

July 18, 1950

Miss Joan Younger, Associate Editor

The Ladies' Home Journal

Independence Square

Philadelphia, Pa.

Dear Miss Younger:

After receiving your letter indicating interest in the "Sidis Story," Mr. Boss (whose assistant I am) asked me to talk with Dr. Sarah Sidis to determine possibilities of an article of interest to Ladies' Home Journal readers.

Several hours' conversation with Dr. Sidis have led me to the assured conclusion that there is an excellent story there, and one your subscribers would find valuable. From your letter I gathered your interest is primarily in the Doctors Boris Sidis and Sarah Sidis and

their son William. Dr. Sarah Sidis told me she had not discussed with you at any length her educational ideas though she mentioned you had noted Eleanor Roosevelt's brief comment on them.

As I see it, an article on the Sidis family could embrace the story of the three Sidises with emphasis on the Sidis method of education. It would be particularly timely since so much stress is currently being placed on the question of educational methods in America of which Dorothy Thompson in your land article this month observed "There is certainly something wrong."

The element of tragedy in the adult of William Sidis immediately presents a question as to the Sidis method since he was, after all, its product. His failure may, however, be partially explained by the notoriety given to him by our press as the "boy genius," to the degree. Dr. Sidis stated, that the whole family came to hate the word. Young William's mind was perfectly sound, but being by nature, and apparently training, a modest, non-limelight seeking person, he retired from anything that would call attention to himself as "different" and apart from others. As to the type of positions he held, he sought work which would assure him a

living, but would leave him free to think. That view I gathered from his mother. Dr. Sidis has several scrapbooks of press clippings which she would make available to your writer for evaluation of that angle.--I have not seen them since that was impossible while talking with her and she was understandably unwilling to permit me to take them home.

That William had an unusually high I.Q., is probably undeniable, though intelligent quotient evaluations were undeveloped at that time. Evidences of the analytical qualities of his mind appeared as early as the age of eight, when he pointed out errors in a mathematical text written by Dr. Huntington of Harvard. The youngster noted and mentioned them while reading galleys of the book (to while away the time when the adults were talking!)--and Dr. Huntington duly revised his text. When William was ten, he lectured on higher math to a Harvard faculty group, and later, after graduation from Harvard at 14, taught higher mathematics at Rice Institute for two years. His age during that period: 15-17. From there he went to Harvard Law School for two years but World War I discontinued those studies. A conscientious objector, he played no part in that conflict and his story from there on is largely unknown to me.

It was in math that William was exceptionally brilliant, but his knowledge of other subjects--languages, history, literature, the sciences--was exceedingly broad. It is Dr. Sidis' contention that fully 75 to 80 percent of normal children, if properly trained, could be equally educated. William's failure does not does not distract from the soundness of Dr. Sidis' educational method. As she points out, reasonably enough, the brain is an organ of the body as is the heart, the liver, etc. and to permit it to lie dormant and unused is folly.

William learned to read before he was two. The method: old-fashioned alphabet blocks, through which he learned not only to read but to spell as he learned to talk. When he was three, he could peck out words on a typewriter. To the child, all this was like a game, made so by his mother and father. This "training" or guidance, was also accompanied by reasoning, which is really plain common sense, all too uncommon among parents of this day or any other.

Dorothy Thompson's comment on the fears underlying the complexities of our adult population is persistent to Dr. Sidis' emphasis

on the necessity to avoid the introduction of fear into the child's mind. A child can easily be reasoned with, made to see why he should or should not do certain things, but the easiest disciplinary method is to induce fear if obedience is not immediate. Hence the punishments and the threats, which latter so often lead to rooted prejudices as well as unrecognized guilt and fear complexes.

In the education of the child William, mythology and fairy tales played a vital role. Mythology, embodying as it does figures after which stars and planets are named, led him to an interest in astronomy which in turn developed his interest in mathematics.

I find in William's childhood a comparison to that of Goethe, who also was taught early to read. Both, given the tool of a mind trained to reason and to read, really educated themselves. But in Goethe there was the saving spark of genius.

