The Story of My Life
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Chapter XIV

For an indeterminate length of time I again faced a task that was given me, not through any external circumstance, but through the inner processes of development of my views of life and the world. To the same cause was due the fact that I used for my doctor's examination at the University of Rostock my dissertation on the endeavour after “an understanding of human consciousness with itself.” External circumstances merely prevented me from taking the examination in Vienna. I had official credit for the work of the Realschule, not of the Gymnasium, though I had completed privately the Gymnasium course of study, even tutoring also in these courses. This fact barred me from obtaining the doctor's degree in Austria. I had grounded myself thoroughly in philosophy, but I was credited officially with a course of study which excluded me from everything to which the study of philosophy gives a man access.

Now at the close of the first phase of my life a philosophical work had fallen into my hands which fascinated me extraordinarily – the *Sieben Bücher Platonismus* [1] of Heinrich von Stein, who was then teaching philosophy at Rostock. This fact led me to submit my dissertation to the lovable old philosopher, whom I valued highly because of his book, and whom I saw for the first time in connection with the examination.

The personality of Heinrich von Stein still lives in my memory – almost as if I had spent much of my life with him. For the *Seven Books of Platonism* is the expression of a sharply stamped philosophical individuality. Philosophy as thought-content is not taken in this work as something which stands upon its own feet. Plato is viewed from all angles as the philosopher who sought for such a self-supporting philosophy. What he found in this direction is carefully set forth by Heinrich von Stein. In the first chapters of the book one enters vitally and wholly into the Platonic world conception. Then, however, Stein passes on to the breaking into human evolution of the Christ revelation. This actual breaking in of the spiritual life he sets forth as something higher than the elaboration of thought-content through mere philosophy.

From Plato to Christ as to the fulfilment of that for which men have striven – such we may designate the exposition of von Stein. Then he traces further the influence of world conceptions of Platonism in the Christian evolution.

Stein is of the opinion that revelation gave content from without to human strivings after a world-conception. There I could not agree with him. I knew from experience that the human being, when he comes to an understanding with himself in vital spiritual consciousness, can possess the revelation, and that this revelation can then attain to an existence in the ideal experience of man. But I felt something in the book which drew me on. The real life of the spirit behind the ideal life, even though in a form which was not my own, had set in motion an impulse toward a comprehensive exposition of the history of philosophy. Plato, the great representative of an ideal world which was fixed through its fulfilment by the Christ impulse – it is the setting forth of this which forms the content of Stein's book. In spite of the opposition I felt toward the book, it came closer to me than any of the philosophies which merely elaborate a content out of concepts and sense-experiences.

I missed in Stein also the consciousness that Plato's ideal world had its source in a primal revelation of the spiritual world. This (pre-Christian) revelation, which has been sympathetically set forth, for example, in Otto Willmann's *Geschichte des Idealismus*[2] does not appear in Stein's view. He sets forth Platonism, not as the residue of ideas from the primal revelation, which then recovers in Christianity and on a higher level its lost spiritual form; he represents the Platonic ideas as a content of concepts self-woven which then attained life through Christ.

Yet the book is one of those written with philosophical warmth, and its author a personality penetrated by a deep religious feeling who sought in philosophy the expression of the religious life. On every page of the three-volume work one is aware of the personality in the background. After I had read this book, and especially the parts dealing with the relation of Platonism to Christianity, over and over again, it was a significant experience to meet the author face to face.

A personality serene in his whole bearing, in advanced age, with mild eyes that looked as if they were made to survey kindly but penetratingly the process of evolution of his students; speech which in every sentence carried the reflection of the philosopher in the tone of the words – just so did Stein stand before me when I visited him before the examination. He said to me: “Your dissertation is not such as is required; one can perceive from it that you have not produced it under the guidance of a professor; but what it contains makes it possible that I can very gladly accept you.” I should now have been extremely glad to be questioned orally on something which was related to the *Seven Books of Platonism*; but no question related to this; all were drawn from the philosophy of Kant.

I have always kept the image of Heinrich von Stein deeply imprinted on my heart; and it would have given me immeasurable pleasure to have met the man again. Destiny never again brought us together. My doctor's examination is one of my pleasant memories, because the impression of Stein's personality shines out beyond everything else pertaining to it.

