

## THE CHILD'S RIGHT TO RESPECT

### *Disdain — Distrust*

From earliest infancy the mind is trained to regard size as value.

"I'm big now," a child put on the table exclaims joyfully. "I'm bigger than you are," another proudly announces, comparing his size with that of a peer.

It is annoying to have to stand on tiptoe and still be unable to reach. It is hard to keep up with the grownups when one's steps are small. A glass will easily slip out of a little hand. Awkwardly, with difficulty, a child climbs on a chair, into a vehicle, up the stairs. He can't reach the door knob, look out of the window, take down or hang up anything because it is too high. In a crowd, he can't see anything, he gets in the way and is buffeted. It is uncomfortable and annoying to be small.

Respect and admiration goes to what is big, what takes up more room. Small stands for common and uninteresting. Little people — little wants, little joys, little sorrows.

Impressive — a big city, high mountains, a tall tree. We say:

"A great deed, a great man."

A small child is light, there is less of him. We must bend down, reach down to him. Even worse — he is weak.

We can lift him, toss him in the air, make him sit when he doesn't want to, force him to stop running, foil his effort.

If he doesn't listen to me, I have a reserve of power. I say: "Don't go ... , don't move ... , get out of the way ... give it back." He knows he must. How often he fruitlessly tries to resist before he understands, gives in, gives up.

Who and when, under what extraordinary conditions, will dare to push, pull, strike an adult? And how commonplace and harmless is a smack, a sharp tug at an arm, a painful squeeze of a child!

The sense of his powerlessness creates a respect for power. Anyone older and stronger, not necessarily an adult, may brutally express his displeasure, back up demand with force, exact obedience, injure with impunity.

By our own example, we teach disdain for the weaker. Bad training, a bad sign.

The world has changed. It is no longer muscle power that achieves, defends against an

enemy. No longer does that power wrest command, prosperity and security from land, forests and seas. A subjugated slave — the machine. Muscles have lost their exclusive right and their singular value. Now intellect and learning are to be respected.

A once suspect hovel, the thinker's cave has developed into the halls and laboratories of the researcher. Library buildings rise higher and higher, the shelves groan under the weight of books. The temples of proud reason have been populated. Learned man creates and commands. The hieroglyphs of figures and scores add progressively to the achievements of the masses, bear witness to the might of man. All this must be borne in mind and comprehended.

The years of tedious study grow longer and longer — more and more schools, examinations, printed words.

And the child, small, weak, who has lived but briefly, has not read, does not know....

It is a tough problem to divide the conquered areas, assign work and pay for each, husband the globe mastered by man. How many plants, and how should they be distributed to provide work to hungry hands and brains? How to impose on the human swarm discipline and order? How to guard against the ill will and fury of the individual? How to allocate the hours of life to action, rest and leisure, to root out apathy, satiety and boredom? How to weld men into disciplined communities and facilitate understanding, when to scatter and divide? Here push ahead... there brake ... here to inflame ... there to dampen the fire.

Politicians and lawgivers make tentative efforts, and time and again they blunder.

They deliberate and decide on the child, too. But who asks the child for his opinion and consent? What can a child possibly have to say?

Along with reason and learning, craftiness helps in the struggle for existence and influence. A sharp operator will have his nose on the trail and will be paid far above his worth. Without reference to fair calculation, he will achieve promptly and smoothly. Cunning is needed to know man who is no longer the altar but the pigsty of life.

And the child plods clumsily on with school book, ball and doll. He senses that without his participation something important and mighty is going on over his head, something decisive for good or ill, something that punishes, rewards or breaks.

The flower is forerunner of the fruit, the chick will become an egg-laying hen, the calf will in due time yield milk. In the meantime — care, expense and worry. Will it live, will it not fall by the wayside?

The young one causes anxiety, prolonged waiting Perhaps he will become the prop of

our old age, pay back with interest. But life is not unfamiliar 'with droughts, frosts and hailstorms, which mow down and destroy the crops.

We seek some indication of the future, we wish to foresee, make sure. This anxious looking to what might be distorts our view of what is.

The market value of the very young is small Only in the sight of God and the Law is the apple blossom worth as much as the apple, green shoots as much as a field of ripe corn.

We rear, shield, feed, educate. Without having to worry, the child gets all he needs. What would he be without us to whom he owes everything?

Everything, only and exclusively — us.

We know the roads to prosperity, give directions and advice. We develop virtues, suppress faults Guide, correct, train. The child — nothing. We — everything.

We order about and demand obedience.

Morally and legally responsible, wise and far-seeing, we are the sole judges of the child's actions, movements, thoughts and plans.

We give instructions and supervise the execution. Depending on will and understanding — our children^ our property — hands off!

(True, things have changed a little. No longer the exclusive will and authority of the family. Cautiously, gently, imperceptibly some social control has already entered.)

A beggar can do as he will with the alms he receives but a child owns nothing and must account for every object received for free use.

It is forbidden to tear, break, soil. Forbidden to give a gift. Forbidden to reject in distaste. The child must accept and be satisfied. Everything in the right place and at the right time, sensibly and to good purpose.

(Perhaps that is why a child values worthless little things which in us arouse only a surprised pity: odds and ends, his sole real property and wealth — a piece of string, a box, some beads.)