Every child's mind is inquisitive. Why not guide that curiosity early into constructive channels instead of letting it run wildly unguided until the customary age of six when

formalized training is now begun? That question, I believe, and the answer given in Dr. Sidis' methods would make an article which your parent-readers, and anyone concerned about education, would welcome.

Dr. Sidis lent me one of your husband's books, *Philistine and Genius*, written in 1910 (when William was 12). It is a superb diatribe on education and as it presents his philosophy on that subject as well as references to William, I have appended a few excerpts for you since the book is out of print.

Now, as to the story of the Doctors Boris and Sarah Sidis. The tale of each is an amazing unfolding of triumph of obstacles. The story of those two could easily make a separate article, but I believe my original suggestion of an overall separate article is possible.

Before my meeting with Dr. Sidis, she had dictated to a secretary a rather rambling account of both their early lives--as you will see, but a beginning of their story. In the interest of getting this off to you without further delay, I have copied it as dictated, a process which serves the double purpose of

saving me the time of re-writing which Dr. Sidis recognizes it needs, and of giving you an indication of Dr. Sidis herself. She is quite a youthful person for all of her 75 years--mentally and physically active, as you will observe if you meet her this summer as she plans.

Lengthy as this attempted summary is, I find I have but skimmed the surface of Dr. Sidis' methods. If this presentation rekindles your interest to doing a piece yourself, or sending another staff writer, I am certain your efforts will be fruitful.

Please return to us the typed material on Boris and Sarah Sidis and let us know whether you plan the article.

Sincerely yours,

Nedra McNamara

Assistant to Malcolm Ross

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Sidis Story

Excerpts from

PHILISTINE AND GENIUS

By Boris Sidis, M.A., Ph. D., M.D.

(Published ca. 1910)

The love of knowledge, the love of truth for its own sake, is entirely neglected in our modern scheme of education.

In the education of the young generation the purpose is to bring up the child as a good man, as a liberal-minded citizen, devoted soul and body to the interests of social welfare. This purpose in the education of the young citizen is of the utmost importance in every society, but it is a vital need in a democratic society. We do not want narrow-minded patriots devoted to party-factions, nor bigoted sectarians, nor greedy entrepreneurs fastening in trusts, like so many barnacles, on the body-politic. We do not want ringleaders and mobs, unscrupulous bosses and easily led voters. What we need is men having at heart the welfare of their fellow-men.

The purpose of education provided by the nation for its young generation is the rearing of healthy, talented, broad-minded citizens. We need, above all, good citizens, active and intelligent, with a knowledge of life and with a delicate sense of discrimination and detection of evil in all its protean forms; we need strong-minded citizens with grit and courage to resist oppression and root out evil wherever it is found. A strong sense of recognition of evil should be the social sense of every well-educated citizen as a safeguard of social and national life. The principle of evil under all its guises is at the basis of the true education of man.

Is it not strange that this vital principle of education, the recognition of evil,--a fundamental principle with the great thinkers of humanity, -- should remain so sadly neglected by our educators and public instructors? Our educators are owl-wise, our teachers are pedants and all their ambition is the turning out of smooth, well-polished philistines. It is a sad case of the blind leading the blind.

Awaken in early childhood the critical spirit of man; awaken, early in the child's life, love of knowledge, love of truth, of art and literature for their

own sake, and you arouse man's genius. We have average mediocre students, because we have mediocre teachers, department-store superintendents, clerkly principals and deans with bookkeeper's souls, because our schools and colleges deliberately aim at mediocrity.

"Ribot in describing the degenerated Byzantine Greeks tells us that their leaders were mediocrities and their great men commonplace personalities. Is the American nation drifting in the same direction? It was the system of cultivation of independent thought that awakened the Greek mind to its highest achievements in arts, science and philosophy; it was the deadly Byzantine bureaucratic red tape with its cut-and-dried theological discipline that dried up the sources of Greek genius. We are in danger of building up a Byzantine empire with large institutions and big corporations, but with small minds and dwarfed individualities. Like the Byzantines we begin to value administration above individuality and official, red-tape ceremonialism above originality.

