The Secret of Childhood

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This translation is dedicated to Margaret Huffman. The best Montessorian I ever knew. And Maria Montessori. The best Montessorian I never knew.

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Preface

Childhood, A Social Question

For some years now a social movement in favor of childhood has begun, not because anyone in particular took the initiative. It arose like a natural eruption on volcanic ground, where scattered fires spontaneously appear here and there. Thus great movements are born. Science undoubtedly contributed to this; it was the initiator of the social movement on behalf of childhood.

Hygiene first began to combat infant mortality; then it demonstrated that childhood was a victim of scholastic fatigue, an unknown martyr, condemned to perpetual punishment, since childhood itself ended only with the end of the school period.

School hygiene described an unfortunate childhood: contracted spirits, weary intelligences, stooped shoulders and narrow chests, a childhood predisposed to tuberculosis.

Finally, after thirty years of studies, we consider the child as a human being displaced by society and, even before that, by those who gave him life and preserve it. What is childhood? A constant

disturbance for the worried adult, exhausted by ever more absorbing occupations.

There is no place for childhood in the cramped houses of the modern city, where families accumulate. There is no place for it in the streets, because vehicles multiply and sidewalks are crowded with people in haste.

Adults have no time to care for it, since their urgent obligations oppress them. Father and mother are both forced to work, and when work is lacking, misery oppresses and crushes children as it does adults.

Even under the best conditions, the child remains confined to his room, entrusted to salaried strangers, and is not permitted to enter that part of the house where dwell the beings to whom he owes his life.

There exists no refuge in which the child feels his soul understood, where he may exercise the activity proper to him. He must behave, remain silent, touch nothing, because nothing belongs to him. Everything is inviolable, the exclusive property of the adult and forbidden to the child.

What belongs to him? Nothing.

To work consciously for childhood and to pursue this work to the end with the prodigious intention of saving it would mean conquering the secret of humanity, just as so many secrets of external nature have already been conquered.

Part I

Chapter I — The Century Of The Child

The progress achieved in only a few years in the care and education of children has been so rapid and surprising that it can be connected more with an awakening of consciousness than with the evolution of living conditions.

It was not only the progress due to child hygiene, which developed precisely in the last decade of the nineteenth century; the very personality of the child manifested itself under new aspects and assumed the highest importance.

Today it is impossible to penetrate any branch of medicine or philosophy, or even sociology, without considering the contributions that may come from knowledge of childhood life.

A faint comparison of its importance might be drawn from the clarifying influence that embryology exerted on all biological knowledge and even on theories of evolution. But in the case of the child, we must recognize an influence infinitely greater upon all questions concerning humanity.

It is not the physical child who will give a dominant and powerful impulse to the improvement of mankind, but the psychic child. It

is the spirit of the child that may determine what will perhaps be the true progress of humanity and—who knows?—the beginning of a new civilization.

The Swedish writer and poet Ellen Key had already prophesied that our century would be the century of the child.

Anyone with the patience to investigate historical documents would find striking coincidences of ideas in the first speech from the throne delivered by the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel III, in 1900, precisely on the threshold of the new century, when he succeeded his assassinated father. Referring to the new era that was beginning, he defined it as "the century of childhood."

It is highly probable that these hints, almost prophetic lights, were reflections of the impressions aroused by science in the last decade of the nineteenth century, when it revealed the suffering child, attacked by death in infectious diseases ten times more than the adult, and the child victim of the torment of school.

No one, however, could foresee that the child enclosed within himself a secret of life capable of lifting a veil from the mysteries of the human soul, that he bore within himself an essential unknown capable of offering the adult the possibility of resolving his individual and social problems.

This point of view may become the foundation of a new science of research on the child, whose importance may influence the entire social life of mankind.

Psychoanalysis And The Child

Psychoanalysis opened a previously unknown field of research by penetrating the secrets of the subconscious. However, it did not practically resolve any pressing problems in the practice of life;

nevertheless, it can prepare us to understand the contribution that the hidden child may offer.

Psychoanalysis, one might say, went beyond the cortex of consciousness, which psychology had considered something insurmountable, just as in ancient history the Pillars of Hercules represented a limit beyond which superstition placed the end of the world.

Psychoanalysis went beyond: it penetrated the ocean of the subconscious. Without this discovery, it would be difficult to illustrate the contribution that the psychic child can offer to a deeper study of human problems.

It is known that what later became psychoanalysis was initially nothing more than a new technique for treating psychic illnesses; thus, at its origin, it was a branch of medicine.

The truly illuminating contribution of psychoanalysis was the discovery of the power that the subconscious exercises over human actions. It was almost a study of penetrating psychic reactions beyond consciousness, which bring to light, through their responses, hidden facts and unimagined realities, overturning old ideas.

They reveal the existence of an unknown world, enormously vast, to which, one might say, the destiny of individuals is bound.

However, this unknown world was not fully illuminated. Having barely passed beyond the Pillars of Hercules, explorers did not venture into the vastness of the ocean. A suggestion comparable to the Greek prejudice held Freud within pathological limits.

Already in the time of Charcot, in the previous century, the subconscious had appeared in the field of psychiatry.

Almost by an internal boiling of disturbed elements forcing their way to the surface, the subconscious opened a path for itself, manifesting, in exceptional cases, in the deepest states of psychic illness.

Thus, the strange phenomena of the subconscious, so contrasting with the manifestations of consciousness, were regarded simply as symptoms of illness.

Freud did the opposite: he found a way to penetrate the subconscious with the help of a laborious technique; but he too remained almost exclusively within the pathological field.

For who among the normal would submit to the painful trials of psychoanalysis—that is, to a kind of operative act upon the soul? Thus, by treating the sick, Freud deduced his conclusions about psychology; and they were largely personal deductions drawn from an abnormal base that gave substance to the new psychology.

Freud imagined the ocean, but he did not explore it; and he endowed it with the characteristics of a stormy strait.

For this reason, Freud's theories were not satisfactory; nor was the technique of treating patients entirely satisfactory, because it did not always lead to the healing of the "diseases of the soul."

For this reason, social traditions—which are deposits of very ancient experiences—have risen as a barrier against certain generalizations of Freud's theories.

Whereas a truly illuminating new truth should have caused traditions to fall, just as reality causes an image to fall.

Perhaps the exploration of this immense reality requires something other than a clinical treatment technique or a theoretical deduction.

It may be the task of different scientific fields, and of differently framed concepts, to penetrate this vast unexplored territory: to study human beings from their very origins, seeking to decipher in the soul of the child its development through conflicts with the environment, and to receive the secret of the struggles through which the soul of man has remained distorted and obscured.

This secret had already been touched upon by psychoanalysis. One of the most striking discoveries derived from the application of its technique was the origin of psychoses in the distant age of childhood.

The memories evoked from the unconscious demonstrated childhood sufferings that were not those commonly recognized; indeed, they were so far removed from prevailing opinion that they constituted the most impressive and unsettling aspect of all psychoanalytic discoveries.

These sufferings were purely psychic in nature: slow and constant, and entirely unnoticed as facts capable of culminating in an adult personality psychically ill.

