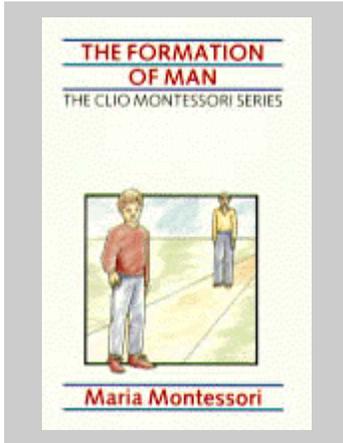




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From the Clio Montessori Series Summary:

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THE FORMATION OF MAN

THE CLIO MONTESSORI SERIES

VOLUME 3

Maria Montessori

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1. PART ONE PREJUDICES AND NEBULAE INTRODUCTION

Almost half a century has gone by since we started our work. The first "Children's House" was inaugurated in 1907 and almost immediately thereafter our ideas and endeavours for child-education spread all over the world. The upheavals caused by two European and World Wars during the intervening years have not destroyed this educational movement which has taken root in many countries.

With the passage of time we have become even more convinced of the importance of child-education, and we wish to infuse new life into our endeavour, so that it may become an effective means for the reconstruction of modern society sadly disfigured by the ravages of these worst of all wars in history.

I feel as if I were addressing a strong family which must continue along the road we have opened up and which, young vigorous though it be, has great need of faith and hope.

I should like to give in these pages a guide for the orientation of our work. Why are there so many difficulties, so many contradictions, so much uncertainty with regard to what are commonly called "Montessori schools" and the "Montessori Method"? Yet, in spite of this confusion and these difficulties, our schools continue to progress and expand even in the most distant lands. They can be found in the Hawaiian Islands, in Honolulu, in Greenland and in India, among the people of Nigeria, and in Ceylon, indeed among all races and in all parts of the world.

Can it be that these schools conducted by African and Indian people, in backwards rural areas, or for that matter, in the most civilised nations, are all perfect? Experts say that there is not so much as one good school among them; yet all agree that the Montessori Method is more widely spread than any other modern method of education. How to explain its popularity, if many of the schools using our name fall so short of perfection? How to explain the fact that many nations have changed their educational laws in order to obstruct the application of the Montessori Method? How did it spread so far afield, without any publicity campaign, when there are only a few regular reviews or organised societies working in harmony with an organic superstructure? It lacked all these aids, yet it spread like a transforming leaven, like the seed propagated by the wind!

Here is another apparent contradiction. The Method seems egoistic, it wishes to go its own way and not to mix with any other and yet, no other method takes every possible opportunity of inculcating world union and world peace as does this one. All this is contradictory even mysterious!

Today there are many important currents and personalities in the field of education. There is the New Education Fellowship which wishes to promote harmony between and collaboration with the Montessori Method and the other new methods which continue to crop up. Everywhere this decisive step is looked for, to establish an agreement between the efforts of those who in different ways are attempting to educate the child. There is a widespread tendency to break through the isolation of our method, to make students and scientists appreciate it and above all to improve and extend the training of Montessori teachers. I know that many who have dedicated their lives to this Method, now face this problem of cooperation.

Another strange fact about this Method is that though originally worked out for pre-primary education, it has now infiltrated into the primary and secondary stages even into the University.

In Holland there are five Montessori Lycea, the results of which have been so satisfactory that the Dutch Government has not only granted them subsidies but has given them the same recognition and independence as the other recognised Lycea. In Paris I saw a private Montessori Lyceum where the students were more independent in character and less scared of examinations than in other French Lycea; while in India many people have come to the conclusion that Montessori Universities are a necessity.

In the opposite direction also the Montessori Method has developed, and has been applied to children under three years of age. In Ceylon, two year old children are being admitted to our schools, while parents request admission for those of one and a half years. In England, many crèches follow our Method and in New York also Montessori crèches have been founded.

What exactly, then, is this Method, which begins with new-born babies and extends to undergraduates? Other methods have not so wide a function.

For example, the Froebel Method deals with children below school-going age only; that inspired by Pestalozzi is confined to the primary school; while the methods of Herbert deal mostly with primary and secondary education. Among the modern methods we find that of Decroly mostly in primary schools, the Dalton Plan in secondary schools, etc. Traditional methods have certainly been changed, but the teacher of one particular stage cannot teach other grades. No secondary school teacher worries about the methods employed in crèches. Each stage is clearly defined and the methods, which nowadays are constantly on the increase, are always limited to schools of one or other of these well-defined categories.