We wish even to turn our schools into practical school-shops. We shall in time become a nation of well-trained clerks and clever artisans. The time is at hand when

we shall be justified in writing over the gates of our school-shops "mediocrity made here!"

I have spoken of the fundamental law of early education. The question is "how early?" There are, of course, children who are backwards in their development. This backwardness may either be congenital or may be due to some overlooked pathological condition that may be easily remedied by proper treatment. In the large majority of children, however, the beginning of education is between the second and third year. It is at that time that the child begins to form his interests. It is at that critical period that we have to seize the opportunity to guide the child's formative energies in the right channels. To delay is a mistake and a wrong to the child. We can at that early period awaken a love of knowledge which will persist through life. The child will as eagerly play in the game of knowledge as he now spends the most of his energies in meaningless games and objectless silly sports.

We claim we are afraid to force the child's mind. We claim we are afraid to strain his brain prematurely. This is an error. In directing the course of the use of the child's energies we do not force the

child. If you do not direct the energies in the right course, the child will waste them in the wrong direction. The same amount of mental energy used in those silly games, which we think are specially adapted for the childish mind, can be directed with lasting benefit, to the development of his interests in intellectual activity and love of knowledge. The child will learn to play at the game of knowledge-acquisition with the same ease, grace and interest as he is showing now in his nursery-games and physical exercises.

If, however, you do not neglect the child between the second and the third year, and see to it that the brain should not be starved, should have its proper function, like the rest of the bodily organs, by developing an interest in intellectual activity and love of knowledge, no forcing of the child to study is afterwards requisite. The child will go on by himself,--he will derive intense enjoyment from his intellectual activity, as he does from his games and physical exercise. The child will be stronger, healthier, sturdier than the present average child, with its purely animal activities and total neglect of brain-function. His physical and mental development will go apace. He will not be a

barbarian with animal proclivities and a strong distaste for knowledge and mental enjoyment, but he will be a strong, healthy, thinking man.

Besides, many a mental trouble will be prevented in adult-life. The child will acquire knowledge with the same ease as he learns to ride the bicycle or play ball. By the tenth year, without almost any effort, the child will acquire the knowledge which at present the best college-graduate obtains with infinite labor and pain. That this can be accomplished I can say with authority; I know it as a fact from my own experience with child life.

From an economical standpoint alone, think of the saving it would ensure for society. Consider the fact that our children spend nearly eight years in the common school, studying spelling and arithmetic, and do not know them when they graduate! Think of the eight years of waste of school buildings and salaries for the teaching force. However, our real object is not economy, but the development of a strong, healthy, great race of genius.

As fathers and mothers it may interest you to learn of one of those boys who were brought up in the love and

enjoyment of knowledge for its own sake. At the age of twelve, when other children of his age are hardly able to read and spell, and drag a miserable mental existence at the apron strings of some antiquated school-dame, the boy is intensely enjoying courses in the highest branches of mathematics and astronomy at one of our foremost universities. The Iliad and the Odyssey are known to him by heart, and he is deeply interested in the advanced work of Classical Philology. He is able to read Herodotus, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Lucian and other Greek writers with the same zest and ease as our schoolboy reads Robinson Crusoe or the productions of Cooper and Henty. The boy has a fair understanding of Comparative Philology and Mythology. He is well versed in Logic, Ancient History, American History and has a general insight into our politics and into the groundwork of our Constitution. At the same time he is of an extremely happy disposition, brimming over with humor and fun. His physical condition is splendid, his cheeks glow with health. Many a girl would envy his complexion. Being above five feet four he towers above the average boy of his age. His physical constitution, weight, form of hardihood organs, far surpasses that of the ordinary

schoolboy. He looks like a boy of sixteen. He is healthy, strong and sturdy.