In return, the child is expected to be submissive and behave. Let him beg or cheat — as long as he does not demand. Nothing is his due, we give of our own goodwill. (A painful analogy comes to mind: a rich man's mistress.)

The child's poverty and the favor of material dependence have depraved the attitude of adults to children.

We look down upon the child because he is ignorant, unsuspecting and simple, does not

know, guess, sense.

He knows nothing of the difficulties and complications of adult life, nothing of the origins of our excitements, disappointments and fatigues, what deprives us of peace of mind and turns us bitter. He knows nothing of adult struggles and failures. Artless, he can be easily lulled into complacency, deceived and kept in the dark.

The child believes life to be straightforward and easy. There are daddy and mummy — one earns money, the other goes shopping. He knows nothing of failure to discharge obligations or the methods of man's struggle for his own — and more.

The child, having no material worries, no strong temptations or shocks, knows little and cannot judge. We can guess what he is driving at in an instant. We can see through him at a glance. Without having to investigate, we detect his simple subterfuges.

But perhaps we deceive ourselves that the child is no more than we want him to be? Perhaps he holds out on us, suffers in secret?

We level, mountains, fell trees, kill animals. Ever new settlements where previously there were wilderness and swamps. Progressively we establish man in new territories. The world has been subdued. Metal and animal are servants. We have subjugated the colored races, roughly arranged the various relationships between peoples, tamed the masses. A just order in the world is in the future — distrust and evil are still predominant.

Childish doubts and reservations seem to be of little importance.

The shining egalitarianism of a child knows nothing of hierarchy. Only momentarily does he feel pain at a laborer's sweat, the hunger pangs of a playmate, the fate of an ill-treated horse and a slaughtered hen. A dog and a bird are close to his heart, a butterfly and a flower his equals, he finds a brother in a pebble and a little shell. Finding no kinship with the haughtiness of the upstart, he is unaware that only man has a soul.

We do not treat a child seriously because he has a long life ahead.

We are conscious of the effort of our own steps, the burden of self-interest, the limitations of perceptions and sensations. A child runs and jumps, sees without desiring, is puzzled, asks questions. Lightly he sheds tears and generously he enjoys himself.

A fine day in the fall, when the sun has lost power, has its own kind of charm, as has a day in spring when everything is green. Take it as it comes, so little is needed to make us happy — effort is unnecessary. Hastily, carelessly, we dismiss a child. We ignore

the multiplicity of his life and the joy which we can so easily bring him.

Valuable quarter-hours and years are lost. He has plenty of time. He can wait.

A child is not a soldier, he does not defend his homeland, though he suffers together with it.

Why trouble to make him think well of you when he has no vote, does not threaten, demand, argue.

Weak, small, poor, dependent — a citizen in embryo.

Indulgence, roughness, brutality — and always disdain.

A brat, a kid. A man in the future, but not today. Will be.

\*\*\*

To be watched, never out of sight. Watched, never left alone. Watched at every step.

He may fall, bump himself, cut, dirty, spill, tear, break, mislay, lose, set fire, let burglars in. He will harm himself, us; cripple himself, us, a friend.

Ours to maintain a vigil, deny independence. Ours to control and criticize.

The child does not know how much and what he should eat, how much and when to drink. He does not know what will overtire. So supervise his diet, his sleep, his rest.

For how long? As of when? Always. Distrust changes with age, but does not diminish, even tends to increase.

He cannot distinguish the important from the unimportant. Order and systematic work are alien to him. Absent-minded, he will forget, ignore, neglect. He does not know about future responsibilities.

We must instruct, guide, break in, slow down, suppress, straighten out, warn, prevent, impose and combat.

Combat whim, fancy, and obstinacy.

We aim to impose a program of caution, circumspection, fears and anxieties, premonitions of evil, and sinister anticipations.

By experience, we know how many dangers lie in wait — ambushes, traps, unfortunate adventures and accidents.

We know that the utmost caution is no complete safeguard and that makes us the more suspicious. We want to have a clear conscience, nothing with which to reproach ourselves in the event of a misfortune.

He revels in the hazard of mischief making, is peculiarly inclined to trouble. Gladly listens to evil whisperings, follows the worst examples.

Easily spoiled, corrected with difficulty.

We want to benefit him, to help. We offer all our experience without reservation, sufficient — ready. We know what is harmful to children, we remember what harmed us. Let him avoid, prevent, escape.

"Remember, realize, understand."

"You will find out, see for yourself."

He does not listen. As though deliberately, out of spite. One must see that he has obeyed, has done his work. Alone, he openly chooses trouble, a worse and riskier road.

How can one tolerate thoughtless mischief, senseless escapades, irresponsible outbursts.

Deceptively incalculable is primitive man. Apparently subservient, innocent — in fact, cunning, treacherous.

He can slip out of control, lull vigilance, deceive.

An excuse, a twist is always at the tip of his tongue. He conceals or tells an outright lie.

Uncertainty undermines confidence.

Disdain and distrust, suspicions and accusations.

A painful analogy: a bully, a drunk, a rebel, a madman. How can one live under the same roof with him?

### ***Resentment***

Nothing really matters. We love children In spite of everything, they are our delight, consolation and hope, our joy and relaxation, our sunshine. We do not terrify, burden, harry, and they feel free and happy. ...

Why, all the same, that sense of a heavy load an obstruction, an awkward appendage? From where the feeling of resentment toward the beloved child?