To think of Lycea using the Froebel method would be clearly nonsensical. To advocate Nursery School Methods in the University would be equally so.

Why then is the application of the Montessori Method to all stages of education a matter of serious discussion? What does it mean? What is the Montessori Method thought to be?

Constant comparisons and analogies are also being made. The English Nursery Schools, for instance, are being compared to Montessori schools. The toys used and the treatment of children in the former are being compared to the objects employed and the procedure adopted in the latter, in order to establish some sort of compromise between the two and amalgamate them. In the United States many parallel features have been pointed out in the Froebelian Kindergarten and the Children's Houses. While comparing the gifts of Froebel and our apparatus it has been pointed out that both are efficient and their conjoint use is advocated. There are only a few conflicting points, e.g. the question of fairy tales, play with sand, the exact use of the apparatus and certain other details about which much discussion is still going on. Also in primary schools the methods of teaching, reading, writing and arithmetic are still being discussed. There is much controversy over our insistence on teaching geometry and other advanced subjects at this early stage. Different opinions are also held regarding the teaching in secondary schools. There are those who think we do not lay sufficient stress on games, and certain activities which give a modern character to teaching methods, by introducing mechanical and manual crafts. Much importance is attached to those questions, as naturally the programme of secondary Montessori schools has to conform with that of standard secondary schools, otherwise the students would fail to gain admission to the University.

In short, we find ourselves in a maze.

What is the Montessori Method?

One would like to know in a few clear words what this Montessori Method really is.

If we were to eliminate not only the name "Method" but also its common conception, things would become much clearer. We must consider the human personality and not a method of education. For the word "Method" we should substitute something like this: "Help given in order that the human personality may achieve its independence," or "means offered to deliver the human personality from the oppression of age-old prejudice regarding education." The defence of the child, the scientific recognition of his nature, the social proclamation of his rights, must replace the piecemeal ways of conceiving education.

The "human personality" belongs to all human beings. Europeans, Indians and Chinese, etc., are all men. If therefore certain vital conditions are found to be a help to the human personality, these concern and affect the inhabitants of all nations.

And what is this "human personality"? Where does it begin? When does a man become a human being? This might be difficult to ascertain. According to the Old Testament man was created as an adult; in the New Testament it is the infant Jesus who appears. The human personality is essentially one during the successive stages of its development. Yet, whatever human being we consider, and at whatever age, whether children in the primary school, adolescents, youths or adults, all start by being children, all then grow from childhood to manhood or womanhood without changing the unity of their persons. If the human personality is one at all stages of its development we must conceive of a principle of education which has regard to all stages.

In our most recent courses, in fact, we call the child "Man".

Man, the Unknown

Man appearing in this world in the form of a child develops rapidly by a veritable miracle of creation. The new-born possesses neither the language nor any other characteristics which reflect the customs of his kind. He has neither intelligence, memory nor will, not even the power of moving about or keeping himself upright. Yet, this new-born realises a real psychic creation. At two years of age he speaks, walks, recognises people and objects in his environment, and at five, he acquires sufficient psychic development to be admitted to a school and start his formal education.

Nowadays, the scientific world is greatly interested in the psychology of the child during the first two years of life. For thousands and thousands of years, mankind had passed the child by, unimpressed by this miracle of Nature for the formation of the intelligence of a human personality is certainly a miracle. How is it formed? By means of what processes and in obedience to what laws?

If the whole universe is governed by fixed laws, is it possible that the human mind can be formed haphazardly, i.e. without any law at all?

Everything in course of development passes through a complex process of evolution. Man, too, who at five years of age has become an intelligent being, must have gone through a constructive evolution.

This field, we must admit, has hitherto been unexplored. There is a vacuum in our present scientific knowledge, an unexplored territory, an unknown factor and this void concerns the process of the formation of the personality.

The persistence of such ignorance, at the level of civilisation to which we have attained, must needs have mysterious causes. Something has remained buried in the subconscious and an encrustation of prejudices, difficult to break through, has formed over it. In order to start the scientific exploration of this immense and obscure field of the human spirit, we must overcome powerful obstacles. We only know that in the human psyche, there exists an enigma, not yet touched upon by our interest, just as a short time ago we only knew there was an immense area of ice at the South Pole. Antarctic exploration was then undertaken and a whole continent, full of marvels and wealth, emerged on the horizon of our mind. Its wonders, its warm-water lakes, its large living beings, whose every existence had been unsuspected, now stood revealed. What massive barriers of ice to be broken through and what freezing climate, so different from ours, to be braved! The same applies to that pole of human life early childhood.