[Leon's insert from "Philistine & Genius":
"What indeed is the worth of an education that does not create even as much as an ordinary respect for learning and love of truth, and that prizes knowledge in terms of hard cash? What is the educational worth of a college or of a university which suppresses its most gifted students by putting them under the ban of disorderly behavior, because of not conforming to commonplace mannerisms? What is the educational value of a university which is but a modern edition of a gladiatorial school with a smattering of the humanities? What is the educational value of an institution of learning that expels its best students because they "attract more attention than their professors"? What is the intellectual level of a college that expels from its courses the ablest of its students for some slight infringement, and that an involuntary one, under the pretext that it is done for the sake of class discipline, "for the general good of the class"? What travesty on education is a system that suppresses genius in the interest of mediocrity? What is the cultural, the humanistic value of an education that puts a prize on mediocrity?"

We do not appreciate the genius harbored in the average child, and we let it lie fallow. We are mentally poor, not because we lack riches, but because we do not know how to use the wealth of mines, the hidden treasures, the now inaccessible mental powers which we possess.

In speaking of our mental capacities, Francis Galton, I think, says that we are in relation to the ancient Greeks what the bushmen and Hottentots are in relation to us. Galton and many other learned men regard the modern European races as inferior to the Hellenic race. They are wrong, and I know from experience that they are wrong. It rests in our hands either to remain inferior barbarians or to rival and even surpass in brilliance the genius of the ancient Hellenes. We can develop into a great race by the proper education of man's genius.

Sidis Story

Boris Sidis - 1

(As told to secretary by Dr. Sarah Sidis)

As a boy he was called "little father" by his friends. He was a man always ahead of his times. He introduced the idea of going into the fields of Russia to teach the peasants on Sunday afternoons to a group of his teen-age friends. He lived believing that all people are entitled to an education.

Boris was born into an upper middle class family in Berdich, the state [near the city of] of Kiev in the Ukraine or Little Russia. At the age of eight he knew several of the Semitic languages and was well read in history which was one of his lifelong favorites. He composed poems, while still a youngster, that were put to music and sung by the townspeople. His family line can be traced eight hundred years. His parents died in the first World War. He had two brothers and two sisters. One sister is a medical doctor, as is an older brother. The younger brother was chief engineer at the Nepa Plant in Russia in 1928-1929 when Dr. Sarah Sidis went to Russia on a tour of Europe as an American representative of the League of Women Voters. The remaining sister is a wife of a lawyer. The home life of Boris was pleasant. His father was a moderately well to do merchant; he had a governess up until

he was eight or so. There were few servants in his father's house, however.

Boris had always planned on attending the University of Moscow and when he was in his middle teens he thought he would be able to go to Keshnoff, an academy which comparable to preparatory schools in this country and included junior college. Although he was under siege he was allowed to enter at the same time as his group of friends who were mostly a year or so older than he. All in all there were about a dozen students in their group and all managed to board at the same house.

On Sunday afternoons they continued their home town practice of going out into the surrounding countryside and teaching the peasants. The Czarist police began watching the boys when their unusual behavior of teaching peasants became known and after about a month the police appeared at their boarding house. The landlady, sympathetic to Boris' dream of education for all the Russian people, heard of the police's impeding search and quickly burned all their teaching materials that she found in Boris' room. The twelve were arrested. Two were hanged as an object lesson before the others, and the rest were sent to Siberia. As walking in the snow barefooted

and chained together for eight-hour periods was common practice, only six survived the journey.

Boris was confined to solitary confinement. This period when he was forced to be alone in terrible discomfort for days on end was often attributed by Boris himself as one of his greatest creative periods. His body was confined but he could still think. By concentrating on subject matter that took his awareness away from his misery, he was able to survive.

The governor learned that while he was the youngest of the prisoners he had been the leader and had been taken from his cell, dressed, and brought to a big party he was lavishly wined and dined. After the banquet he was told he had a chance to go home if he would fill in the details of what the movement had been all about. Education was considered a political movement because it interfered with the social hierarchy that supported the political structure of Russia at this time. He refused and was taken back to prison, this time to be put into a body-sized cell that did not allow for reclining except with the knees against the wall. He passed out finally and when he next awoke, found himself in a prison hospital--two months

had passed. He recovered and they sent him back to prison.

