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## Box 10, Folder 05 - "Untitled" [short bio of Maria Montessori] (E.M.S.)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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Tomms  
Smiths

1 Top  
+ 2 copies  
please. (please keep  
all I return)

stut

Maria Montessori, ~~the~~ founder of the educational method that bears her name, was born in Italy <sup>at</sup> ~~in~~ Ancona in 1870. She took up the career of medicine, being the first woman to qualify as a doctor in the University of Rome, where <sup>afterwards</sup> for many years she held the chair of Anthropology. She ~~also~~ specialised in nervous disorders; <sup>and</sup> this led to her becoming interested in the education of backward children. <sup>She was already 40 years old when</sup> ~~and so~~ eventually - by circuitous ~~she~~ and unexpected paths entered the sphere of normal education <sup>at</sup> ~~the age of 40~~. <sup>in which she was to become so famous.</sup> Her first great experiment with normal children took place in one of the slum districts in Rome in 1907.

1. m

When what is now known as the Montessori Method found its way to England some five or six years later, it seemed like a thing miraculous <sup>in fact</sup> what Dr. E. B. Ballard <sup>Montessori</sup> calls "The miracle of making it possible for private study to take place in the infant school; of making it possible for a number of little children (~~to~~) to work independently in the same room at the same time, and this without any driving power beyond the impelling force that comes from the work itself..... In this alone, even if she had done nothing else Dr. Montessori has made an imperishable contribution to the cause of education". ("The Changing School" page 192. <sup>It takes an hour</sup>)

stie

To the great majority of people today the name Montessori is primarily associated with a new method of education. <sup>it is true that</sup> This is comprehensible enough for ~~she~~ she has devised a new and very original method. But her deepest and strongest claim to a permanent place amongst the <sup>great</sup> educators of humanity lies in the

- 2 -  
profoundly important

fact that she has made a ~~great~~ discovery with regard to the nature of the child. Briefly stated it amounts to this, that the child loves work as much as, and even more than, <sup>he loves</sup> play. ~~is~~ Such a revolutionary doctrine <sup>is</sup> and so contrary to our traditional ideas ~~that no one need be surprised~~ that most people do not believe it yet, nor can even imagine it to be true. They are more inclined to <sup>agree with</sup> Shakespeare's description of the schoolboy "with his satchel and shining morning face, creeping like a snail unwillingly to school".

*strike one as so revolutionary*

This statement, however, does not ~~appear so extraordinary~~ if one stops to consider carefully what takes place in the mental development of any normal child during the first four years of its life, before it comes to school. It is only custom which blinds us to an appreciation of the prodigious amount of hard mental labour which he accomplishes all by himself during that period. Every child is by nature an explorer. Unceasingly, untiringly and, though it sounds strange, one might almost add unconsciously, the infant is busy exploring his environment. Everything is grist to his mill. Watch any baby, even in the pram before he can walk or speak, and you will find him busy examining the nature and properties of every <sup>object</sup> ~~thing~~ which comes his way. The mysteries of form, shape, colour, weight, size, causation, space, time, language, the ego and the non-ego, are but some of the subjects which his unwearying intelligence

*is constantly*

endeavours <sup>us</sup> ~~constantly~~ to sort out <sup>thus</sup>. And with such success that by the age of four, he has managed to ~~set out~~ <sup>arrange the</sup> this confusing <sup>elements of this</sup> jig-saw of a universe into some sort of an orderly organised system.

*people*

And all this by himself, mark you, ~~no~~<sup>any</sup>one teaching him! Regarded then from this ~~point of view~~ we can see that the outstanding mental characteristic of the pre-school child is that he is a great ~~spontaneous~~ "absorber". His mind is continually absorbing knowledge from his environment; and must do so by its very nature.

Now Montessori's great achievement, as far as practice is concerned lies in ~~this~~<sup>the fact</sup> that she has evolved a new kind of school which is based fairly and squarely on this remarkable capacity of the child ~~to~~<sup>spontaneously</sup> absorb knowledge from his environment.