Even before he greeted the inhospitable world confusion and limitations crept into the domestic scene Into the past, irrevocably, recede the brief months of long-awaited, sanctioned joy.

The long period of oppressive indisposition culminates in incapacity and pain, restless nights and extra expense. Disturbed peace, disorder, unbalanced budget.

To the acid odor of diapers and the piercing yell of the newborn is added the clanking of the chain of nuptial slavery.

The burden of being unable to communicate, the necessity to imagine, to guess. We wait, perhaps even with much patience.

When at long last he talks and walks, gets in the way, touches everything, explores every corner, he is no less obstructive and upsetting. The little sloven — the despot.

He causes damage, opposes our reasonable will. He demands and understands only what he finds convenient to understand.

Trifles are not to be dismissed lightly. Our grudge against children is cumulative: their waking with the lark, the crumpled newspaper, a spot on a dress and on the wallpaper, the wet carpet, the broken eyeglasses and treasured flowerpot, the spilled milk and perfume, and the doctor's fee.

He falls asleep just when we would like him to be awake, messes his food, cries with fear when we thought we would make him laugh. And delicate. The slightest omission involves the danger of disease, foreshadows fresh difficulties.

If one forgives, the other accuses and nags the more. An opinion of the child is formed by the father, the nurse, the maid, the woman next door, and not just by the mother. Against the mother's wish or secretly each may punish.

The little schemer is often the cause of friction and misunderstandings between adults. There is always somebody resentful and hurt. For the indulgence of one, the child is held responsible by another. Frequently seeming kindness amounts to stupid negligence and the responsibility for the misdemeanors of others falls upon the child.

(Boys and girls do not like to be called children. Sharing that word with the youngest burdens them with responsibility for the past, imposes on them the bad reputation of the little ones, while equally numerous charges continue to be leveled against their own age group.)

How rarely this satisfies our aspirations, how often his growth is accompanied by a feeling of disappointment.

"He ought to by now...."

The child should reciprocate our goodwill by trying his best. He should understand, concede and control his urges; and, above all, he should feel grateful

The duties imposed and the demands laid down increase with the years, for the most part differently from what we should wish and less than we expected. Part of the time, we hand over the requirements and authority to the school. Vigilance is doubled; responsibility increased; divergent jurisdictions come into collision. Shortcomings make their appearance.

The parents will forgive whole-heartedly their indulgence stemming from a clear sense of guilt at having given life — of a wrong done in the case of an infirm child. Occasionally, a mother of a supposedly ill child seeks to defend herself against the accusations of others and against her own doubts.

As a rule, the mother's opinion is not trusted. It is judged to be biased and incompetent. Better to rely on the opinions of teachers, experts, experienced people as to a particular child's need for special kindness.

A tutor in a private home rarely finds conditions conducive to coexistence with the children.

Fettered by a distrustful control, he must follow a path between someone else's directives and his own outlook, between an external requirement and his own peace and convenience. While bearing responsibility for the child, he bears also the consequences of the dubious decisions of the legitimate guardians — his employers.

Driven to conceal and to avoid difficulties, he may easily become corrupted by hypocrisy, embittered and apathetic.

As the years of work go by, the gap between adult demands and the child's desires becomes progressively wider, familiarity with repulsive means of subjugation becomes ever greater.

Dissatisfaction is felt with the ungrateful job: whom God wants to punish he makes a teacher.

We grow weary of the vital, noisy, interesting life full of puzzles. We tire of questions and surprises, of discoveries, of attempts which frequently end in failure.

Rarely are we advisers and comforters, more often stern judges. Summary judgment and punishment produce only one result — less frequent but more violent and spiteful outbursts of boredom and rebellion. Consequently there is closer supervision since resistance must be broken, and safeguards provided against any contingency.

This is the teacher's downfall.

He disdains, distrusts, suspects, spies, catches, scolds, charges and punishes, seeking the line of least resistance to prevention. More and more prohibitions and more



intolerant compulsion. He fails to understand the effort required of a child in neatly filling a page or in simply living for an hour, and declares aridly — hopeless.

Infrequent is the blue sky of pardons, frequent the purple of anger and indignation.

How much more understanding is needed in educational work with a group, how much easier it is to shift into habits of accusation and grudge bearing.

One child alone, small and weak, is wearing. His isolated infractions enrage. How much more annoying, obtrusive, exacting and incalculable is a crowd.

Understand at last — not children but a crowd. A bunch, a gang, a mob — not children.

You have grown accustomed to the notion that you are strong; suddenly you feel small and weak. The mob, the giant, with its vast collective weight and sum total of experience, now pools its forces in combined resistance, on another occasion splits into dozens of pairs of legs and arms — heads, each concealing different thoughts and unspoken demands.

How difficult it is for a new teacher to take charge of a class or an institution where the children have been kept under fierce discipline, where, riotous and dispirited, they have organized themselves on the principle of criminal coercion. When they strike collectively at your will and try to break it, how powerful and menacing they are — not children but a primordial force.

How many revolutions about which the Teacher keeps quiet, ashamed to admit himself weaker than a child.

