

## TWO LIES TOLD BY CHILDREN - (1913)

We can understand children telling lies, when in doing so, they are imitating the lies told by grown-up people. But a number of lies told by well-brought-up children have a particular significance and should cause those in charge of them to reflect rather than be angry. These lies occur under the influence of excessive feelings of love, and become momentous when they lead to a misunderstanding between the child and the person it loves.

I

A girl of seven (in her second year at school) had asked her father for some money to buy colours for painting Easter eggs. Her father had refused, saying he had no money. Shortly afterwards the girl asked her father for some money for a contribution towards a wreath for the funeral of their reigning princess, who had recently died. Each of the schoolchildren was to bring fifty pfennigs. Her father gave her ten marks; she paid her contribution, put nine marks on her father's writing-table, and with the remaining fifty pfennigs bought some paints, which she hid in her toy cupboard. At dinner her father asked suspiciously what she had done with the missing fifty pfennigs, and whether she had not bought paints with them after all. She denied it; but her brother, who was two years her elder and with whom she had planned to paint the eggs, betrayed her; the paints were found in the cupboard. The angry father handed the culprit over to her mother for punishment, and it was severely administered. Afterwards her mother was herself much shaken, when she saw how great the child's despair was. She caressed the little girl after the punishment, and took her for a walk to console her. But the effects of the experience, which were described by the patient herself as the 'turning-point in her life', proved to be ineradicable. Up to then she had been a wild, self-confident child, afterwards she became shy and timid. When she was engaged to be married and her mother undertook the purchase of her furniture and her trousseau, she flew into a rage which was incomprehensible even to herself. She had a feeling that after all it was her money, and no one else ought to buy anything with it. As a young wife she was shy of asking her husband for any expenditure on her personal needs, and made an uncalled-for distinction between 'her' money and his. During the treatment it happened now and again that her husband's remittances to her were delayed, so that she was left without resources in a foreign city. After she had told me this once, I made her promise that if it happened again she would borrow the small sum necessary from me. She promised to do so; but on the next occasion of financial embarrassment she did not keep her promise, but preferred to pawn her jewellery. She explained that she could not take money from me.

The appropriation of the fifty pfennigs in her childhood had had a significance which her father could not guess. Some time before she began going to school she had played a singular prank with money. A neighbour with whom they were friendly had sent the girl out with a small sum of money, in the company of her own little boy who was even younger, to buy something in a shop. Being the elder of the two, she was bringing the change back home. But, meeting the neighbour's servant in

the street, she threw the money down on the pavement. In the analysis of this action, which she herself found inexplicable, the thought of Judas occurred to her, who threw down the thirty pieces of silver which he had been given for betraying his Master. She said she was certainly acquainted with the story of the Passion before she went to school. But in what way could she identify herself with Judas?

When she was three and a half she had a nursemaid of whom she was extremely fond. This girl became involved in a love affair with a doctor whose surgery she visited with the child. It appears that at that time the child witnessed various sexual proceedings. It is not certain whether she saw the doctor give the girl money; but there is no doubt that, to make sure of the child's keeping silence, the girl gave her some small coins, with which purchases were made (probably of sweets) on the way home. It is possible too that the doctor himself occasionally gave the child money. Nevertheless the child betrayed the girl to her mother out of jealousy. She played so ostentatiously with the coins she had brought home that her mother could not help asking: 'Where did you get that money?' The girl was dismissed.

To take money from anyone had thus early come to mean to her a physical surrender, an erotic relation. To take money from her father was equivalent to a declaration of love. The phantasy that her father was her lover was so seductive that with its help her childish wish for paints for the Easter eggs easily put itself into effect in spite of the prohibition. She could not admit, however, that she had appropriated the money; she was obliged to disavow it, because her motive for the deed, which was unconscious to herself, could not be admitted. Her father's punishment was thus a rejection of the tenderness she was offering him - a humiliation - and so it broke her spirit. During the treatment a period of severe depression occurred (whose explanation led to her remembering the events described here) when on one occasion I was obliged to reproduce this humiliation by asking her not to bring me any more flowers.

For psycho-analysts I need hardly emphasize the fact that in this little experience of the child's we have before us one of those extremely common cases in which early anal erotism persists into later erotic life. Even her desire to paint the eggs with colours derived from the same source.<sup>9</sup>

## II

A woman who is now seriously ill in consequence of a frustration in life was in her earlier years a particularly capable, truth-loving, serious and virtuous girl, and became an affectionate wife. But still earlier, in the first years of her life, she had been a wilful and discontented child, and, though she had changed fairly quickly into an excessively good and conscientious one, there were occurrences in her schooldays, which, when she fell ill, caused her deep self-reproaches, and were regarded by her as proofs of fundamental depravity. Her memory told her that in those days she had often bragged and lied. Once on the way to school a school-fellow had said boastfully: 'Yesterday we had ice at dinner.' She replied: 'Oh we have ice every day.' In reality she did not know what ice at dinner could mean; she only knew ice in the long blocks in which it is carted about, but she assumed that

there must be something grand in having it for dinner, so she refused to be outdone by her school-fellow.

When she was ten years old, they were set the task in the drawing lesson of making a free-hand drawing of a circle. But she used a pair of compasses, thus easily producing a perfect circle, and showed her achievement in triumph to her neighbour in class. The mistress came up, heard her boasting, discovered the marks of the compasses in the circle, and questioned the girl. But she stubbornly denied what she had done, would not give way to any evidence, and took refuge in sullen silence. The mistress consulted with her father about it. They were both influenced by the girl's usually good behaviour into deciding not to take any further steps about the matter.

Both the child's lies were instigated by the same complex. As the eldest of five children, the little girl early developed an unusually strong attachment to her father, which was destined when she was grown up to wreck her happiness in life. But she could not long escape the discovery that her beloved father was not so great a personage as she was inclined to think him. He had to struggle against money difficulties; he was not so powerful or so distinguished as she had imagined. But she could not put up with this departure from her ideal. Since, as women do, she based all her ambition on the man she loved, she became too strongly dominated by the motive of supporting her father against the world. So she boasted to her school-fellows, in order not to have to belittle her father. When, later on, she learned to translate ice for dinner by '

glace', her self-reproaches about this reminiscence led her by an easy path into a pathological dread of pieces or splinters of glass.

Her father was an excellent draughtsman, and had often enough excited the delight and admiration of the children by exhibitions of his skill. It was as an identification of herself with her father that she had drawn the circle at school - which she could only do successfully by deceitful methods. It was as though she wanted to boast: 'Look at what my father can do!' The sense of guilt that was attached to her excessive fondness for her father found its expression in connection with her attempted deception; an admission was impossible for the same reason that was given in the first of these observations: it would inevitably have been an admission of her hidden incestuous love.

0 We should not think lightly of such episodes in the life of children. It would be a serious mistake to read into childish misdemeanours like these a prognosis of the development of a bad character. Nevertheless, they are intimately connected with the most powerful motive forces in children's minds, and give notice of dispositions that will lead to later eventualities in their lives or to future neuroses.<sup>1</sup>