

# THE ESSENTIAL BORIS SIDIS

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-PHILOSOPHY-

CHANCE AND MIND

Dear Prof. James,

Freud's little volume is "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life." His "Traumdetung" may also be of interest to you. It seems to me it's too sweeping a statement that there is no chance element in our life experience. In fact, the opposite point of view could be taken and with greater force. I have tried to follow out some of its lines suggested—in thoughts and dreams—and it seems to me that the reasonable element is but an insignificant portion, a pin point, of our psychic life. Chance and not reason rules the world. Reason's function is often a kind of chance's handmaid to justify what has come to pass. In fact much of our "reason" in science is just this chance element locked into shape and form.

Yours as e  
B/.-SIDIS

1905

Thoughts that present themselves at any one moment are meaningless and purposeless; they are simply the accidental chance material which the given momentary, purposive thought selects as fit in order to succeed best in the achievement of its purpose. The ideas themselves as they present themselves are meaningless, purposeless, chance creations of the brain, like the phenomena of accidental variation.

(1914)

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Not purpose, but chance is at the heart of mental life.

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(1914)

## THE UNCONSCIOUS

There is no special controlling agency somewhere in the mind sending out orders, mandates, inhibitions, like a despotically ruling autocrat, like a psycho-analytic censor, or like an omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, invisible deity.

(1914)

## THE INDIVIDUAL

The individual is a composite,—a multiple individuality.

(1904)

## SCIENCE

Science is the description of phenomena and the formulation of their relations.

(1914)

Science furnishes our knowledge of the external world, but science is essentially not self-conscious, and it cannot therefore on its own grounds answer the question as to the validity of its knowledge.

(1914)

## PURPOSE

We are apt to overestimate the utility of organs and functions in the world of living beings. There may be



organs which are of no use to the organism, and there may be functions which are indifferent and even positively harmful to life.

(1914)

WE ARE FAR MORE CREATURES OF HABIT AND INSTINCT THAN OF REASON AND WILL.  
(1909)

THE TENDENCY OF LIFE IS NOT THE PRESERVATION OF THE SPECIES, BUT SOLELY THE PRESERVATION OF EACH INDIVIDUAL ORGANISM, AS LONG AS IT IS IN EXISTENCE AT ALL, AND IS ABLE TO CARRY ON ITS LIFE PROCESSES.  
(1922)

## MEMORY

We cannot remember what we were not conscious of.  
(1914)

If anything is of the utmost

importance in mental life, it is surely memory. Memory forms a unity of our life, brings, so to speak, to a focus our life-experiences, which would have otherwise been disconnected, confused, and chaotic. I remember just now what I did an hour ago, a day ago, what I lived through many years ago. I remember the experiences of my childhood, boyhood, and youth. I remember my struggles and disappointments, my loves, my friendships, my enmities, my feelings, sentiments, emotions, ideas, and sensations. All these inter-connected, interlocked links of memories form the solid chain of my conscious personality.

(1914)



## THE SUBCONSCIOUS

The nature of the subconsciousness, whether it be physiological or psychological, or both, we may leave to the speculations of the philosophical psychopathologist and metaphysical psychologist. Our present object is to note the clinical facts, describe them accurately, correlate them into generalizations, and use provisionally limiting concepts, much in the same way as the mathematician uses space or

the physicist uses matter and ether.

(1909)

## SYCHOANALYSIS

Distasteful as it is for me to do it, I find it my duty to enter a protest against the vagaries and absurdities of psychoanalysis which is nothing but a pseudo-science, the same as astrology, oneiromancy, palmistry and magic.

(1914)

## EDUCATION

The principle of recognition of evil under all its guises is at the basis of the true education of man.

(1909)

The aim of education of children is self-perfection. We should surround our young with the graceful, the true, the beautiful, the good, the

kind, the lovely, and the loving.  
(1919)

The cultivation of the power of habit-disintegration is what constitutes the proper education of man's genius.  
(1909)

Ontogenesis is an epitome of Phylogenesis. This biogenetic law holds true in the domain of education. The stored-up experiences of the race are condensed, foreshortened, and recapitulated in the child's life history. This process of progressive precocity, or of foreshortening of education, has been going on unconsciously in the course of human evolution. We have reached a stage when man can be made conscious of this fundamental process, thus getting control over his own growth and development. We should remember that there is genius in every healthy, normal child.  
(1919)

My boy plays—plays with his toys,  
and plays with his books.

(1910)

## LAUGHTER

The highest point reached by  
laughter is intimately related with  
the highest intellectual, aesthetic,  
and moral development.  
(1913)



The phenomena that lie on the borderland of what is regarded as normal mental activity are of great interest and importance, because, being deviations or variations from the normal and the familiar, they are apt to call attention to the mechanism, causation and laws that govern mental activity in general—normal and abnormal, conscious and subconscious.  
(1914)

## TREATMENT METHODS

For many years, day after day and night after night, I lived with patients who were under my care, observation, and treatment.—*Causation and Treatment of Psychopathic Diseases*, Chap. 11.

