The Story of My Life
GA 28

Chapter XIII

Just at this time my outward life was altogether happy. I was frequently with my old friends. Few as were the opportunities I had to speak of the things I am here discussing, yet the spiritual and mental ties that bound me to these friends were none the less strong. How often must I think over again the conversations, sometimes unending, which occurred at that time in a well-known coffee house on Michaelerplatz in Vienna. I had cause to think of these especially during that period following the World War when old Austria went to pieces. For the causes of this crumbling to pieces were at that time already present everywhere. But no one was willing to recognize this. Everyone had thoughts that would be the means of a cure, always according to his own special national or cultural leanings. And if ideals which manifest themselves at times of the ebbing tide are stimulating, yet they are ideals born out of the decadence itself, out of the desire to prevent this-themselves being no less tragic. Such tragic ideals worked in the hearts of the best Viennese and Austrians.

I frequently caused misunderstandings with these idealists when I expressed a conviction which had been borne in upon me through my absorption in the period of Goethe. I said that a culmination in Occidental cultural evolution had been reached during that period. This had not been continued. The period of the natural sciences, with its effects upon the lives of men and of peoples, denoted a decadence. For any further advance there was needed an entirely new attack from the side of the spirit. There could be no further progress into the spiritual by those roads which had previously been laid out, except after a previous turning back.

Goethe is a climax, but therefore not a point of departure; on the contrary, an end. He develops the results of an evolution which goes as far as himself and finds in him its most complete embodiment, but which cannot be further advanced without first resorting to far more primal springs of spiritual experience than exist in this evolution. In this mood I wrote the last part of my Goethe exposition.

It was in this mood that I first became acquainted with Nietzsche's writings. *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*[1] was the first of his books that I read. I was fascinated by his way of viewing things and yet at the same time repelled. I found it hard to get a right attitude toward Nietzsche. I

loved his style; I loved his keenness; but I did not love at all the way in which Nietzsche spoke of the most profound problems without immersing himself in these with fully conscious thought in spiritual experience. Only I then observed that he said many things with which I stood in the closest intimacy in my spiritual experience. And thus I felt myself close to his struggle and felt that I must find an expression for this proximity. Nietzsche seemed to me one of the most tragic figures of that time. And this tragedy, I believed, must be the effect of the spiritual attitude characterizing the natural-scientific age upon human souls of more than ordinary depth. I passed my last years in Vienna with such feelings as these.

Before the close of the first phase of my life, I had the opportunity of visiting also Budapest and Siebenbürgen (Transylvania). The friend I have previously mentioned whose family belonged to Transylvania, who had remained bound to me with rare loyalty through all these years, had introduced me to a good many of the people from his district who were in Vienna. Thus it happened that, in addition to my other extensive social relationships, I had also this with persons from Transylvania. Among them were Herr and Frau Breitenstein, who became friends of mine at that time and who have remained such in the most heartfelt fashion. For a long time they have taken a leading part in the Anthroposophical Society in Vienna. This human relationship with "Siebenbürgers" led me to make a journey to Budapest. The capital of Hungary, in character so entirely unlike Vienna, made a deep impression upon me. One went there from Vienna through a region brilliant in the beauty of its scenery, its highly temperamental humanity, and the intensity of its musical interest. When one looked from the windows of the train, one had the impression that nature herself had become poetic in a special way, and that human beings, paying little heed to the poetic nature so familiar to them, plunged down within themselves in an often profoundly inward music of the heart. And, when one reached Budapest, there came to expression a world which may be viewed with the greatest interest from the point of view of the relationships to other European peoples, but which can from this point of view never be wholly understood. A dark undertone over which gleams a light playing amid colours. This character seemed to me as if it were forced together into visible unity when I stood before the Franz Drak [Ferenc Deák – e.Ed] monument. In this head of the maker of that Hungary which existed from the year 1867 to 1918 there lived a strong, proud will which laid hold with all its might, which forced itself through without cunning but with elemental mercilessness. I felt how true subjectively for every Hungarian was the proverb I had often heard: "Outside of Hungary there is no life; and, if there is a life, it is by no means such as this."

