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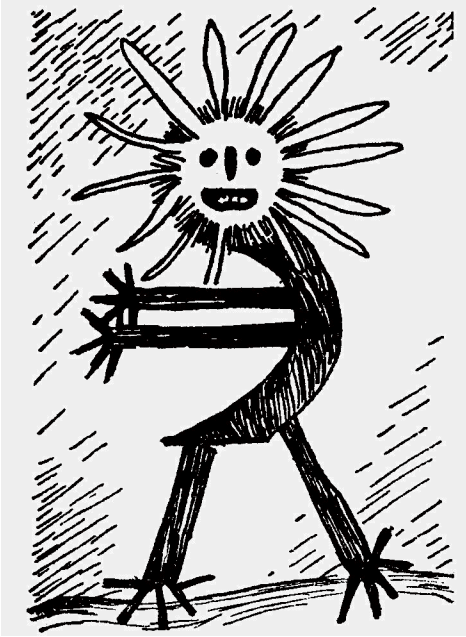
CHILDREN'S QUARRELS

By Elisabeth Klein
(Translated by Ruth Puscb)

It is often said that children reveal a great deal of their inner nature through their drawings and paintings. Some time ago, a boy in my class Wolfgang - provided a picture of himself in one of his drawings that was more convincing than any photograph could have been. It was drawn at the beginning of our study of Man and Animal in the Fourth Grade, when the children were between nine and ten.



At that time the human being was described according to function, as consisting of head, trunk and limbs, in order to show, as we approached zoology, that man - as far as his form is concerned - is the focal point of the animal kingdom. His head, in which the senses are concentrated, is a sphere. The breastbones are shaped like a basket or barrel, an enclosure. But the limbs are like radiating, branching, outgoing rays.

Wolfgang waved his hand vigorously as the children had made these discoveries together.

"I've found something else", he said. "You can see it plainly: what streams into the head at the top radiates out again," and he pointed to his hands and feet.

This was immediately "enlightening" to the other children, and they began to make drawings of it. Wolfgang drew himself in his picture.

After several years and many experiences together, the class reached preadolescence and the Seventh Grade. At this time, a very serious division came about in the class. The children had been allowed to

build themselves a "den", something that comes up as a necessity at this age. It was in the cellar of one of the boys' houses, and there they carried on their secret club business. Two boys, particularly, were leaders in the class. One was Wolfgang, wild, imaginative, full of ideas and mischief, a natural extrovert of sanguine-choleric temperament. His absolute opposite was John, a very gifted boy, dark, melancholy-choleric, easily hurt, often reserved but with a richly glowing inner life. It was John's parents who had provided the cellar.

In my class diary I find characteristic remarks from both boys. In the Second Grade I had told a kind of fable about sulfur and coal. Sulfur had turned up as a boaster, who then in the course of the story had been pathetically crushed by an earthquake. Modest Coal, however, had been pressed by the great force of the earthquake and transformed into a diamond.

"When people talk too much," I told them at the end, "we get to be like Sulfur. It goes to our heads and then we can be called 'hotheads'. And there is," I added very slowly, "just such a 'hothead' in this class."

Wolfgang, who was the one I meant, wagged his head around, looking at everyone else in the class. "Which one is the hothead, I'd like to know!" he shouted.

In the Sixth Grade, John had read Felix Dahn's Struggle for Rome with great enthusiasm. "My favorite story is about the defeat of the Goths," he told me, "and the hero I love the best is that brave, dark-haired Teia."

And now in the Seventh Grade, the children were often in their den, and it was over this clubroom that their quarrels arose. Some of them suddenly found the place "not good enough" and they began to make fun of it. This was for John a personal insult, and so the first battle came about. After that, John and those in the class who took his side no longer allowed the others to enter the den, and these others missed the games there badly.

For four weeks there was a complete state of war. It made itself felt in all the lessons and recess-times, but one could do nothing about it. If there were no battles at school, they were raging on the street or in front of the cellar. John's parents - his father was a professor in the Academy of Art - very wisely took no part in the affair. Wolfgang was the active, passionate attacker; John ever more doggedly held the defense.

