.~~ Standing, is the tea for your pipe". *Then* ~~And~~ there was the little child who was visiting in a strange house. As she and her mother entered ~~into~~ ^{and} the hall they noticed a number of trophies stuck up on the wall of the hall ~~the~~ ^{for} host was a big game hunter. As the little girl looked at these trophies she whispered to her mother, "Mommie, ^{I want to go} ~~may we go~~ next door"? The ~~mother said~~, "Whatever for, my dear"? ~~The child replied~~, "Because I want to see the rest of ~~the stag~~". *Of course, there was just the head and shoulders of the stag showing.* *were visible sticking out from the wall*

In fact, children's ~~reason~~ ^{ability to}, as Montessori tells us, begins to work right from a surprisingly early period - not of course, in a fully complete sort of way; but it is there from the start, *and often indeed* ~~and sometimes~~ we find ~~it kind~~ ^{a sort} of remorseless logic in the way

children look at things. There was the mother who said, "Bobby, ^{Tommy} how often have I told you ~~that the Tomlinsons are bad boys~~ and ~~I don't want you to play with them~~?" Bobby replied, "Yes mother, ^{not to play with the Jones boys} ~~but~~ I am a good boy, and ~~I will~~ ^{So it will} be good for them to play with me!" *But mommie*

They are bad for you ~~Then there was the little boy who stole common kiss Antry, who~~ ^{was tried to kiss Auntie} ~~was a dreadful old she-dragon sort of person~~ and he ~~said~~, "Why, ^{raped}

what have I done"! Then there was the Sunday school teacher who, with great care and preparation ~~of pictures and diagrams~~, told the story of Adam and Eve, the apple and the Fall. "And now, what is the moral of all this"? she said at the end. One little bright boy got up and said, "Please Miss, eat less fruit".

NP ~~Then there was~~ a little girl walking with her mother in the street and they ^{as} passed ~~them~~ by a preambulator in which there were twins. It was a special kind of preambulator, very broad, and the twins were placed so that the head of one came out at one end ^{of the corner} and the head of the other came out at the other end ~~of the coverlet~~. The little girl when she saw this going by said, "Mommie, why can't we have a baby with a head at each end"? Then there was a ~~poor~~ ^{this became} little child who got lost at a flower show, ^{she} separated from the adults whom she ^{with} ~~was with~~, ^{had come,} and she went up to a policeman and said, "Please Sir, have you seen two ladies walking about without me"? "Well, Tommy", said Daddy, "What did you learn today at school"? Tommy replied, "I learned that five and four don't make seven". (Well, ^{even so} that ~~is~~ something ^{to be going on with} but ~~it wouldn't take him very far~~). ^{that} As Montessori was always pointing out, we are always inclined to be too negative with children — like the mother in "Punch" who said to her ~~elder~~ ^{middle} daughter (about 8 1/2) ~~eight~~, "Go upstairs ^{and} see what Tommy is doing and tell him not to". She couldn't imagine that ^{Tommy} ~~he~~ could spontaneously ^{be doing} ~~do~~ anything good. ~~I suppose perhaps it was his relation or~~ ^{who} perhaps it was Tommy on another occasion when ^{his mother said} ~~he was told~~, "Tommy be a good boy", and he replied, "What mustn't I do"?

NP Sometimes ~~Christian groups~~ ^{critics} complain about the Montessori Method, that the children ~~work too long hours~~. They forget that

it keeps the children working for too long a time.

for the ~~spontaneous~~ intellect to think is as natural and easy as it is for the heart to beat. Nobody complains that there ^{is} ~~was~~ a mistake in our ~~anatomy~~ ^{scale of} ~~in~~ expecting the heart to go on beating, without stopping, for ^{seventy} ~~to eighty~~ years as it often does. This is because, as Montessori ^{says} ~~would say~~, it is natural for the heart to work ^{it can} and ~~even it can~~ rest while doing so. That is why Saint Augustin^e said, "Love is never at rest until it is at work". (~~In fact, the whole story of the redemption of mankind is implied in that sentence~~). That is why the little girl who was made to rest in the afternoon said, "Mommie, can I get up? It's so tiring having to rest".

Everyone who knows anything about Montessori and her psychology knows how ^{robust} ~~fond~~ children are to ^{make} what appears to us as quite useless repetitions. ^{To illustrate this in a lecture she} ~~In fact,~~ one day ~~Montessori~~ had a tray brought in with a teapot ^{with tea} ~~and the tea~~ in it and several cups and saucers. She poured ~~the~~ tea into all the ~~different~~ cups, and then took the lid ^{off} ~~from~~ the teapot and ^{from the cups} poured the tea all back again and said, "That's exactly the sort of thing a child would do". How true ^{was her remark as to following incident} ~~it is because~~ there was a little boy from the town who went to stay on the farm, ^{and} ~~for the first time~~ and for the first time ~~he~~ saw a cow being milked, ^{fashioned} ~~not~~ mechanically milked, but in the good old way with a stool ^{milk maid} ~~and~~ milk pail ~~and~~. When it was all over the little fellow said to the milkmaid, "Now, put ^{it all} ~~the milk~~ all back again, and do it again". ^{when they}