Once taught a lesson, the teacher will resort to any means to overcome and prevail. No familiarity, no passing joke, no sulky reply permitted, no shrug or gesture of resentment, no obstinate silence or angry look. He will do all to uproot, to exorcise the disdain and negativism. The ringleaders will be bribed with privileges, informers will be recruited. The teacher is no longer concerned that punishment be just so long as it is severe. He is determined to make an example so that the first spark of rebellion will be extinguished in time, so that the all-powerful crowd may not be tempted, not even in thought, to dictate demands or to run amok.

The child's weakness may evoke tenderness. Group power revolts and offends.

It is not true that kindness turns children defiant, and that the response to gentleness is lack of discipline and order.

Beware that by kindness you do not understand laxity, inefficiency and clumsy stupidity. We find among teachers not only crafty brutes and misanthropes but also

rejects from every possible kind of work, incapable of sustaining any responsible position.

Occasionally, a teacher tries to win the children's confidence at one stroke, promptly, at little cost, without effort. He wants to play the fool with them when in a good mood and not tediously organize community life. Sometimes his lordly indulgence is shot through with sudden outbursts of bad temper. He makes himself ridiculous in the children's eyes.

Occasionally, one who is ambitious believes that it is easy to reform a man by persuasion and fiery moral teaching, that it suffices to stir the emotions and coax a promise of improvement. He is an irritating bore.

Occasionally, seeming friendly teachers, allied in insincere grandiloquence, are all the more treacherous enemies and oppressors. They arouse aversion.

The response to humiliation will be disdain, to kindness — resentment and rebellion, to distrust — conspiracy.

Years of work made it increasingly obvious [to me] that children deserve respect, confidence and kindness, that good is derived from them in the cheerful atmosphere of mild sensations, merry laughter, strenuous first efforts and surprises, pure, clear, lovable joys. Such work is lively, fruitful and attractive.

There was one thing that always caused me doubt and anxiety.

How was it that occasionally a child whom I considered absolutely trustworthy failed? What lay behind a sudden explosion by the group into unruly action such as does, though rarely, occur? Perhaps adults are no better, only more self-controlled, more stable; one could more safely rely upon them.

Persistently I sought the answer, and gradually it began to dawn on me.

1. If a teacher is intent upon seeking out the traits and values which to his mind appear to be exception ally precious, if he tries to force all into one mold to set one course for all - he will be led into error. Some will pretend to adopt his tenets, others will sincerely yield to his suggestions — for a time. When the real face of the child appears, the defeat will be painful not only to the teacher but to the child as well The greater the effort in pretending or yielding to influence, the more violent will be the reaction His real character laid bare, a child has nothing more to lose An important lesson can be learned from that.

2. The teacher's criteria are one thing, the group's another. Both parties are conscious of the richness of the spirit. He waits for them to develop, they wait to see

what immediate good will come of those riches, whether he will share what he has or keep it to himself as an exclusive privilege — the stuck-up, jealous, egoist and niggard. He will not tell a story, will not play, make a drawing, help out— "he does favors," "waits to be begged." Isolated, the child makes deliberate attempts to recover the friendship of his community, which gladly accepts his conversion. He did not become spoiled suddenly. On the contrary, he has understood and mended his ways.

3. They failed collectively, the community hurt. I found an explanation in a book on taming animals and make no secret of it. A lion is not dangerous when angry but when playful and eager to let itself go a bit; and a crowd is as strong as a lion....Not only in psychology should solutions be sought but also in medical books, in sociology, ethnology, history, poetry, criminology, the prayer book and the handbook of animal training. *Ars longa*.<sup>28</sup>

4. The most illuminating, but not the final, explanation emerged. A child can become intoxicated with oxygen as an adult is with liquor. Excitement, loosening of self-control, thrills, a rush of blood to the head: the reaction — embarrassment, chagrin, a feeling of disgust and guilt. My observation is absolutely accurate — clinical. The most respectable may find that alcohol goes easily to his head.

Don't scold. This obvious childish intoxication should arouse warm feeling and respect. It should not estrange and set apart but draw closer and link.

We hide our own faults and dubious actions. Children are not supposed to criticize, to notice our bad habits, addictions and laughable peculiarities. We assume the pose of perfection. Under penalty of being deeply offended, we guard the secrets of the ruling clan, the caste of the initiated — those ordained to sublime duties. Only a child may be shamelessly degraded, put in the pillory.

We play with the children using phony cards. The weaknesses of tender years we pierce with the trumps of adult virtues. Cheats, we so shuffle the cards as to juxtapose the worst of theirs with the best and most valuable of ours.

What about the careless and frivolous among us, the gluttons, fools, idlers, knaves, brawlers, confidence-tricksters, frauds, drunks, thieves? How about our outrages and crimes - public and secret? How much dissension, treachery, envy, slander and blackmail, mutilating words, disgraceful deeds? How many family tragedies kept quiet, in which children are the sufferers, the first martyrs?

And we dare to censure and accuse!

---

<sup>28</sup> The study of an art requires time. *Vita brevis ars longa*.

And clearly, adult society has been carefully sifted and filtered. How many have been swallowed by the grave, the prison and the lunatic asylum, how much scum has gone down the gutter!

We urge respect for elders and the experienced, not for reason. Children have experienced elders among them, much closer at hand, the adolescents with their obtrusive prompting and pressure.

