

The Search for Felix the Herb-Gatherer

Emil Bock

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This article is based on a lecture given by the late Emil Bock in Stuttgart in November 1958

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IN the fateful year 1879, when the Michael Age began—the age in which we are now living—Rudolf Steiner, who was then 18, had an important experience. He had come to live in the big city from a world in which he had been used to a very simple life, a world moreover that was then still strongly pervaded by the forces of nature. This was when he began his studies at the Technical College in Vienna. He needed to be escorted over the threshold of the modern world; and it was significant for him that he found such a guide in Felix the herb-gatherer, who understood plants as a friend and had a deep feeling for the spirit of the earth and all the processes of nature. In the Mystery Plays he is known as Felix Balde, and is a metamorphosis of the “Man with the Lamp” in Goethe’s fairy-tale.

It has often been remarked that the emergence of Rudolf Steiner from a rural family background reflected to some extent the destiny of mankind in the second half of the nineteenth century, rather as the advancing hand of a clock mirrors the passage of time. During his childhood and youth he was surrounded by the world of nature, but even then the early signs of a rising technical civilisation entered unobtrusively but decisively into his life.

At Pottschach and Neudörfel his parents lived in the stationmaster’s house outside or right on the edge of the village, so that the family was somewhat isolated from the other villagers. This part of the Austrian Southern line ran through an unspoilt region where the railway still represented an innovation that was revolutionising people’s lives. The big moment of the day was always when the train came in or left! The elders of the village—the mayor, the parson and the schoolmaster—would gather for the occasion. And for the stationmaster’s children, too, the most important room in the building was where father sat by his morse transmitter, receiving and passing on the telegraphic messages.

The makeshift homes which the railway company provided for its employees were not intended for a settled existence. Rudolf Steiner’s father was constantly being moved from one part of Lower

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Austria to another, so that the boy's home was constantly changing. There was something symbolic about this, reminiscent of the way humanity has to be uprooted, when nature withdraws before the advance of civilisation.

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Circumstances were such that Rudolf Steiner as a young lad experienced this transition in a very acute form. This had to do with the profound sympathy he felt for his father in all that the latter went through emotionally. In *The Story of My Life* he says of his father that he was not happy in his work: "He saw the work of the railway as his duty, but he had no love for it. . . . Sometimes he was on duty for three days and nights at a stretch. Then he would have 24 hours off. There was nothing colourful about his life. It was a dismal grey." This was not easy for "one with a passionate nature that was easily aroused, especially when he was a young man."

How had the father come to take up this work? The answer takes us to a turning-point, a dramatic climax, in the life of this man of peace and goodwill. His own father—Rudolf Steiner's grandfather—had been a forester all his life. His whole existence was bound up with the life of the forest, which for him meant the immense undisturbed forests north of the Danube, stretching away to the Czech border and known to this day as the Waldviertel. He was responsible for one of the big areas of forest belonging to the Hoyos family.

The whole ambition of Rudolf Steiner's father was to follow the same career. He had the job of gamekeeper, which led on to the position of forester, in the same part of the Waldviertel. The forest was his home, his world; and it was there that he would have liked to spend his whole life. But a difficulty arose which finally compelled him to leave his native forest. He became engaged to a girl, who was also in the service of the Hoyos family at Schloss Horn, south of his own district of Geras. In those districts the old ideas of serfdom were not yet extinct, and it was on this basis that the Count was able to forbid the marriage.

It seems that the young couple waited patiently for a long time, hoping their master would change his mind. In the end the rift came suddenly, when Johann was already 32 and his fiancée 27. No doubt approaching destiny—later to be known as Rudolf Steiner—was helping, from another world, to bring things to a head. At short notice Johann Steiner, who had now decided to marry, had to leave his beloved forest and look around for another job. What he found was work as telegraph operator on one of the new stretches of railway that were coming into existence everywhere and creating a sudden demand for workers.

After a short time in Styria, possibly as a trainee, Johann Steiner was appointed station telegraph operator in a remote spot,

far away on the Croatian border. It was a long way from his forest home—in fact, one might say "right out of the world." He was married in May, 1860, and in February, 1861, Rudolf was born.

It was with dramatic violence that destiny thrust these quiet people into a homeless existence, when they left the life of the woods for the new world that was developing so rapidly with technical progress. All the time the growing lad could feel the homesickness which gnawed at his father's soul, sometimes causing him real distress. To the end of his days the older Steiner never really got over the change. It was natural that when in the nineties he was able to retire, he and his wife went back to the Waldviertel which was their home.

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In 1879, when Rudolf Steiner had finished at the Realschule in Wiener Neustadt at the age of 18, the Austrian Southern line kept its promise to his father to move him nearer Vienna to facilitate the son's further education. The family left Neudörfel for the railway town of Inzersdorf on the southern outskirts of Vienna, where the Southern line originally came to an end. From there the young student was able, once term started, to go in every day to his lectures. Even before that, during the summer holidays before lectures began, he often went into Vienna. This was how the meeting with Felix the herb-gatherer, which was to mean so much to him, came about:

That is how I came to know an ordinary working man, who happened to go into Vienna every week on the same train as myself. He collected medicinal herbs in the country and sold them in Vienna to the chemists' shops. We became close friends. When he spoke of the spiritual world, one realised that it was from experience. He was a man of deep integrity and devotion, though no scholar. True, he had read a good deal of mystical literature, but what he said was quite uninfluenced by this reading. This was the direct product of his soul-life, in which there was an elemental creative wisdom. . . . It was as though his personality was nothing but a mouthpiece for some spiritual being that spoke from occult worlds. With him it was possible to look deep into the secrets of nature. On his back he carried his bundle of herbs, but in his heart he carried the spiritual gifts he received from nature as he gathered his plants. . . . So in time I began to feel as though I was in contact with a soul from distant times, who possessed an instinctive knowledge of the past, uninfluenced by civilisation, science and present-day ideas. (*The Story of my Life*, pp. 39-40.)