They were due to the repression of the child's spontaneous activity by the adult who dominates him, and therefore were linked to the adult who has the greatest influence over the child: the mother.

It is necessary to distinguish clearly between two levels of investigation encountered by psychoanalysis.

One, the more superficial, arises from the clash between the instincts of the individual and the conditions of the environment to which the individual must adapt—conditions that often conflict with instinctive desires. From this arise the curable cases,

in which it is not difficult to bring back into consciousness the disturbing causes that lie beneath.

There is, however, another, deeper level: that of childhood memories, in which the conflict was not between the man and his present social environment, but between the child and the mother—or, more generally, between the child and the adult.

This latter conflict, which psychoanalysis has only barely touched upon, is connected with illnesses that are difficult to cure and has therefore remained outside practical treatment, relegated to the simple importance of anamnesis—that is, an interpretation of presumed causes of illness.

In all illnesses, even physical ones, the importance of events occurring in childhood has been recognized; and the illnesses that have their causes in childhood are the most serious and the least curable.

Thus, in childhood lies, one might say, the forge of predispositions.

However, while recognition of the childhood origins of physical illness has already led to the development of scientific fields such as child hygiene, pediatrics, and even eugenics—and has produced a practical social reform movement in the physical treatment of the child—the same has not occurred with psychoanalysis.

The acknowledgment of the childhood origins of serious psychic disturbances in adults, and of the predispositions that intensify the adult's conflicts with the external world, has not led to any practical action for childhood life.

Perhaps this is because psychoanalysis devoted itself to a technique of probing the subconscious. The very technique that enabled discovery in adults became an obstacle in the case of the child.

The child, by his nature, does not lend himself to the same technique: he does not have to remember his childhood—he is childhood.

One must observe him rather than probe him—but observe him from a psychic point of view, seeking to identify the conflicts through which the child passes in his relationships with adults and with the social environment.

This perspective necessarily takes us outside the field of psychoanalytic techniques and theories and introduces us into a new field of observation of the child in his social existence.

It is not a matter of passing through the narrow and difficult straits of probing sick individuals, but of ranging across the reality of human life oriented toward the psychic child.

The entire life of man, in its developments from birth onward, presents itself as the practical problem.

The page of human history that recounts the adventure of the psychic man is unknown: the sensitive child who encounters obstacles and finds himself immersed in insurmountable conflicts with the stronger adult who dominates him without understanding him.

It is the blank page on which have not yet been written the unknown sufferings that disturb the intact and delicate spiritual field of the child, organizing within his subconscious an inferior man, different from the one that nature would have designed.

Continuation — After "The Secret Of The Child"

This complex question is illustrated, but not integrated, within psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis confines itself to the concept of

illness and curative medicine; the question of the psychic child contains a prophylaxis with respect to psychoanalysis, because it concerns the normal and general treatment of childhood humanity.

Such treatment helps to avoid obstacles and conflicts, and therefore their consequences, which are the psychic illnesses addressed by psychoanalysis, or the simple moral imbalances that it considers to extend to almost all of humanity.

Around the child there thus arises an entirely new and independent field of scientific exploration, even from its only parallel, psychoanalysis.

It is essentially a form of aid to the psychic life of the child and belongs fully to the field of normality and education; its distinctive feature, however, is the penetration of psychic facts still unknown in the child, together with the awakening of the adult, who, in the presence of the child, holds erroneous attitudes originating in the subconscious.

Chapter II — The Accused

The word repression, used by Freud to describe the deepest origins of the psychic disturbances encountered in adults, is in itself an illustration.

The child cannot expand as he must in a being in the process of development. And this is because the adult represses him.

The adult is an abstract term: the child is isolated in society; therefore, if an adult has influence over him, that adult is immediately identifiable — it is the adult closest to the child.

Thus, primarily the mother, then the father, and finally the teachers.

These are the adults to whom society assigns a role that is precisely the opposite, because it attributes to them the merit of educating and developing the child.

Yet from the probing of the depths of the soul there emerges an accusation against those who had been recognized as the custodians and benefactors of humanity.

They become the accused.

And since all are fathers and mothers, and many are teachers and guardians of children, the accusation extends to the adult — to the society responsible for children.

This astonishing accusation has something apocalyptic about it; it is mysterious and terrible like the voice of the Last Judgment:

"What did you do with the children I entrusted to you?"

The first reaction is defense, a protest:

"We did our best; children are our love; we cared for them with sacrifice."

Two opposing concepts are set before one another: one conscious, the other referring to unconscious facts.

The defense is well known, ancient, deeply rooted, and uninteresting.

What matters is the accusation — indeed, the accused.

He goes about laboring and striving to perfect the care and education of children, and finds himself entangled in a labyrinth of problems, in a kind of open forest that nevertheless has no exit, because the error he carries within himself is unknown to him.

Advocacy on behalf of the child must maintain the attitude of accusation toward the adult — an accusation without remission, without exception.

And suddenly the accusation becomes a fascinating center of interest.

For it does not denounce involuntary errors — which would be humiliating, indicating deficiency or diminution — but unconscious errors.

And thus it enlarges, leads to self-discovery.

Every true enlargement comes from discovery, from the utilization of the unknown.

For this reason, in all times, human attitudes toward error have been contradictory.

Every individual is offended by conscious error and attracted and fascinated by unconscious error.

Because unconscious error contains the secret of improvement beyond known and desired limits, and elevates one to a higher plane.

Thus the medieval knight was ready to duel over the slightest accusation that diminished his conscious domain, yet prostrated himself before the altar saying humbly:

"I am guilty; I declare it before all; and the fault is mine alone."

Biblical narratives offer striking examples of this contrast.

What cause gathered the multitude around Jonah at Nineveh, and why was the enthusiasm so great, from king to people, as to swell the crowd of followers of the prophet?

He accused them of being terrible sinners and affirmed that, if they did not convert, Nineveh would be destroyed.

How does John the Baptist call the crowds on the banks of the Jordan, what gentle epithets does he find to obtain so extraordinary an influx?

He calls them all:

"Brood of vipers."

Here is the spiritual phenomenon: people flocking to hear themselves accused; and to flock is to consent, to recognize.

There are harsh and insistent accusations that summon the

unconscious from its depths to merge with consciousness.

All spiritual development is a conquest of consciousness that assumes what was previously outside it.

Thus, just as civil progress advances along the path of discoveries.

Now, to treat the child differently from today, to save him from the conflicts that endanger his psychic life, it is first necessary to take a fundamental and essential step, on which everything depends:

to transform the adult.

For by affirming that he already does everything he can, and that, as he says, he already loves the child to the point of sacrifice, he confesses that he stands before the insurmountable.

He must necessarily appeal to what lies beyond — to more than what is known, voluntary, and conscious.

For the child too there exists the unknown.

There is a part of the child's soul that has always been unknown and that must be known.

Toward the child as well, discovery leading toward the unknown is required.

For beyond the child observed and studied by psychology and education, there exists the ignored child.

One must go in search of him with a spirit of enthusiasm and sacrifice, as those do who, knowing that gold is hidden somewhere, rush toward unknown lands and remove rocks to seek the precious metal.

