

QUOTATION

MONTAIGNE ON THE USE OF PUNISHMENT IN EDUCATION

The discipline of most of our schools has always been a thing of which I have disapproved. If they had erred on the side of indulgence, they might have erred less lamentably. But they are veritable gaols in which imprisoned youth loses all discipline by being punished before it has done anything wrong. Visit one of these colleges when the lessons are in progress; you hear nothing but the cries of children being beaten and of masters drunk with anger. What a way of arousing an appetite for learning in these young and timid minds, to lead them to it with a terrifying visage and an armful of rods! This is a wicked and pernicious system. Besides, as Quintilian very well observed, such imperious authority has some very dangerous consequences, particularly in the matter of punishment. How much more fitting it would be if the classrooms were strewn with flowers and leaves than with bits of bloodstained switches! I would have my school hung with pictures of Joy and Gladness, and of Flora and the Graces, as the philosopher Speusippus had his. Where their profit is, let their pleasure be also. One should sweeten the food that is healthy for a child, and dip what is harmful in gall.

From: Montaigne, M. (1958). Essays (J. M. Cohen, Trans.). Baltimore: Penguin. Original work published 1580.

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