

A New World and Education

Maria Montessori

This speech was delivered to the Educational Institute of Scotland on 9 November 1946 upon which Dr Montessori was admitted to the Honorary Fellowship of the Institute. On the nomination of the Board of Examiners, the grade of Honorary Fellow may be conferred on persons who have rendered signal service to education in Scotland or elsewhere. The Board of Examiners unanimously agreed to recommend, on 12 October 1946, that the Honorary Fellowship should be conferred upon Dr Montessori, in recognition of her great work in the sphere of education. (see illustration from Minute Book) Montessori's speech was previously published in The Montessori Magazine, 1947, v1, n 4.

A new world, and education for the new world are much spoken of today. But when one enquires what exactly is meant by these two expressions, one finds that the first implies a vague aspiration towards a world which is yet to be created, and the second seems to allude to a hope or to a probability of realizing, a new world by means of new men whose task will be that of constructing it.

To me the problem is quite different and is very clear. The new world is the world in which we are living now. It is new because it has been built with prodigious rapidity during this century. Indeed, if the Industrial Revolution created a new world the more recent Revolution of Science has created yet a newer world, the one in which we are living.

This new world is not due to the accomplishment of any special nation. It is the consequence of the intelligent collaboration of the whole of humanity. The powerful impulse given by the use of machinery has created for man a new form of life. This, although in varying degrees, is accessible to all nations of the world.

The more recent conquests seem almost to belong to the supernatural. These conquests no longer centre upon gold, minerals and precious stones which are extracted

from the earth. They are concerned with something which is invisible and intangible; they are the energies dispersed throughout the Universe and are, therefore, common to all. These energies, which were hitherto unsuspected, are today within the grasp of man. Man has acquired through them marvellous and fabulous powers over all things that exist in his environment.

We are living in a prodigious world and it concerns us so closely that we cannot live out of it. Humanity of today cannot adapt itself to the narrow limits given by nature alone. The conquest of the atmosphere for communications is weaving, above the natural world but enveloping the terrestrial environment, a network of far reaching and lofty powers. Human life today exists in space which has three dimensions, and not two dimensions as before.

All this has taken place through unconscious cosmic urges. It is not the result of planning with forethought. Yet it is the product of the immense power of the intelligence of man. This intelligence has become a collective intelligence and therefore colossal in its power. Thoughts and voices are magically transmitted throughout the world. The work of a man of genius is now the heritage of all.

Special Meeting of Fellows.

A Special Meeting of Fellows was held in the Assembly Hall, The Mound, Edinburgh, on 9th November 1946 at 2 p.m.

Sederunt. - President (Mr. John Wishart); Ex-President (Mr. Lowe); General Secretary; Deputy Secretary (Mr. W^m Campbell); Misses Blair, Bonnar, Brown, Kettle, Mason, Ruxton; Messrs. F. J. Belford, W. S. B. Brown, E. Campbell, D. G. Culbert, R. M. Munro, J. S. Stalker, G. Tucker, and W^m Wallace (Annan).

The President welcomed the Fellows to the Special Meeting and called upon the Convener of the Board of Examiners to explain the business.

The Convener stated that the Board of Examiners, at their meeting on 12th October, had unanimously agreed to recommend that the Honorary Fellowship should be conferred upon Dr. Montessori in recognition of her great work in the sphere of Education. As they knew, Dr. Montessori would be addressing the Edinburgh Regional Conference that afternoon and it was proposed to confer the Degree then.

In accordance with the Rules of the Institute, he asked the meeting to confirm this decision. The Meeting of Fellows cordially approved the conferring of the Degree upon Dr. Montessori.

The President thanked the Fellows for their attendance.

William Wallace.
Convener.

Discoveries are used by every nation. The conquest of a destructive power becomes at once a threat to all. Men are surprised at the extraordinary fact of finding themselves tied together by a common interest through the superhuman powers which are able to think with the genius of the whole of humanity and have placed these formidable forces within the grasp of mankind.

The new world of these energies can be termed a spiritual world because they repre-

sent the spirit of the earth which rises above material limitations. Every human being today can well say, 'I am the citizen of a star which revolves round the sun and is called the earth.' Where is the terrestrial world of the past? Where is that world of two dimensions which spread out upon the earth, where men laboured to construct their civilization? Where is that world in which man cultivated the soil, dug into the ground, and accumulated only material goods?

In that world mankind divided the earth: each group enclosing its portion within its special borders. Whatever they elaborated they clung to; it became the heritage of their race or nation. Whatever they had, they defended with protective laws and through the geographical barriers of mountains, rivers or seas. That was the world of yesterday; upon it a new world has been built.

In that world of the past men held an ideal in their hearts; it was a cosmic sentiment which aspired towards another form of life which was less material. They saw it only as a world of fantasy, as a sort of paradise which would be larger and more perfect and in which the miraculous could take place; where men would feel themselves to be brothers and the children of God. It was something as far off as Heaven which could only be reached after death.