As a child I had seen on the western borders of Hungary how Germans were made to feel this strong, proud will; now I learned in the midst of Hungary how this will brings the Magyar people into an isolation from humanity which clothes them, as they rather naïvely think, in a

certain glamour obvious to themselves which values much the showing of itself to the hidden eyes of nature but not to the open eyes of men.

Half a year after this visit, my Transylvanian friends arranged for me to deliver a lecture at Hermannstadt. It was Christmas time. I traveled over the wide plains in the midst of which lies Arad. The melancholy poetry of Lenau sounded in my heart as I looked out over these plains where all is one expanse to which the eye can find no limit. I had to spend the night in a little border village between Hungary and Transylvania.

I sat in a little guest-room half the night. Besides myself there was only a group of card-players sitting round a table. In this group there were all the nationalities to be found at that time in Hungary and Transylvania. The men were playing with a vehemence which constantly broke loose at half-hour intervals, so that it took the form of soul-clouds which rose above the table, struggled together like demons, and wreathed the men about completely as if in the folds of serpents. What differences in vehement existence were there manifested by these different national types!

I reached Hermannstadt on Christmas Day. Here I was introduced into "Siebenburger Saxondom." This existed there in the midst of a Rumanian and Magyar environment. A noble folk which, in the midst of a decline that it could not perceive, desired to prove its gallantry. A Germanism which, like a memory of the transfer of its life centuries ago to the East, wished to show its loyalty to its origins, but which in this temper of soul showed a trait of alienation from the world manifesting itself as an elevated universal joy in life. I passed happy days among the German ministers of the Evangelical Church, among the teachers of the German schools, and among other German Siebenburgers. My heart warmed to these people who, in the concern for their folk life and in their duty to this, evolved a culture of the heart which spoke first of all likewise to the heart. This vital warmth filled my soul as I sat in a sleigh, wrapped close in heavy furs, and travelled with these old and new friends through icy-cold and crackling snow to the Carpathians (the Transylvanian Alps). A dark, forested mountain country when one moves toward it from the distance; a wild, precipitous, often frightful mountain landscape when one is close at hand.

The centre in all which I then experienced was my friend of many years. He was always thinking out something new whereby I might learn thoroughly Siebenburger Saxondom. He was still dividing his time between Vienna and Hermannstadt. At that time he owned a weekly paper at Hermannstadt founded for the purpose of fostering Siebenburger Saxondom. An undertaking it was which arose entirely out of idealism, utterly devoid of practical experience, but at

which almost all representatives of Saxondom laboured together. After a few weeks it came to grief.

Such experiences as this journey were brought me by destiny; and through them I was enabled to educate my perception for the outer world, a thing which had not been easy for me, whereas in the element of the spiritual I lived as in something self-evident.

It was with sad memories that I made the journey back to Vienna. There fell into my hands just then a book of whose "spiritual richness" men of all sorts were speaking: *Rembrandt als Erzieher*.[2] In conversations about this book, which were then going on wherever one went, one could hear about the coming of an entirely new spirit. I was forced to become aware, by reason of this very phenomenon, of the great loneliness in which I stood with my temper of mind amid the spiritual life of that period.

In regard to a book which was prized in the highest degree by all the world my own feeling was as if someone had sat for several months at a table in one of the better hotels and listened to what the "outstanding" personalities in the genealogical tables said by way of "brilliant" remarks, and had then written these down in the form of aphorisms. After this continuous "preliminary work" he could have thrown his slips of paper with these remarks into a vessel, shaken them thoroughly together, and then taken them out again After drawing out the slips, he could have made a series of these and so produced a book. Of course, this criticism is exaggerated. But my inner vital mood forced me into such revulsion from that which the "spirit of the times" then praised as a work of the highest merit. I considered *Rembrandt as Teacher* a book which dealt wholly with the surface of thoughts that have to do with the realm of the spiritual, and which did not harmonize in a single sentence with the real depths of the human soul. It grieved me to know that my contemporaries considered such a book as coming from a profound personality, whereas I was forced to believe that such dealers in the small change of thought moving in the shallows of the spirit would drive all that is deeply human out of man's soul.