It appears to the adult that he comes from an unknown source. He judges the various aspects of his life as he finds them. His efforts to lead human beings in their successive stages as children, adolescents, youths etc., - are therefore empirical and superficial. As a clumsy cultivator he judges appearances and effects without worrying about the causes that produce them. Rightly, Froebel calls the schools for children of four or five years of age "Kindergarten" (gardens of children). It is what all schools could be called especially the better types where a serious effort is made to benefit the children and promote their happiness. All could be called "gardens" to distinguish them from those schools where only a cruel tyranny reigns. In fact the more modern and better schools, those that correspond to Froebel's ideas, the educators behave as do good gardeners and cultivators towards their plants.

Behind the good cultivator, however, stands the scientist who scrutinises the secrets of Nature. His experiments enable him to acquire profound knowledge which helps not only to better understanding of the plants, but can be used to transform them. The modern cultivator who multiplies the varieties of flowers and fruits, who reclaims forests, who, we may say, changes the face of the earth, gathers his technical principles from science, not from customary practices. Thus, those marvellous flowers with their varied beauty, those double carnations with all their different hues, those superb orchids, those giant roses so fragrant and without thorns, the many fruits and all the marvels that have changed the face of the earth are the outcome of man's scientific study of plant life. It was science that offered a new technique. It was the scientist who gave the impetus to the construction of a real "supra-Nature" fantastically more rich and beautiful than what we call now "wild Nature".

The Study of Man

If science began to study man, it would not only succeed in offering new techniques for the education of children and the young, it would further lead to a profound understanding of many human and social phenomena that are still enveloped in obscurity.

The basis of the reform of education and society which is a necessity of our times must be built upon the scientific study of Man the Unknown.

As we mentioned, however, there is a great obstacle to the scientific study of man. This obstacle is formed by the prejudices accumulated during thousands of years and which have become as solid, as majestic and almost as inaccessible as glaciers. A courageous exploration is therefore needed, a struggle against adverse elements, for which the ordinary weapons of science, i.e. observation and experiment, do not suffice.

This study of the spirit of man, of psychology, has grown into an intellectual movement which has spread since the beginning of our century. The discovery of the subconscious has been especially fruitful, first in making contact with adults suffering from mental diseases, and then extending to adults considered normal. More recently child psychology has begun to interest students of this science. The conclusion reached, as a result of these studies, was that almost all men now living have some imperfection in their mental make-up, and statistics irrefutably reveal an ever-growing number of lunatics and psychopathological criminals. They also show that the number of "problem children" is on the increase and stress the growing phenomenon of juvenile delinquency, which is thought-provoking on account of the harm it does to humanity. Evidently the social conditions produced by our civilisation create obstacles for the normal development of man.

Our civilisation has not yet devised means of defence for the spirit similar to those devised for the body through physical hygiene. Whilst nowadays we control and utilise the material wealth of the earth and its energies, no consideration has yet been given to that supreme energy represented by the human intellect. Whilst the hidden potentialities of nature have been explored and exploited to their very utmost, the abyss of man's subconscious has not yet been scanned. Man, as a spiritual being, has been left to the mercy of outer circumstances and is on the way to becoming a destroyer of his own constructions.

It is, therefore, possible to conceive a universal movement for human reconstruction which follows a single path. Its sole aim is to help man to preserve his balance, his psychic health and build up a secure orientation in the present conditions of our outer world. This movement is not limited to any one nation nor to any particular political trend, because it aims at the simple realisation of human values and that is what is of primary interest over and above all political or national differences. The conception of the old schools, where teaching continues in the same way as in times profoundly different from ours, are clearly inadequate in view of the aims of the new movement we have outlined above.

Education now becomes a social and human endeavour of interest to all. It must be based on psychology in order to safeguard the individuality of the child. It must furthermore be oriented towards a clear understanding of our civilisation so that the personality defended against the disorder

of circumstances may become a human being conscious of his real position in history. Evidently a syllabus or curriculum arbitrarily drawn up cannot ensure the culture we need today. There is a need of a syllabus which can give an understanding of the conditions of man in modern society with a cosmic vision of history and the evolution of human life. What purpose would education serve in our days unless it helped man to a knowledge of the environment to which he has to adapt himself!

Finally, the problems of education must be solved on the basis of the laws of cosmic order. These laws reach from the eternal laws governing the psychic construction of human life to the changing laws which lead society along the road of evolution on earth.