Today union among men has become a reality. The miracles dreamt of in the past have been realized, surpassed. But this reality weighs upon men who are fearful because they do not understand the reality. They live in confusion and are staggered by its formidable manifestations.

There are two worlds. One is that which arose through the ancient traditions of historical evolution. The other is the new world of today in which we find ourselves and of which we are almost as unconscious as the new born. The disastrous events of our days were connected with the fact that mankind had not yet become conscious of its position in the new world. Man himself was not sufficiently evolved to reach the level of evolution attained by his environment. He is still imbued with the sentiments and prejudices which were rooted in mankind during the long path of history when he still lived on the hard surface, in a two-dimensional world where human groups had divided the earth and strove to defend their portions

against their neighbours or aspired to make their nations larger by conquering additional territory.

Today the progress of civilization has made formidable conquests of unlimited extensions which no one can own and which, therefore, belongs to all. It will be absurd for anyone to attempt to own the atmosphere, electricity, the cosmic rays, or the vibrations of the ether. Yet it is these powers that form the world of today. It is upon these powers that our civilization, which tends to expand with vertiginous progress, is based.

The danger is very real. It is not the energies of the new world that are dangerous. It is the lack of development in man. If there is a task which will make the new world a beneficial reality, that task is the help which has to be given for the development of man. For humanity must acquire a new consciousness and thus realize a psychic adaptation suited to the new world in which it lives. The tragic absurdity of old sentiment in these new conditions is revealed by those groups of men who, urged by anticipations of universal power, still clung to the illusion that they could act as men acted in the past.

No matter what political ideology they held, be it Nazism, Communism or Shintoism, each wished to become master of the world. The powerful means which were within the grasp of man encouraged them to attempt to realize their illusion. But if each group were to seek to conquer the whole world and its supernatural powers for itself, there would result a general clash, a cyclone of universal destruction. This is the reality which threatens us in this epoch.

The education for this new world must aim, first of all, at bringing help to the consciousness of humanity so that it may adapt itself to the present conditions which have been created through the progress of civili-

zation. A new education is necessary. Everyone agrees on this point. Though the necessity is universally recognized, there is as yet no guide for its realization. How are we to proceed? What is the practical way to bring about this new education?

At present we have to battle with the hope of bringing happiness or joy to children or to men and women. For how can one inspire joy when a cataclysm is threatening the whole world? Many advocate the instilling of a spirit of optimism. But why advocate an illusion? Nor can the remedy be in freedom without law, for in a world where a vaster organization was necessary, man must learn to obey laws which are as strict and as sure as those which govern the universe. Nor can the preaching of brotherhood, the insistent advice to love and to understand one another bring a solution to the problem. Experience has shown that wars have grown ever more cruel during the tens of centuries which have elapsed since man first began to preach the great principles of fraternal love. The bitter reality is that events have overcome the sentiment and the will of man.

Education cannot express itself in terms of any of these incomplete ideas of the past. The joy of life, the optimism of hope, freedom and independence, love amongst men, are the spontaneous and natural consequences of an education based on life. If these are to be realized it is necessary to have the right conditions for normal life. It is necessary that all the latent energies should have the possibility of expansion. Only then can the character of man be formed; man will then be sure of his actions and capable of controlling them.

Character is not an item of knowledge which can be taught through learning or imitation. It is a conquest made during life through personal exercise and through personal experience. Two things are necessary

in education. The first is to study man who, as Dr Carrel expressed it, is still an unknown. The second thing is to help man in his normal development. For this all the laws and energies put there by nature, for the creation of man must be utilized. It is therefore necessary to know man from birth itself, to be aware of the processes of development through the different epochs of life, or, better, to have a scientific knowledge of all the phases of growth from birth till maturity is reached.

This is what education ought to be: an education which starts from birth and which is based upon the knowledge of the psychology of human growth; an education which aims at giving the means and creating the conditions required for the development of man himself. It is evident that as man is a living being of a determined species, his education must fundamentally be common to all humanity. This education must be based upon freedom, because it is necessary to respect the laws of development. This education must be based upon independence, because if a man is dependent he does not exist as a functioning individual. The purpose of this education is the development of character so as to make man master of himself and sure of his actions.

The second necessary item of education consists of what is generally considered under the heading of syllabuses, the content and extent of the subjects to be studied. It is evident that the syllabus cannot be arbitrary, but it must have a basis which will be the same for all children and which will seek and create an intellectual adaptation to our present times. It is not only necessary to extend culture so that it will be in proportion to the progress of civilization; it must also lead to a unification and correlation of all the subjects which are studied today as separate items. The study of all these items

must lead towards an understanding of the unity of the world and the level of evolution reached by present-day humanity.

Moral education, which is so necessary today, must insist upon the appreciation of civilization rather than upon the appreciation of the character of one's country or of one's race as has been the case in the past. Civilization was created by man the intellectual, man the worker, and man the genius, who carried out a mission of progress, urged by extraordinary energies. It is man that must be appreciated irrespective of race or country, the man who influenced progress, as well as the man who, by his work kept up this loftier environment in which all humanity lived.