When I was fourteen years old I had to begin tutoring; for fifteen years, up to the beginning of the second phase of my life, that spent at Weimar, my destiny kept me engaged in this work. The unfolding of the minds of many persons, both in childhood and in youth, was in this way bound up with my own evolution. Through this means I was able to observe how different were the ways in which the two sexes grow into life. For, along with the giving of instruction to boys and young men, it fell to my lot to teach also a number of young girls. Indeed, for a long time the mother of the boy whose instruction I had taken over because of his pathological

condition was a pupil of mine in geometry; and at another time I taught this lady and her sister aesthetics.

In the family of these children I found for a number of years a sort of home, from which I went out to other families as tutor or instructor. Through the intimate friendship between the mother of the children and myself, it came about that I shared fully in the joys and sorrows of this family. In this woman I perceived a uniquely beautiful human soul. She was wholly devoted to the development of her four boys according to their destiny. In her one could study mother love in its larger manifestation. To co-operate with her in problems of education formed a beautiful content of life. For the musical part of the artistic she possessed both talent and enthusiasm. At times she took charge of the musical practice of her boys, as long as they were still young. She discussed intelligently with me the most varied life problems, sharing in everything with the deepest interest. She gave the greatest attention to my scientific and other tasks. There was a time when I had the greatest need to discuss with her everything which intimately concerned me. When I spoke of my spiritual experiences, she listened in a peculiar way. To her intelligence the thing was entirely congenial, but it maintained a certain marked reserve; yet her mind absorbed everything. At the same time she maintained in reference to man's being a certain naturalistic view. She believed the moral temper to be entirely bound up with the health or sickness of the bodily constitution. I mean to say that she thought instinctively about man in a medical fashion, whereby her thinking tended to be somewhat naturalistic. To discuss things in this way with her was in the highest degree stimulating. Besides, her attitude toward all outer life was that of a woman who attended with the strongest sense of duty to everything which fell to her lot, but who looked upon most inner things as not belonging to her sphere. She looked upon her fate in many aspects as something burdensome. But still she made no claims upon life; she accepted this as it took form so far as it did not concern her sons. In relation to these she felt every experience with the deepest emotion of her soul.

All this I shared vitally – the soul-life of a woman, her beautiful devotion to her sons, the life of the family within a wide circle of kinsmen and acquaintances. But for this reason things did not move without difficulty. The family was Jewish. In their views they were quite free from any sectarian or racial narrowness, but the head of the family, to whom I was deeply attached, felt a certain sensitiveness to any expression by a Gentile in regard to the Jews. The flame of anti-Semitism which had sprung up at that time had caused this feeling.

Now, I took a keen interest in the struggle which the Germans in Austria were then carrying on in behalf of their national existence. I was also led to occupy myself with the historical and the social position of the Jews. Especially earnest did this activity of mine become after the appearance of Hamerling's *Homunculus*. This eminent German poet was considered by a great

part of the journalists as an anti-Semite on account of this work; indeed, he was claimed by the German national anti-Semites as one of their own. This disturbed me very little; but I wrote a paper on the *Homunculus* in which, as I thought, I expressed myself quite objectively in regard to the Jews. The man in whose home I lived, and who was my friend, took this to be a special form of anti-Semitism. Not in the least did his friendly feeling for me suffer on that account, but he was affected with a profound distress. When he had read the paper, he faced me, his heart torn by innermost sorrow, and said to me: "What you wrote in this in regard to the Jews cannot be explained in a friendly sense; but this is not what hurts me, but the fact that you could have had the experiences in regard to us which induced you to write thus only through your close relationship with us and our friends." He was mistaken: for I had formed my opinions altogether from a spiritual and historic survey; nothing personal had entered into my judgment. He could not see the thing in this way. His reply to my explanations was: "No, the man who teaches my children is, after this paper, no 'friend of the Jews.'" He could not be induced to change. Not for a moment did he think that my relation ship to the family ought to be altered. This he looked upon as something necessary. Still less could I make this matter the occasion for a change; for I looked upon the teaching of his sons as a task which destiny had brought to me. But neither of us could do otherwise than think that a tragic thread had been woven into this relationship. To all this was added the fact that many of my friends had taken on from their national struggle a tinge of anti-Semitism in their view of the Jews. They did not view sympathetically my holding a post in a Jewish family; and the head of this family saw in my friendly mingling with such persons only a confirmation of the impression which he had received from my paper.