So must the adult act in seeking that unknown something hidden in the soul of the child.

It is the work to which all must contribute, without distinction of class, race, or nation, because it concerns bringing forth the indispensable element for the moral progress of humanity.

The adult has not understood the child or the adolescent, and therefore is in continual conflict with him.

The remedy is not that the adult learn something intellectually or supplement a deficient culture.

No: the foundation from which we must begin is different.

The adult must find within himself the still-unknown error that prevents him from seeing the child.

If this preparation has not been made, and if the attitudes corresponding to it have not been acquired, one cannot proceed further.

Turning inward is not as difficult as one might suppose.

For error, even when unconscious in itself, produces the suffering of anguish.

And a single hint of the remedy awakens an acute need for it.

As one who has a dislocated finger feels the need to set it straight, knowing that his hand cannot work and that his pain will find no relief, so one feels the need to straighten one's conscience as soon as the error is understood.

For then the weakness and suffering long endured become intolerable.

Once this is done, everything proceeds easily.

As soon as the conviction arises in us that we had attributed to ourselves too much merit, that we believed ourselves capable of acting beyond our task and our possibility, it becomes possible and

interesting to recognize the characteristics of souls different from our own — such as those of children.

The adult has become egocentric with respect to the child — not egoistic, but egocentric.

Thus he considers everything relating to the psychic child from references to himself, thereby arriving at an ever-deepening incomprehension.

It is this viewpoint that leads him to consider the child as an empty being whom the adult must fill with his own effort;

as an inert and incapable being for whom he must do everything;

as a being without inner guidance, whom the adult must guide step by step from without.

Finally, the adult acts as though he were the creator of the child, judging the good and evil of the child's actions from the standpoint of his own relationship with him.

The adult becomes the standard of good and evil.

He is infallible; he is the good to which the child must conform.

Everything in the child that departs from the characteristics of the adult is an evil that the adult hastens to correct.

In this attitude — which unconsciously cancels the child's personality — the adult acts convinced that he is full of zeal, love, and sacrifice.

Chapter III — Biological Interlude

When Wolff made known his discoveries on the segmentation of the germ cell, he demonstrated the process of the creation of living beings and at the same time gave a living and directly observable form to the existence of inner directives toward a predetermined design.

It was he who overturned certain physiological ideas, such as those of Leibniz and Spallanzani, concerning the preexistence of the complete form of beings within the germ.

The philosophical school of the time supposed that within the egg—that is, at the origin—the being that later developed already existed, though imperfectly and in miniature proportions, provided it was placed in contact with a favorable environment.

This idea came from observation of the seed of a plant, which already contains, hidden between the two cotyledons, an entire little plant in which roots and leaves can be recognized, and which, when placed in the soil, unfolds that whole preexisting form.

An analogous process was assumed for animals and for human beings.

But when Wolff, after the discovery of the microscope, was able to observe how a living being is actually formed (he began by studying the embryos of birds), he found that the origin is a simple germ cell, in which the microscope—precisely because it makes the invisible visible—demonstrates that no form preexists.

The germ cell (which comes from the fusion of two cells) has only a membrane, protoplasm, and nucleus, like any other cell; it represents the simple cell in its primitive form, without differentiation of any kind.

Every living being, plant or animal, comes from a primitive cell.

What had been observed before the discovery of the microscope—the little plant inside the seed—is an embryo already developed from the germ cell, which has passed through the phase completed within the fruit before the mature seed is cast into the earth.

In the germ cell, however, there exists a most singular property: that of dividing rapidly and of dividing according to a predetermined design.

Of this design, however, there exists not the slightest material trace in the primitive cell.

Only within it are there small corpuscles: the chromosomes, which are related to heredity.

Following the earliest developments in animals, one sees the first cell divide into two cells, then into four, and so on, until it forms a kind of hollow ball called a morula, which then folds inward into two layers leaving an opening, thus forming an open cavity with a double wall (the gastrula).

Through multiplications, infoldings, and differentiations, a

complex being of organs and tissues continues to develop.

Thus the germ cell, though so simple, clear, and devoid of any material design, works and constructs with exact obedience to the immaterial command it carries within itself—as if it were a faithful servant who knows by heart the mission entrusted to him and fulfills it, yet bears no document that could reveal the secret order received.

The design is visible only through the tireless activity of the cells, and only the completed work can be seen. Outside of the completed work, nothing appears.

In the embryos of mammals, and therefore of humans, one of the first organs to appear is the heart—or rather what will become the heart—a small vesicle that immediately begins to pulsate rhythmically, beating twice in the time the maternal heart requires for a single beat.

It will continue to beat without fatigue, because it is the vital motor that assists all the vital tissues as they form, propelling toward them the means necessary for life.

Altogether this is a hidden labor, marvelous precisely because it is accomplished alone; it is truly the miracle of creation from nothing.

Those supremely wise living cells never err and find within themselves the power to transform profoundly—some into cartilage cells, others into nerve cells, others into cells of the skin covering—and each tissue takes its precise place.

This marvel of creation, a kind of secret of the universe, is rigorously concealed; nature envelops it in veils and impenetrable coverings, which only she herself can break when she releases a mature being into the world.

But the being that is born is not merely a material body; it in turn becomes like a germ cell, containing latent psychic functions of an already determined type.

This new body does not function only through its organs; it also possesses other functions: instincts.

These cannot be deposited in a cell, but must be deposited in a living body, in a being that has already been born.

Just as every germ cell contains within itself the design of the organism without any possibility of penetrating its documents, so every newborn body, whatever species it belongs to, contains within itself the design of psychic instincts—functions that will place the being in relationship with the environment.

Whatever the being may be, even an insect.

The marvelous instincts of bees, which lead them to such complex social organization, begin to act only in bees, not in the egg or larvae.

The instinct to fly exists in the bird only after birth, and so forth.

Thus, when the new being is formed, it becomes the seat of mysterious guides that will give rise to actions, traits, and labors—that is, functions in relation to the external environment.

The external environment must not provide only the means of physiological existence, but also the calls to the mysterious missions that every animal being carries within itself and that summon it not merely to live, but to exercise a function necessary to preserve the world and its harmony.

Thus the environment is, for each being, according to its species.

The body itself has the form adapted to this psychic superfunction, which must enter into the economy of the

universe.

That such higher functions are already inherent in the newborn being is evident in animals.

One knows that a newborn mammal will be peaceful because it is a lamb; that another will be ferocious because it is a lion.

One knows that one insect will work tirelessly in unalterable discipline because it is an ant, and another will do nothing but sing in solitude because it is a cicada.

And so the newborn child is not only a body ready to function, but a spiritual embryo possessing latent psychic directives.

It would be absurd to think that man alone—distinguished from all creatures by the grandeur of his psychic life—would be the only one not to possess a design of psychic development.

The spirit may be so deeply latent that it does not manifest itself as animal instinct does, which is already ready to reveal itself in fixed actions.

The absence of fixed guiding instincts, as in animals, is the sign of a foundation of freedom of action that requires special elaboration—a creation left to the development of each individual and therefore unpredictable, but all the more delicate, difficult, and hidden.

