

## Portrait of Mario M. Montessori

**Mario Montessori**—a simple man, an innocent man. An extremely generous man, a shy man, an exuberant man. A contemplative man, but an active man! A controversial and complex man. A man who loved life passionately and remained young till the day he died.

He loved the earth; what was hidden in it; what lived and grew on it. He loved the sky, the sun, the clouds, the moon and the stars. He loved the wind, the storms and the sea. He loved to fight the elements. He loved to ride, to row and to swim. Always impeccably groomed, he liked good clothes, and as a young man sported spats and hats and fancy waistcoats. He loved giving extravagant presents—never one rose but at least sixty! He loved food; he loved to cook; he loved to drink and smoke. He loved pretty girls, music and song; there was nothing ascetic about him, though he chose to live an ascetic life.

He was a born teacher. He loved children and especially tiny babies whom he called the *miracle makers*, and with whom he held long conversations, which the newborns, staring at his lips, followed with fascination.

But all his many loves were nothing compared to his love for his mother and her work. An all encompassing love which dominated his whole existence. His dedication to her was a conscious and free choice, not a result of mother/son attachment. After all, he was almost fifteen years old when he first knew and lived with her—too late in life to grow a subconscious Oedipus complex. She had no place in his absorbent mind period. There could have been no question on either side of being unable to sever the umbilical cord. He lived for her, with her, but not through her. The amazing thing about this man with no real scholastic or academic background was the clarity of his total understanding of the working of her mind. His intuitive intelligence and openness of spirit allowed him to keep abreast with her quantum leaps from the

first to the *n*th dimension—even sometimes arriving just ahead, thus enabling her to soar even further. Nothing she deduced, developed or stated ever surprised him. Thanks to him, she never suffered the isolation common to genius, never became static. But he was not just a very bright sounding board for her ideas; he helped her to clarify them and give them shape, enabling her to continue developing her unique mind to the end. As she grew older, he took more and more of her workload on himself, organising the courses, examining students, lecturing on material, practical life, etc. He coped with all details and unexpected complications during the training courses. By protecting her from all practical details, he enabled Maria Montessori to concentrate fully on her creative work. He presented her with new ideas, not only reactions. As the years advanced, their complicity became total. Without him she would have grown frustrated by the lack of understanding, retreating into her spiritual isolation, unable to cope and fight alone to preserve the purity of her work. By his understanding, his enthusiasm and belief in the significance of her cosmic vision for the development of mankind, he became a pillar of her work. He continued her fight after she died. Against all odds, all struggles for power, all intrigues, he continued the fight for the child—the child, father of man.

Mario Montessori, my father, was an extraordinary man.

*Marilena Henny Montessori*