Meanwhile his father had been using every influence he had to get Boris paroled from prison on the basis that he never leave his home town again, report to the parole officers at certain times the remainder of his life. However, further education would be impossible for him because of the fact that he had been a political prisoner. He was finally released and went back home, but being unable to get anymore education or to be unable to put into practice theories of education for everyone, he was cut off from all that he had ever loved. He prevailed upon his father to get him out of the country. This was arranged and Boris and two or three others who had been sent back to their home towns came to New York with \$500 that Boris' father had given him. They arrived in this country in 1876. Between them the money did not last long.

Boris' first job was with the Singer Sewing Machine Company for \$5.00 a week. He lasted a week and lived on this for three weeks with a herring and black bread diet. He spent all of the time he could in the library. His next job was in a New Jersey hat pressing factory. He then decided he

could find the kind of atmosphere he sought in Boston as it had the reputation as the cultural center of America. It was winter time and the room he finally got for as little as possible was so cold that a glass of water left overnight would be ice in the morning. The room only cost a dollar a week and this left him free from unskilled jobs longer so as to enable him to spend the time in libraries he so coveted. After being in this country four or five months, he spoke and wrote English. The people who rented his room to him suggested he tutor other young Russians in English. One of the first articles he wrote in this country he sold to the Boston Transcript.

Next year he got a room with a little more heat but he still only had the survivor coat in which he had arrived from Russia. He stopped by a Russian tailor, a man about forty years old, to get a tear in his coat sewn. The man did not speak English and could not read. His one great ambition was to read Spinoza. They made a bargain; Boris would teach him to read Spinoza and the tailor would make him a winter coat. Within a year the man was attending lectures on Spinoza and within another year he had joined an American union and became a union leader who lectured to immigrant and American

laborers. This was Boris' first student in America.

While still in Europe, Boris had written a novel, longhand and in Russian which he called Helena. When he entered Harvard he took it to an English professor and it became misplaced. He never wrote the novel again but named only his daughter Helen.

During the presidency of William Jennings Bryan the Silver Standard inspired Boris to write an article about the reaction to the "silver craze" and he took it to the Century. Several months passed and he heard nothing so under the urging of Sarah, then a student of his, he went to the office to inquire about it. He was informed there probably had been no return address or postage and the office attendant showed no great curiosity as to what had happened to it. The editor of the periodical happened in the office during the conversation and noticed Boris' agitation inquired as to the subject matter of the article. Boris answered that it was about the hysteria of the crowds over the silver craze. "Oh," the editor replied, "something psychological." Boris informed him he didn't wish to argue over the title of the subject matter (a word unfamiliar to

him at the time) he was just interested in getting it back. The editor, impressed by the young foreigner's vehemence, banged his hand on the desk in union with Boris and the office boy found it promptly. The editor read it, found it pertinent to the common political causes and paid Boris \$100 for it.

The silver craze was actually of less interest to Boris than was the American reaction to it. To give knowledge to others or show them how they could find it was the main motivating factor in Boris' life. He brought many of his best loved books with him from Russia and gave them to the Boston public library so that others may be able to enjoy them also. He never sought money; in fact, he shied away from it after seeing what it did to others. He always feared the distracting effects of being able to earn large amounts of it.

Sarah was taking lessons from him by now and it was common for him to talk over his dreams and ambitions with her. He was an intellectual and a social idealist. (William absorbed his father's ambitions and his dislikes for anything involving the desperate acquisition of wealth).

On entrance into Harvard the examining board exempted Boris from taking exams on everything but physics and Latin. He took courses in these two subjects for one semester along with courses in economics under Cummings; philosophy under Royce. Professor Lyons helped him get these courses free of charge by scholarship as he knew how little money the young Russian student had. Sarah talked to Dr. Royce after the first semester's work to see if he would use his influence to get Boris to enroll in Harvard for a degree--attaching of degrees to learning always annoyed him. Boris did enroll and his first year he took literature from Oliver Wendell Holmes; psychology from William James; ethics from Palmer; experimental psychology from Munestraberg [Münsterberg]. Sarah encouraged him to go and talk to his teachers to see if he could not get through in two years instead of the regular four. The faculty decision was to graduate him in one year Magna Cum Laude. Elliot was president of Harvard at that time.