The mood in which I came to Weimar was tinged by previous thorough-going work in Platonism. I think that mood helped me greatly to take the right attitude toward my task on the Goethe and Schiller archives. How did Plato live in the ideal world, and how Goethe? This occupied my thoughts on my walk to and from the archives; it occupied me also as I went over the manuscripts of the Goethe legacy.

This question was in the background when at the beginning of 1891 I expressed in some such words as the following my impression of Goethe's knowledge of nature "It is impossible for the majority of men to grasp the fact that something for whose appearance subjective conditions are necessary may still have objective significance and being. And of this very sort is the 'archetypal plant.' It is the essential of all plants, objectively contained within them; but if it is to attain to phenomenal existence the human spirit must freely construct it." Or these other words: that a correct understanding of Goethe's way of thinking "admits of the possibility of asking whether it is in keeping with the conception of Goethe to identify the 'archetypal plant' or 'archetypal animal' with any physically real organic form which has appeared or will appear at any definite time. To this question the only possible answer is a decisive 'No.' The 'archetypal' plant is contained in every plant; it may be won from the plant world by the constructive power of the spirit; but no single individual form can be said to be typical.[3]

I now entered the Goethe-Schiller Institute as a collaborator. This was the place into which the philology of the end of the nineteenth century had taken over Goethe's literary remains. At the head of the Institute was Bernhard Suphan. With him also, I may say, I had a personal relationship from the very first day of the Weimar phase of my life. I had frequent opportunities to be in his home. That Bernhard Suphan had succeeded Erich Schmidt, the first director of the Institute, was due to his friendship with Herman Grimm.

The last descendant of Goethe, Walther von Goethe, had left Goethe's literary remains as a legacy to the Grand-duchess Sophie. She had founded the archives in order that the legacy might be introduced in appropriate manner into the spiritual life of the times. She naturally turned to those personalities of whom she had to assume that they might know what was to be done with the Goethe literary remains.

First of all, there was Herr von Loeper. He was, so to speak, foreordained to become the intermediary between Goethe scholars and the Court at Weimar to which the control of the Goethe legacy had been entrusted. For he had attained to high rank in the Prussian household administration, and thus stood in close relation with the Queen of Prussia, sister of the Grand-duchess of Saxe-Weimar; and, besides, he was a collaborator in the most famous edition of Goethe of that time, that of Hempel.

Loeper was an unique personality, a very congenial mixture of the man of the world and the recluse. As an amateur, not as a professional, had he come to be interested in "Goethe research." But he had attained to high distinction in this. In his opinions concerning Goethe, which appear in such beautiful form in his edition of Faust, he was entirely independent. What he advanced he had learned from Goethe himself. Since he had now to advise how Goethe's literary remains could best be administered, he had to turn to those with whom he had become familiar as Goethe scholars through his own work with Goethe.

The first to be considered was Herman Grimm. It was as an historian of art that Herman Grimm had become concerned with Goethe; as such he had delivered lectures on Goethe at the University of Berlin, which he then published as a book. But he might well look upon himself as a sort of spiritual descendant of Goethe. He was rooted in those circles of the German spiritual life which had always been conscious of a living tradition of Goethe, and which might in a sense consider themselves bound in a personal way with him. The wife of Herman Grimm was Gisela von Arnim, the daughter of Bettina, author of the book, Goethe's *Correspondence with a Child*.

Herman Grimm's judgments about Goethe were those of an historian of art. Moreover, as an historian of art he had grown into scholarship only so far as this was possible to him under the standards of a personally coloured relationship to art as a connoisseur.

I think that Herman Grimm could readily come to an understanding with Loeper, with whom he was naturally on friendly terms by reason of their common interest in Goethe I imagine that, when these two discussed Goethe, the human interest in the genius came strongly to the fore and scholarly considerations fell into the background.