To the family circle in which I so intimately shared belonged the composer of *Das Goldene Kreuz*, Ignatius Brüll. A sensitive person he was, of whom I was extraordinarily fond. Ignatius Brüll was something of an alien to the world, buried in himself. His interests were not exclusively musical; they were directed toward many aspects of the spiritual life. These interests he could enter into only as a "darling of destiny" against the background of a family circle which never permitted him to be disturbed by attention to everyday affairs but permitted his creative work to grow out of a certain prosperity. And thus he did not grow in life but only in music. To what degree his musical creations were or were not meritorious is not the question just here. But it was stimulating in the most beautiful sense to meet the man in the street and see him awaken out of his world of tones when one addressed him. Generally he did not have his waistcoat buttons in the right button-holes. His eye spoke in a mild thoughtfulness; his walk was not fast but very expressive. One could talk with him about many things; for these he had a sensitive understanding; but one saw how the content of the conversation slipped, as it were, for him into the sphere of music.

In the family in which I thus lived I became acquainted also with the distinguished physician, Dr. Breuer, who was associated with Dr. Freud at the birth of psycho-analysis. Only in the beginning, however, did he share in this sort of view, and he was not in agreement with Freud in its later development. Dr. Breuer was to me a very attractive personality. I admired the way in which he was related to his medical profession. Besides, he was a man of many interests in other fields. He spoke of Shakespeare in such a way as to stimulate one very strongly. It was interesting also to hear him in his purely medical way of thinking speak of Ibsen or even of Tolstoi's *Kreuzer Sonata*. When he spoke with the friend I have here described, the mother of the children whom I had to teach, I was often present and deeply interested. Psycho-analysis was not yet born; but the problems which looked toward this goal were already there. The phenomena of hypnotism had given a special colouring to medical thought. My friend had been a friend of Dr. Breuer from her youth. There I faced a fact which gave me much food for thought. This woman thought in a certain direction more medically than the distinguished physician. They were once discussing a morphine addict. Dr. Breuer was treating him. The woman once said to me: “Think what Breuer has done! He has taken the promise of the morphine addict on his word of honour that he will take no more morphine. He expected to attain something by this, and he was deluded, since the patient did not keep his promise. He even said: ‘How can I treat a man who does not keep his promise?’ Would one have believed,” she said, “that so distinguished a physician could be so naïve? How can one try to cure ‘by a promise’ something so deeply rooted ‘in a man's nature’?” The woman may not, however, have been entirely right; the opinion of the physician regarding the therapy of suggestion may have entered then into his attempt at a cure; but no one can deny that my friend's statement indicated the extraordinary energy with which she spoke in a noteworthy fashion out of the spirit which lived in the Viennese school of medicine up to the time when this new school blossomed forth.

This woman was in her own way a significant person; and she is a significant phenomenon in my life. She has long been dead; among the things which made it hard for me to leave Vienna was this also, that I had to part from her.

When I reflect in retrospect upon the content of the first phase of my life, while I seek to characterize it as if from without, the feeling forces itself upon me that destiny so led me that I was not fettered by any external “calling” during my first thirty years. I entered the Goethe and Schiller Institute in Weimar also, not to take a life position, but as a free collaborator in the edition of Goethe which would be published by the Institute under a commission from the Grand-duchess Sophie. In the report which the Director of the Institute published in the twelfth volume of the *Goethe Year Book* occurs this statement: “The permanent workers have associated with themselves since 1890 Rudolf Steiner from Vienna. To him has been assigned

the general field of ‘morphology’ (with the exception of the osteological part): five or probably six volumes of the ‘second division,’ to which important material is added from the manuscript, remains.”

1. *Beyond Good and Evil.*
2. *Rembrandt as Teacher.*