The new education must foster an understanding of the real values of humanity and gratitude must be felt for those workers upon whom human life depended. If man was not appreciated, if there was no respect

and veneration for human life, how can we expect or hope that men will become friends and work in peaceful collaboration?

There is something more. There is also the fact that if one has grown up with a veneration for humanity one will not consent to become an unconscious destructive force to destroy humanity. Men will not lend themselves to those erroneous ways which foolishly destroy the creators and maintainers of everything that provides for their existence. They will be unwilling to use the supernatural and universal powers which they possess for a cosmic cataclysm to destroy the fruits of civilization. Having developed a conscience and sentiment towards human life they will be incapable of cruelty: for cruelty belongs to a dead soul.

This may seem impossible to conceive, but there are examples of this sentiment among those people that we foolishly considered to be inferior to us in civilization.



Maria Montessori holding the diploma conferring on her the degree of Honorary Fellow of the Educational Institute of Scotland

These groups of men who grow with a respect and veneration for animals do not kill them. The impulse to destroy animals on a large scale never arises in such people. The same will happen to men who, conscious of the value of humanity, will refuse to obey an insane and absurd command as will be the one for destroying those who produce and maintain the civilization in which we all live.

Through all this shine forth the necessity and importance of educating the child. The child must not be considered as he is today,

way as we consider with fear the destructive power of the atomic bomb. In the case of the atom, the power which was within it had to be discovered and utilized. The same must be done with the hitherto unknown powers of the child. This conception is completely lacking in today's consideration of the social destiny of mankind.

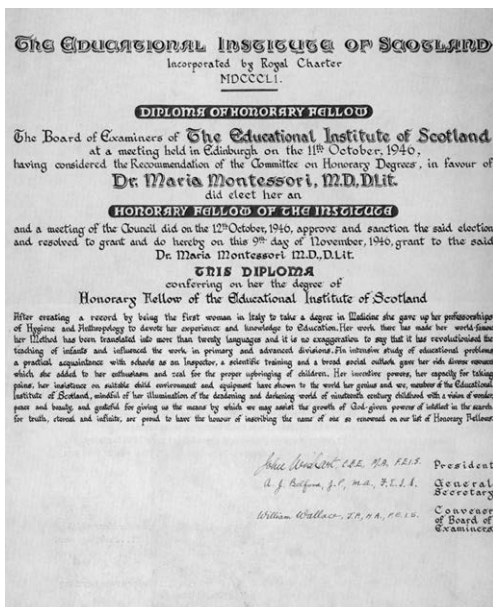
Our contribution to education was specially concerned with the study of the child beginning from birth. For not only man has his roots in the child, but so does society. One cannot conceive an education which prepares humanity for the new world, or better, for the present world, without beginning by educating the child. Indeed, the child is the very organ of adaptation. The task of the greatest importance in education today is to help and to hasten the adaptation of man to new conditions of life. By paying attention to the child we can hasten and control the evolution of mankind. Until we have this control we shall not be able to hope for any practical and effective benefit from education.

The character of the individual is formed during infancy and if conditions of freedom and independence are not given to the child, all the efforts to stabilize a social discipline in great proportions and to establish a democratic discipline will be in vain. The man who has been enslaved during infancy will never be really free. The man growing up dependent on another will never become a man of independent character.

Another marvellous aspect of the child is the form of his mind. In the period when he cannot be credited with conscious effort he has the ability of absorbing things intellectually from the environment without a teacher and without fatigue. The absorbent mind is the secret which permits us to construct the foundations of our culture. It is sufficient to think of the language which

in his apparent weakness in relation to us. He must be considered in his power of potential man. Every human being is the result of the growth of a child; as every tree, even if gigantic, originated from the seed which potentially contained it.

Today we speak of the immense power enclosed in the atom. Immense power is also enclosed in the child. In the reconstruction of humanity the child must be considered with faith and hope in much the same



every child has developed at two years of age. The language which he has absorbed unconsciously is his mother-tongue which becomes a characteristic of each race and which is the only language that each man possesses as a distinguishing part of himself. This is not all, there is something more important: the child creates the psychic man, he lays the foundations of knowledge and of every aspect of mental life. During successive periods of growth the individual develops and elaborates what the child has created.

During forty years of experience and observation it has been found that during the period of the absorbent mind, that is up to six years of age, the child can absorb not only language but the foundations of all subjects. During certain periods of creative sensitivity, given by nature, the small child from three to six years can learn reading and writing without fatigue. He can develop a knowledge of arithmetic, of geography, of biology,

and so many other aspects of knowledge. He can, in other words, absorb culture in its simpler elements. These become the seeds of interest which urge the child to seek, in the successive periods, greater and greater knowledge. If education takes into consideration and follows these intellectual interests and these natural activities, it will lead to the acquisition of a superior type of culture in the later years of life. It will be a spontaneous development which will carry out and strengthen the principles of free activity and independence.

I wish to conclude by affirming my personal belief in the power of a New Education to prepare man to function efficiently and harmoniously in the New World.

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