The Story of My Life
GA 28

Chapter I

In public discussions of the anthroposophy for which I stand there have been mingled for some time past statements and judgments about the course which my life has taken. From what has been said in this connection conclusions have been drawn with regard to the origin of the variations so called which some persons believe they have discovered in the course of my spiritual evolution. In view of these facts, friends have felt that it would be well if I myself should write something about my own life.

This does not accord, I must confess, with my own inclinations. For it has always been my endeavour so to order what I might have to say and what I might think well to do according as the thing itself might require, and not from personal considerations. To be sure, it has always been my conviction that in many provinces of life the personal element gives to human action a colouring of the utmost value; only it seems to me that this personal element should reveal itself through the manner in which one speaks and acts, and not through conscious attention to one's own personality. Whatever may come about as a result of such attention is something a man has to settle with himself.

And so it has been possible for me to resolve upon the following narration only because it is necessary to set in a true light by means of an objective written statement many a false judgment in reference to the consistency between my life and the thing that I have fostered, and because those who through friendly interest have urged this upon me seem to me justified in view of such false judgments.

The home of my parents was in Lower Austria. My father was born at Geras, a very small place in the Lower Austrian forest region; my mother at Horn, a city of the same district.

My father passed his childhood and youth in the most intimate association with the seminary of the Premonstratensian Order at Geras. He always looked back with the greatest affection upon this time in his life. He liked to tell how he served in the college, and how the monks instructed him. Later on, he was a huntsman in the service of Count Hoyos. This family had a place at Horn. It was there that my father became acquainted with my mother. Then he gave up

the work of huntsman and became a telegraphist on the Southern Austrian Railway. He was sent at first to a little station in southern Styria. Then he was transferred to Kraljevec on the border between Hungary and Croatia. It was during this period that he married my mother. Her maiden name was Blie. She was descended from an old family of Horn. I was born at Kraljevec on February 27, 1861. It thus happened that the place of my birth was far removed from that part of the world from which my family came.

My father, and my mother as well, were true children of the South Austrian forest country, north of the Danube. It is a region into which the railway was late in coming. Even to this day it has left Geras untouched. My parents loved the life they had lived in their native region. When they spoke of this, one realized instinctively how in their souls they had never parted from that birthplace in spite of the fate that forced them to pass the greater part of their lives far away from it. And so, when my father retired, after a life filled with work, they returned at once there-to Horn.

My father was a man of the utmost good will, but of a temper – especially while he was still young – which could be passionately aroused. The work of a railway employee was to him a matter of duty; he had no love for it. While I was still a boy, he would sometimes have to remain on duty for three days and three nights continuously. Then he would be relieved for twenty-four hours. Under such conditions life for him wore no bright colours; all was dull grey. Some pleasure he found in keeping up with political developments. In these he took the liveliest interest. My mother, since our worldly goods were none too plentiful, was forced to devote herself to household duties. Her days were filled with loving care of her children and of the little home.

When I was a year and a half old; my father was transferred to Mödling, near Vienna. There my parents remained a half-year. Then my father was put in charge of the little station on the Southern Railway at Pottschach in Lower Austria, near the Styrian border. There I lived from my second to my eighth year. A wonderful landscape formed the environment of my childhood. The view stretched as far as the mountains that separate Lower Austria from Styria: “Snow Mountain,” Wechsel, the Rax Alps, the Semmering. Snow Mountain caught the sun's earliest rays on its bare summit, and the kindling reflection of these from the mountain down to the little village was the first greeting of dawn in the beautiful summer days. The grey back of the Wechsel put one by contrast in a sober mood. It was as if the mountains rose up out of the all-surrounding green of the friendly landscape. On the distant boundaries of the circle one had the majesty of the peaks, and close around the tenderness of nature.

But around the little station all interest was centered on the business of the railway. At that time the trains passed in that region only at long intervals; but, when they came, many of the men of the village who could spare the time were generally gathered at the station, seeking thus to bring some change into their lives, which they found otherwise very monotonous. The schoolmaster, the priest, the book-keeper of the manor, and often the burgomaster as well, would be there.