Seeing him with this rural eccentric in the streets of Vienna, people would look round at them, as Felix shared his spiritual treasures with the young man, treasures that mankind has gradually lost on its odyssey through time. In the autobiographical lecture given on February 1, 1913, at the conference marking the foundation of the Anthroposophical Society, Rudolf Steiner touched on the story of the herb-gatherer:

In my first year at college, something quite special had already happened . . . a strange personality crossed my youthful path . . . despite scanty education, there was deep understanding and wisdom. . . . "Felix," who lived with his peasant family in a remote and lonely little village in the mountains, had his room packed with occult and mystical literature and was himself deeply imbued with such wisdom. . . . Everywhere in the neighbourhood of his home he collected plants of all kinds and could explain their essential nature and occult origins. There were tremendous occult depths in the man. It was remarkable what one could discuss with him, going with him on his lonely journeys. . . .

Obviously the lively intercourse which Rudolf Steiner had with Felix did not take place only in the streets of Vienna, as they went from the South Station to the centre of the city. The two of them would sometimes go out together in the woods on early morning expeditions in search of herbs.

The first scene of the first Mystery Play (*The Portal of Initiation*) shows Felix Balde replying to Benedictus's "Your every word is more precious to me than I can say," with "It was impertinence that made me so talkative when you did me the honour of letting me accompany you on our mountain walks." And in the rough draft, where the characters still bear the same names as in the Goethean fairy-tale, the "Lily" says to the "Man with the Lamp": "He told me how he went round with you collecting herbs and how you led him into remote places, where rare flora were found growing on soil so thin that it barely covered the rock . . ."

On one occasion Rudolf Steiner visited Felix in his cottage in the place he called a "quiet mountain village". It was on June 22, 1919, in Stuttgart that he came to speak of this, when describing Felix once again:

There is a spot in Lower Austria from which the view of the mountains, especially at sunset, is very fine, as you look south towards the Lower Austrian Schneeberg, the Wechsel and the northern fringe of the Styrian mountains. Here there is a small unassuming cottage with the following inscription over the door: *In Gottes Segen ist alles gelegen* ("With the blessing of God all things are good"). I have only once been in that house, and that was as a young man. There were no outward pretensions about the man who lived there. His occupation was to go about collecting medicinal herbs, and his house was crammed with them. Once a week he packed up the herbs in a knapsack and travelled with them on his back to Vienna. At that time . . . I had to follow the same route; we used to travel together to the South Station and then walk along the road leading into the Wieden district of Vienna. . . . This man's speech had a quite different ring from that of most people. When he spoke of the leaves on the trees or of the trees themselves, but more especially when he spoke of the marvellous intrinsic properties of his medicinal herbs, it became apparent how closely this man's soul was bound up with the whole spirit of that part of the countryside. . . . He was in his own particular way a great sage. . . . Apart from the herbs with which his little cottage was crammed, he had quite a library of notable books of all kinds—which had this in common, that their principal features were related to the principal features and fundamental character of his own soul. He was not well off. There was

not much money to be made from the trade in herbs, which had been collected in the mountains—in fact very, very little. But his face bore an expression of deep contentment and he possessed great wisdom. (From the cycle, "Social and Pedagogical Questions in the Light of Spiritual Science," lecture 7.)

Everything Dr. Steiner said about the herb-gatherer suggested that there was some mystery surrounding his personality. It was particularly after he became well-known as Felix Balde and was seen on the stage in the mystery plays in that guise, merging with Goethe's "Man with the Lamp", that he became a veritably mythical figure. The question of discovering some actual place where Felix had lived and whether anything could still be traced about the man himself was therefore approached with some hesitation.

However, some friends did try to find out where the herb-gatherer had lived and what his name was in real life. For a long time it was definitely understood that his name was Felix Krakotzki and that he lived in Münchendorf, a quiet village near Laxenburg in the Hungarian Plain south of Vienna. This is the report I had in my hands in the forties: "Count Polzer, Dr. Emil Hamburger and Dr. Walter Johannes Stein were in Münchendorf in 1919. A cobbler called Scharinger said Felix took messages to Vienna for a textile firm and collected herbs. He was the only person they found who had known Felix. He spoke of Felix as "a jolly fellow and a great one for telling jokes in the inn. He had two sons, one of whom rented a farm near Münchenhof in 1919. The other was a gamekeeper on the estate of Count Hoyos near Gutenstein".

These three friends, leading figures in the Anthroposophical Society, intended to follow up their enquiries in the church registers, but gave up on being told that all particulars had been destroyed. I was never able to understand their being put off so easily. Why, I wondered, did they not try and get in touch with one of the sons, who were said to be still alive? In 1950 I had the opportunity to visit Münchendorf myself. Unfortunately my visit had to be a very short one, as I had risked going without a passport into what was at that time still the Russian zone. I thought I might trace something not only of Felix but of Johannes Wurth, the village schoolmaster in Lower Austria, to whom Dr. Steiner had, without giving his name, made some striking allusions in the year 1919.

Down in one of the back cottages of the village I came across a headmaster's widow, then aged ninety. These villages are built in the Hungarian manner. They consist of rows of single-storey houses stretching to right and left along the main street. On passing through the gateway of one of these low buildings you find yourself in an alley at right angles to the main street; and here there are once again cottages to right and left.