This scholarly way of looking at Goethe was the vital thing in William Scherer, professor of German literature at the University of Berlin. In him both Loeper and Grimm had to recognize the official Goethe scholar. Loeper did so in a childlike, harmless fashion; Herman Grimm with a certain inner opposition. For to him the philological point of view which characterized Scherer was really uncongenial. With these three persons rested the actual direction in the ad-

ministration of the Goethe legacy. But it nevertheless really slipped entirely into the hands of Scherer. Loeper really thought nothing about this further than to advise and to share from without as a collaborator in the task; he had his fixed social relationships through his position in the household of the Prussian King. Herman Grimm thought just as little about it. He could only contribute points of view and right directions for the work by reason of his position in the spiritual life; for the directing of details he could not take responsibility.

Quite different was the thing for William Scherer. For him Goethe was an important chapter in the history of German literature. In the Goethe archives new sources had come to light of immeasurable value for this chapter. Therefore, the work in the Goethe archives must be systematically united with the general work of the history of literature. The plan arose for an edition of Goethe which should take a philologically correct form. Scherer took over the intellectual supervision; the direction of the archives was left to his student Erich Schmidt, who then occupied the chair of modern German literature at Vienna.

Thus the work of the Goethe Institute received its stamp. Not only so, but also everything that happened at the Institute or by reason of this. All bore the mark of the contemporary philological character of thought and work.

In William Scherer literary-historical philology strove for an imitation of contemporary natural-scientific methods. Men took the current ideas of the natural sciences and sought to form philological and literary-historical ideas on these as models. Whence had a poet derived something? How had this something been modified in him? These were the questions which were placed at the foundations of a history of the evolution of the spiritual life. The poetic personalities disappeared from view; instead there came forward views as to how “material” and “motif” were evolved by the personalities. The climax of this sort of view was reached in Erich Schmidt's extended monograph on Lessing. In this Lessing's personality is not the main fact but an extremely painstaking consideration of the motifs of *Minna von Barnhelm*, *Nathan*, and the like.

Scherer died young, shortly after the Goethe Institute was established. His students were numerous. Erich Schmidt was called from the Goethe Institute to Scherer's position in Berlin. Herman Grimm then arranged so that not one of the numerous students of Scherer should have the direction of the Institute, but instead Bernhard Suphan.

As to his post before this time, he had been teaching in a Gymnasium in Berlin. At the same time he had undertaken the editing of Herder's works. Through this he seemed marked as the person to take direction also of the edition of Goethe. Erich Schmidt still exercised a certain

influence; through this fact Scherer's spirit still continued to rule over the Goethe task. But the ideas of Herman Grimm came forward in stronger fashion, if not in the manner of work yet in the personal relationships within the Goethe Institute.

When I came to Weimar, and entered into a close relationship with Bernhard Suphan, he was a man sorely tried in his personal life. His first and second wives, who were sisters, he had seen buried at an early age. He lived now with his two children in Weimar, grieving over those who had left him, and not feeling any happiness in life. His sole satisfaction lay in the good will which the Grand-duchess Sophie, his profoundly honoured lady, bore to him. In this respect for her there was nothing servile: Suphan loved and admired the Grand-duchess in an entirely personal way.

In loyal dependence was Suphan devoted to Herman Grimm. He had previously been honoured as a member of the household of Grimm in Berlin, and had breathed with satisfaction the spiritual atmosphere of that home. But there was something in him which prevented him from getting adjusted to life. One could speak freely with him about the highest spiritual matters, yet something bitter would easily come into the conversation, something arising from his experiences. Most of all did this melancholy dominate in his own mind; then he would help himself past these experiences by means of a dry humour. So one could not feel warm in his company. He could in a moment grasp some great idea quite sympathetically, and then, without any transition, fall immediately into the petty and trivial. He always showed good will toward me. In the spiritual interests vital within my own soul he could take no part, and at times treated them from the view-point of his dry humour; but in the direction of my work in the Goethe Institute and in my personal life he felt the warmest interest. I cannot deny that I was often painfully disturbed by what Suphan did, the way in which he conducted himself in the management of the Institute, and the direction of the editing of Goethe; I never made any secret of this fact. Yet, when I look back upon the years which I passed with him, this is outweighed by a strong inner interest in the fate and the personality of the sorely tried man. He suffered in his life, and he suffered in himself. I saw how in a certain way, with all the good aspects of his character and all his capacities, he sank more and more into a bottomless brooding which rose up in his soul. When the Goethe and Schiller archives were moved to the new building erected in Ilm, Suphan said that he looked upon himself in relation to the opening of this building like one of those human victims who in primitive times were walled up before the doors of sacred buildings to sanctify the thing. He had really come gradually to fancy himself altogether in the role of one sacrificed on behalf of something with which he did not feel that he was wholly united. He felt that he was a beast of burden working at this Goethe task with which others with higher intellectual gifts might have been occupied. In this mood I al-

ways found him later whenever I met him after I had left Weimar. He ended his life by suicide in a mood of depression.

