

President : Dr. Maria Montessori

MONTHLY LETTER.

November 1938.

THE MONTESSORI CONGRESS

EDINBURGH

July 26th.-August 2nd, 1938.

The Edinburgh branch of the Montessori Society organised a Conference which was held at the Hostels, Edinburgh. Conference Presidents were Dr. Maria Montessori and Miss Margaret Drummond, M.A. Chairman of the Committee of the Edinburgh Branch.

The Rt. Hon. Lord Provost of Edinburgh, the Principal of the University of Edinburgh, the President of the Educational Institute of Scotland, the Chairman of the Edinburgh Education Committee, several Councillors of Edinburgh, Professors of the Edinburgh University, and many other most distinguished personalities were Honorary Presidents of the Conference.

Although the Congress was organised as a regional reunion, delegates of Denmark, Egypt, France, Ireland, Italy, Holland, Spain and the United States of America represented the Montessori movement in their countries.

Dr. Montessori and the members of the Congress were received with great splendour by the Scottish Government and the City of Edinburgh. Holyrood Castle was floodlit during the Congress. Great attention was paid by the Press to Dr. Montessori's first visit to Scotland and the sessions of the Congress. The City of Glasgow and the Board of the Empire Exhibition invited Dr. Montessori for an official reception in the Royal Pavilion and conducted her at the Exhibition. At its Educational Department she was shown a pillar symbolising the rising path of Education through all ages which starting with Socrates had her name at its very top.

The four lectures given by Dr. Montessori had the following themes : "The Sensitive Periods", "Freedom and Discipline", "Moral and Social Education", "Culture as a Means of Development during the Formative Periods". A public lecture was given on : "The Four Planes of Education".

In her first lecture Dr. Montessori illustrated the personality of the child and his fundamental revelations upon which she built her Method. The guiding instincts of child's growth were treated and the importance of basing education on the knowledge and respect of these leading forces. It was found that many of the things which were difficult for children of older age, were not only easy, but of highest satisfaction for much younger children. A re-distribution of culture according to the special needs and abilities of the child in the various phases of his growth would therefore be a positive step towards a fundamental reform of education. Another revelation of the children was exposed in the second lecture. In the special environment of the Montessori schools, which is devised to correspond to the natural laws of growth, the children showed that freedom and discipline are two aspects of the same phenomenon. They spontaneously adopted a form of social discipline which determined the limits within which they acted in joy and freedom. Freedom cannot exist without these limits, and real discipline cannot exist without freedom. Speaking on "Moral and Social Education" Dr. Montessori remarked that moral and social education cannot be given by merely teaching abstract principles. Only by rendering possible personal experiences suited to the different periods of life real moral and social development can be helped and furthered. In her fourth lecture Dr. Montessori stressed the fact that culture is as necessary for the spiritual development, as nourishment for the development of the body. In order to be a real help to the development of the personality, culture has to be given according to the characteristic needs of the different periods of the child's growth. At a very early age the child is capable and eager to absorb the very foundations of culture in a sensorial way, later its memory asks for material upon which it may exercise its powers and many items which cause great difficulties at an older age can then be easily absorbed. If culture is given in response to the child's successive vital needs it is no longer a cause of fatigue, but strengthens the personality and gives the vast outlook which is so much needed in our days.

In the public lecture the characteristics of the four periods of development were explained and the consequent need to adapt education to these laws of growth rather than to preconceived programmes. Striking examples showed the various forms of a standstill in the development revealing itself in the adult which may occur if the individual could not satisfy its vital needs.

Other speakers were Dr.H.Crichton-Miller, Founder of the Institute of Medical Psychology, London; Dr. Winifred Rushford, Edinburgh; Dir. Vilhelm Rasmussen, Copenhagen; Dr. Robert M'Leod. Mr. Mario M. Montessori held two Study Groups on the Primary and Advanced Montessori Apparatus, two sessions were devoted to the demonstration of new material for the teaching of biology.

Mr. Mario M. Montessori also spoke on the aims of the recently founded "Social Party of the Child" (Hon. Sec. English Branch: Miss Saida S.E. Day, 131 Poplar Rd. South, London S.W. 19) and two special reunions were held at which Dr. Montessori led a discussion on this subject.

COPIES OF THE LECTURES GIVEN BY Dr. MONTESSORI MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE SECRETARIAT OF THE A.M.I. (Price 2s.6d.)

Quotations from Dr. Montessori's Lectures held at the Edinburgh Conference.

"The ability to give freedom is one of the sciences of life.

Freedom of life has certain limits, and on account of these limits life can continue. By putting a limit to freedom the fullness of life is ensured.

The research for our happiness and freedom is the research for our laws and limits.

The laws of life are absolute and more rigid than those imposed by any human being, the punishments are infinitely more serious than the arbitrary punishments of schools. The latter are petty and miserable and do not represent a danger to humanity, but when - without knowing it - we compel the child to leave the path traced by the laws of nature, the child is punished with results that we can never do away.

One might compare morality to the tissues between the living cells. A moral body cannot be built up without this connective tissue. We must consider morality as a fact of life which can be studied in the developing child, it has different phases following the phases of growth.

The harmonious relations between adult and child do not depend only on their loving each other; mutual understanding and love rather depend on the degree of independence the child has acquired.

The child never helps one who makes an effort and tries to solve his own problems, but if something untoward happens, when help is really needed, the child will rise and go to help. This is a social relation very different from our own: adults are always ready to help those who need no help, but if there is someone in real need of help and requires some sacrifice from them, they immediately look for a way of escape.

Before depriving the human being of our days from an item of knowledge and deciding he should be ignorant in this matter, try first another way of imparting culture. Our aim is to give the richest possible culture and before deciding to leave something out, because we think it is not suited, we should reason like the physician does before deciding an amputation. To-day the greatest efforts are made to save organs, be they as common as a simple tooth, the same efforts ought to be made in education whose aim it is to help the development of the human being. It should not amputate the powers of man, but save as much as possible.

We desire mutual understanding among mankind, but it does not come easily: it is something that can arise only in a fully developed man. It is not enough to say that we must mutually understand each other. We must say that we have got to help man to develop in such a way, that he is capable of mutual understanding. It is not merely a matter of words, it is a labour of Education!"

Dr. MONTESSORI'S NEXT TRAINING COURSE WILL BE HELD IN LONDON FROM MARCH 14th to JULY 7th 1939.

TRY AND FIND MEMBERS FOR THE ASSOCIATION MONTESSORI INTERNATIONALE IN ORDER TO SPREAD MORE WIDELY Dr. MONTESSORI'S MESSAGE TO THE BENEFIT OF CHILDHOOD AND MANKIND!

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