The next year he got a Fellowship through Edward Lyons from the J. P. Morgan fund. He was offered \$750 for study here of \$1,000 for study abroad. He was married by then so he remained in this country. 1897, his third year at Harvard and the year that

Sarah was to graduate from Boston Medical School, he was working on his Ph.D. and writing Psychology of Suggestion. He did experiments at home with patients and volunteers.

Sarah had entered Boston Medical School in September of 1893, the fall before she and Boris were married (Christmas vacation). Boris registered for the Ph.D. in 1895 but did very little work on it the first year. He did not want the degree and it was Sarah who realized the practical importance of such recognition.

In 1894 he got his Master's. At the end of his first Ph. D. year William James said he was going to send him to someone to talk to who might be able to help him find a position. He sent him to Teddy Roosevelt in New York, for it was just before he was to leave this office for that of the Presidency. Boris talked to him for several hours and Teddy was so impressed he made him stay overnight so that he could take Civil Service exams early the next morning. He was made Associate Director of the New York State Hospitals for the Insane and \$50,000 was appropriated to improve conditions of treatment. Boris went all over the state lecturing to the various heads of hospitals--a young man without his

Ph. D. or medical degree (both of which he later received).

At this stage in his career he helped establish the Journal of Abnormal Psychology. He first approached Morton Prince, then professor at Tuft's and later at Harvard, on the ideas. Prince had received the Nobel prize and was independently wealthy. Morton Prince was the head of the periodical; William James and Boris Sidis were on the staff along with two neurologists, Putman and Taylor. That year Boris was alone in New York as Sarah was still in school but she visited him on Easter vacation as he never liked to be without her.

After graduation Sarah came to New York and they stayed there for five years during which time the State of New York published his Psychopathological Researches. Harvard sent him his Ph.D. degree while he was in New York. He was not sure he was going to get it because he wouldn't submit his Psychology of Suggestion as a thesis.

One day he came home with his face radiant, telling Sarah what he had been to do that day was worth all the difficult days he had ever known. There were no more

straightjackets or padded cells in the hospitals of New York state. He hoped that other states would follow his example.

Before entering Harvard, Boris had many "boys." Young men whom he tutored and helped in various educational problems. One of these was a young immigrant very similar to himself and all young immigrants in that in seeking any higher education, almost immediate disapproval of the whole family was certain to be aroused. Most of the foreigners came of peasant stock and had accustomed to accepting the fact that education was not for them. One such young man became a physician and a good friend of the Sidis's but the difference in his pattern was that it was his mother who had the vision and ambition for her son. She heard of the young Russian boy who gave lessons to foreigners for very little charge and came to Boris to see if he could give lessons to her son. He did, and encouraged the man to go on to medical school. He later became head of the Boston hospital near the Harvard Medical School. As did all the "boys" of Boris, he visited him at least once a week before and after he became a success.

During the winter of 1894-1895 Boris attended a stag dinner party given by

William James who did a great deal of university entertaining for visiting dignitaries and the like. One occasion involved the visiting of Prince Volcansky, representative of the Czar of Russia and the Minister of Education. James thought that Boris would be interested in someone from home despite his political beliefs so he was invited and sat at the right of the Prince. Prince Volcansky approached Boris about returning to Russia. He was promised all the freedom of action, experimentation, investigation and practice if he should do so, but Boris declined saying he would never return under a Czar. (He always thought revolution would be necessary before Russia could progress, but lived long enough to see only another veritable dictator substituted for another in Russia.) He never wanted to go back then and he died without doing so. Boris' books were always translated into Russian and possibly more accepted there than here.

While Boris was director of the state hospitals, Dr. Simon Goodhart brought the case of the famed minister who was one of his patients. This young man was a minister and he was to get married. While driving in a carriage to meet his fiance, he fell out of the carriage in an accident and hit his head. When the young man was picked up he

had a complete loss of memory. A Columbia medical school graduate heard of this case and investigated. He couldn't speak, he couldn't walk, and if he was given a piece of soap he put it in his mouth like a baby. He reacted at the level of a one year old child. In about two or three weeks all the most famed workers in the field had tried their hand at restoring his memory to this young minister without success. It was then Dr. Goodheart came to interest Boris.