The old lady had quite a lot to say about Johannes Wurth, although he had died as far back as 1870. She herself was a head-

master's daughter and had married her father's predecessor. Before long she was telling me of the detailed record which her father had kept of events in Münchendorf. This chronicle had recently disappeared. She encouraged me to have a search for it and gave me the names of several very old villagers, who would be able to help me. We should be sure, she thought, to find everything there that we needed.

Finally I asked her about the herb-gatherer, Felix. She remembered him at once: "Yes, old Felix, he often used to come over to us in the evenings, Sundays especially; and after that he would sit in the inn with the men from the village." When I asked where he would have come from, at first she could not say. After a time she said she thought he must have come from Laxenburg.

This was the first hint that Münchendorf was not after all the home of the herb-gatherer. But all further enquiries undertaken by friends at that time were fruitless.

During the years that followed, interest grew in Felix, and in the unresolved questions relating to his life. It turned out that the church registers for Münchendorf as well as for Laxenburg and the immediate surroundings had been preserved intact; but there was no trace of anybody called Felix Krakotzki. There was one point on which all who took part in these enquiries were in agreement: Münchendorf in no way fitted the description Dr. Steiner gave of Felix's home. In the first place it was not a "mountain village", as it lay in the broad plain known as the "Wiener Becken". Secondly, there was surely no question there of seeing the mountains clearly of which Dr. Steiner had spoken, the wonderful formations of the Schneeberg, Rax and Wechsel in their sunset colouring.

No further progress was made until the beginning of 1958, when preparations were under way for bringing out the *Pädagogische Seminar* lectures given by Dr. Steiner in 1919 at the foundation of the Waldorf School. A clue emerged that had been overlooked. In previous editions sentences had often been omitted, if they were not easy to read in the original notes. It now turned out that one such sentence referred to the home of the herb-gatherer:

Recently I had occasion to explain that the man Felix lived in *Trumau*. The name of the old cobbler, who knew the archetype of Felix Balde, was Scharinger from Münchendorf. Felix is still a living tradition in those parts. All the characters to be found in my *Mystery Plays* are actual individuals.

It suddenly became clear that Dr. Steiner had himself said where Felix lived—at Trumau. Nobody had taken in this fact before. Trumau is only 6 km. south of Münchendorf and has just the same character.

The publication of this passage from the *Pädagogische Seminar* threw into sharp relief the whole question of how Münchendorf had

ever come to be regarded as Felix's home; also why those friends who were in Münchendorf in 1919 had dropped their enquiries with such astonishing alacrity. The fact was that they were not really in Münchendorf on account of the herb-gatherer. They were there primarily for something quite different.

In the lecture given by Dr. Steiner in Stuttgart on June 22, 1919, referring to the visit he had once paid to Felix's humble home, he had gone on to speak of another visit he had paid. The impression given was that both took place in the same village, if not in adjoining cottages:

When speaking of the visit I paid to my good friend Felix in his little cottage, I had to think of how at the same time I looked up the widow of the schoolmaster in her home. Although her husband had died some years before, I visited her because this Lower Austrian schoolmaster was a most interesting person. His widow still had the fine library he had assembled. There one could find all that German scholarship had collected and recorded about the German language and the content of myths and legends, for the invigoration of the German people. Until his dying day the opportunity never came for this solitary schoolmaster to emerge into the limelight. It was only after his death that extracts from his literary remains were published. But I have still not been able to see the lengthy journals kept by this lonely schoolmaster, in which are to be found pearls of wisdom. I do not know what has become of them.

Among the audience at this lecture were some of the leaders and principal speakers in the movement for the Threefold Commonwealth, then in full swing. The audience also included those who were being considered for the College of Teachers in the Waldorf School, Stuttgart, prior to its foundation. Among them was the enthusiastic but temperamental Dr. Walter Johannes Stein.

It will have been especially Dr. Stein who took Dr. Steiner's reference to the notebooks of the schoolmaster in Lower Austria as a request to procure these for him. After the lecture he may well have gone up to Dr. Steiner with the words: "We shall get hold of these journals for you, Herr Doktor." Dr. Steiner must have told him that the schoolmaster's name was Johannes Wurth and that his last home was Münchendorf.

It was therefore the journals of Johannes Wurth, who died in 1870, that Dr. Stein, Dr. Hamburger and Count Polzer were looking for in those weeks that followed the conference—and not for Felix the herb-gatherer. They were successful. When lectures were resumed in Stuttgart, they were able to hand over to Dr. Steiner the comprehensive four-volume journal. (The entries proved to be less rewarding than had been expected. Copies of them are to be found in Dornach.) When the friends proudly handed over their find, they were also able to report that they had come across traces of the herb-gatherer in Münchendorf.

Now Rudolf Steiner's lecture about his visit to Felix and to Johannes Wurth's house had been given on June 22, 1919. The

reference to the chance discoveries which these friends had made of traces of Felix occurred in the course of the same seminar lecture in which Dr. Steiner mentioned the name, Trumau. This lecture was not given until August 26, 1919. When Dr. Stein and the others were in Münchendorf, they must have been under the impression that Felix's surname was Krakotzki.

When Dr. Steiner mentioned Trumau, he had obviously wanted to correct the impression that Felix, like Johannes Wurth, had lived in Münchendorf. For some reason or other no attention was paid to this allusion at the time. Probably the name of the village was not taken in. At any rate, it was not recorded accurately in the shorthand notes.

