

ADVOCATES CHILD FREEDOM.

Dr. Montessori Explains This Doesn't Mean Abandoning to Its Own Devices.

From the Outlook.

Her lecture before the Brooklyn Institute, given in the Brooklyn Academy of Music, may serve as an example of her method of presenting to American audiences her theory and her practice. First she gave an address in Italian. She would in a few sentences make a point, and then pause while her coadjutor, Miss Anne E. George, interpreted her words in English. There is one great advantage in this form of lecture; it allows the succession of points to sink into the minds of the hearers.

That lecture of Dr. Montessori's followed this course: Everything that grows must have its own freedom; and its freedom must be respected—the freedom of the bird to fly, the freedom of the tree to sink its roots into the ground. If we prevent the bird from moving freely it ceases to be what it ought to be; if, on the other hand, we root up the tree and move it about from place to place, we deprive it of its freedom to grow and we injure it. We recognize the freedom of the bird as being different from that of the tree. We should also recognize the freedom of the child, but we should try to discover what that freedom is.

It is certainly not abandoning the child to its own devices. We know a good deal about the physical freedom of the child, but the inner freedom of the child—the freedom of his mind—is harder to understand. To learn about it requires study. Children have before them a great task in the process of learning, incomparably more difficult than that which confronts an adult who goes into a foreign country.

The child is not only learning a foreign language, for all language is foreign to him, but he is learning to use his senses. He learns very largely at first, through the sense of touch, and yet he is being told by adults not to touch; he is constantly being asked if he cannot keep his hands off things. Children thus are learning in constant antagonism to adults; but in spite of the opposition they meet they go on learning, but often with a sense of irritation. They are bound to learn, in spite of adults. To give children a chance to learn is to release them from this restraint, and when they are thus released they expand at once. Children's interest in their environment is insatiable.

The new kind of teacher is the one who guides the child's discoveries, who distinguishes between the useful and harmful activities of the child, who knows when to interfere with the activities of the child so as to enable the child to avoid the harmful and to make the best use of the useful, and who, when interfering, does so in such a way that the child is not deprived of the consciousness of arriving at his knowledge himself. If properly carried out, this guidance of the freedom of the child will no more deprive him of the power of doing the things he does not want to do than hygienic care deprives infants of the power of overcoming disease. The stronger the child the more capable he is of making sacrifice. As we are preparing the race for physical conflicts by hygiene in infancy, so through spiritual and mental hygiene we can prepare the race for mental and moral conquest.