Boris came in contact with the man when he had been returned to his father's house. He lived there, in the same room without ever leaving or taking his eyes from the antics of the child-like man for about four weeks. Sarah was still studying in Boston and couldn't be there. Boris did not undress or lie down to sleep; he got down on the floor to watch the man and studied him from all angles. Then Boris started to train him as a child. He tried to instill in this child all the old knowledge that he had lost. When the boy was sleeping, Boris listened to the verbalizing of his dreams and quizzed him on whatever words came out. He used the semi-conscious state and pumped and prodded at whatever came up. Other doctors had used the day hours but Boris made use of the sleeping hours and came to realize that the

semi-hypnoidal state was more revealing than any observation during waking hours. After about three months from the time Boris observed and worked with young minister, he was back in the ministry, married and as happy as if nothing had ever happened. Many fingers were pointed at Boris because was then without a Ph.D. or medical degree, but Dr. White (Binghampton State Hospital) was one of the few to appreciate to his treatment.

This gave birth to the book Multiple Personality. Boris never received any money for his services and this is typical of his interest and perseverance along the creative lines that interest him.

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Books by [Dr. Boris Sidis

(Philistine and Genius)

Nervous Ills, Their Cause and Cure

The Foundations of Normal and Abnormal Psychology

Psychology of Laughter

Symptomatology, Psychognosis and Diagnosis of Psychopathic Diseases

The Causation and Treatment of Psychopathic Diseases

The Source and Aim of Human Progress

The Psychology of Suggestion

Multiple Personality

Psychopathological Researches by Sidis,
White and Parker

An Experimental Study of Sleep

The Doctrine of Primary and Secondary
Sensory Elements

The Nature of Hallucinations

A Study of Galvanometric Deflections by
Sidis and Kalmus

The Nature and Causation of the
Galvanometric Phenomena by Sidis and Nelson

Positions Held: (may be incomplete)

Associate Psychologist and
Psychopathologist - Pathological Institute,
New York State Hospital - 1896-1901

Director Psychopathological
Hospital and Psychopathic Laboratory, New
York Infirmary for Women and Children -
1901

Director, Sidis Psychotherapeutic
Institute, Portsmouth, N.H. -

Associate Editor, Archives of
Neurology and Psychopathology

Associate Editor, Journal of
Abnormal Psychology

Sidis Story

Sarah Sidis

(As told to secretary

by Dr. Sarah Sidis)

Sarah Sidis was born in Russia on
October 2, 1875, in a small village called
Old Constantine. Her parents lived with
their respective in-laws in the two cities
of Zaslav and Stara Constantine. They had
been married very young; her mother had
been fourteen and her father sixteen. Her
father finished his schooling after he was
married. Living with both sets of parents

was known as being 'on-board' with them and it was not uncommon for lower middle class parents to do this until their children were able to take up economic responsibilities for themselves. The mother was known as the village beauty and gave birth to fifteen children (one set of twins) of which twelve lived.

Sarah's first vivid remembrance occurs when she was about four when she recalls Sunday walks around the village park, woods and streets, known as family promenading. Sarah was started on household tasks by the time she was five. Her father made a little footstool for her and she made the beds and dusted the house. Her older sister, by three and a half years, did the family cooking. As new babies survived, the girls within the family took on the babies as little mothers so that as the family increased in size, the parents became accustomed to think of their younger offspring as the charges of two or three older girls. "Sarah, your baby is crying," was not a strange comment for Sarah's mother to make. Sarah learned to read and write at the age of six and soon after this the father taught her rudimentary arithmetic so that she could help him in his figures. He was a wheat merchant. He considered her the brightest of the lot.

She was known for her energy even as a child and despite all her chores she could always dance if a tune were available. Sarah resembled her mother the most and was known for her sparkling eyes.