It seems to me that passing my childhood in such an environment had a certain significance for my life. For I felt a very deep interest in everything about me of a mechanical character; and I know how this interest tended constantly to overshadow in my childish soul the affections which went out to that tender and yet mighty nature into which the railway train, in spite of being in subjection to this mechanism, must always disappear in the far distance.

In the midst of all this there was present the influence of a certain personality of marked originality, the priest of St. Valentin, a place that one could reach on foot from Pottschach in about three-quarters of an hour. This priest liked to come to the home of my parents. Almost every day he took a walk to our home, and he nearly always stayed for a long time. He belonged to the liberal type of Catholic cleric, tolerant and genial; a robust, broad-shouldered man. He was quite witty, too; had many jokes to tell, and was pleased when he drew a laugh from the persons about him. And they would laugh even more loudly over what he had said long after he was gone. He was a man of a practical way of life, and liked to give good practical advice. Such a piece of practical counsel produced its effects in my family for a long time. There was a row of acacia trees (Robinien) on each side of the railway at Pottschach. Once we were walking along the little footpath under these trees, when he remarked: “Ah, what beautiful acacia blossoms these are!” He seized one of the branches at once and broke off a mass of the blossoms. Spreading out his huge red pocket-handkerchief – he was extremely fond of snuff – he carefully wrapped the twigs in this, and put the “Binkerl” under his arm. Then he said: “How lucky you are to have so many acacia blossoms! “My father was astonished, and answered: “Why, what can we do with them?” “Wh-a-a-t?” said the priest. “Don't you know that you can bake the acacia blossoms just like elder flowers, and that they taste much better then because they have a far more delicate aroma?” From that time on we often had in our family, as opportunity offered from time to time, “baked acacia blossoms.”

In Pottschach a daughter and another son were born to my parents. There was never any further addition to the family.

As a very young child I showed a marked individuality. From the time that I could feed myself, I had to be carefully watched. For I had formed the conviction that a soup-bowl or a cof-

fee cup was meant to be used only once; and so, every time that I was not watched, as soon as I had finished eating something I would throw the bowl or the cup under the table and smash it to pieces. Then, when my mother appeared, I would call out to her : “Mother, I've finished!”

This could not have been a mere propensity for destroying things, since I handled my toys with the greatest care, and kept them in good condition for a long time. Among these toys those that had the strongest attraction for me were the kind which even now I consider especially good. These were picture-books with figures that could be made to move by pulling strings attached to them at the bottom. One associated little stories with these figures, to whom one gave a part of their life by pulling the strings. Many a time have I sat by the hour poring over the picture-books with my sister. Besides, I learned from them by myself the first steps in reading.

My father was concerned that I should learn early to read and write. When I reached the required age, I was sent to the village school. The schoolmaster was an old man to whom the work of “teaching school” was a burdensome business. Equally burdensome to me was the business of being taught by him. I had no faith whatever that I could ever learn anything from him. For he often came to our house with his wife and his little son, and this son, according to my notions at that time, was a scamp. So I had this idea firmly fixed in my head: “Whoever has such a scamp for a son, nobody can learn anything from him.” Besides, something else happened, “quite dreadful.” This scamp, who also was in the school, played the prank one day of dipping a chip into all the ink-wells of the school and making circles around them with dabs of ink. His father noticed these. Most of the pupils had already gone. The teacher's son, two other boys, and I were still there. The schoolmaster was beside himself; he talked in a frightful manner. I felt sure that he would actually roar but for the fact that his voice was always husky. In spite of his rage, he got an inkling from our behaviour as to who the culprit was. But things then took a different turn. The teacher's home was next-door to the school-room. The “lady head mistress” heard the commotion and came into the school-room with wild eyes, waving her arms in the air. To her it was perfectly clear that her little son could not have done this thing. She put the blame on me. I ran away. My father was furious when I reported this matter at home. Then, the next time the teacher's family came to our house, he told them with the utmost bluntness that the friendship between us was ended, and added baldly: “My boy shall never set foot in your school again,” Now my father himself took over the task of teaching me; and so I would sit beside him in his little office by the hour, and had to read and write between whiles whenever he was busy with his duties.