Teachers ^{often get} ~~very often~~ ask children questions and ~~they~~ get unexpected answers. It doesn't mean that the children haven't thought. Like the teacher who drew some rectangles on the board ^{which were} joined together, and said, "Now Mary, what have I drawn"? ~~and~~ Mary said, "I don't know, Miss Brown, but it looks like our bath-

always showed

NP

room window". ^{Another thing any Montessori person knows is} ~~the~~ ^{when presenting things to} importance of accurate ~~presentation with~~ children. Accuracy is essential. (To give them freedom doesn't mean that we abandon them to do anything they like) A mother once said to a little girl, "Janet, go and wash, will you?" Janet said, "Where shall I wash, Mommie?" "In the bathroom, of course, my dear", replied her mother. ^{replies Janet} ~~Then Janet said,~~ "Yes, but where on me?" ~~Sometimes we forget that people who don't understand Montessori don't understand the liberty which is given to children~~

often

Of course, ~~the liberty of~~ children's spontaneous thinking is ~~is~~ ^{often} ~~some extent conditioned~~ ^{conditioned} by the ^{IV} environment. ^{from a} Like the little boy ^{as he} ~~in the very~~ strict Puritan family, who was standing by the sea ~~and he~~ asked, "Daddy, does the tide come up on Sundays"? Critics of the Montessori system sometimes complain that it is a sort of cruelty to children to teach them such subjects as geometry and grammar when they are only four and a half to six years of age. The reason for that again is that they do not understand what Montessori would call the mind of the "awakened child" who shows an extraordinary degree of intellectual interest. ^{stones} In fact, Montessori once said at a lecture that if there were no practical use to teaching grammar to children we should have to do it because it answers a real need for their intelligence at a particular stage of their development and they have that extraordinary interest in words and the relationship of words to each other. Anyone who has seen the children working in a Montessori school with the grammar symbols or carrying out the grammar commands can have not the faintest doubt the interest which the children show in such matters. Though it would be dull for a child to be taught grammar in the old fashioned kind of way without any activity

and beginning with abstractions and no use of that self-activity which is the basis of everything which is done in the Montessori class. It was such a child who had been so taught who was asked, "What do you do with a noun"? And he said, "Decline it." And then the teacher said, "What do you do with a verb?" And he said, "Congratulate it." But, of course, grammar actually is all practical use in the way of giving the person who is speaking or writing more confidence in the use of construction of words. It can also be of practical use on quite unexpected occasions as the following incident indicates (For this we are indigit to "Punch" as for many other of these stories). This, which I am about to say happened in Ireland: It appeared that a certain Irishman called Sean McClusky had stolen a pig (Like Tom, Tom the Piper's son) and he had been found out. The case was being tried in court and a certain Pat Malooney, a workman and farm laborer, was called on to give evidence. Now Pat, as his mother said, had had his reading and writing and general education scattered on him and his culture was of a very thin kind. The magistrate in charge of the case thought that Sean McCluskey had confessed to doing this deed so he said to Pat, in the witness box, "Tell me now, Pat, what did the prisoner say; tell me what he siad in his own words." Pat said, "He said he stole a pig, your Worship." Magistrate, "But he wouldn't have used the third person." Pat, "Aw, shore thore there wasn't no third person it it." Magistrate, "What you mean, Pat, is that the prisoner said, 'I stole the pig'." Pat, "Aw, but your Worship didn't come into it atall, atall." (Incidentally, I would like to write a grammar book just to bring that story into it).

In children not only is the intelligence always spontaneously working but they show at an early age (sometimes at a surprisingly early age) a sense of understanding in the sphere of religion which is sometimes quite staggering. I was once telling a Bible story to a child of about four or five. The story was about Our Lord healing, from a distance, the servant of the Centurion, and ^{how} the Gospel tells us, ~~that Our Lord~~ ^{Christ} was astonished at the Faith of this Gentile. ^{Upon this he} ~~This~~ little fellow piped up as naturally as anything, "But he wasn't surprised at the God-part of him, was he?" And on another occasion a boy, of a wealthy family while at the breakfast was addressed by one of the guests ^{as follows} ~~with this remark~~, "You are a lucky fellow, because when you grow up you will be a rich man ^{since} because your father has a big estate and you will inherit that." The young chap ~~quite naturally and simply~~ finished his mouthful, put down his egg spoon and then said, "Now let me tell you something!" "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." The poor visitor was so surprised that she ~~could~~ almost imagine ~~that she could~~ ^{fall} fall off her chair backwards! ^{out} Through the whole incident the boy was quite simple and spontaneous, and there was no sense of showing off whatever. The misfortune, of course, is their sense of security which appeals to them as you can tell by children's prayers. Like the little boy who said in his evening prayer, "God bless daddy and mommie and all the rest of the family; and the dog and the cat. Then added, You know our new telephone number; it is Woodby-3651."

Probably every reader of the above anecdotes could supply several out of his or her own experiences with children; ^(I) but enough has been given here to show how true it is that the minds of children are constantly working spontaneously and do not need to be coerced in order to do so.