Besides Bernhard Suphan, there was engaged at the Goethe and Schiller Institute at the time of my entrance Julius Wahle. He was one of those called by Erich Schmidt. Wahle and I were intimates from the time of my first sojourn at Weimar; a heartfelt friendship grew up between us. Wahle was working at the editing of Goethe's journals. Eduard von der Hellen worked as Keeper of the Records, and also had the responsibility of editing Goethe's letters.

On Goethe's works a great part of the German "world of Germanists" was engaged. There was a constant coming and going of professors and instructors in philology. One was then much in company with them during their longer or shorter visits. One could get vitally into the circle of interests of these persons.

Besides these actual collaborators in the Goethe task the archives were visited by numbers of persons who were interested in one way or another in the rich collections of manuscripts of other German poets. For the Institute gradually became the place for collecting the literary remains of many poets. And other interested persons came also who at first were less interested in manuscripts than in simply studying in the library contained within the rooms of the Institute. There were, moreover, many visitors who merely wished to see the treasures there.

Everybody who worked at the Institute was happy when Loeper appeared. He entered with sympathetic and amiable remarks. He requested the material he needed for his work, sat down, and worked for hours with a concentration seldom to be seen in anyone. No matter what was going on around him, he did not look up. If I were seeking for a personification of amiability, I should choose Herr von Loeper. Amiable was his Goethe research, amiable every word he uttered to anyone. Especially amiable was the stamp his whole inner life had taken from the fact that he seemed to be thinking of one thing only: how to bring the world to a true understanding of Goethe. I once sat by him during the presentation of *Faust* in the theatre. I began to discuss the manner of presentation, the dramatic qualities. He did not hear at all what I said. But he replied: "Yes, this actor often uses words and phrases that do not agree with those of Goethe." Still more lovable did Loeper appear to me in his "absentmindedness." When in a pause I chanced to speak of something which required a reckoning of duration of time, Loeper said: "Therefore the hours to 100 minutes; the minutes to 100 seconds ..." I stared at him, and said: "Your Excellency, 60." He took out his watch, tested it, laughed heartily, counted, and said: "Yes, yes, 60 minutes, 60 seconds." I often observed in him such instances of absent-mindedness. But over such proofs of Loeper's unique temper of mind I myself could not laugh, for they seemed to me a significant by-product – and also charming in their effect – of the person-

ality so utterly free from pose, unsentimental, I might say gracious, in its earnestness. He spoke in rather sprawling sentences, almost without modulation; but one heard through the colourless speech a firm articulation of thought.

Spiritual purpose entered the Institute when Herman Grimm appeared. From the standpoint from which I had read – while still in Vienna – his book on Goethe, I felt the deepest sympathy with his type of mind. And when I was able to meet him for the first time in the Institute, I had read almost everything that had come from his pen. Through Suphan I was soon afterwards brought into much more intimate acquaintance with him. Then, while Suphan was once absent from Weimar and he came for a visit to the Institute, he invited me to luncheon at his hotel. I was alone with him. It was plainly agreeable to him to see how I could enter into his way of viewing the world and life. He became communicative. He spoke to me of his idea of a *Geschicte der Deutsche Phantasie* [4] which he had in mind. I then received the impression that he would write such a book. This did not come to pass. But he explained to me beautifully how the contemporary stream of historic evolution has its impulse in the creative fantasy of the folk, which in its temper takes on the character of a living, working supersensible genius. During this luncheon I was wholly filled with the expositions of Herman Grimm. I believed that I knew how the supersensible spiritual works through man. I had before me a man whose spiritual vision reached as far as the creative spiritual, but who would not lay hold upon the actual life of this spiritual, but remained in the region where the spiritual expresses its life in man in the form of fantasy.

