

The Fear Instinct in Early Childhood

A most interesting and enlightening lecture by Boris Sidis in 1919. Here're the emphasized excerpts:

"The child is regarded as a sort of a little beast, a kind of young ape, at best a little savage. The child, accordingly, is trained to act not by the light of reason, but by the command of superior force. The child is ruled by fear. Our young generation is trained by fear into discipline and obedience. We thus suppress the natural genius and originality of the child, we favor and raise mediocrity, and cultivate the philistine, the product of education, ruled by rod, not by thought.

"As a protection against fear the child, in self defense, becomes secretive, evasive of truth, and cowardly of action. These traits of character, acquired in early childhood, due to training by rod, fist, intimidation, and fear, become often ingrained in the very soul of the child to last him his life long. Seared by the rod, the scourge, and the fist the child often emerges a moral and intellectual cripple. Cowered and terrorized by the awakening and cultivation of the most powerful of impulses, the impulse of self-preservation and the most uncontrollable of all instincts, the fear instinct, the child can never fully rid himself of all the distressing, morbid consequences. Fear will stay with him and dog his steps all his life long."

"Education by force, punishment, repression, rod, whip, and knout will only train a generation of slaves."

"Children should be treated not by fear and cruelty, but with kindness and gentleness. Nothing so much degrades and bastardises a young nature as violence and compulsion."

"Locke tells us that 'a slavish discipline makes a slavish temper.' The child submits, and dissembles obedience, whilst the fear of the rod hangs over him. Beating them (children), and all other sorts of slavish and corporal punishments, are not the discipline fit to be used in the education of those we would have wise, good, and ingenuous men..."

"If we turn to Tolstoy, the great artist and reader of the human heart, we find this attitude, as to the freedom of children from vice and crime, still more emphasized. 'There are two important rules in education,' writes Tolstoy. '(1) Live well according to the highest moral ideal. (2) Perfect yourself continually, and conceal nothing from your children, especially your faults, mistakes, and shortcomings. Children are much more sensitive morally than are adults. Without saying or even being directly conscious of it children not only see the faults of their parents, but even the worst of all faults, their hypocrisy..."

"As long as the child will be trained not by love, but by fear, so long will humanity live not

by justice, but by force. As long as the child will be ruled by the educator's threat and by the father's rod, so long will mankind be dominated by the policeman's club, by fear of jail, and by panic of invasion by armies and navies."

"Insanity can be alleviated,-but much, if not all, of that psychopathic misery known as functional, mental diseases is entirely preventable. For it is the result of our pitiful, wretched, brain-starving, mind-crippling, terrifying and terrorizing system of education."

"In my clinical study of numbers of cases under my medical care I have become convinced of the preponderant influence of the impulse of self preservation and fear instinct in early childhood in the causation of psychopathic nervous and mental maladies. Most, in fact we may say all, of functional, nervous, mental diseases have their origin in early childhood."

"The great Italian physiologist, Mosso, agrees with the dicta of the greatest thinkers on the subject of child education, from Plato and Aristotle to our own times. 'Every ugly thing,' says Mosso, 'told to the child, every shock, every fright given him, will remain like minute splinters in the flesh, to torture him all his life long.'

"If we wish to have a strong, healthy, happy race of men, we should lay a good foundation in the education of early childhood. We should avoid all means of brutal, slavish training which cripple man's individuality, freedom, and happiness. We should not use violence and fear. We should be careful to remove from the children all that is brutal, ugly, vicious, and fearsome. We should surround our young with the graceful, the true, the beautiful, the good, the kind, the lovely, and the loving."