Consequently ~~to~~<sup>for</sup> her the art of education ~~exists~~<sup>Consists</sup> in (1) preparing a Special Environment for the child which ~~contains~~<sup>shall</sup> in it what we wish him to absorb (~~This is what the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education in its report on Infant Schools - when discussing Montessori calls an "Instructive Environment", though as we shall see it is more than that~~), (2) placing the child in ~~a~~<sup>that</sup> dynamic relations with ~~this~~<sup>the</sup> environment, ~~which~~<sup>thus</sup> involves - (3) giving him freedom "to live his own life in ~~this~~<sup>the</sup> environment, free from adult interference, according to the laws of his own nature".

~~That is why some have tried to sum up the Montessori Method as one which is based on "freedom in a prepared environment".~~

This Prepared Environment contains a multitude of Occupations or Teaching Materials whose primary aim is to assist the child's physical, mental and spiritual development, ~~but which~~<sup>time</sup> at the same ~~time~~<sup>time</sup> enable the child ~~to~~<sup>they</sup> spontaneously to learn "the three R's" and other school subjects, - in short to acquire that form of

~~DELETED~~

(Therefore)

The Montessori Method may be summed up as

however

culture which corresponds to the civilisation (east or west) to which he happens to belong. From ~~the~~ <sup>her</sup> point of view ~~of~~ <sup>"</sup> schooling, then, one may say that ~~this~~ <sup>is</sup> a method which combines the acquisition of culture with spontaneity. "

It is important constantly to bear in mind that Montessori's method of education is not/a practice based on a theory as a theory based on a practice, ~~or shall we say~~ <sup>so much</sup> on the observation of children acting freely without adult interference. Obviously it is impossible in a brief outline to do justice to the wonderful system of harmoniously inter-related principles which has been <sup>evaluated</sup> ~~built up by Dr. Montessori~~ during the past thirty years, as <sup>the</sup> ~~result~~ of her unceasing researches into the psychological mysteries of infantile growth. (see "The Secret of Childhood", Longmans.) We can only touch on some of the more important aspects.

<sup>is that</sup> A fundamental, if not ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> fundamental principle of Montessori's point of view <sup>is that</sup> we must always <sup>bear in mind</sup> ~~remember~~ <sup>what</sup> that which constitutes the chief difference between the child and the adult, <sup>to what</sup> ~~namely~~ <sup>"</sup> that the ~~former~~ <sup>child</sup> is in a constant state of transformation or "metamorphosis" whereas the adult has reached the norm of the species. <sup>are</sup> From this ~~derive~~ <sup>derive</sup> other principles, one of the most ~~interesting and~~ <sup>her</sup> original of which is ~~the~~ Doctrine of Sensitive Periods in Development.

During his development each child passes through various stages, called Sensitive Periods, in each of which ~~the child~~ <sup>he</sup> possesses a special but transient sensibility to certain ~~facts~~ <sup>aspects</sup> of his environment. Each of these Sensitive Periods may be compared to the beams of a searchlight coming from within

but transient  
burning

and lighting up certain ~~aspects or~~ facts in the environment to the exclusion of others. A Sensitive Period is ~~not~~ like a bright flame "which burns without consuming"; <sup>became</sup> ~~and~~ while it is in the ascendant it endows the child with ~~special (but transient)~~ <sup>special</sup> interests and <sup>special</sup> potentialities. Such for example is the Sensitive Period for language, which enables a child to absorb a language from its environment in all its complexities of grammar, syntax and pronunciation "simply by living". Such again is the Sensitive Period for order, (See "Secret of Childhood, page ") and there are many others.