Thus there is a secret in the soul of the child that cannot be penetrated unless he himself reveals it gradually as he constructs himself.

Just as in the segmentation of the germ cell, where there is nothing but a design—a design that no means can reveal and that will manifest itself only as the details of the organism are realized.

For this reason, only the child can reveal to us the natural design of

man.

Chapter IV — The Newborn

The Supernatural Environment

The child who is born does not enter a natural environment, but the environment of civilization, where human life unfolds.

It is a supernatural environment, constructed above and at the expense of nature, driven by the impulse to obtain minute aids to human life and to make adaptation easier.

But what provisions has civilization devised to assist the newborn—the human being who accomplishes the supreme effort of adaptation when, at birth, he passes from one life to another?

The shattering transition of birth should require a scientific treatment of the newborn child, because at no other period of life does man encounter such an occasion of struggle, contrast, and therefore suffering.

Yet there exists no provision whatsoever to facilitate this tremendous transition.

And yet, in the history of human civilization, there should be a

page preceding all others, recounting what civilized humanity does to assist the being who is born—but this page remains blank.

Many will think, on the contrary, that civilization today is greatly concerned with the newborn child.

How?

When a child is born, everyone concerns themselves with the mother: it is said that the mother has suffered.

But has the child not suffered as well?

Darkness and silence are prepared around the mother because she is fatigued.

But is the child not fatigued, who comes from a place where not the slightest glimmer of light nor the faintest sound ever reached him?

For him, therefore, darkness and silence must be prepared.

He had grown in a place protected from every shock and every fluctuation of temperature, in a soft and uniform liquid created expressly for his rest, where not the slightest glimmer of light nor the faintest sound ever reached him—and suddenly he exchanges his liquid environment for air.

How does the adult meet him, who comes from nothing and now finds himself in the world with delicate eyes that have never seen light and ears plunged in silence?

How does one meet that being with tormented limbs who, until the moment of birth, had remained in the mother's womb without any contact whatsoever?

He passes abruptly from a liquid environment to air, without successive transformations, as the tadpole becomes a frog.

That delicate body is exposed to the brutal impact of solid things; it is handled by the soulless hands of the adult human being.

Indeed, the household scarcely dares to touch him because he is so fragile; relatives and the mother look upon him with fear and entrust him to expert hands.

Yes—but those expert hands are often not sufficiently skilled to touch a being so delicate.

It is not enough merely to hold the child securely with strong hands.

One must prepare oneself to know how to approach this delicate being.

Why must a nurse, before approaching an adult patient or a wounded person, long practice the technique of moving the infirm—or that of delicately applying an ointment or a bandage?

With the child, it is not so.

The physician handles him without special care, and when the newborn cries desperately, everyone smiles with complacency.

That is his voice.

Crying is his language, and his cries are said to be necessary to cleanse the eyes and expand the lungs.

The newborn is immediately clothed.

Formerly he was wrapped in rigid swaddling bands as though he were cast in plaster; the tiny being, who had remained curled in the maternal womb, was stretched out and immobilized.

Yet it is not necessary to clothe the newborn, neither at the first moment nor during the first month.

Indeed, if we follow the history of newborn clothing, we see a

gradual evolution from rigid supports to light garments, to a progressive reduction of clothing—one more step and the clothing of the newborn will be abolished altogether.

The child should remain naked, as art represents him.

Angels are painted or sculpted completely nude, and in the Nativity the Virgin Mary adores the Divine Infant naked and so carries him in her arms.

In fact, the child needs to be warmed by the environment and not by clothing.

He does not yet possess sufficient internal heat to face external temperature, having previously lived within the warmth of the maternal body.

It is known that clothing can do nothing but retain body heat—that is, prevent its dispersion.

And if an environment is warmed, clothing becomes an obstacle between the warmth of the environment and the child's body, which must receive it.

We see that in animals, even when newborns are covered with fur, the mother's body covers them to warm them.

I do not wish to insist excessively on this point.

I am certain that, if they could speak to me, Americans would recount the care given to newborns in their country; and Germans and English would ask with surprise how I could be unaware of the progress achieved in theirs.

Yet I would have to reply that I know all these things and have studied, in some of these countries, the most refined practices and the improvements attained.

But everywhere, there is still lacking the nobility of consciousness

necessary to receive the newborn human being with dignity.

It is true that much is done—but what is progress if not seeing what was not seen before, and adding to what already seemed completely sufficient and even unsurpassable?

Nowhere in the world is the child yet understood with dignity.

Chapter IV — The Newborn (Continued)

I would also like to touch upon another point and indicate the fact that, even while deeply loving the child, we almost possess an instinct of defense against him, which prevails from the very first instant in which he comes to visit us.

And this is not only an instinct of defense, but also an instinct of avarice, which makes us rush to protect the things we possess, even when those things are of no real value.

From the moment of birth onward, the adult's attitude always expresses this concern: to ensure that the child does not damage, soil, or disturb.

Yes—defend oneself, defend oneself from him.

* * *

I believe that when humanity has acquired a full understanding of the child, it will find for him much more perfect forms of care.

In Vienna, some efforts have been made for the benefit of the newborn: the part of the bed on which the child is to be placed at birth is warmed, and absorbent mattresses have been devised that are discarded and renewed each time.

But the care of the newborn must not be limited to defense against

death and isolation from infectious agents, as is done today in the most modern clinics, where nurses approaching the child cover their faces with bandages so that microbes from their mouths do not reach him.

There exist problems of the 'psychic treatment of the child' from birth onward, and problems of care intended to facilitate his adaptation to the external world.

For this purpose, experiments must still be carried out in clinics and education promoted in families, so that attitudes toward the newborn may change.

In wealthy families, attention is still given to the magnificence of cradles and to precious lace for newborn clothing.

Yet by comparison one is led to think that if there were a custom of whipping children, then according to this criterion there would exist whips with handles of gold encrusted with pearls for rich children.

In truth, luxury for newborns demonstrates the complete absence of consideration for the psychic child.

Family wealth ought to provide the best hygienic treatment, not luxury, for the privileged child.

A better treatment would be to provide a place sheltered from the noises of the city, where sufficient silence exists and where light may be moderated and softened.

A warm and constant temperature, such as has long been achieved in operating rooms, should be the preparation of the environment for the naked child.

Another problem concerns moving and transporting the child, reducing to a minimum the need to touch him with hands.

The child should be lifted by means of a light and yielding support, like a delicately padded mesh hammock, which supports the entire body of the child, gathered in a position similar to the prenatal attitude.

These supports must be handled with delicacy and slowness, by light hands trained through meticulous preparation.

To move the child vertically or horizontally requires special skill.

In nursing, such study has already been carried out: there exists a special technique for lifting and transporting the patient horizontally and slowly, and it is the most elementary technique of care.

No one lifts a patient vertically in their arms anymore; instead, one moves him by means of a yielding support delicately inserted beneath the body, preserving horizontal position.

Now the newborn is an invalid; like the mother, he has passed through a danger of death.

The joy of seeing him alive is also relief from the danger passed.

