

"The Forgotten Citizen"

by Maria Montessori

Parts from a Letter Written in 1947 and Sent to all Governments

My life has been spent in the research of truth. Through study of children I have scrutinized human nature at its origin both in the East and the West and although it is forty years now since I began my work, childhood still seems to me an inexhaustible source of revelations and - let me say - of hope.

Childhood has shown me that all humanity is one. All children talk, no matter what their race or their circumstances or their family, more or less at the same age; they walk, change their teeth, etc. at certain fixed periods of their life. In other aspects also, especially in the psychical field, they are just as similar, just as susceptible.

Children are the constructors of men whom they build, taking from the environment language, religion, customs and the peculiarities not only of the race, not only of the nation, but even of a special district in which they develop.

Childhood constructs with what it finds. If the material is poor, the construction is also poor. As far as civilisation is concerned the child is at the level of the food-gatherers.

In order to build himself, he

has to take by chance, whatever he finds in the environment.

The child is the forgotten citizen, and yet, if statesmen and educationists once came to realise the terrific force that is in childhood for



good or for evil, I feel they would give it priority above everything else.

All problems of humanity depend on man himself; if man is disregarded in his construction, the problems will never be solved.

No child is a Bolshevik or a Fascist or a Democrat; they all become what circumstances or the environment make them.

In our days when in spite of the terrible lessons of two world wars, the times ahead loom as dark as ever before, I feel strongly that another field has to be explored, besides those of economics and ideology. It is the study of MAN - not of adult man on whom every appeal is wasted. He, economically insecure, remains bewildered in the maelstrom of conflicting ideas and throws himself now on this side, now on that. Man must be cultivated from the beginning of life when the great powers of nature are at work. It is then that one can hope to plan for a better international understanding.

Maria Montessori