It is our business as educators to place in the environment didactic occupations which correspond to <sup>these</sup> ~~the~~ Sensitive Periods through <sup>which</sup> ~~the~~ child <sup>passes</sup> ~~is passing~~. ~~This is because~~ Sensitive Periods are phenomena of mental development; ~~and~~ <sup>for</sup> each enables the child, <sup>as it</sup> ~~who is passing~~ <sup>so</sup> through it to absorb <sup>spontaneous</sup> ~~certain~~ <sup>(particular)</sup> elements from his environment, <sup>at the same time forms a faculty or a skill</sup> ~~and to fix a faculty~~ with an ease and permanency which will never occur again. Without going into details we may

(faculty)

N.P.

say in general of these Montessori occupations that each is designed with the purpose of assisting the child's development in a precise and particular way. ~~And this means~~ Not only his mental development but that of his personality as a whole; for with Montessori ~~the~~ body and ~~the~~ mind and ~~the individual and the social group~~ are never separated, ~~either~~ in theory or in practice.

Each of these occupations involves therefore a twofold activity, - material and mental, <sup>muscular + cerebral</sup> ~~of body and mind~~, of muscle ~~and brain~~. It is always a question of "learning by doing". But it is not, ~~emph atically not~~, a question of learning by doing

There is nothing vague abt. the M. Method - it has form, precision, purpose, interrelation, coherence, gradation all  
 - 6 - along no line

just anything, anyhow, anywhere. Since each occupation is designed with a precise aim it is necessary that the child should be initiated into that <sup>aim, or to put it another way</sup> ~~purpose and, consequently,~~ into the exact way in which the material is to be used. This is the teacher's job, and that is why Montessori describes her as the "dynamic link" between the child and the prepared environment. Incidentally Montessori ~~XX~~ prefers the word "Directress" to that of "Teacher" because her job is not so much to teach directly as to direct a mental energy, which already exists <sup>in such a way that the child is</sup> ~~in the child, and which~~ enabled ~~it~~ to make port under its own steam. [ The child's activity with the material (after the teacher has gone away/completed her task of initiation into its use) is <sup>essentially</sup> an individual thing. It is self-activity, - <sup>that</sup> ~~the~~ Selbst Tatigkeit which Froebel was forever seeking and yet never successfully realised through his "gifts". Like Froebel's, these occupations could well be <sup>described as</sup> ~~called~~ "gifts", for they bring <sup>to</sup> the child not only the gift of knowledge, but that most precious of all gifts, ~~self-knowledge~~ self-realisation, or what Montessori calls "valorisation" of personality. ] It is in these occupations that we find the secret of the Montessori child's intense <sup>mental</sup> concentration. For each <sup>occupation</sup> establishes a "point of contact" between the prepared environment and the soul of the child. This "point of contact" sets going a precise <sup>manipulative with ~~the~~ ~~material~~</sup> activity ~~of~~ material which is accompanied by a correspondingly precise activity of mind. ~~and~~ This <sup>two</sup> ~~twofold~~ activity may, and often does, continue for long periods of time, far longer than the ordinary <sup>period</sup> of a Primary School. It goes on in fact until the "cycle of work" comes full circle

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and the child stops of his own accord. This concentrated activity with the material, involving both the "Centre and the Periphery" of the child's personality, is the means by which, at the same time, ~~builds up~~ he strengthen his mental powers and builds up a living system of knowledge. ~~Often these activities~~ *me &* *This long continued work with the materials often* results in sudden and spontaneous leaps of the mind, or ~~is~~ unexpected acquisitions of skill, such as the famous "explosion into writing" and "the discovery of reading" which astonished the world in Montessori's first schools in Rome.