At times the child has nearly been strangled and is revived through rapid artificial respiration; he often has a head deformed by a hematoma—that is, a pooling of blood beneath the skin.

Yet the newborn cannot even be confused with an adult patient.

His need is not that of an invalid, but of one who is making an inconceivable effort of adaptation, accompanied by the first psychic impressions of a being who comes from nothing and yet is sensitive.

The feeling toward the newborn is not one of compassion, but of veneration for the mystery of creation, for the secret of an infinity being composed within limits perceptible to us.

I have seen a newborn, just saved from a dangerous state of asphyxia, placed in a basin positioned low, almost at ground level.

In the rapid movement that carried him downward to be immersed in the water, the child opened his eyes wide and gave a start, stretching out his legs and arms like one who feels himself falling.

That was his first experience of fear.

The acts by which we touch and move the child, and the delicacy of feeling he ought to inspire in us, recall the gestures with which the Catholic priest handles the Sacred Host upon the altar.

With purified hands and studied, meditated gestures, he moves the Host now vertically, now horizontally, with pauses and intervals, as though those gestures were charged with such power that they must be interrupted from time to time.

And when he sets the Host down, the priest bends his knees to adore it.

All of this takes place in a silent environment, where light enters softened through colored glass.

A feeling of hope and elevation dominates the sacred place.

Such should be the environment in which the newborn lives.

* * *

If we draw a parallel between the care given to the child and that given to the mother, and attempt to imagine what it would be for the mother to be treated as the newborn is treated, the error we commit becomes clearer.

The mother is left immobile, while the newborn is transported far from her so that he will not disturb her with his presence, and is brought back near her only at the hours when she must feed him.

During these journeys, the child is handled, not without jolts, in order to dress him in fine garments and adornments of ribbons and lace.

This would be equivalent to forcing the mother, immediately after childbirth, to rise and dress elegantly in order to attend a reception.

The child is lifted from the cradle and raised to the level of the adult's shoulders in order to be transported, then lowered again to be placed beside the mother.

Who would ever think of subjecting the woman who has just given birth to such movements?

The justification commonly offered is this: the child has no consciousness, and without consciousness there is neither suffering nor enjoyment; therefore it would be a myth to use such refinements for the newborn.

But what then of the care lavished upon adult sufferers who are in danger of life and who are in a state of unconsciousness?

It is the need for assistance—not the consciousness of that need—that demands, more than at any other age of human life, the acute attention of science and feeling.

No—there is no possible justification.

The fact is that in the history of civilization there exists a gap for the first period of life; there is a blank page on which no one has yet written because no one has examined the first needs of man.

And yet each day we become more conscious of an impressive truth illustrated by countless experiences: that the discomforts of early life (and even of the prenatal period) influence the entire life of man.

Embryonic life and childhood contain, as is now universally

recognized, the health of the adult and the health of the race.

Why then is birth not considered—the most difficult crisis to overcome in life?

The newborn, we do not feel him; for us, he is not a man.

When he arrives in our world, we do not know how to receive him, even though the world we have created is destined for him, so that he may continue it and carry it forward toward a progress superior to our own.

All of this recalls to us the words of Saint John the Evangelist:

"He came into the world, and the world was made for Him, yet the world did not know Him.

He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

Chapter V — Natural Instincts

Higher animals, mammals, guided by instinct, do not neglect the delicate and difficult period of nursing their young.

The humble house cat offers us an example: when her kittens are newly born, she hides them in some secluded, dark place, and is so jealous of her offspring that she does not even allow them to be looked at.

Soon afterward the kittens appear beautiful and lively.

Even greater care is reserved for their young by mammals living in complete freedom.

Almost all such animals live in numerous herds, but the female nearing birth withdraws from the group and seeks a secluded, hidden place.

After giving birth, she keeps her young in silent isolation for a period that varies by species—from two or three weeks to a month or more.

The mother quickly transforms herself into nurse and attendant for these new creatures.

The newborns could not remain in the usual conditions of an environment full of light and noise; therefore she guards them in a quiet and sheltered place.

Although in general the young are born with all functions already developed, capable of standing and walking, the mother, with tender care and attempts at education, obliges them to remain isolated until they have fully acquired mastery of their functions and adapted to the environment.

Only then does she guide them toward the rest of the herd, so that they may live among their own kind.

Indeed, the history of these maternal attentions is striking, all essentially similar even among mammals of very different species, such as horses, bison, wild boar, wolves, and tigers.

The female bison remains for several weeks far from the herd, isolated with her calf, caring for him with marvelous tenderness.

When he is cold, she covers him with her forelegs; when he is dirty, she patiently licks him to smooth his coat; when she feeds him, she balances herself on only three legs to make the act easier for him.

Then she returns him to the herd and continues to nurse him with the patient indifference common to all quadruped mothers.

At times the mother does not limit herself to seeking isolation during the final months of pregnancy, but devotes herself to intense labor to prepare a suitable place for the newborn.

The she-wolf, for example, hides in a remote and dark corner of the forest, preferably in a cave that can serve as a refuge.

If she cannot find an appropriate place, she digs a tunnel, prepares a den in the hollow trunk of a tree, or constructs a shelter which she then lines with something soft—almost always her own fur,

which she tears from her chest, thereby also facilitating the nursing of her young.

She gives birth to six or seven cubs, with eyes and ears closed, and raises them hidden away, never abandoning them.

All mothers during this period are extremely aggressive toward anyone who attempts to approach the den.

These instincts become distorted when animals live in domesticated conditions.

Sows may come to devour their own offspring, whereas the wild boar is one of the most tender and affectionate mothers that exist.

Even lionesses imprisoned in zoological gardens have at times been driven to devour their newborns.

Nature thus develops her providential protective energies only when beings are free to obey their fundamental instincts.

The logic of instinct is clear and simple: the mammalian newborn must be especially assisted during its first contacts with the external environment.

Therefore it is necessary to take into account an initial period of extreme delicacy, corresponding to its arrival in the world, to the rest required after the enormous effort of birth, and to the simultaneous beginning of all its functions.

After this begins what is called early childhood—that is, the first year of existence—the period of nursing, the first life in the world.

The care animals give their isolated young is not limited to the body alone.

The mother is also concerned with the psychic awakening of instincts arising from the depths of the new being, forming another individual of the same species.

This awakening occurs best in softened light and away from noise, under the vigilance of the mother who, in feeding them, lovingly assists and perfects her offspring.

As the foal's limbs strengthen, he learns to recognize and follow his mother; meanwhile, within that fragile body the characteristics of the horse begin to manifest—the hereditary conditions come into function.

For this reason, the mare does not allow anyone to see her offspring before he has transformed into a colt; nor does the cat permit her kittens to be examined before they have opened their eyes and strengthened their legs—before they have truly become kittens.

It is evident that nature watches over these powerful realizations with the greatest care.

The mission of maternal care far surpasses purely physiological functions.

Through the most tender love and delicate attentions, it is above all directed toward the awakening of latent instincts.

In an analogous way, one might say that through the delicate care necessarily bestowed upon the newborn child, we must attend to the spiritual birth of man.