Respect for these cosmic laws is fundamental. Only when we hold to these as a basis can we judge and modify the multitude of human laws which deal with the passing moments of external society construction.

Our Social Present

It is commonplace to assert that there exists a lack of balance between the miraculous progress of our environment and the arrest of development suffered by man. Everyone knows that man meets with great difficulties in his adaptation to this environment and that he suffers and deteriorates in the process.

We might compare the forces of outer progress to those of a powerful nation which invades and crushes a weaker one and, as always happens in barbaric wars, the vanquished is enslaved.

Today mankind is vanquished and enslaved by its own environment because it has remained weak in comparison with that environment.

This slavery is growing rapidly and is now assuming forms never experienced in the past struggles between powerful victorious peoples, and weak, vanquished ones. Never before did human helplessness reach that extreme point witnessed in our days.

Do we not see that nothing is no longer secure? Money kept in banks may in various ways be suddenly and irretrievably lost to its owner and should an attempt be made to safeguard it by hiding it in secret places, as was done in the Middle Ages, it may lose its value and be withdrawn from circulation. The money of one country cannot be taken into another. Even a wealthy person cannot now go to live in the country of his choice for he may not carry money or jewellery across the border. There is the risk of inspection at frontier posts where people are undressed and searched as if their property had been stolen. One can travel only with passports which are now a nuisance instead of a protection as they were originally intended to be. Even in one's own country, one is obliged, specially during a war, to carry about one's photograph and fingerprints a thing not imposed even on criminals in former days. It happened to us that we were allowed to buy only what was strictly necessary for life and had to depend on coupons distributed at regular intervals to buy even bread. Such a thing was unheard of before, except in the case of mendicants.

Nowadays nobody's life is safe. An absurd war may be declared in which all men young and old, women and children are in mortal danger. Civilians are bombed and people have to take refuge in underground shelters just as primitive men took refuge in caves to defend themselves against wild beasts. The supply of food may be cut off and millions may die of famine and plague. Do we not see men in rags or even naked, freezing to death, families separated and torn apart, children abandoned and roaming about in wild hordes?

This we see, not only among those vanquished in war, but everywhere. Humanity itself is vanquished and enslaved but why enslaved? Because all men are slaves, the victors as well as the vanquished, insecure, frightened, suspicious and hostile, compelled to defend themselves by means of spying and brigandage, using and fostering immorality as a means of defence. Cheating and robbing appear in a changed light and are considered means of survival where restrictions reach an absurd level. Vileness, prostitution and violence become quite common modes of living. Spiritual and intellectual values

which once honoured human society lose their bearings. Study becomes an arid, wearying pursuit without any uplifting influence. It is undertaken only as a means to get a job, which in its turn is uncertain and insecure.

It is strikingly impressive that humanity despite its nameless slavery forms a kind of stereotyped chorus crying out that it is free and independent. These miserable and degraded people proclaim their own sovereignty. What do these unfortunates look for? They seek, as their greatest good, what they call Democracy, i.e. that the people may give their opinion as to how they are to be ruled that they may cast their votes at elections. What irony! To choose one's rulers! But those who rule cannot free anybody from the chains which bind all, which render all activity and initiative futile and render them helpless to save themselves.

The master of all is a mysterious entity. The tyrant is all powerful, like a god. It is the environment that swallows up and crushes the man.

The other day a young baker, who worked in a big mechanised bakery, had his hands caught between the wheels which then trapped his whole body and reduced it to pulp. Is not that a symbol of the conditions in which mankind languishes, unconsciously, a victim of its fate? The environment can be compared to that colossal engine which can produce fabulous quantities of food and the workman it entrapped represents our unwary and imprudent humanity which is grabbed and crushed by what should give it abundance. Here we see one aspect of the lack of balance between man and his environment from which humanity must deliver itself by strengthening its own resources, developing its own values, healing its own madness and becoming conscious of its own power.

Man must gather together all his values and energies, he must develop them and prepare himself for his liberation. This is not the time to fight each other, to try and subdue each other. We must consider man alone and strive to raise him up, to strip him of the useless bonds he creates for himself and which push him downwards into the abyss of lunacy. The real enemy is man's impotence against his own products; it is the arrest of development of humanity itself. To vanquish this enemy, man has only to react to and behave in a different manner towards the environment, which in itself is a source of wealth and happiness. A universal revolution is what we need. This revolution requires only that man should raise his values and become the master instead of the victim, of the environment he himself has created.