- a. My mode of hypnotization consists in forming a monotonous environment;
- b. the light is lowered, and a profound silence reigns in the room;
- c. then gently and monotonously stroking the skin of the subject's forehead,
- d. and in a low, muffled, monotonous voice, as if rocking a baby to sleep,
- e. I go on repeating, 'Sleep, sleep, sleep,' etc., until the subject falls into the hypnotic state.

(1898)



Great stress is laid on re-association, or synthesis of dissociated systems.

From a therapeutic point of view, synthesis is cure.

(1908)

Important, however, as the following-up of the history or of the psychogenesis of the symptoms may be, both to the physician and to the patient, for an intelligent and scientific comprehension of the case, it does not cure, as some are apt to claim, the psychopathic malady.

Most important, however, is the access gained through the agency of the hypnoidal state to the stores of potential subconscious reserve-energy, which, by a liberation of energy, bring about a re-association and synthesis of the dissociated mental systems underlying the symptoms of the disease.

## CONDITIONS OF NORMAL AND ABNORMAL SUGGESTIBILITY

|           | Normal Suggestibility                    |    | Abnormal Suggestibility                  |
|-----------|--|----|--|
| <u>1.</u> | Fixation of attention                    | 1. | Fixation of attention                    |
| <u>2.</u> | Distraction                              | 2. | _____                                    |
| <u>3.</u> | Monotony                                 | 3. | Monotony                                 |
| <u>4.</u> | Limitation of voluntary movements        | 4. | Limitation of voluntary movements        |
| <u>5.</u> | Limitation of the field of consciousness | 5. | Limitation of the field of consciousness |
| <u>6.</u> | Inhibition                               | 6. | Inhibition                               |
| <u>7.</u> | Immediate execution                      | 7. | _____                                    |

THE law of suggestibility in general, and those of normal and abnormal suggestibility in particular, indicate a coexistence of two streams of consciousness, of two selves within the frame of the

individual; the one, the waking  
consciousness, the waking self; the  
other, the subwaking  
consciousness,



THE WARDEN STUDIO  
PORTSMOUTH, N. H.

## Political Psychology

May not a future historian look to our own times with dismay, and perhaps with horror? He will represent our age as dark and cruel—an age of the blind, senseless Napoleonic wars, of great commercial crises, Black Fridays, Coxey armies and crazes of all sorts and descriptions.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES



### Dr. Boris Sidis

b. Oct. 12, 1867, Berditchev, Russia. d.  
Oct. 24, 1923, Portsmouth, NH

Dr. Boris Sidis was born in Russia and came to the United States when twenty years old. He won four degrees at Harvard, the A. B., A. M., Ph. D., and M. D. He is a widely known writer on psychopathology and kindred subjects. Experimental Study of

Sleep, The Psychology of Laughter, The Causation and Treatment of Psychopathic Diseases, and The Source and Aim of Human Progress, are among his books. He has been associated with various institutions, including the Pathological Institute of N. Y. State. He is fifty-three [56] years old and resides at Portsmouth, N. H.

American Magazine, 1923, 95, 14-15; 98-102.

Outline for The Sidis Story (Contains more biographical information about the Sidises than any other source found so far.)

The Sidis Story by Sarah Sidis, M.D. (1952)

Most thoughtful people today have come to realize that all effective psychologists must be as much artist as scientist. They must have a perception so delicate and acute that they can follow instantly along the twisting paths of the subwaking mind. Boris had the delicacy, the perception and the artistry that that

takes. It made him not only a great scientist, but a great teacher and a great man, and it made him a marvelous husband.

But his college teachers did not want him to be a college teacher. 'I am in a rut', said James. 'I teach the same thing over and over again year after year. I have too little time to really study, or really contribute anything to the world. It is a question to me whether my teaching means anything at all to 90 per cent of my students. You mustn't teach, for you can do greater things'.

...so Boris said to Morton Prince, who had inherited a million dollars, 'Look here, Prince, let's have a Journal of Abnormal Psychology'. Prince said, 'If you think it's a good idea, let's do it'.







[Boris, Helena, Sarah in Los Angeles, ca.  
1920]

# Boris Sidis's Harvard Medical School Diploma

HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
MEDICAL SCHOOL

Boston, Mass., 29 April 1952

THIS CERTIFIES

*That* Boris Sidis  
A.B. (Harvard Univ.) 1894; A.M. (ibid.) 1895; Ph.D. (ibid.) 1897  
*received the degree of M.D. from this School on*

26 February 1908

*George Parker Berry*

George Parker Berry, M.D. *Dean*



He matriculated in the Harvard Medical School on

1 February 1908.

# Boris Sidis's Harvard Undergraduate Transcript

## HARVARD COLLEGE OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Date: April 16, 1952

Record of BOBIS SIDIS  
Received the degree of A.B. in 1894.

He was admitted in 1892 as a special student.

| SUBJECT                 | Course | Half-Course | SUBJECT | Course | Half-Course |
|-------------------------|--------|-------------|---------|--------|-------------|
| 1892-93 Special Student |        |             |         |        |             |
| English 12              | A      |             |         |        |             |
| Philosophy 3            | A      |             |         |        |             |
| Philosophy 15           | A      |             |         |        |             |
| Political Economy 2     | E      |             |         |        |             |
| 1893-94 Senior          |        |             |         |        |             |
| Philosophy 2            | A-     |             |         |        |             |
| Philosophy 4            | A      |             |         |        |             |
| Philosophy 11           | A-     |             |         |        |             |
| Political Economy 3     | A-     |             |         |        |             |



Click to open, again to read.