Chapter VI — The Spiritual Embryo

Incarnation

The word incarnation evokes the image of the newborn as a spirit enclosed in flesh in order to come and live in the world.

This concept is contemplated in Christianity among the most venerable mysteries of religion, that in which the divine Spirit itself becomes incarnate: “et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto, et homo factus est.”

Science, on the other hand, considers the new being as having come from nothing; it is then flesh, not incarnation.

It is merely a development of tissues and organs composing a living whole.

This too is a mystery: for how can that complex and living body have come from nothing?

However, our purpose is not to dwell on such meditations, but to penetrate reality by going beneath the surface.

In the same way that the germ cell contains within itself a design of

the organism that no instrument can reveal, so the newborn child contains within himself a design of psychic life.

At birth, man is not yet a psychic being; he must become one.

The newborn possesses the potentiality of psychic development, but this development is not automatic.

The psychic embryo must be constructed through experience in the environment.

The child therefore is not born with a ready-made spirit; he must incarnate his spirit.

This incarnation occurs through activity.

Movement, sensation, language, and work are the means through which the child constructs his psychic personality.

If the environment offers obstacles to this constructive activity, the spiritual embryo is deformed.

The spiritual embryo is far more delicate than the physical embryo.

While nature protects the physical embryo with membranes and fluids, the spiritual embryo has no such natural protections.

It depends entirely on the environment provided by adults.

Thus, errors committed in the treatment of the child strike at the very root of the formation of the human personality.

The adult, often without awareness, becomes the obstacle to the incarnation of the child's spirit.

Education, therefore, must be understood not as the transmission of knowledge, but as aid to the process of incarnation.

To help the spiritual embryo means to remove obstacles and to prepare an environment that allows free and constructive activity.

Only in such an environment can the child truly incarnate his

spirit and become fully human.

Chapter VII — Delicate Psychic Constructions

The Sensitive Periods

There exist in the life of the child special periods of sensitivity, during which he is endowed with particular sensibilities that enable him to acquire certain characteristics or skills with extraordinary ease.

These periods are transient; once they have passed, the same acquisitions become difficult or even impossible.

They are not conscious choices on the part of the child, but interior impulses that guide him toward specific activities.

During a sensitive period, the child displays an intense and irresistible attraction toward certain stimuli in the environment, while remaining indifferent to others.

This attraction is temporary, but while it lasts it is extraordinarily powerful.

Through these sensitive periods, nature accomplishes the

construction of fundamental human faculties.

If the environment responds to these inner needs, development proceeds harmoniously; if not, the opportunity is lost.

One of the most important characteristics of sensitive periods is their exclusivity: while one sensitivity dominates, all others recede.

This explains the child's concentration and the apparent obsession with particular activities.

For example, there is a sensitive period for language.

During this time, the child absorbs language effortlessly from the environment, without fatigue and without conscious effort.

Later, the same acquisition would require long and laborious study.

There is also a sensitive period for order.

Order for the child is not the same as order for the adult.

It is not an external tidiness, but an internal sense of orientation that allows the child to understand the world.

When this internal order is disturbed, the child suffers deeply.

There are sensitive periods for movement, for refinement of the senses, and for social relations.

Each of these periods corresponds to a constructive necessity of the psychic embryo.

The adult who is unaware of these delicate constructions may unknowingly become their greatest obstacle.

By imposing his own rhythms, interests, and conveniences, the adult interrupts the natural work of the child.

Punishments, rewards, and forced instruction are often applied precisely at the moments when the child needs freedom and

appropriate stimuli.

The result is not education, but deviation.

The child whose sensitive periods have been thwarted may appear obedient or docile, but his inner development has been compromised.

True education consists in recognizing these sensitive periods and protecting them.

This requires observation, patience, and humility on the part of the adult.

The task of education is therefore indirect: it consists in preparing an environment that responds to the child's inner needs.

When this is done, development unfolds spontaneously, without coercion and without fatigue.

The delicate psychic constructions of childhood are the foundation upon which the adult personality will later rest.

Chapter VIII — Order

Order is one of the first and most important needs of the child.

It is not the external order sought by the adult, but an internal order that allows the child to orient himself in the world.

Through order, the child builds a mental map of reality and gains security.

When the environment is orderly and predictable, the child feels calm and confident.

When order is disturbed, the child experiences profound discomfort that adults often misinterpret as caprice or disobedience.

The child's love of order manifests itself in early childhood with surprising intensity.

He wants objects to remain in their accustomed places and events to follow a known sequence.

This need is not intellectual but vital.

Order is the foundation upon which intelligence and character are constructed.

Without order, the child's mind is confused and his energies are dispersed.

Adults frequently violate the child's sense of order without realizing it.

They move objects arbitrarily, interrupt activities, and impose changes according to their own convenience.

The child then reacts with distress, crying, or anger.

Such reactions are often punished, even though they arise from a legitimate inner need.

Respect for the child's sense of order does not mean rigidity or immobility.

It means maintaining consistency and clarity in the environment while allowing gradual and meaningful change.

When the child's need for order is satisfied, he becomes peaceful and receptive.

Order prepares the ground for concentration, work, and independence.

It is one of the invisible supports of the child's psychic development.

Chapter VIII — Order (Continued)

Internal Order

There exists, beyond external order, an internal order that is far more profound and essential.

This internal order is a psychic organization that allows the child to

orient himself among the impressions he receives from the world.

Through it, sensations, movements, and experiences are arranged and coordinated.

Without this internal order, the mind would be overwhelmed by chaos.

The child constructs this order through repeated experiences in a stable environment.

Each object in its place, each action following another in a known sequence, helps the child to organize his inner world.

When this internal order is threatened, the child reacts with intense emotional disturbance.

These reactions are often sudden and violent, because they arise from a deep psychic necessity.

Adults frequently misunderstand such reactions, attributing them to bad behavior or caprice.

In reality, they are manifestations of a wounded inner order.

The more delicate the period of development, the more intense the reaction.

The adult who respects the child's need for order protects his psychic construction.

This respect requires not rigidity, but awareness.

It requires the adult to restrain his own impulses to dominate or to rearrange according to convenience.

Gradually, as the child grows, internal order becomes stable and independent of the external environment.

At that point, flexibility and adaptation become possible without suffering.

But if the foundations of order have not been securely laid, later development is fragile.

Thus order is not a minor detail of education, but one of its fundamental pillars.

Chapter IX — Intelligence

Intelligence in the child does not develop through instruction, but through activity.

It is not something that can be poured into the mind from the outside, but something that is constructed through experience.

The child builds his intelligence by acting upon the environment.

Movement, exploration, and manipulation are the foundations of intellectual development.

The hand is the instrument of intelligence.

Through the hand, the child comes into contact with reality and organizes his impressions.

Abstract thought is prepared by concrete action.

Before understanding ideas, the child must live them.

For this reason, premature intellectual instruction is not only useless, but harmful.

It substitutes verbal knowledge for lived experience and weakens the natural process of development.

True intelligence arises from concentration.

When the child is able to focus deeply on an activity chosen freely, his mental powers organize themselves.

In such moments, the child reveals unexpected capacities of attention, perseverance, and joy in work.