When this allusion came to light and was clearly deciphered recently, I asked friends to see to it that the enquiries which had proved fruitless in Münchendorf were followed up in Trumau. The first result was that Dr. Steiner's description of the place as a quiet mountain village, and of the view away to the mountains in the south, seemed to suit Trumau no better than Münchendorf. Nor could the name Krakotzki be traced among the lists of inhabitants, though names of Czech or Polish origin were to be found there, as in Münchendorf and throughout the surrounding countryside.

I became more and more inclined to think that we were not meant to ferret out the details of Felix's life. Perhaps we had to fail in our enquiries, so that no "revelation" should detract from the mythology that had grown-up around the personality of the herb-gatherer—a mythology justified by the marvellous soul qualities which he had undoubtedly possessed. The consequence was that when I had to go to Vienna for a fortnight in the autumn of 1958, I had given up all thought of continuing my search for traces of Felix.

My first morning in Vienna was unexpectedly free. I went out to Mödling for the sake of the view from those hills, and thus to renew my experience of the landscape's unique character. In front of me lay the western end of the broad Hungarian plain, known as the "Wiener Becken". If you wish to understand Vienna, you must get to know this country. Rudolf Steiner has connected the fact that so many musicians lived and composed in Vienna with the character of the Wiener Becken, which is a veritable geological storehouse.¹

The hills above Mödling belong to the "Wiener Wald", which stretches away to the west of the Hungarian plain, forming a northern spur of the Alps. These would be the mountains Dr. Steiner was referring to, the Hohe Wand, Schneeberg, Rax and

¹ See the footnote to a lecture given by Prof. Thomastik in Dornach, Dec. 20th, 1920 (*Dornacher Nachrichtenblatt*, 1954; Vol. XXII, No. 30).

Wechsel, that could be seen from Felix's home suffused in the evening light.

To the east, the flat Wiener Becken is bounded by the Rosalie and Leitha Mountains, which form the foothills of the range that eventually, north of the Danube, turns into the Carpathians. The Hungarian plain between the Wiener Wald and the Leitha Mountains is formed by an ancient subsidence. A deep and extensive cleft must have come into existence there in Atlantean—or maybe even in Lemurian—times. This will have been submerged, so that a kind of sea-water flooded the whole triangular area between the limestone complex of the Alps and the Carpathians and extended far into Hungary. South of where Vienna now stands, the waters dried up, giving the area its characteristic geology. Even to-day the district seems possessed of an imperishable secret that fills one with a sense of wonder.

It was misty when I stood on the hills above Mödling. The outlines of the hills and mountains in the east could be sensed rather than actually seen; yet the special character of the countryside made itself felt.

I was already on my way home when, in Traiskirchen, near Baden, I came across a signpost saying: "Trumau 5 Km." The idea of making this little digression attracted me, as I had never been in Trumau. That was the end of the resolution I had half made not to follow up any further the history of Felix the herb-gatherer.

A quite unpretentious village, lying among flat green fields in this vast plain, Trumau had a strange fascination for me. I felt that never before had I experienced the hidden secret of the Hungarian plain so distinctly.

On entering the village, I was at once directed to an old farmer, named Hörbinger, who was said to be an authority on local history. When he emerged from his low-built steading, covered from head to foot in dirt, he at once agreed that he knew a house in the village with the inscription over the door: *In Gottes Segen ist alles gelegen*.

He thought the house had needed buttressing and was therefore completely altered. However, he let himself be bundled into the car without any cleaning up in order to show us the house. There was in fact nothing left of the inscription; and it turned out afterwards that Felix had not lived there. Then the farmer had an idea: "Old Steinhäuser lives just round the corner. He is 93 and must have known the fellow you are looking for. He is practically stone deaf and a bit weak in the head, but there is no harm in paying him a visit."

The old man, pitifully shrivelled and bent, was sitting over his midday meal with his family. The room was very small. I sat down next to him and shouted one or two questions into his ear. He kept asking again and again, cupping his ear right up against my mouth: "Hey? Hey?" It was obvious that he could under-

stand nothing. Then suddenly a strange thing happened: the old man let his head fall right forward and, long drawn-out, as though echoing from a deep well, these words emerged: "Aye, old Kogutzki, his name was Felix."

Now we suddenly had a name to go on. Our friend Hörbinger exclaimed in astonishment: "Yes, old man Kogutzki's grave is in the churchyard." It was getting quite exciting. Back we went to the car and off to the churchyard. We could not find the grave at once, but then another farmer was able to help us—by now the whole village was involved—and immediately by the gate on the right, a little hidden in the corner, we found the words: "Here lies Felix Kogutzki, died 1909 in his 76th year." Now we knew that Felix was born in 1833. We had certainly got on to the tracks of the herb-gatherer.

A few minutes later we were sitting round the table in the inn with quite a crowd of old men. The air buzzed with jokes and anecdotes, mostly concerned, however, not with Felix but with his sons, with whom these old farmers had grown up. At the office of the parish council we were able (although it was not a working day) to ascertain from documents that Felix Kogutzki had five sons, of whom one of the survivors was actually in Vienna.

One thing emerged fairly soon from the old men's gossip round the table. Although it was known for a fact that Felix's principal occupation had for long been that of herbalist (*Dürkräutler*), it transpired that in the course of time he had to try to earn a living in many different ways, especially as his boys grew older. He wore out the soles of his shoes travelling as agent for various businesses; and both he and his wife took work in the factories. At weddings he accompanied the dancing on his accordion and sometimes acted as organist in the church.

One of the old men called Felix a "scholar". He did not mean that Felix had had any higher education or had been to a university, but only that he was a great reader. Another recounted how they used to say, when Felix appeared: "Here comes the chap who can see ghosts." Evidently this was their way of expressing what Jacob's sons used to say of their brother Joseph: "Behold this dreamer cometh!" In spite of the peculiar regard felt for him and the esteem in which he was held by the people of Trumau, by and large they had no feeling that there was anything very special about Felix.