Neither with him could I feel any real interest in what had to come to me by way of direct instruction. What interested me was the things that my father himself was writing. I would imi-

tate what he did. In this way I learned a great deal. As to the things I was taught by him, I could see no reason why I should do these just for my own improvement. On the other hand, I became rooted, in a child's way, in everything that formed a part of the practical work of life. The routine of a railway office, everything connected with it, – this caught my attention. It was, however, more especially the laws of nature that had already taken me as their little errand boy. When I wrote, it was because I had to write, and I wrote as fast as I could so that I should soon have a page filled. For then I could strew the sort of dust my father used over this writing. Then I would be absorbed in watching how quickly the dust dried up the ink, and what sort of mixture they made together. I would try the letters over and over with my fingers to discover which were already dry, which not. My curiosity about this was very great, and it was in this way chiefly that I quickly learned the alphabet. Thus my writing lessons took on a character that did not please my father, but he was good-natured and reproved me only by frequently calling me an incorrigible little “rascal.” This, however, was not the only thing that evolved in me by means of the writing lessons. What interested me more than the shapes of the letters was the body of the writing quill itself. I could take my father's ruler and force the point of this into the slit in the point of the quill, and in this manner carry on researches in physics, concerning the elasticity of a feather. Afterwards, of course, I bent the feather back into shape; but the beauty of my handwriting distinctly suffered in this process.

This was also the time when, with my inclination toward the understanding of natural phenomena, I occupied a position midway between seeing through a combination of things, on the one hand, and “the limits of understanding” on the other. About three minutes from the home of my parents there was a mill. The owners of the mill were the god-parents of my brother and sister. We were always welcome at this mill. I often disappeared within it. Then I studied with all my heart the work of a miller. I forced a way for myself into the “interior of nature.” Still nearer us, however, there was a yarn factory. The raw material for this came to the railway station; the finished product went away from the station. I participated thus in everything which disappeared within the factory and everything which reappeared. We were strictly forbidden to take one peep at the “inside” of this factory. This we never succeeded in doing. There were the “limits of understanding” And how I wished to step across the boundaries! For almost every day the manager of the factory came to see my father on some matter of business. For me as a boy this manager was a problem, casting a miraculous veil, as it were, over the “inside” of those works. He was spotted here and there with white tufts; his eyes had taken on a certain set look from working at machinery. He spoke hoarsely, as if with a mechanical speech. “What is the connection between this man and everything that is surrounded by those walls?” – this was an insoluble problem facing my mind. But I never questioned anyone regarding the mystery. For it was my childish conviction that it does no good to ask questions about a problem which is concealed from one's eyes. Thus I lived between the friendly mill and the unfriendly factory.

Once something happened at the station that was very “dreadful.” A freight train rumbled up. My father stood looking at it. One of the rear cars was on fire. The crew had not noticed this at all. All that followed as a result of this made a deep impression on me. Fire had started in a car by reason of some highly inflammable material. For a long time I was absorbed in the question how such a thing could happen. What my surroundings said to me in this case was, as in many other matters, not to my satisfaction. I was filled with questions, and I had to carry these about with me unanswered. It was thus that I reached my eighth year.

During my eighth year the family moved to Neudörfl, a little Hungarian village. This village is just at the border over against Lower Austria. The boundary here was formed by the Laytha River. The station that my father had in charge was at one end of the village. Half an hour's walk further on was the boundary stream. Still another half-hour brought one to Wiener-Neustadt.

The range of the Alps that I had seen close by at Pottschach was now visible only at a distance. Yet the mountains still stood there in the background to awaken our memories when we looked at lower mountains that could be reached in a short time from our family's new home. Massive heights covered with beautiful forests bounded the view in one direction; in the other, the eye could range over a level region, decked out in fields and woodland, all the way to Hungary. Of all the mountains, I gave my unbounded love to one that could be climbed in three-quarters of an hour. On its crest there stood a chapel containing a painting of Saint Rosalie. This chapel came to be the objective of a walk which I often took at first with my parents and my sister and brother, and later loved to take alone. Such walks were filled with a special happiness because of the fact that at that time of year we could bring back with us rich gifts of nature. For in these woods there were blackberries, raspberries, and strawberries. One could often find an inner satisfaction in an hour and a half of berrying for the purpose of adding a delicious contribution to the family supper, which otherwise consisted merely of a piece of buttered bread or bread and cheese for each of us.