Herman Grimm had a special gift for surveying greater or lesser epochs of the history of the mind and of setting forth the period surveyed in precise, brilliant, epigrammatic characterization. When he described a single personality – Michelangelo, Raphael, Goethe, Homer – his representation always appeared against the background of such a survey.

How often have I read his essays in which he characterized in his striking glances the Greek and Roman cultures and the Middle Ages. The whole man was the revelation of unified style. When he fashioned his beautiful sentences in oral speech I had the feeling: “This may appear just so in one of his essays”; and, when I read an essay of his after having become acquainted with him, I felt as if I were listening to him. He permitted himself no laxity in oral speech, but he had the feeling that in artistic or literary presentation one must remain the same person who moved about in everyday life. But Herman Grimm did not roam around like other men even in everyday life. It was inevitable for him to lead a life possessed of style. When Herman Grimm appeared in Weimar, and in the Institute, then one felt that the plan of the legacy was, so to speak, united with Goethe by secret spiritual threads. Not so when Erich Schmidt came. He

was bound to these papers that were preserved in the Institute, not by ideas, but by the historic-philological methods. I could never attain to a human relation with Erich Schmidt. And so all the great respect shown him by all those who worked at the Institute as Scherer philologists made practically no impression upon me.

Those were always pleasant moments when the Grand-duke Karl Alexander appeared in the Institute. An inwardly true enthusiasm – though manifested in a fashionable bearing – for everything pertaining to Goethe was a part of the nature of this man. Because of his age, his long connection with much that was important in the spiritual life of Germany, and because of his attractive lovableness he made a satisfying impression. It was a pleasing thought to know that he was the protector of the Goethe work in the Institute.

The Grand-duchess Sophie, owner of the Institute, one saw there only on special festival occasions. When she had anything to say, she caused Suphan to be summoned. The collaborating workers were taken to her to be presented. But her solicitude for the Institute was extraordinary. She herself personally made all the preliminary preparations for the erection of a public building in which the poetic legacies might be worthily housed.

The heir of the Grand-duke also, Carl August, who died before he became Grand-duke, came often to the Institute. His interest in everything there going on was not profound, but he liked to mingle with us collaborators. This interesting himself in the requirements of the spiritual life he viewed rather as a duty. But the interest of the heiress, Pauline, was full of warmth. I was able many times to converse with her about things which pertained to Goethe, poetry, and the like. As regards its social intercourse the Institute was between the scientific and artistic circles and the courtly circle of Weimar. From both sides it received its own colouring. Scarcely would the door have closed after a professor when it would reopen to admit some princely personage who came for a visit. Many men of all social positions shared in what went on in the Institute. At bottom it was a stirring life, stimulating in many relationships.

Immediately beside the Institute was the Weimar library. In this resided as chief librarian a man of a childlike temperament and unlimited scholarship, Reinhold Köhle. The collaborators at the Institute often had occasion to resort there. For what they had in the Institute as literary aid to their work was here greatly augmented. Reinhold Köhle had roved around with unique comprehensiveness in the myths, fairy-tales, and sagas; his knowledge in the field of linguistic scholarship was of the most admirable universality. He knew where to turn for the most out-of-the-way literary material. His modesty was most touching, and he received one with great cordiality. He never permitted anyone to bring the books he needed from their resting-places into the work-room of the archives where we did our work. I came in once and asked for a

book that Goethe used in connection with his studies in botany, in order to look into it. Reinhold Köhle went to get the old book which had rested somewhere on the topmost shelves unused for decades. He did not come back for a long time. Someone went to see where he was. He had fallen from the ladder on which he had to climb to attend to the books. He had broken his thigh. The noble and lovable person never recovered from the effect of the accident. After a lingering illness this widely known man died. I grieved over the painful thought that his misfortune had happened while he was attending to a book for me.

1. *Seven Books of Platonism.*

2. *History of Idealism.*

3. In the essay on "The Gain to Our View of Goethe's Natural-Scientific Works through the Publications of the Goethe Institute," in the twelfth volume of the *Goethe Year Book*.

4. *History of the German Imagination.*