Strangely enough, everybody maintained that Felix and his family did not live in a mean little cottage, but in a large well-built house that belonged to the "castle". It turned out later that Felix did in fact move in the year 1883, after the birth of four of his children, into the bigger house. On the first floor of this house we were shown the room, admittedly not very spacious, which served for a long time as living-room and bedroom for the family of seven. In spite of these poor living conditions, Felix succeeded in starting

his sons off in steady middle-class professions. Of the two oldest, Felix Anton became a forester and Anton Felix a bookseller. Immanuel, the youngest, also became a forester, while the middle one, Gottfried, became an official in the Vienna criminal courts.

By now it had gone 2 o'clock, as it was nearly midday when we got to Trumau. I had to be in Vienna at a quarter to four, so that we had to leave these good people, with whom a very friendly understanding had grown up. As we started on our hurried journey home, there was a happy conclusion to our exciting morning's discoveries. The sun broke through the mist and all of a sudden we could see far away to the south, in very faint outline, the Schneeberg, with its characteristic rounded summit, as well as the long line of the Hohe Wand. This proved to us that Dr. Steiner's description of the southern mountains, which he could see from Felix's house in the evening light, did in fact apply to Trumau, despite all appearances to the contrary. The fleeting fairylike glimpse of the distant mountains convinced me that we were here dealing with a matter of special significance in Dr. Steiner's life.

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In Vienna, on the following day, the problem was to find Richard Kogutzki, Felix's second youngest son. We finally discovered him in Floridsdorf, an out-of-the-way industrial suburb, to which he had moved just under a year previously. The people of Trumau had always referred to him jokingly as the "doctor of the left" (*der Linken*), because he had tried unsuccessfully as a young man to study law—i.e., to become a "doctor of the right" or "of law" (*der Rechten*).

We found a pathetic little man of 76, emaciated and bent with worry, but with bright eyes. At first I had to support him with my arm, as he had difficulty in moving about. But it was quite an experience to see how he livened up in the course of conversation, and finally, when I had shown him the passage about his father in Dr. Steiner's *Story of My Life*, he pranced about the room like a small child.

His wife had died only a few weeks before and his connection with her had been, and in fact still was, a very close one. She copied pictures, and the charming manner in which she did this, and the deep feeling she brought to the task, as well as to her original landscapes, made one profoundly conscious of her presence. The walls of the room in which he lived were covered with her pictures.

To begin with I simply let old Richard Kogutzki tell his own story. At first he had difficulty in finding words to express what he meant. One could see that, although his life had derived a sense of security from his father's remarkable qualities, he had never really been fully conscious of them. Probably he had never given much thought to his father's astonishing personality, or to its

significance. But a revelation seemed to come to him as we spoke; and it was very moving to see how the light gradually dawned.

He began with: "Well, my father was a profound philosopher of nature." In the end he gained confidence and seemed surprised at his own words: "He knew things that nobody else knew. He knew them . . ."—at this he took several breaths, while searching for the right word—"he knew them . . . intuitively." Then something else followed: "He knew it as though from . . ." Words failed him, so that I had to try and finish the sentence for him. "As though he knew it from a previous life", I suggested; and he called out in excitement: "Yes, that's it, in a previous life he might have been a Brahmin!" I hardly think that prior to this Richard had entertained the idea of repeated earthly lives, let alone spoken of it. Now to his own surprise he spoke of it as though of something that he had known for a long time.

He recalled many things—for instance, that his father used to read much of Paracelsus and similar writers. After recounting one or two amusing incidents, another idea came to his mind—that there was a good deal of "the occult" about his father. This idea brought him to tears, because it immediately led him to think of his wife, who had just died. When his sobs had died down, he told us how even now his wife often stood by his bed at night. Not long ago she kept pointing to a drawer in the cupboard that stood there; and when he looked next morning, he found wrapped up in the drawer a present intended for a small relation. She had got it ready but had not managed to send it off. He told me how he had then posted the parcel himself. This made it clear what the word "occult" conveyed to him.

Finally, I read to him what Dr. Steiner had written and said about the herb-gatherer. This led to the transformation I have already mentioned. There was no holding him. He kept jumping up and repeating: "Isn't what you have just read exactly the same as I was telling you? Only it is all expressed much better. That is the kind of father we had. If only we had seen it as clearly when he was still alive! We loved our father—and how we enjoyed being with him! But it is only now, after all this long time, that at last I understand everything!"

Now the dear old man was well away. He started making great plans. He wanted to go with us next day to see his relations, who he thought would still have some documents, books, pictures and other relics of his father. His only thought was how he could help me in my search. It was not until afterwards that I realised what a sacrifice it was for him to interrupt the work which completely absorbed him, that of making model houses. He pottered around with a box of aluminium bricks, out of which it was possible to make 45 different kinds of week-end bungalows and other small houses. Anyone planning a house for himself was to have the fun of making a model of it down to the minutest desired detail. His

idea was that this would one day bring him in a lot of money.

He spent a sleepless night thinking over the journeys he had planned, and by the next morning had reduced these to manageable proportions. He had given up the idea of travelling south to near Aspang, where his youngest brother was still alive, but seriously ill and incapable of making conversation. But we had a long journey together through the beautiful Austrian countryside by way of St. Pölten to Kirchberg on the river Pielach, which flows from the mountains northwards to the Danube. It was there that Richard's nephew Anton, son of the second oldest brother, was headmaster. His wife looked after us while we waited for him, as we had arrived to find him teaching until midday.