The most important incident that decided the family to come to this country was a robbery ...[illegible]... were carried off and the house damaged by the razing. Her mother was knocked unconscious, her father's teeth knocked out and one baby killed. Her father armed himself with a rake, ran outside and challenged them. Father took the little money there was hidden from the bandits and with Sarah came to this country. It took a year for the older sister to earn enough money to get here and then the three set about saving every penny they could so that they could send for the family.

On the trip over they had been stuck in Hamburg because of lack of funds for two tickets and Sarah had made the rounds begging for half-fare ticket. She was finally granted this on an English boat and they traveled in steerage with the chickens. She won a contest for dancing on the trip over and the seamen, taken by her vivaciousness and smile, kept her and her

father in food. When they arrived in New York, they had fifty cents.

Sarah had a letter to a struggling young plumber's wife in Boston whose mother had been a friend of her mother's. They spent their last cent to get there. They lived with her three or four weeks and she would not take payment. She knew Sarah had to have the foreignness taken off before she could get a job and bought her a corset and a hat to make her look older. A cot was set up for the father in the kitchen and Sarah had a bed from two dining room chairs in the living room. Their first money went for American clothes that were so necessary in order to get a decent job.

Sarah was introduced to several young men while working and living with the Barnetts but was not interested in marriage and babies as she had had too many years of that already. She wanted to learn so that she would not have to follow the road of most immigrant girls, or girls in general of that day, and find a young man who showed promise and tie herself down early in life to childbirth and homemaking.

When she was fifteen, her older sister came and the two girls found several young immigrants who thought as they did

about education and they arranged for young college students to tutor the group for a dollar a week. By now Sarah was a seamstress in an expensive dress shop and most of the money was being saved for the passage money for the rest of the family in Russia. When enough money had been saved the family was sent for. Sarah found an apartment for the family with a bathroom two flights down. After the family came there were always many parties. Her mother found company nice and with one daughter who did all the cooking and another who did all the cleaning, entertaining was not too difficult.

The student group that Sarah and her older sister Ida started lasted about a year and then dissolved. Sarah by then had heard of Boris and how he gave lessons to those who really wanted to learn, so she went to him for lessons. Sarah was the only girl who kept up the lessons for any length of time as the rest gradually found husbands and settled down. It was Boris who suggested to her that she could go to college. She had never been to high school and her family was disgusted with the idea. Imagine the nerve of a sixteen year-old immigrant girl who had to work eight or ten hours a day to support her family thinking

she had the ability or the time for a college education!

Boris began teaching her the high school curriculum and after six months she went to take her college entrance exams. She was passed with honors and enrolled in Boston Medical School. A good friend of Boris', a Rabbi in the newly established Jewish Reform Church, lent Sarah the needed forty dollars for her first semester's tuition. This was the only money either of them ever borrowed. When it came time for her to pay her second semester, she went to the Dean and told him she did not have the money and would have to drop out as she would not borrow it from anyone. He said if she did not come he would send a policeman for her and that she did not have to pay. She never paid after that.

Christmas vacation of her first year in medical school she and Boris decided to get married. He was attending Harvard at the time. Sarah was under-age. As marrying a very poor young man who would probably never have any money, since he currently showed no interest in it, was obviously not her family's idea of a good suitor, they decided to go to Providence and get married very quickly. The Rabbi friend of Boris arranged to have a friend of his, a Supreme

Court judge of Rhode Island, at his home to perform the ceremony, and the young people spent the weekend as the guests of the Rabbi.

They had rented two attics their first year of married life as it enabled both of them to study and cost no more than one room. Boris did not have to pay tuition at Harvard and with tutoring students they managed to get along. Sundays, Sarah spent the day cleaning her parent's home and doing the week's washing. She still sewed a good deal and made all her own and her husband's clothes. They subsisted mainly on black coffee and second day bread and it used to be a standard joke as to whether they would ever be able to afford cream for their coffee. It was quite a while before they were able to afford a little milk. Neither minded because they were used to hard work and doing without and they had their common dreams and were able to get the learning they both desired so much.

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[Typed by Leon Hansen.]