Still another pleasant thing came from rambling about in these forests, which were the common property of all. There the villagers got their supplies of wood. The poor gathered it for themselves; the well-to-do had servants to do this. One could become acquainted with all of these most-friendly persons. They always had time for a chat when Steiner Rudolf met them. “So thou goest again for a bit of a walk, Steiner Rudolf” – thus they would begin, and then they would talk about everything imaginable. The people did not think of the fact that they had a mere child before them. For at the bottom of their souls they also were only children, even when they could number sixty years. And so I really learned from the stories they told me almost everything that happened in the houses of the village.

Half an hour's walk from Neudörfl is Sauerbrunn, where there is a spring containing iron and carbonic acid. The road to this lies along the railway, and part of the way through beautiful woods. During vacation time I went there every day early in the morning, carrying with me a "Blutzer." This is a water vessel made of clay. The smallest of these hold three or four litres. One could fill this without charge at the spring. Then at midday the family could enjoy the delicious sparkling water.

Toward Wiener-Neustadt and farther on toward Styria, the mountains fall away to a level country. Through this level country the Laytha River winds its way. On the slope of the mountains there was a cloister of the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer. I often met the monks on my walks. I still remember how glad I should have been if they had spoken to me. They never did. And so I carried away from these meetings an undefined but solemn feeling which remained constantly with me for a long time. It was in my ninth year that the idea became fixed in me that there must be weighty matters in connection with the duties of these monks which I ought to learn to understand. There again I was filled with questions which I had to carry around unanswered. Indeed, these questions about all possible sorts of things made me as a boy very lonely.

On the foothills of the Alps two castles were visible: Pitten and Frohsdorf. In the second there lived at that time Count Chambord, who, at the beginning of the year 1870, claimed the throne of France as Henry V. Very deep were the impressions that I received from that fragment of life bound up with the castle Frohsdorf. The Count with his retinue frequently took the train for a journey from the station at Neudörfl.

Everything drew my attention to these men. Especially deep was the impression made by one man in the Count's retinue. He had but one ear. The other had been slashed off clean. The hair lying over this he had braided. At the sight of this I perceived for the first time what a duel is. For it was in this manner that the man had lost one ear.

Then, too, a fragment of social life unveiled itself to me in connection with Frohsdorf. The assistant teacher at Neudörfl, whom I was often permitted to see at work in his little chamber, prepared innumerable petitions to Count Chambord for the poor of the village and the country around. In response to every such appeal there always came back a donation of one gulden, and from this the teacher was always allowed to keep six kreuzer for his services. This income he had need of, for the annual salary yielded him by his profession was fifty-eight gulden. In addition, he had his morning coffee and his lunch with the "schoolmaster." Then, too, he gave special lessons to about ten children, of whom I was one. For such lessons the charge was one gulden a month.

To this assistant teacher I owe a great deal. Not that I was greatly benefited by his lessons at the school. In that respect I had about the same experience as at Pottschach. As soon as we moved to Neudörfl, I was sent to school there This school consisted of one room in which five classes of both boys and girls all had their lessons. While the boy who sat on my bench were at their task of copying out the story of King Arpad, the very little fellows stood at a black board on which *i* and *u* had been written with chalk for them. It was simply impossible to do anything save to let the mind fall into a dull reverie while the hands almost mechanically took care of the copying. Almost all the teaching had to be done by the assistant teacher alone. The "schoolmaster" appeared in the school only very rarely. He was also the village notary, and it was said that in this occupation he had so much to take up his time that he could never keep school.