In the grandson we were dealing with a man of the present day—a younger man who will never have been preoccupied with the kind of world and the problems that concerned his grandfather. But he began gradually to show interest in our enquiries. What is more, he was soon at the cupboard door, getting out a packet of things which had come down to him through his father, who must have been old Felix's favourite son.

First of all, there were two well-thumbed little black books, a sample of the herb-gatherer's library of occult literature. Both had the same inscription, written in a shaky hand: *Dem Toni gewittmet* (sic). *Trumau Samstag den 1. April 1905 K.F.s.* So these books were given by old Felix (Felix Kogutzki the elder), four years before his death, to his son Anton. The title of one was:

Albertus Magnus
Natural and sympathetic
household remedies and medicines
for man and beast
The
best pharmacopoeia
with
more than 100 proved remedies
against all imaginable ills.

The other was smaller:

The new and improved
Albertus Magnus
tried and authenticated
sympathetic and natural
Egyptian secrets
for
man and beast
or
counsellor in homoeopathy
magnetism and the most important
secret remedies for ills of all kinds.

Obviously these were not writings of the great Dominican monk himself. The citing of his name in these instances only indicates that the use of ancient popular remedies in this form for the purpose

of healing is reckoned to belong to the same tradition as that which Albertus Magnus followed.

Inside the books were scraps of paper with proverbs scrawled on them, evidently used by Felix in his "consultations" when attending sick animals and maybe also human patients. It seems that from time to time he undertook work of this kind. People would turn to him when their animals were sick. When his advice was asked on health matters, he tried to help with herbs and ointments.

The most precious find was a tattered old notebook, in which the herb-gatherer had kept his diary from March, 1876, until February, 1884. The entries were written in a clumsy peasant hand. It was touching to read with what circumstantial detail life's little happenings were recorded. There is no expression of thoughts and inner experiences of the soul: everything is simple and straightforward fact. Each entry is signed, as though it were an important document, by Felix together with his full titles: "Felix Kogutzki, certificated herbalist, agent, etc." At the end of the book every entry is indexed under its appropriate heading. The diary begins with a prayer:

Praised and blessed be the most holy sacrament of the altar, for ever and ever. Amen!

Monday 20th March A.D. 1876, I made enquiries at the university of the city of Vienna about the names of the professors of botany.

Tuesday 21st d.M.u.J. (i.e. same month and year) I bought a Black Forest clock.

Monday 27th d.M.u.J. I introduced myself to Herr Frenzi, curator of the Vienna botanical museum. A day or two ago I bought a botanical magnifying glass.

Tuesday 4th. I bought an ordinary saw.

After this Felix refers to the professor of botany, who has set him an examination. We then read:

Friday 23rd June. I was awarded my *Concession ad Negotium in plantis medicinis*.

In the index entry No. 9 above is entitled: "Herbalist's licence" (*Dürkräutler Concession*).

The diary begins, then, at the time that Felix is trying to make a regular profession of herb-gathering. He starts getting himself established in Trumau, buys furniture and even puts a business name-plate over the door of his house. A few months later he marries. His wife, Johanna Neumeier, was eighteen years younger than himself and came from the Bohemian Forest. She died in 1920. One by one the events are recorded which constitute the life of this humble family. 1877, 1879, 1881, 1883 and 1886 are the years in which the sons were born. In 1883 the family moved into the house by the castle. It soon became necessary to take on

other work besides herb-gathering in order to make ends meet.

When I held this precious diary with its yellowing pages in my hands, I was quick to turn up the most important entry of all:

No. 41. Herr Steiner jun., Studiosus, of Inzersdorf, visited me

Sunday 21st August A.D. 1881: unfortunately I was out.

No. 42. H. St. paid me a second visit Friday 26th. d.M.u.J.

This, then, was the visit of which Rudolf Steiner spoke. At that time they must have known each other for nearly two years—their friendship being constantly renewed in the course of their journeys together to Vienna.

The Kirchberg headmaster also let me have two pictures of Felix as an old man. They show him with his wife, his children and grandchildren. In the evening, when we got back from our journey, the widow of the middle son, Gottfried Kogutzki, who lived in Vienna, showed us a large picture of the family. The five sons, then grown up, were standing behind the parents. The date was 1906—three years before Felix's death. It is difficult to describe Felix's face. In spite of its simplicity, it has noble features. One could take him for a parson—for one who has devoted a long life to the service of his fellow men. There is a look about his face as though of transfiguration.

On the way home from Kirchberg old Richard kept remembering further incidents in his father's life. As we were able to make the detour through Trumau, we had a useful chance to complete the picture we had already formed there. After we had put flowers on Felix's grave, Richard showed us the place where the cottage used to stand. It was where his father first lived and where he himself was born. After that we sat down in the inn again with the old men, who had meanwhile remembered a number of other things from the old times.

Felix Kogutzki was born in Vienna on August 1st, 1833. His mother, Barbara, was unmarried. She was the daughter of a Polish cavalry captain, Michael Kogutzki, who was with the troops that fought in 1831 to free Poland from the Russians, but were defeated. They were forced into Austrian territory, where they were disarmed. Vienna was at that time full of impoverished Polish officers and soldiers. Captain Kogutzki's daughter was therefore compelled to go into domestic service with a family in Trattnerhof, near St. Stephen's Cathedral. This was the house in which many famous composers and writers subsequently lived. The very day he was born, little Felix was christened in St. Stephen's and was then brought up in the foundling hospital. Those who told me of this could not find words to describe the inhuman severity meted out to the child there. His head was often battered against the wall.

