

Closing Address - Maria Montessori, Copenhagen Montessori Congress, 1937

Generally the child is considered as a 'dear little thing', in need of help and support, to be assisted in difficulties, to be consoled when crying, to be cared for when ill. And as he is considered from this materialist point of view, he is nursed when ill and taught when ignorant. But this is not our point of view.

The figure of the child must stand before us as a light and a symbol, a light that will show us reality and a symbol that will teach us. This idea is perhaps too far from the concrete conception which we have of the child today; it needs to be proved by the revelations of practical psychology. And as precisely these revelations have been made, and also confirmed by positive experiments, we wish to make them known everywhere. These revelations show us things that were unknown before, things that the child can teach us, and that we must learn if we would take the road of Peace. If, however, we cannot accept this spiritual conception, and prefer to be practical, it will be necessary to consider the child from a different point of view. Socially speaking, we want to see the child regarded as a human being, a citizen, a man with a certain dignity, with the right to live and be protected. To whatever social rank, to whatever race he may belong, in every country of the world, the child must be recognized as a citizen.

The protection combined with the education of the child, and implying also the education of the adult, would be a way of preserving the great riches we possess, and might also lead us nearer to that light which we call Peace. May I say to you that no amount of discussion or no meditation on the sufferings of the child can help, but that the new orientation can convert us, and on this conversion everything depends.

We do not wish only to speak to educational experts, but also to the general public. And above all to the conscience of parents, for it is the parents who should defend the rights of their children. In fact, the child has not been brought into the world by nature alone, but by a father and a mother to whom it has been given in trust, and whose duty is love! When this union between fathers and mothers is found to imply new social responsibilities, it may lead mankind further along the road of civilization. For all men, in all countries and of all races, have children, and in the child they may find a common interest through which universal sympathy and cooperation may become possible. The task of protection becomes a great and good work which may help us to realize a better world by 'valorizing' the forgotten part of mankind. And this is a practical step towards the realization of Peace.