Felonious and reckless adults wander at large, knock about, push and harm — and infect. And children as such bear joint responsibility for them, for at times, they drive us to distraction, too. It is those few who shock the respectable public, stain with conspicuous blots the surface of childish life. They dictate the routine methods: keep a tight rein though it oppresses, be rough though it hurts, be stern even brutal.

We do not allow children to organize themselves. Disdainful, distrustful, resentful, we do not care. Yet without the participation of experts we shall never succeed, and the expert is the child.

Are we so blindly uncritical as to consider the caresses which we impose upon children as kindness? Can we not understand that hugging a child we do the clinging? Feeling helpless, we hide in his arms, seek protection and escape in the hour of pain; in the homeless desolation of not belonging, we burden him with our sufferings and yearnings.

Any caress which is not an escape to the child and plea for hope is a culpable search for and awakening in him of sensual pleasure.

"I hold you in my arms because I feel sad. Kiss and I'll give it you."

Selfishness, not kindness.

### ***The Right To Respect***

There are as it were two lives, one serious, respectable, the other indulgently tolerated, of less value We say: man of the future, worker of the future citizen of the future. Such they will be, there will be a beginning, seriously, but in the future. We kindly permit them to stick around but we find it more to our taste when they are not at hand.

No, they were and they will be. They have not caught us on the run and briefly. Children are not a casual encounter to be hurriedly passed by with a smile and a light word of greeting.

Children account for a considerable portion of mankind, of the population, of nationals, residents, citizens and constant companions. They were, they will be and they are.

Is there such a thing as a make-believe existence? No. Childhood means long and important years of a man's life.

A cruel though sincere law in Greece and Rome permitted the killing of a child. In the Middle Ages, fishermen used to catch in their nets the bodies of drowned infants. In 18th-century Paris, older children were sold to beggars, younger were given away in front of Notre Dame. Not so long ago. And to this day parents farm a child out if he is in the way.

The number of illegitimate, deserted, neglected, exploited, deprived, maltreated children increases steadily. They are protected by law, but is the protection adequate? Much has changed. Old laws require revision.

We have become rich. We no longer depend on the fruits of our own effort. We are heirs to a great fortune, shareholders, co proprietors. Cities, large buildings, factories, mines, hotels, theaters — all ours. What an abundance of goods on the market, how many ships ply to and fro with them — their suppliers thrust themselves upon the consumer, entreat us to make use of them.

Let us strike a balance and calculate how much of the grand total is due the child, determine his share, not as a favor, not as charity. Let us examine honestly how much we allocate to the child population, the underage nation, the subjugated class. What does the inheritance amount to, how should it be divided? Have we not — the unjust stewards — by any chance disinherited, expropriated?

They are cramped, impoverished, bored and grim.

We have introduced education for all, compulsory mental work. We have school registration and mobilization. We have shifted onto the shoulders of the child the burden of reconciling the differences between the interests of two simultaneous authorities.

The school demands, the parents are reluctant to give. The conflicts between the family and the school must be paid for by the child. The parents associate themselves with the not always just complaints made by the school against the child, thus thrusting on the school the duty to take care of him.

The efforts of a military conscript are also a preparation for the day when he will be called upon to go into action, and the state provides him with board and lodging, a uniform, a rifle and pay. These are his due, not charity.

The child, though subject to compulsory education has to beg from the parents and local authority

The Geneva lawgivers have confused duties with rights. The tone of the declaration is not insistence but persuasion: an appeal to goodwill, a plea for kindness.<sup>29</sup>

The school creates the rhythm of hours, days and years. The school staff is supposed to satisfy the current needs of young citizens. The child is a rational being. He appreciates the needs, difficulties and impediments in his life. Not a despotic order, stern discipline and distrustful control, but tactful understanding, faith in experience, collaboration and coexistence are the guidelines for child care.

The child is not foolish. There are no more fools among children than among adults. Draped in the judicial robes of age, how often we impose thoughtless, uncritical, impractical regulations. The wise child sometimes stops short in amazement when confronted with the aggressive, senile, offensive stupidity.

The child has a future but also a past consisting of events, memories, long hours of highly significant solitary reflections. He remembers and forgets in a manner no different from our own, appreciates and condemns, reasons logically and makes mistakes born of ignorance. Thoughtfully, he trusts and doubts.

The child is a foreigner who does not understand the language or the street plan, who is ignorant of the laws and customs. Occasionally, he likes to go sightseeing on his own; and, when up against some difficulty, he asks for information and advice. Wanted — a guide to answer questions politely.

Respect the ignorance of a child!

A cad, a cheat and a crook will take advantage of a foreigner's ignorance, answer in gibberish, deliberately mislead. A boor will grudgingly mutter something. We are constantly at odds with the children — nag, admonish, scold, punish — but we don't inform kindly.

How impoverished would be the child's knowledge if not for his peers, for eavesdropping, if he did not pick up words and scraps of conversation from adults.

Respect the labor of developing knowledge!

Respect for failure and tears!

Not only a torn stocking but a scratched knee, not only a broken tumbler but also a cut finger and a bruise, and a bump and pain.

An inkblot in a copybook is an accident, an unpleasant disaster. "When dad spills the tea, mother says: 'never mind'; but she always makes a fuss when it's me."

---

<sup>29</sup> Reference here is to the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1923.

Unaccustomed to pain, wrongs, injustice, they suffer acutely, frequently burst into tears. But even the tears of a child are treated as a joke, made to seem less important, irksome.