Later, when the boy expressed the wish to be educated in the

Schottenkloster¹ and perhaps to study for the priesthood, such a career was regarded as impossible for an illegitimate child. "You can study the muckheap," he was told roughly. Felix was then apprenticed to a baker. Once, when Croatian soldiers were passing through, he was given an enormous basket of rolls and told to offer them to the soldiers for sale. He soon got rid of the rolls but brought no money back, for which he was soundly thrashed by his master. Many such tales were told, which showed increasingly clearly what a harsh upbringing Felix must have had, until he succeeded in establishing himself in Trumau and earning a modest living.

One entry in Felix's diary reveals how strictly he used to discipline himself:

Use and arrangement of time with respect to getting up in the morning, if required by duty or pressure of work. During May, June and July 3 a.m., August and September 3.45, October 4 a.m., November 4.45, December and January 5 a.m., February 4.30, March 4 a.m., and finally April 3.45. Besides arranging my times in this way, my time for getting up is subject to another condition. When there is no great urgency, I shall still get up as soon as I hear the Ave Maria, in whatever place or country I may be. Trumau, Friday 30th June A.D. 1882, F.K.

When we read this, we should bear in mind what tremendous distances Felix had to cover on foot. Whether he went east to the Leitha Mountains or west to the foothills of the Vienna Woods to collect herbs, he had a good three hours' walking. Several times every day distances like that from Trumau to Münchendorf, which takes an hour, had to be covered.

Many anecdotes reveal the demands made on the herb-gatherer by neighbours in all spheres of life and activity. With the beginning of the Socialist movement, which had Felix's sympathy, he was once fetched to address a popular meeting in place of the intended speaker, who had failed to turn up. His speech was enthusiastically received. But there was some embarrassment afterwards, when he closed the meeting with three cheers for the Emperor Franz Joseph.

The following incident reveals how he was regarded by the other inhabitants of Trumau. Once, when Felix was hard up, he had to borrow a considerable sum from a well-to-do neighbour, the village innkeeper and baker. As security, he handed over his gold watch. By the time carnival came round, not much had been paid back, but the publican sent word to Felix that one of the boys should come round to fetch their pancakes. One of the pancakes in the basket was much bigger and heavier than the rest and was found, on being opened, to contain the watch.

On the journey home from Kirchberg, Richard had much to tell of the family atmosphere in which he had grown up. The father was very devout: grace was said before meals and prayers before going to bed. At Christmas, the initials of the Three Kings were

¹ An ancient grammar school run by Benedictine monks.

hung over the door—K M B. There was much music-making at home: and when Felix sang, his voice would resound through the village.

This is a suitable place to insert a quotation from a letter written to me by Richard Kogutzki: "You have already been told at Trumau that at weddings he would play the accordion, accompanied on the violin by his third son Gottfried, once he had reached his fourteenth year. To this music Father would sing songs gay and grave. His fine baritone voice had exceptional power. All five boys were very talented musically and had good voices, so that music and song were a feature of our family life. Between us we played with success the violin, the guitar, zither, French horn, bugle and piano. A scene comes to mind of a warm spring evening, when we were singing a solemn chorale by the open window of our first-floor flat next to the castle. Father was accompanying us on his tuneful three-manual accordion. Passers-by stood and looked on approvingly, clapping loudly at the end of the song."

The children's upbringing was strict, but always with positive intention. The cane was used, but really only as a symbol. "Our parents brought us up in a spirit of freedom, always anxious to make us self-reliant—and after all we have not grown up a bad lot." Once, for a short time, Felix looked after a girl who was sickly and suffered from depression, because she had been constantly scolded and beaten by her parents. Felix had, as his son points out, a good way of building up conscious self-reliance in children; and after a few weeks the girl was able to go back home, well and happy. "Yes, the most that scolding teaches children is how to scold." One can well imagine that wherever Felix peddled his wares from house to house, perhaps sometimes even in Baden or as far afield as Vienna, he took with him at the same time a warm and friendly human feeling.

The herb-gatherer lived on until 1909. All outward contact between him and Rudolf Steiner seems to have ended long before then. But it is surely no coincidence that soon after Felix had left the physical plane, Rudolf Steiner started work on his first Mystery Play, *The Portal of Initiation*, in which Felix appeared, first as the "Man with the Lamp" and then as Felix Balde. The play was performed for the first time in 1910, in Munich. The character who had played such an important part in Rudolf Steiner's life was then seen for the first time on the stage. In this way the herb-gatherer came to life again. The mythical aura surrounding Felix Balde was no mere trimming: it indicated that part of the man from Trumau which lay outside his own consciousness, for he was a greater man than he himself knew.

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There is an important sense in which Felix's essential nature is paralleled by the countryside around Trumau. The district in

which he lived was as unpretentious as the man himself, but, like his plain exterior features, it concealed inner forces and a rich soul life. We are here touching on the puzzling question of how Rudolf Steiner came to describe Trumau as a "solitary mountain village". There is no suggestion of mountainous country about the village itself. Wide treeless plains extend in all directions. But the word *Gebirge* has, in addition to its usual meaning, a rather special sense in that district, especially on the western fringe of the Hungarian plain. So, for instance, the name of the place to which Rudolf Steiner's parents moved with him and the rest of the family, after three years in Inzersdorf, was *Brunn am Gebirge* ("mountain spring"). This place is north of Mödling and barely touches the foothills of the Vienna Woods. The use of the word *Gebirge* in this instance is clearly a reference to a mountain atmosphere rather than to the actual presence of hills and valleys.