The adult often interrupts these moments of concentration, mistaking them for stubbornness or monotony.

In doing so, he destroys the very process by which intelligence is being formed.

Education therefore must protect concentration.

The role of the adult is to prepare an environment rich in meaningful activities and then to step aside.

Only in freedom can intelligence develop fully.

Discipline and intelligence are not opposed.

True discipline arises spontaneously from concentrated work.

An intelligent child is not one who repeats words or facts, but one who knows how to act purposefully and independently in the world.

Chapter X — The Struggles Along The Path Of Growth

Growth is not a peaceful process.

It is accompanied by inner struggles that arise from the effort of construction.

The child who is growing encounters obstacles both within himself and in the environment.

These struggles are necessary and beneficial when the environment allows them to be resolved through activity.

When obstacles are excessive or artificial, however, they deform development.

Many of the child's difficulties do not arise from his nature, but from the conditions imposed upon him by adults.

The adult often interprets the child's struggles as defects, disobedience, or bad character.

In reality, they are signs of a life striving to grow.

One of the most misunderstood aspects of growth is fatigue.

The child becomes fatigued not by work chosen freely, but by forced inactivity or imposed tasks.

True work refreshes the child; it does not exhaust him.

Fatigue appears when the child's energies are blocked and cannot find a natural outlet.

Another frequent struggle concerns sleep.

The child who has not been allowed to expend his energies constructively often has difficulty sleeping.

Sleep is a function of equilibrium.

When the psychic and physical life of the child has been harmonized through activity, sleep comes naturally.

Adults frequently attempt to regulate sleep through external means, without addressing the deeper causes of restlessness.

They impose schedules and coercion, which only aggravate the problem.

Growth also involves periods of apparent regression.

At times the child seems to lose abilities he had already acquired.

This phenomenon is temporary and corresponds to internal reorganizations.

The adult who intervenes anxiously may interrupt these necessary processes.

There are also struggles related to independence.

The child seeks to do things by himself, even when his movements are still imperfect.

This effort is often discouraged by adults in the name of efficiency or order.

Yet every time the adult substitutes himself for the child, he deprives him of a conquest.

The child's repeated attempts, even when clumsy, are the means by which coordination and confidence are built.

Another source of struggle is the adult's impatience.

The rhythms of childhood are different from those of adulthood.

When the adult imposes his own tempo, the child experiences tension and frustration.

Growth requires time.

Nature never hurries, yet everything is accomplished.

The struggles of growth are therefore not to be eliminated, but understood.

Education must not aim at suppressing effort, but at ensuring that effort is meaningful and constructive.

When the environment is adapted to the child's needs, struggles lead to strength rather than conflict.

The child who overcomes obstacles through his own activity develops confidence, discipline, and inner peace.

Chapter XI — Walking

Walking is one of the greatest conquests of early childhood.

It is not merely a mechanical act, but a profound transformation of the child's relationship with the world.

Through walking, the child becomes free.

He is no longer carried; he can go toward what attracts him.

This conquest is achieved through immense effort and perseverance.

Before walking independently, the child must coordinate countless movements, strengthen muscles, and develop balance.

Each attempt represents a victory over gravity and over his own limitations.

The adult often underestimates the importance of this struggle.

He may seek to accelerate the process by supporting the child excessively or by using artificial aids.

Such interventions deprive the child of the very experiences necessary for true coordination.

Walking cannot be taught; it must be conquered.

The child learns to walk by walking.

Every fall, every rise, every repeated attempt contributes to the formation of coordination and confidence.

When the adult intervenes too quickly to prevent falls, he interrupts this natural process.

The environment therefore must be adapted to allow safe freedom of movement.

The floor should invite exploration, not fear.

Furniture and obstacles should be proportioned to the child's size and strength.

In such an environment, the child practices tirelessly.

Walking brings with it a new psychological state.

The child who walks experiences joy, pride, and a new sense of independence.

He begins to perceive himself as an agent capable of acting upon the world.

This new power awakens further desires for conquest.

Walking also transforms the child's intelligence.

The horizon expands, and with it the range of experiences.

Objects once distant become accessible; relationships multiply.

The child's mind grows through movement.

When walking is respected as a natural conquest, it becomes the foundation for later autonomy.

If it is hindered or distorted, later development suffers.

Thus, walking is not a simple milestone, but a decisive step in the

construction of the human personality.

Chapter XII — The Hand

The hand is the instrument of intelligence.

Through the hand, the child enters into relationship with the world and constructs his mind.

The hand is the visible expression of the psyche.

Before speaking, the child works with his hands; before thinking abstractly, he acts.

The development of the hand follows a precise and delicate path.

At first, movements are disorderly and uncertain.

Gradually, through repetition and effort, coordination is achieved.

Each conquest of the hand corresponds to a conquest of the mind.

When the child is allowed to act freely, the hand becomes increasingly refined.

This refinement is not imposed from the outside, but arises from inner necessity.

The adult often misunderstands the importance of manual activity.

He may regard it as mere play or as something inferior to intellectual work.

In reality, manual activity is the foundation of intellectual development.

The hand prepares the way for writing, drawing, and all higher forms of expression.

Actions that appear simple—opening, closing, pouring, fitting—are in fact complex exercises of coordination and will.

Through these actions, the child develops precision, attention, and control.

The repetition of purposeful movements is not mechanical.

It is guided by an inner drive toward perfection.

The child repeats an action not to imitate, but to satisfy an internal need.

This repetition leads to concentration.

Concentration, in turn, organizes the personality.

When the adult interrupts or trivializes manual work, he interrupts the formation of intelligence.

Tools and objects should therefore be proportioned to the child's hand.

They should invite activity and allow success.

In such conditions, the hand becomes the ally of the mind.

The education of the hand is thus inseparable from the education of the intellect.

To neglect the hand is to neglect the child's path toward human completeness.

Chapter XIII — Rhythm

Every living being possesses an inner rhythm.

This rhythm governs growth, movement, and the succession of activities.

In the child, rhythm manifests itself with particular clarity and importance.

The child's life is not uniform, but composed of alternating periods of activity and rest.

When these rhythms are respected, development proceeds harmoniously.

When they are violated, disorder and fatigue arise.

The adult often attempts to impose an external rhythm upon the child.

This rhythm is usually dictated by social convenience rather than by the child's needs.

Such imposition creates conflict between the child's inner life and the demands of the environment.

Rhythm is closely connected to repetition.

The child repeats actions not mechanically, but rhythmically.

Through repetition, movements become refined and psychic organization is achieved.

This rhythmic repetition brings joy and calm.

It is a sign of inner harmony.

Interrupting this rhythm produces agitation and resistance.

Adults often misinterpret rhythmic repetition as monotony or useless persistence.

In reality, it is a constructive process essential to development.

There is also a rhythm in the child's emotional life.

Periods of intense sensitivity alternate with moments of apparent indifference.

Respecting these emotional rhythms is as important as respecting physical ones.

Education therefore must adapt itself to the child's rhythm.

It should not force uniformity or haste.

When the environment is flexible and responsive, rhythm becomes a source of balance.