The Task of New Education

It may seem that we have drifted rather far from our original subject Education. This digression, however, must open up the new road along which we now have to go. In the same way in which we help the patients in hospital to recover their health and continue to live so we must now help humanity to save itself. We must be nurses in a hospital, as vast as the world itself.

We must realise that the problem in question is not confined to schools as they are conceived today and that it does not concern methods of education more or less practical, more or less philosophical.

Either education contributes to a movement of universal liberation by showing the way to defend and raise humanity or it becomes like one of those organs which have shrivelled up by not being used during the evolution of the organism.

We already mentioned that there is in our day a totally new scientific movement which presents results, at present disconnected spread here and there but certainly tending to unify themselves in the near future.

This movement, however, is not really part of education, it belongs rather to the field of psychology. Even in psychology it did not emerge from a pedagogical impulse to know man in order to educate him but was rather stimulated by the desire to assuage the sufferings and abnormalities of mankind especially of adults. This new psychology therefore was born in the field of medicine, not in that of education. This psychology of diseased humanity turned its attention also to children who seemed

agitated and unhappy, and it discovered that their vital energies were represented and deviated from the path of normality.

In any case this is the scientific movement which is taking shape and it aims at building up some barrier against the ever spreading evil and at prescribing some remedy for the confused and disoriented soul of man. Education must attach itself to this movement.

Believe me the attempts of so-called modern education which simply try to deliver the child from presumed repression are not on the right path. To let the pupils do what they like, to amuse them with light occupations, to lead them back to an almost wild state, does not solve the problem. The question is not to deliver man from some bonds, but to reconstruct: and reconstruction requires the elaboration of a "science of the human spirit". It is a patient work, an endeavour based on research, to which thousands of people, dedicated to this aim, must contribute.

Whoever works for this ideal must be actuated by a great ideal, much greater than those political ideals which have promoted social improvements, which concern only the material life of some groups of men oppressed by injustice or misery. This ideal is universal in its scope. It aims at the deliverance of the whole of humanity. Much patient work, I repeat, is needed along this road towards the freedom and "valorisation" of mankind.

Look at what happens in the field of other sciences! How many people work in closed laboratories, observing cells under the microscope, discovering the miracles of life! How many pass their lives in chemistry laboratories, testing reactions, discovering cosmic energies in order to capture and utilise them! It is these innumerable patient and sincere workers who have advanced civilisation.

Something similar therefore has to be done for man himself. The ideal, the proposed aim, however, must be common to all. Its realisation must lead to what has been said in regard to man in the Scriptures: "Specie tua et pulchritudine tua intende, prospere procede et regna!". We might paraphrase it thus: "Understand thyself and thy beauty, proceed prosperously in thine environment, rich and full of miracles, and reign over it!".

Now you may say: "Yes, all this is very beautiful and fascinating, but do you not see how, in the meantime, everywhere around us children grow up, young boys become full-grown men? We cannot wait for any scientific elaboration because meanwhile mankind will be destroyed."

I would answer: "It is not necessary that the whole work of research be accomplished. It is enough that the idea be understood and the work be taken in hand following its indications".

Meanwhile, one thing is clear: Pedagogy must be guided as in the past, by the ideas which some philosophers and philanthropists formed of it, by some individual inspired by piety, sympathy or charity. Pedagogy must follow the guidance of psychology, by the psychology which, applied to education, should at once be given a distinct name: Psycho-pedagogy.

Many discoveries have yet to be made in this field. There is no doubt that the liberation of man will give stupendous revelations if he is still repressed and unknown.

Education must proceed along the path lit up by these revelations, just as common medicine is based on the vis medicatrix nature, on the curative forces already existing in nature; and hygiene is based on the natural functions of the body.

To help life: this is the first and fundamental principle.

Who then can reveal the natural ways along which the psychic development of man proceeds but the child himself, or rather the vital urge with the cosmic laws that lead him unconsciously. Not what we call the child's will, but the mysterious will that directs his formation this must be our guide.

I may affirm that the revelations of the child are not at all so difficult to obtain; the real difficulty lies in the adult's old prejudices concerning him. It lies in the total lack of understanding and in the veil which an arbitrary form of education, based only on human reasoning and still more on the unconscious egoism of man and his pride as a dominator, have been weaving, so that the values of wise nature are hidden.

Our contribution however small and still incomplete however insignificant in the opinion of those working in the field of scientific psychology will serve precisely to illustrate this enormous obstacle of prejudices which are capable of cancelling and destroying the contributions of our isolated experience. We would already have conferred a benefit of general importance were we only to succeed in proving the existence of these prejudices.