In some sense this seems to apply also to the triangle of land formed by the western end of the Hungarian plain that lies south of the Danube. In prehistoric times there was a landslide, but the mountains which were there before that event have left behind something of their inner character, so that the word *Gebirge* is to be found in the plain itself, as well as in the hills fringing it to east and west. The wide plain, in which much of Vienna is spread out, is *Gebirge* because within itself mountains lie submerged. The present-day language still reveals this sense of a mountainous district.

In this connection let us go back to the deep impression made on Rudolf Steiner as a young man, when he saw the distant mountains tinged gold by the setting sun, as he looked away to the south from Felix's cottage. This view of the Schneeberg and the other mountains of northern Styria is not normally seen from Trumau, but only on particular occasions. They then appear as though a curtain had been drawn aside somewhat to reveal the hidden secret of this whole countryside. This had quite a special significance for Rudolf Steiner. The view he had that evening in Trumau of the mountains seemed to sum up his entire previous relationship with the country. These mountains were home to him, as nothing else was.

When Rudolf Steiner reached the age at which a child becomes fully conscious of the outside world, his father was stationmaster at Pottschach, which lies immediately at the foot of this range of mountains. The shapes of the Schneeberg, Rax and Wechsel, where they go down to the Semmering, were deeply imprinted on his soul as a child. It was as though the guardian spirits of his home watched over his young life from the peaks of these mountains. He describes this himself in the *Story of My Life*:

My childhood was spent in the most glorious country surroundings. One could see the mountains which join Lower Austria to

Styria — the Schneeberg, Wechsel, Rax and Semmering. The bare rocky summit of the Schneeberg would catch the rays of the morning sun. This was our first greeting from a fine summer's day. In striking contrast was the severe grey ridge of the Wechsel. The mountains seemed to rise up, as though growing out of the friendly countryside, which is everywhere a smiling green. Close at hand were the intimate beauties of nature, while the splendour of the mountain tops dominated the distant horizon.

Later on, Rudolf Steiner's father was shifted to Neudörf. This lies considerably further north, on the eastern fringe of the "Wiener Becken", where the Leitha Mountains form the frontier between Austria and Hungary. It was then that the young lad started at the Realschule in Wiener Neustadt, making the journey from Neudörf every day. There is a splendid distant prospect of these same mountains to be seen from Wiener Neustadt, and also from Neudörf. This time the view covers the entire range. As a schoolboy, therefore, Rudolf Steiner had the experience of constantly seeing the most magnificent aspect of his childhood surroundings afresh:

The Alps, which could be seen close at hand in Pottschach, were now only visible in the distance. But they were a constant reminder of the past, standing in the background, as one looked at the lower ranges which could be reached in a short time from our new home.

Inzersdorf, where Rudolf Steiner was living when he began his studies in Vienna, lies so far north that from there he could no longer see the mountains that spoke to him of home. But in August, 1881, when at the age of 20 he visited the herb-gatherer Felix in Trumau, he was perhaps in the most northerly spot from which, given the right conditions, it is possible to catch momentary glimpses of these mountains. Seeing the mountain-tops he loved, as he was saying good-bye, was like a reunion with the very heart of his home. It allayed the homesickness that persisted in his soul. The mountains spoke the same language, sang to him as it were in the same key, as Felix. His heart responded to the soul of the earth, which had now released him for work in the big city. In making this transition, he had had Felix as his guide.

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The world of modern civilisation, into which Rudolf Steiner was thrust when he left the country, was also to be the scene of a profound awakening. In this process of development, he was to be the pioneer of a new spiritual era for mankind. It is significant that here, too, Felix was to play the part of an intermediary and guide!

In a sense my friend Felix was simply the forerunner of another personality, who had the task of stimulating something in the soul of this youth, standing as he was in the midst of the spiritual world. He drew attention to the need for regular systematic exercises, which are essential in the spiritual world. . . . As far as his everyday work went, this distinguished man was as insignificant as Felix himself. (4th February, 1913).

Edouard Schuré wrote as follows about this personality, on the strength of information given him by Rudolf Steiner in conversation:

The teacher (*Meister*) whom Rudolf Steiner found was one of those mighty personalities who fulfil their mission, unknown to the world and in the guise of some quite conventional work which they take on . . ." (from the Preface to the French edition of *Christianity as Mystical Fact*).

This teacher led the young Steiner by way of Fichte's writings to that vigorous development of the power of thought which culminates in a decisive awakening of the soul. In contrast to Felix, he must have been an exceptionally forceful and active character. In the modern equivalent of the "fight with the dragon", it was he who was Rudolf Steiner's teacher (*Lehrmeister*):

How was he to tame the dragon of modern science and harness him to the vehicle of Spiritual Science? . . . How was he to overcome the monster (*Stier*) of public opinion?

To this question the unknown Master answers:

You will not conquer the dragon until you get inside his skin. As for the monster, you must take him by the horns. I have shown you who you are. Now go and be yourself.

In Goethe's fairy-tale, the decisive moment occurs when the snake whispers the missing fourth secret to the Old Man with the Lamp. At this the old man becomes the herald of a new age: "The time has come!" he calls in a resounding voice. This must have been the way in which Rudolf Steiner experienced his meeting with Felix. It was through him that he heard the call, "The time has come!" After that he was equipped and ready for all that might follow.

The call appears in the following words spoken by Felix Balde in the second Mystery Play:

Obediently I followed the spirit's leading,
Its voice in my heart,
When it enjoined me to be silent.
And now, when it calls on me to speak,
I will again obey.

The being of man changes
In the course of the earth's becoming.
We are at a turning-point in time.
A portion of spiritual knowledge
Must be disclosed to all men
Whose minds are open to receive it.

Translated by John Naumann.

Source: [The Waldorf Library](#)