"Whines, cries, moans, squeaks."

(A brace of words invented by adults to be applied to children.)

Obstinate and capricious — in fact, tears of frustration and rebellion, a despairing effort of protest, a cry for help, a complaint against negligence, evidence that insensibly they restrain and coerce, a symptom of indisposition, and always of suffering.

Respect the child's belongings and budget. The child shares the painful material worries of the family, feels the pinch of shortage and compares his own poverty with the affluence of a classmate. The few pennies which mark his poverty hurt bitterly. He does not want to be a burden.

But it is difficult if one needs a new cap and book, and a movie ticket, and to replace a copybook a pencil lost or stolen. It would be nice to make a small gift to someone dear, to buy a cake, and to lend a few pennies to a friend. So many essential needs, wishes and temptations and no means to finance them!

Can we learn nothing from the fact that in courts for juvenile delinquents thefts account for a considerable percentage of the cases? Retribution for a disregard of the child's budget which no punishment will help. ,

A child's property — not useless junk but beggar's possessions and instruments of labor — hopes and souvenirs.

The worries and anxieties of today, the bitterness and disappointments of the years of youth are not illusory but significant.

He grows. Lives more vigorously — quickened breathing, livelier pulse — he builds himself up, he is bigger and bigger, and dives deeper into life. He grows night and day, sleeping and waking, gay and gloomy, when he gets into mischief and when he stands penitent before you.

There are the sunny springs of redoubled development effort and the limpid falls of standstill. Now, bone growth races ahead, the heart does not keep up. At another time, too little or too much, a different chemical reaction of the sluggish or burgeoning glands, a new anxiety, a new surprise.

Now, running about is as essential as breathing, an urge to fight and conquer. At another time the mood is to hide, daydream, spin melancholy memories.

Alternately, endeavor or need of peace, tenderness and comfort. Alternately, strong and ardent desires or depression.

Fatigue, painful indisposition, a cold, too hot, too chilly, drowsiness, hunger, thirst, excess, lack, feeling low — these are not just whim, school excuses.

Respect for the mysteries and fluctuations of the toil of growth!

Respect for the present moment, for today. How will he manage tomorrow, if we do not allow him a conscious, responsible life today.

Not to trample upon, humiliate, handle as a mere slave to tomorrow; not to repress, hurry, drive on.

Respect for every single instant, for it passes never to return, and always take it seriously; hurt, it will bleed, slain, it will haunt with harsh memories.

Let him eagerly drink in the joy of the morning and look ahead with confidence. That is just how the child wants it to be. A fable, a chat with the dog, catching a ball, an intense study of a picture, the copying of a single letter — nothing is for a child a waste of time. Everything kindly. Right is on the side of the child.

Naively, we are afraid of death, forgetful that life is a procession of dying and reborn moments. A year is no more than an attempt to understand eternity for everyday use. An instant is but the duration of a smile or a sigh. A mother is anxious to rear her child. She will not succeed. Every time it is a different woman who bids farewell to a different person and welcomes a different one upon his return.

Unintelligently we divide years into less or more mature ones. There is no such thing as present immaturity, no hierarchy of age, no higher and lower grades of pain and joy, hopes and disappointments.

When I play or talk with a child, two equally mature moments — mine and the child's — have intermingled. When I am with a crowd of children, I always manage a passing greeting and take *leave* with just one glance and smile. When I am annoyed with a child — again togetherness, only that my evil hateful instant breaks into and poisons this mature' important instant of his life.

Remuneration in the interests of tomorrow? What sort of an idea is that? We paint in excessively sombre colors. And prediction is fulfilled: the roof falls in for want of care in laying the foundations.



## ***The Child's Right To Be Himself***

How will he turn out when he's grown up? — we ask anxiously.<sup>1</sup>

We desire our children to improve on ourselves. We dream of a perfect man of the future.

We must swiftly denounce our own lie, pin down selfishness decked out in lofty phrases. Apparent self-denial is, in fact, a common swindle.

We have come to terms with ourselves, been reconciled, forgiven ourselves and set aside the duty to improve. We were badly brought up. Too late now. The defects and bad habits have too strong a hold. We neither let the children criticize us nor do we watch our own behavior.

Absolved, we have capitulated, shifting the burden of all that onto the children.

A teacher eagerly adopts the adult prerogative. To watch the children, not himself, to register the children's faults, not his own.

A child's fault will be whatever threatens our peace, ambition, comfort, that which endangers and angers, which runs counter to our ways, that which impinges on our time and thought. We do not accept that there can be fault without bad intention.

The child does not know, has not heard well, has misunderstood, misheard, made a mistake, failed, cannot—everything is his fault. A child is unfortunate, does not feel well — every difficult hour comes of his guilt and ill will.

Not fast enough or too fast; any operation performed imperfectly we see as the result of negligence, laziness absent-mindedness, unwillingness.

The failure to comply with a mischievous unpracticable demand - guilty. A clumsy, malicious suspicion - guilty too. Our suspicions are confirmed. Even the child's efforts to mend his ways show him to be guilty:

"See, when you try, you can do it.

We always find something as grounds for reproach-greedily we always demand more. '

Do we tactfully meet the child halfway, do we avoid unnecessary grievances, facilitate mutual relations? Are we not rather stubborn, capricious, offensive and annoying?