The child who lives according to his natural rhythms develops serenity, endurance, and inner order.

Rhythm thus unites movement, work, rest, and emotion into a coherent whole.

Chapter XIV — The Substitution Of Personality

One of the gravest errors committed by adults in relation to the child is the substitution of their own personality for that of the child.

The adult does not limit himself to guiding or assisting; he replaces.

He acts, decides, chooses, and thinks in place of the child.

In doing so, he suppresses the child's own activity, initiative, and inner development.

This substitution is often unconscious and motivated by affection.

The adult believes he is helping, when in reality he is hindering.

The child is deprived of the opportunity to construct himself through experience.

Every act performed in the child's place is a lost conquest.

The child who is continually assisted becomes dependent.

His will weakens, his confidence diminishes, and his sense of responsibility fails to develop.

The adult then complains that the child lacks initiative, strength, or discipline.

But these deficiencies are often the direct result of excessive adult intervention.

True help consists not in replacing the child, but in supporting his efforts.

It means preparing the environment so that the child can act independently.

The adult must restrain his impulse to intervene.

This restraint requires humility and self-discipline.

The substitution of personality also affects the child's emotional life.

When the adult imposes his own reactions and judgments, the child loses contact with his authentic feelings.

He learns to conform rather than to understand himself.

Education thus risks producing imitation instead of individuality.

Respect for the child's personality is the foundation of true education.

Only by allowing the child to act for himself can we help him become himself.

Chapter XV — The Preparation Of The Adult

The education of the child is not primarily a problem of the child, but of the adult.

Before acting upon the child, the adult must transform himself.

The adult carries within himself obstacles formed by habits, prejudices, and unconscious attitudes.

These obstacles interfere with the child's development far more than any external difficulty.

The first task of education is therefore the preparation of the adult.

This preparation is not intellectual.

It does not consist in acquiring notions or techniques alone.

It is above all a moral preparation.

The adult must become aware of his own defects and limitations.

He must recognize the tendency to dominate, to substitute himself, and to impose his own will.

Such tendencies often disguise themselves as love or devotion.

The adult must learn to restrain himself.

He must cultivate patience, humility, and respect for the child's inner life.

This inner work is difficult and requires constant vigilance.

The adult must learn to observe the child without preconceived ideas.

Observation is the foundation of scientific education.

Through observation, the adult discovers the child's true needs.

This discovery often contradicts traditional beliefs.

To accept it requires courage.

The prepared adult does not act impulsively.

He intervenes only when necessary, and then with precision.

He knows when to withdraw and allow the child to act independently.

Authority, in this context, is not imposed but earned.

It arises from understanding and from the capacity to serve the child's development.

The preparation of the adult is therefore the cornerstone of any true reform of education.

Without it, methods and materials lose their value.

With it, even simple means become powerful instruments of growth.

Chapter XVI — The Role Of The Teacher

The teacher's role is not to transmit knowledge, but to serve the development of the child.

In traditional education, the teacher is the center of activity; in scientific education, the child occupies that place.

The teacher therefore must undergo a profound transformation of attitude.

He must renounce the illusion of being indispensable.

His task is to prepare the environment and then to observe.

Observation allows the teacher to understand when to intervene and when to withdraw.

Intervention must always be minimal and precise.

The teacher who intervenes too much obstructs development; the one who intervenes too little abandons the child.

The balance between action and restraint is learned through experience and self-discipline.

Authority in the teacher does not derive from power, but from

competence and respect.

The teacher gains authority by understanding the laws of development and by acting in harmony with them.

Punishments and rewards are incompatible with this role.

They substitute external control for inner discipline.

True discipline arises from concentration and purposeful activity.

The teacher therefore must protect the child's work.

He must ensure continuity, order, and freedom within the environment.

Silence, calm, and respect are essential conditions.

The teacher is a guide, not a judge.

He accompanies the child along the path of self-construction.

When the teacher succeeds in this role, education becomes an aid to life.

Chapter XVII — Discipline And Freedom

Discipline and freedom are often regarded as opposites.

In reality, true discipline is born from freedom.

When the child is free to act according to his inner needs, order and self-control emerge spontaneously.

Discipline imposed from the outside produces only obedience or rebellion.

It does not create inner strength.

Freedom does not mean license.

It means the possibility of choosing purposeful activity within a prepared environment.

The limits of freedom are determined by respect for others and for the environment.

Within these limits, the child must be free to act.

Through free activity, the child organizes his movements, his thoughts, and his will.

This organization is discipline.

The disciplined child is calm, concentrated, and capable of sustained effort.

He obeys not because he is forced, but because he has mastered himself.

The adult who fears freedom often confuses it with disorder.

In reality, disorder arises when freedom is denied.

The child who is prevented from acting constructively seeks outlets in agitation and opposition.

Freedom, when rightly understood, is therefore the foundation of discipline.

Education must aim to liberate the child's energies and to guide them toward constructive work.

In such conditions, discipline ceases to be a problem and becomes a natural state.

Chapter XVIII — Collective Work And Social Life

When the child has acquired inner discipline through individual work, he is naturally prepared for social life.

Social behavior does not arise from imposed rules, but from inner order.

A child who is master of himself respects others spontaneously.

Collective life in childhood therefore must be built upon individual development.

In traditional schools, social life is often organized through external regulations.

Children are compelled to act together according to a common rhythm imposed from above.

This produces conformity rather than true social harmony.

In an environment where individual activity is respected, social relations arise naturally.

Children observe one another, imitate constructive actions, and help spontaneously.

The group becomes a place of mutual aid rather than competition.

Older or more experienced children assist younger ones.

This assistance is not commanded; it springs from sympathy and understanding.

Thus a true social instinct develops.

The adult must not force socialization.

Premature collective activities can hinder individual development.

Only when the child has achieved a certain level of independence does social work become beneficial.

In such conditions, collective work refines moral qualities.

Respect, patience, and responsibility grow through shared experience.

The child learns to regulate his behavior in relation to others.

Social life thus becomes an extension of individual discipline.

Education therefore must consider society as the natural outcome of inner construction.

Chapter XIX — Education And Peace

Education must be understood as the principal means for the construction of peace.

Wars arise not only from political causes, but from disordered human souls.

If the inner life of man is not harmonized, society reflects this disorder.

The child represents the promise of a new humanity.

In him lie the possibilities of transformation that adults no longer possess.

To educate the child is therefore to work for peace.

Peace is not merely the absence of war.

It is the positive construction of harmony among individuals and peoples.

Such harmony can only be built upon respect for human personality.

The foundations of peace must be laid in early childhood.

If the child grows in an environment that respects his dignity and inner needs, he will become an adult capable of respect.

Violence, oppression, and injustice have their roots in frustrated childhoods.

The adult who dominates the child prepares the man who will dominate others.

Education therefore must aim at liberation, not submission.

The liberated child becomes a responsible and peaceful adult.

The task of education is immense.

It concerns not only schools, but humanity itself.

Through education, mankind can choose between destruction and renewal.

The child is the forgotten citizen.

To recognize his rights is to open the way to peace.

Education, understood as an aid to life, thus becomes the most powerful instrument for the salvation of humanity.