Dr. J. Madison Taylor  
1504 Pine St.  
Philadelphia, PA

[Saturday] June 8, 1918

This is to certify that Dr. Boris Sidis of Portsmouth, NH, has been under my personal observation for some years, and he has devoted himself so

strenuously to his scientific and professional work as to seriously impair his health, and in my opinion it is imperative that he spend several months, the better part of a year, in recuperation.

He was compelled to undergo two extensive operations on the same occasion, and afterward suffered a secondary infection which [has frustrated ?] him until the present time. My personal advice is that he give up all responsibilities and special labors and carry out a long cherished plan to travel in the orient and pursue some special scientific observations and researches.

Also I find it imperative that his son William James Sidis accompany his father who must have a constant companion and assistant, and at times caretaker.

Dr. Sidis's immediate objective is Tien Tsien [Tianjin] where he will have special opportunities afforded him by his particular friend Prof. Richard Evans of International Law at Tien Tsein University.

Dr. J[ohn]. Madison Taylor

Biographical Sketches (1923)  
He did not encourage anything in the way of a 'following' of pupils to disseminate his findings and his doctrines. Nor was he in frequent contact with fellow-workers. Add an uncompromising intellectual honesty that impelled him to a blunt outrightness with regard to whatever seemed to him erroneous or mischievous, and it is not difficult to understand why during his lifetime Boris Sidis did not enjoy the full measure of recognition which he merited, and which it would seem certain will

eventually be accorded to him.  
Harold Addington Bruce

Masters of the Mind (1910)  
Born in a city of southern Russia, he became involved, while still a very young man, in the Russian revolutionary movement; was arrested, clapped into a fortress, and narrowly escaped a sentence to Siberia. After his release the police made matters so uncomfortable for him that he fled the country, and, after a brief sojourn in Germany, came to New York, knowing not a word of English, friendless, and almost penniless.

This was in 1888. Less than a decade later—the young Russian having managed to put himself through Harvard, where he came under the stimulating influence of Professor William James, and was led to specialize in psychology—he astonished the veterans in that science by the publication of a



striking book on The Psychology of Suggestion. In the meantime he had been appointed Associate in Psychopathology in the then recently established Pathological Institute of the New York State Hospitals. Here he remained several years, developing his method of hypnoidization and effecting many impressive cures.

Harold Addington Bruce

BORIS SIDIS in H. A. Bruce's The Riddle of Personality (1915) A bitter controversy developed, and in the end he and his associates were swept from office with their work unfinished, and the institute was reorganized on a practical basis. For a time the little band of investigators found refuge in a private laboratory, but ere long lack of funds caused their dispersal, Dr. Sidis removing to Brookline, Mass., where he continued his scientific work, to no small extent centering his

efforts on elaborating the law of dissociation.

Letter to Prof. George Herbert Palmer from Dr. Sarah Sidis (1923) In fact we have some partially completed manuscripts on the subjects which we hope sometime to publish.

Letter from Dr. Herbert T. Kalmus to Dr. Sarah Sidis (1950)

There is no memory of any friend that I hold more dear than that of Dr. Boris Sidis. I need not tell you how close we were and how greatly I admired his ingenuity, his ability, and especially his character and personal qualities. He was a great pioneer in his chosen field of abnormal psychiatry...Hence I was very much interested to learn from you that the University of Miami is planning with you the establishment of a department bearing the name of your illustrious husband.

## Sidis Psychotherapeutic Institute

Dr. Sidis will soon be in a position to carry on his investigations more extensively and systematically than in the past, since, through the generosity of a wealthy New England woman, Mrs. Martha Jones, he has come into possession of a beautiful estate near Portsmouth, N. H., given for the express purpose of establishing a psychopathological institute—the first of its kind in the United States. American Magazine, 1910

The treatment is essentially PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC, based on the latest methods of medical research in the domain of Psychopathology. The psychotherapeutic treatment, however, is combined with general medical treatment of the

patients along established and well accepted methods of medicine. Special care is given to the hygienic and dietetic regulation of the patient's life, and electrotheraphy and hydrotherapy, etc., are used when requisite.

By psychotherapeutic methods is meant to indicate the practical therapeutic results obtained by medical psychopathologists in clinics and laboratories. As a reply to many inquiring letters, the opportunity is taken here to state, although it ought to be needless, that Psychotherapy, based on Psychopathological research, has nothing in common with, and in its methods is, diametrically opposed to the superstitious and anti-scientific practices of lay healers and non-medical practitioners. This point cannot be too strongly emphasized. See

Sidis Psychotherapeutic Institute.



Time may show that Boris Sidis was the first psychologist to accomplish most, if not all, of the following.

- propose theories of political psychology (1895-98) identify the Laws of Suggestion (1898)

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