A child attracts our attention whenever he disturbs and makes trouble. Only these are the moments we notice and remember. We do not notice when he is quiet, serious and concentrating. We ignore those sacred moments of communication with himself, the world and God. A child obliged to hide his yearnings and impulses against derision and

caustic remarks will conceal his desire to come to terms, will not disclose his willingness to meet us halfway.

He dutifully hides his penetrating glances, surprises, anxieties, grievances, also his anger and rebelliousness. We want him to jump and clap hands, so he shows us the smiling face of the fool.

Loud are the voices of bad actions and bad children, they drown out the whispers of the good — yet there are a thousand times more good than bad. The good is strong and unflinching. It is easier to spoil than to correct.

We exert our attention and ingenuity in prying into mischief, searching, and sniffing — eager to catch red-handed, looking for portents of evil, building damaging suspicions.

(Do we ever keep an eye on old men so that they do not play soccer? What a horror is the incessant sniffing for masturbation among children.)

One banged the door, one did not make his bed properly, one mislaid his overcoat, one made a blot on his copybook. If we do not actually scold, we must at least grumble instead of rejoicing that it is only one.

We hear complaints and quarrels. True, but how infinitely more there is of forgiveness, forbearance, assistance, solicitude, goodwill, instruction, beneficial influences, deep and fine. Even the bullies and the spiteful cause not tears only but also smiles.

We foolishly desire that no one should ever be out of place, that not one of the ten thousand seconds of the school hour (count them) should raise difficulties.

Why does one teacher see a child as bad and another as good? We demand uniformity of virtues and moments, and in addition that they all suit our tastes and patterns.

Can a case of similar tyranny be found in history? A generation of Neros has proliferated.

Alongside good health stands illness, alongside virtues and values there exist faults and vices.

Alongside a few children to whom joy and festivity are the norm, for whom life is a fable and an inspiring legend, confident and kindly, stand the mass of children to whom, from the earliest days, the world speaks in terms of crude, harsh, sinister truths. They are corrupted by the contemptuous degradation of vulgarity and poverty, or spoiled by the sensual, dallying heedlessness of indulgence and sophistication.

Dirty, distrustful, disappointed with mankind — not so bad.

Not only the home, but the hallway, the courtyard and the street provide models for a child. He talks in the language of his surroundings, expresses views, imitates gestures, follows examples. There is no such thing as a pure child — everyone is contaminated to a lesser or greater extent.

But how quickly he shakes loose and cleanses himself! No cure is necessary, just a good wash. The child helps eagerly, happy to have rediscovered himself. He has been longing for a bath and now he smiles at you and to himself.

These artless triumphs, as it were taken from a tale about poor orphans, are celebrated by every teacher. Such cases deceive uncritical moralists into believing that it all comes easily. A bungler delights in them, an ambitious man attributes the virtues to himself. Some strive to obtain similar results in every case by increasing the dose of persuasion, others by increasing pressure.

Together with the merely grimy, we come across children who are crippled, injured. There are wounds that leave no scars, healing by themselves under a clean dressing. The healing of lacerated wounds takes a little longer; they leave painful scars and care must be taken to avoid reopening. Skin eruptions and ulcers call for greater attention and patience.

Simple folk say: "The healing body." One is tempted to add: "And soul."

How many slight abrasions, how much slight contagion in every school and institution for children, how many temptations and intrusive whispers, and how transient and innocent the effect. We need not be afraid of dangerous epidemics if the atmosphere of the institution is sweet, its environment full of light and fresh air.

How wisely, gradually, and wonderfully the process of recovery proceeds. How many honorable secrets are hidden in the blood, the secretions and tissues! How every function disturbed and organ damaged strives to revert to normal and get on with its job! How many marvels in the growth of plant and man, in the heart, brain, respiration! The slightest emotion or effort, and at once the heart beats faster, the pulse throbs.

The same applies to the power and endurance of the child's spirit. There is such a thing as moral equilibrium and a keen conscience. It is not true that children are particularly susceptible to contagion.

Correctly, though unfortunately belatedly, pedology found its way into the programs of schools. Without understanding the harmony of the body, it is impossible to acquire respect for the mysteries of healing.

An inexperienced diagnosis dumps together all kinds and conditions of children. The agile, ambitious, critical, disturbing, healthy and clean are grouped with the resentful, sulky,

and distrustful. The debased, enticed with evil, frivolous and those meekly following bad examples are equated with those who inherited a load of evil.

(We, adults, have succeeded not only in rendering harmless the stepsons of fate but in skillfully taking advantage of the work of the disinherited.)

Healthy children compelled to live side by side with such suffer doubly. They are harmed and also become entangled in offenses.

As for us, do we not accuse one and all frivolously, impose collective responsibility?

"That's what they are like, all they can do".

This is probably the worst of the wrongs we commit.

The offspring of drunkenness, rape and madness. The offenses are an echo of imperative voices not from without but from within. A dark moment when he realized that he is not as others are, that nothing can be done about it, that being disabled he will suffer ostracism and baiting. The first decisions are to fight the force dictating evil. What others have received free, so easily, what is commonplace and insignificant to the rest, he receives only as the fruit of sweat and blood. He seeks help. If he comes to trust he will approach, plead, demand: "Save me." He has divined the secret, wants to remake himself, once and for all, right away, in a single effort.