In spite of all this I learned earlier than usual to read well. Because of this fact the assistant teacher was able to take hold of something within me which has influenced the whole course of my life. Soon after my entrance into the Neudörfl school, I found a book on geometry in his room. I was on such good terms with the teacher that I was permitted at once to borrow the book for my own use. I plunged into it with enthusiasm. For weeks at a time my mind it was filled with coincidences, similarities between triangles, squares, polygons; I racked my brains over the question: Where do parallel lines actually meet? The theorem of Pythagoras fascinated me. That one can live within the mind in the shaping of forms perceived only within oneself, entirely without impression upon the external senses – this gave me the deepest satisfaction. I found in this a solace for the unhappiness which my unanswered questions had caused me. To be able to lay hold upon something in the spirit alone brought to me an inner joy. I am sure that I learned first in geometry to experience this joy.

In my relation to geometry I must now perceive the first budding forth of a conception which has since gradually evolved in me. This lived within me more or less unconsciously during my childhood, and about my twentieth year took a definite and fully conscious form.

I said to myself: "The objects and occurrences which the senses perceive are in space. But, just as this space is outside of man, so there exists also within man a sort of soul-space which is the arena of spiritual realities and occurrences." In my thoughts I could not see anything in the nature of mental images such as man forms within him from actual things, but I saw a spiritual world in this soul-arena. Geometry seemed to me to be a knowledge which man appeared to have produced but which had, nevertheless, a significance quite independent of man. Naturally I did not, as a child, say all this to myself distinctly, but I felt that one must carry the knowledge of the spiritual world within oneself after the fashion of geometry.

For the reality of the spiritual world was to me as certain as that of the physical. I felt the need, however, for a sort of justification for this assumption. I wished to be able to say to myself that the experience of the spiritual world is just as little an illusion as is that of the physical world. With regard to geometry I said to myself: “Here one is permitted to know something which the mind alone, through its own power, experiences.” In this feeling I found the justification for the spiritual world that I experienced, even as, so to speak, for the physical. And in this way I talked about this. I had two conceptions which were naturally undefined, but which played a great role in my mental life even before my eighth year. I distinguished things as those “which are seen” and those “which are not seen.”

I am relating these matters quite frankly, in spite of the fact that those persons who are seeking for evidence to prove that anthroposophy is fantastic will, perhaps, draw the conclusion from this that even as a child I was marked by a gift for the fantastic: no wonder, then, that a fantastic philosophy should also have evolved within me.

But it is just because I know how little I have followed my own inclinations in forming conceptions of a spiritual world – having on the contrary followed only the inner necessity of things – that I myself can look back quite objectively upon the childlike unaided manner in which I confirmed for myself by means of geometry the feeling that I must speak of a world “which is not seen.”

Only I must also say that I loved to live in that world For I should have been forced to feel the physical world as a sort of spiritual darkness around me had it not received light from that side.

The assistant teacher of Neudörfl had provided me, in the geometry text-book, with that which I then needed – justification for the spiritual world.

In other ways also I owe much to him. He brought to me the element of art. He played the piano and the violin and he drew a great deal. These things attracted me powerfully to him. Just as much as I possibly could be, was I with him. Of drawing he was especially fond, and even in my ninth year he interested me in drawing with crayons. I had in this way to copy pictures under his direction. Long did I sit, for instance, copying a portrait of Count Szedgenyi.

Very seldom at Neudörfl, but frequently in the neighbouring town of Sauerbrunn, could I listen to the impressive music of the Hungarian gipsies.

All this played its part in a childhood which was passed in the immediate neighbourhood of the church and the churchyard. The station at Neudörfl was but a few steps from the church, and between these lay the churchyard. If one went along by the churchyard and then a short stretch further, one came into the village itself. This consisted of two rows of houses. One row began with the school and the other with the home of the priest. Between those two rows of houses flowed a little brook, along the banks of which grew stately nut trees. In connection with these nut trees an order of precedence grew up among the children of the school. When the nuts began to get ripe, the boys and girls assailed the trees with stones, and in this way laid in a winter's supply of nuts. In autumn almost the only thing anyone talked about was the size of his harvest of nuts. Whoever had gathered most of all was the most looked up to, and then step by step was the descent all the way down – to me, the last, who as an "outsider in the village" had no right to share in this order of precedence.