Everyone who has to do with young people knows that such quarrels have to arise at this age. If the fights had not been provoked in one way, they would have come about in another, and probably with the same two groups taking sides. In such a situation to try to do anything with moral admonitions would be like trying to put out a fire with them. Volcanoes are there and have to burst forth in order to become quiet; otherwise they will continue to rumble beneath the surface. The dramatic knot has to be fully played out. Words cannot help at all. But an objective, strong, true picture can bring alleviation.

At this time we were studying European geography. With Germany as the center, the East and the West had been treated, and now came the contrast of North and South, as exemplified by the Scandinavian countries and Italy.

The hot, white chalk cliffs of Italy and Dalmatia with their intricate shapes and forms were described, and then the nature of limestone in particular. Limestone soaks up water. On the inside, it forms itself to stalagtites in caves of fantastic beauty. Outside, on higher ground, the land is dry and arid. But in a chalk soil, created by the prehistoric ocean and its myriad living creatures, there flourish especially sumptuous plants: orchids, wisteria, acacia and many other varieties. In this hot country there are active volcanoes and it has to do with this that the chief source of phosphorus in Europe is

at Girgenti in Sicily. I showed them phosphorus with its light-filled, golden yellow crystals, and demonstrated how easily it burns and how the stone dissolves into smoke.

The Italians living in this land, who are outwardly of dark complexion, actually have phosphorus-like natures: they are fiery and easily excited. They accompany their words with a rich variety of gestures. Art has been their special contribution, particularly in painting and architecture.

The very opposite of all of this is found in the Scandinavian countries, with their granite and ages-old earth. Majestic, calmly layered are the forms of the northern mountains, mightier in their silent monotony than the jagged points of limestone ranges. In the North is little blossoming flora; instead, many tiny spore-plants, ferns and moss in pinewoods and heath. Granite does not let water through, and everywhere there are springs and brooks, called "Elves" in Sweden. The earth is steeped in moisture and in connection with the granite, one finds the presence of metal ores. The south of Italy is the chief source of phosphorus in Europe; here in the lonely North is the largest source of iron, at the Iron Mountain near Kiruna in Sweden.

Farmers and hunters in northern Sweden and fisherman in Norway are, like their landscape, big, calm and silent. A girl wrote about this in her composition book: An Italian often speaks with hand and foot, but the few words the Scandinavian says have hand and foot; they are handfast.

These peoples are not so famous for their sculpture as for their poets and thinkers. It is in the North that the great sagas and epics have been handed on the longest, the Edda in Iceland and the Kalevala in Finland.

By describing these two different landscapes as sources of phosphorus and iron, I wanted to appeal to the two contrasting groups in the class, without mentioning them, of course.

And now came a third mineral substance to the light-filled phosphorus and the dark iron: pyrite, which takes such beautiful crystalline forms, and which shines so brightly that ignorant people sometimes think it must be gold.

"Here you can see the finest of all," I told the children. "In this mineral, pyrite or sulfur-iron, the two mighty opposites have joined forces. Iron contributes its heaviness and strength; phosphorus gives its radiance ... The world would be far less beautiful if there were not such contrasts in it, as phosphorus and iron. But the greatest and most wonderful thing on earth is when opposites join hands to form something new."

John wrote at that time a particularly good essay about granite and the Iron Mountain. The picture had brought him serenity, and the whole class gave him respectful acclaim for his achievement. Here in such efforts one can observe how education has united itself with ordinary learning.

I visited John's mother on the next afternoon and heard loud, cheerful noises coming up from the cellar.

"They are all friends again," said the mother happily.

After most of the children had gone home, I went down to the den in the cellar and found John and Wolfgang there with a few others. I was told that in recess-time at school that day, Wolfgang had said very loudly so that everyone could hear, "John's club room is *really* fine!"

"And then we celebrated with a war dance," said Wolfgang gleefully.

There slumbers in every class some sort of drama, waiting to awaken and come to life. But intellectual learning is a kind of narcotic: it benumbs the children. Artistic learning is more strenuous. When the

underlying drama is aroused, all sorts of dramatic things take place, including even battles. At no other time, however, has the teacher a better chance to take part actively, in order to build up moral forces, to forge character in her children.

In every family, too, some kind of drama slumbers among sisters and brothers, and we parents must let it find its way to the surface. But it requires our help and understanding; then the tensions can be allowed to reach their end by means of a truly curative process.

Dr. Klein is a class teacher at the Waldorf School in Hanover. Her article is reprinted with the kind permission of Die Kommenden.