Instead of resolutely slowing down the incautious impetus, putting off the decision to remake himself we clumsily encourage and urge on. He is anxious to set himself free, we lay a trap for him. He tries to break out, we deceitfully prepare an ambush. When he desires to be open and frank, we only teach to conceal. He offers us one long day without a blemish, we complain of a single instant of error. Should one do so?

He used to wet the bed day after day, now not so often. It was better, then deteriorated again — never mind. Longer periods between the fits of an epileptic. He does not cough so much and the temperature of this TB case is down. No improvement yet, but no deterioration. This is recorded by the doctor, justifying the treatment. No cheating or constraint here.

Desperate, mutinous, contemptuous of sycophants, of the virtuous mob of apple polishers, a group of children confront the teacher. They have retained one virtue, perhaps the last — aversion to hypocrisy. That one we seek to cast down and trample upon. We commit a bloody crime. By hunger and torture, we make powerless and suppress brutally, not the mutiny but its open manifestation. Foolishly we fan to a white heat the malignancy of insidiousness and hypocrisy.

They do not renounce their plan of revenge, but put it off, wait for an opportune

moment. If they believe in the good, they will bury their yearning for it with the profoundest secrecy.

"Why did you let me be born, did I ask for such a dog's life?"

I am reaching for the most secret ways, the most difficult enlightenment. Patience and sympathetic understanding will suffice to deal with infractions and offenses, the culpable need love. Their angry rebellion is just. Learn to resent easy virtue and stand beside the lone, cursed transgression. When, if not now, will he be offered the flower of a smile?

In reformatories, inquisition still holds sway, medieval penal torture, united inveterate hatred, the vengefulness of contempt. Can't you see that the best children feel for the worst. Where lies their guilt?

\*\*\*

Not so long ago, the humble physician used to administer to patients sweet tonics and bitter mixtures, constrain the fevered, let blood, starve in the gloomy anterooms to the graveyard. He was servile to the mighty, heartless to the poor.

Finally he began to demand and was granted.<sup>30</sup>

The physician has won space and sun for children, like — to our shame — a general he offers the child movement, adventure, delight in rendering service to a friend, a possibility for a decision to lead a decent life, chatting by the campfire under a starlit sky.

What is the role of our educators, what is their work?

They are supervisors of walls and furniture, of quiet in the playground, of clean ears and floors. They are cowhands watching that the cattle do no harm, that they do not disturb adults at their occupations and pleasures. They act as custodians of worn-out pants and boots and as stingy dispensers of cereal. They are guardians of adult privilege and careless executors of their inexpert caprices.

An apple cart of fears and warnings, as peddler's stall with second-hand moral ware, a bar of denatured knowledge which baffles, confuses and lulls instead of awakening, invigorating and gratifying. Dealers in cheap virtue, it is our business to thrust upon children worship and humiliations, and evoke in adults tender emotions, flatter their cherished feelings. For a pittance, we are to build a secure future, cheat, and conceal the facts that children are numbers, willpower, might and law.

---

<sup>30</sup> In this section Korczak appears to refer to himself and to pediatrics in general. (Ed.)

The doctor has saved the child from the grips of death, the teacher's assignment is to let him live, win for him the right to be a child.

Researchers have asserted that an adult is guided by motives, a child by urges; an adult is logical, a child reckless in its illusory imagination; an adult has character, a definite moral make-up, a child is enmeshed in chaos of instincts and desires. They examine the child not as a different psychological structure but as a weaker and poorer one. All adults, of course, are saintly professors.

And the adult mess, the backwater of outlooks and convictions, the herd psychology, the prejudices and habits, the frivolity of fathers and mothers, the whole shooting match of irresponsible adult life. Negligence, slothfulness, dull obstinacy, thoughtlessness, adult absurdities, follies and drinking bouts. And the seriousness, sensibility and self-composure of children, their dependable undertakings, experience within their own sphere, a capital of equitable judgments and appraisals, tactful reticence in demands, subtle feelings, infallible sense of right.

Does everybody win when playing chess with a child?

Let us demand respect for the clear eyes, smooth foreheads, youthful effort and confidence. Why should dulled eyes, a furrowed brow, untidy gray hair, or bent resignation command greater respect?

There is sun in the east and in the west. There is morning and evening prayer alike. Every inhalation has its exhalation and every systole its diastole.

A soldier when he goes out to fight, and when he returns battle stained.

A new generation is growing up, a new wave is gathering. They appear with their vices and virtues. Give them conditions for better development. We shall not win a suit against a casket containing diseased heredity; we cannot tell a cornflower to be grain.

We are no performers of miracles — we do not want to be quacks. We renounce the deceptive longing for perfect children.

We demand: do away with hunger, cold, dampness, stench, overcrowding, overpopulation.

It is you who beget the sick and the crippled, you who create the conditions for rebellion and contagion. Yours is the levity, the frivolousness, the insensibility, and the disorder.

Listen. Contemporary life is shaped by a powerful brute, *homo rapax*. He dictates the mode of living. His concessions to the weak are a lie, his respect for the aged, for the emancipation of women, for kindness to children - falsehoods, Aimlessly wanders the

homeless sentiment - a Cinderella. And it is precisely the children who are the princes of feeling, the poets and thinkers. Respect, if not humility, before the white, translucent, immaculate, holy childhood.