Near the railway station, the row of most important houses, in which the "big farmers" lived, was met at right angles by a row of some twenty houses owned by the "middle class" villagers. Then, beginning from the gardens which belonged to the station, came a group of thatched houses belonging to the "small cottagers." These constituted the immediate neighbourhood of my family. The roads leading out from the village went past fields and vineyards that were owned by the villagers. Every year I took part with the "small cottagers" in the vintage, and once also in a village wedding.

Next to the assistant teacher, the person whom I loved most among those who had to do with the direction of the school was the priest. He came regularly twice a week to give instruction in religion and often besides for inspection of the school. The image of the man was deeply impressed upon my mind, and he has come back into my memory again and again throughout my life. Among the persons whom I came to know up to my tenth or eleventh year, he was by far the most significant. He was a vigorous Hungarian patriot. He took active part in the process of Magyarizing the Hungarian territory which was then going forward. From this point of view he wrote articles in the Hungarian language, which I thus learned through the fact that the assistant teacher had to make clear copies of these and he always discussed their contents with me in spite of my youthfulness. But the priest was also an energetic worker for the Church. This once impressed itself deeply upon my mind through one of his sermons.

At Neudörfl there was a lodge of Freemasons. To the villagers this was shrouded in mystery, and they wove about it the most amazing legends. The leading role in this lodge belonged to the manager of a match-factory which stood at the end of the village. Next to him in prominence among the persons immediately interested in the matter were the manager of another factory and a clothing merchant. Otherwise the only significance attaching to the lodge arose

from the fact that from time to time strangers from “remote parts” were visitors there, and these seemed to the villagers in the highest degree unwelcome. The clothing merchant was a noteworthy person. He always walked with his head bowed over as if in deep thought. People called him “the make-believe,” and his isolation rendered it neither possible nor necessary that anyone should approach him. The building in which the lodge met belonged to his home.

I could establish no sort of relationship to this lodge. For the entire behaviour of the persons about me in regard to this matter was such that here again I had to refrain from asking questions; besides, the utterly absurd way in which the manager of the match-factory talked about the church made a shocking impression on me.

Then one Sunday the priest delivered a sermon in his energetic fashion in which he set forth in due order the true principles of morality for human life and spoke of the enemy of the truth in figures of speech framed to fit the lodge. As a climax, he delivered his advice: “Beloved Christians, beware of him who is an enemy of the truth: for example, a Mason or a Jew.” In the eyes of the people, the factory owner and the clothing merchant were thus authoritatively exposed. The vigour with which this had been uttered made a specially deep impression upon me. I owe to the priest also, because of a certain profound impression made upon me, a very great deal in the later orientation of my spiritual life. One day he came into the school, gathered round him in the teacher's little room the “riper” children, among whom he included me, unfolded a drawing he had made, and with the help of this explained to us the Copernican system of astronomy. He spoke about this very vividly – the revolution of the earth around the sun, its rotation on its axis, the inclination of the axis in summer and winter, and also the zones of the earth. In all of it I was absorbed; I made drawings of a similar kind for days together, and then received from the priest further special instruction concerning eclipses of the sun and the moon; and thence-forward I directed all my search for knowledge toward this subject. I was then about ten years old, and I could not yet write without mistakes in spelling and grammar.

Of the deepest significance for my life as a boy was the nearness of the church and the churchyard beside it. Everything that happened in the village school was affected in its course by its relationship to these. This was not by reason of certain dominant social and political relationships existing in every community; it was due to the fact that the priest was an impressive personality. The assistant teacher was at the same time organist of the church and custodian of the vestments used at Mass and of the other church furnishings. He performed all the services of an assistant to the priest in his religious ministrations. We schoolboys had to carry out the duties of ministrants and choristers during Mass, rites for the dead, and funerals. The solemnity of the Latin language and of the liturgy was a thing in which my boyish soul found a Vital

happiness. Because of the fact that up to my tenth year I took such an earnest part in the services of the church, I was often in the company of the priest whom I so revered. In the home of my parents I received no encouragement in this matter of my relationship to the church. My father took no part in this. He was then a “freethinker.” He never entered the church to which I had become so deeply attached; and yet he also, as a boy and as a young man, had been equally devoted and active. In his case this all changed once more only when he went back, as an old man on a pension, to Horn, his native region. There he became again “a pious man.” But by that time I had long ceased to have any association with my parents' home.