For the younger children, beginning at the age of  $3\frac{1}{2}$ , these occupations have largely to do with the refinement of the senses, — hence the name Sensorial Materials. From these the child passes on to other occupations in which the sensorial element diminishes as the more intellectual aspect increases, until finally the Young Explorer finds himself travelling joyfully along ~~the~~ *certain* "prepared paths" which lead to the acquisition of the "three R's" and all the other subjects found in the usual school curriculum. *carefully* Each of these prepared paths consists of a series of carefully graded occupations, passing through which the, child, by his own self-activity, or individual work, perfects himself ~~as he passes~~ *from stage by stage. form of*

With regard to the ~~the~~ Freedom given by Montessori to the child in the prepared environment much misapprehension prevails. *as many people think* The child is not allowed to do "anything he likes". True he is allowed to choose his own occupation; but he is only permitted to choose from amongst those materials of which he already knows

⊕ Except of course certain subjects which, by their nature are less taught collectively, such as dramatization, <sup>the</sup> silence game, story telling.



the correct use. Secondly, having chosen, he is only allowed to work with ~~the~~ <sup>any</sup> materials so long as he uses ~~them~~ <sup>it</sup> in the correct way. Thirdly, ~~the freedom given to him~~ <sup>his</sup> ~~includes~~ <sup>implies</sup> no permission to commit any anti-social acts, or in any way make himself a nuisance to others. It is always <sup>a</sup> freedom to do right. The <sup>shown</sup> /Montessori system, as ~~said~~ above, is based on the laws of development. That is why Montessori ~~is~~ <sup>s</sup> always insisting that we should ~~uncessarily~~ encourage the child towards independence. ~~For~~ Independence & growth are intimately bound ~~up~~ together, are in fact different aspects of the same process; <sup>for</sup> growth consists in the acquisition of ever new stages of independence. Such is the law of life. The act of birth is the first great step towards independence; for with it the child takes over from its Mother <sup>such</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>as</sup> functions of respiration, digestion, sensation, and <sup>learning</sup> ~~many~~ others. Weaning, learning to talk, ~~and~~ to walk are further steps towards independence, for in each the child takes over functions for which he had hitherto been dependent on others. Hence Montessori's famous slogan "Every useless aid arrests development".

The effect of the Montessori movement on modern education is beyond calculation. Its influence extends far beyond the limits of those schools which call themselves after her name. Dr. Ballard, for instance, says somewhere that <sup>influence of</sup> ~~the~~ /Montessori <sup>with</sup> revolutionised the Infant School in London ~~in~~ a dozen years. The Individual Work System so prevalent in Primary Schools today is <sup>spread</sup> ~~largely~~ <sup>largely</sup> the result of the ~~impact~~ of Montessori's <sup>doctrines</sup> principles; while the Dalton System owes much of its value to the

same source (Miss Parkhurst was a student under Dr. Montessori and worked with her for several years in America). Many other movements, such for instance as that of the Creative Activity schools ~~exist~~ owe more than they realise to the liberating influence of Montessori's principles, though ~~many~~ <sup>some</sup> of them would do well to study again, and more deeply, her ~~idea~~ <sup>notion</sup> of liberty. <sup>For</sup> ~~which~~ <sup>hers</sup> is a human liberty and not just freedom to run wild, which, as Montessori says, is the form of liberty we give to cats and lizards<sup>!</sup>. Human liberty and true choice is based on knowledge and not on the instinct of curiosity. ~~But there is no space to develop this point here.~~ <sup>a point we have</sup> Nor have we space to show how the Montessori system, which started with infants of 4½ to 6, has now <sup>to such a degree</sup> developed that in Great Britain there are officially "recognised" Montessori Schools for children up to 12 years of age, <sup>while</sup> ~~and~~ in some countries, notably in Holland, up <sup>they exist</sup> ~~to the~~ University entrance standard.

What of the future? Is the Montessori Method just a passing fad, an evanescent phase? ~~We do not think so, but agree~~ <sup>Perhaps we can best answer this in the words of</sup> rather with Professor Godefroy of the University of Amsterdam ~~when he wrote~~ "Those who are not favourable to the Montessori Method ask sceptically what will become of it after a number of years, meaning to imply that before long a new system will have taken its place. It is not difficult to explain to such that the Montessori Method is founded on general characteristics of life proper to all organisms, and that it will last as long as life itself lasts. It is not possible to imagine that such a principle, having once been introduced into pedagogy could ever be abandoned". )