From the time of my boyhood at Neudörfl, I have always had the strongest impression of the manner in which the contemplation of the church services in close connection with the solemnity of liturgical music causes the riddle of existence to rise in powerful suggestive fashion before the mind. The instruction in the Bible and the catechism imparted by the priest had far less effect upon my mental world than what he accomplished by means of liturgy in mediating between the sensible and the supersensible. From the first this was to me no mere form, but a profound experience. It was all the more so because of the fact that in this I was a stranger in the home of my parents. Even in the atmosphere I had to breathe in my home, my spirit did not lose that vital experience which it had acquired from the liturgy. I passed my life amid this home environment without sharing in it, perceived it; but my real thoughts, feelings, and experience were continually in that other world. I can assert emphatically however, in this connection that I was no dreamer, but quite self-sufficient in all practical affairs.

A complete counterpart to this world of mine was my father's political affairs. He and another employee took turns on duty. This man lived at another railway station, for which he was partly responsible. He came to Neudörfl only every two or three days. During the free hours of the evening he and my father would talk politics. This would take place at a table which stood near the station under two huge and wonderful lime trees. There our whole family and the other employee would assemble. My mother knitted or crocheted; my brother and sister busied themselves about us; I would often sit at the table and listen to the unheard of political arguments of the two men. My participation, however, never had anything to do with the sense of what they were saying, but only with the form which the conversation took. They were always on opposite sides; if one said “Yes,” the other always contradicted him with “No.” All this, however, was marked, not only by a certain intensity – indeed, violence – but also by the good humour which was a basic element in my father's nature.

In the little circle often gathered there, to which were frequently added some of the “notabilities” of the village, there appeared at times a doctor from Wiener-Neustadt. He had many patients in this place, where at that time there was no physician. He came from Wiener-Neustadt

to Neudörfl on foot, and would come to the station after visiting his patients to wait for the train on which he went back. This man passed with my parents, and with most persons who knew him, as an odd character. He did not like to talk about his profession as a doctor, but all the more gladly did he talk about German literature. It was from him that I first heard of Lessing, Goethe, Schiller. At my home there was never any such conversation. Nothing was known of such things. Nor in the village school was there any mention of such matters. There the emphasis was all on Hungarian history. Priest and assistant teacher had no interest in the masters of German literature. And so it happened that with the Wiener-Neustadt doctor a whole new world came within my range of vision. He took an interest in me; often drew me aside after he had rested for a while under the lime trees, walked up and down with me by the station, and talked – not like a lecturer, but enthusiastically – about German literature. In these talks he set forth all sorts of ideas as to what is beautiful and what is ugly.

This also has remained as a picture with me, giving me many happy hours in memory throughout my life: the tall, slender doctor, with his quick, long stride, always with his umbrella in his right hand held invariably in such a way that it dangled by his side, and I, a boy of ten years, on the other side, quite absorbed in what the man was saying.

Along with all these things I was tremendously concerned with everything pertaining to the railroad. I first learned the principles of electricity in connection with the station telegraph. I learned also as a boy to telegraph.

As to language, I grew up in the dialect of German that is spoken in Eastern Lower Austria. This was really the same as that then used in those parts of Hungary bordering on Lower Austria. My relationship to reading and that to writing were entirely different. In my boyhood I passed rapidly over the words in reading; my mind went immediately to the perceptions, the concepts, the ideas, so that I got no feeling from reading either for spelling or for writing grammatically. On the other hand, in writing I had a tendency to fix the word-forms in my mind by their sounds as I generally heard them spoken in the dialect. For this reason it was only after the most arduous effort that I gained facility in writing the literary language; whereas reading was easy for me from the first.

Under such influences I grew up to the age at which my father had to decide whether to send me to the *Gymnasium* or to the *Realschule* [1] at Wiener-Neustadt. From that time on I heard much talk with other persons – in between the political discussions – as to my own future. My father was given this and that advice; I already knew: “He likes to listen to what others say, but he acts according to his own fixed and definite determination.”