The Story of My Life
GA 28

Chapter XV

Two lectures which I had to deliver shortly after the beginning of the Weimar phase of my life are associated for me with important memories. One took place in Weimar, and was entitled, “Fancy as the Creatress of Culture”; it preceded the conversation I have described with Herman Grimm concerning his views on the history of the evolution of fantasy.

Before I delivered the lecture, I summarized in my own mind what I could say on the basis of my spiritual experience concerning the streaming of the real spiritual world into the human fantasy. What lives in the imagination seemed to me to be stimulated by human sense-experiences only as regards its material form. That which is truly creative in the genuine forms of fantasy seemed to me a reflection of the spiritual world existing outside of man. I desired to show that fantasy is the gateway through which the Beings of the spiritual world work creatively indirectly through man in the evolution of civilizations.

Because I had arranged my ideas for such a lecture toward this objective, Herman Grimm's exposition made a deep impression upon me. He felt no need whatever to seek for the supersensible sources of fantasy; what enters the human mind as fantasy he took as matter of fact and proposed to observe this in the course of its evolution

I first set forth one pole of the fantasy – dream-life. I showed how external sense-experiences are perceived, because of the subdued life of the consciousness, not as in waking life, but transformed into symbolic pictures; how inner bodily processes are experienced through the same symbolization; how experiences rise in consciousness, not in sober memories, but in a way that indicates a powerful elaboration of the thing experienced in the depths of the soul-life.

In dreams consciousness is subdued; it sinks down into the sensible physical reality and perceives the control within the sensible existence of something spiritual which during ordinary awareness remains concealed, and which even to the half-sleeping consciousness appears only as a play of colours from the shallows of the sensible.

In fantasy the mind rises as far above the ordinary state of consciousness as it sinks below this in dream-life. The spiritual which is concealed within the sense-existence does not appear, yet the spiritual influences man; but he cannot grasp this in its very own form but pictures it unconsciously to himself by means of a soul-content which he borrows from the sense-world. The consciousness does not penetrate all the way to the perception of the spiritual; but it experiences this in pictures which draw their material from the sense. world. In this way the genuine creations of fantasy are evidences of the spiritual world even though this does not penetrate into human consciousness.

By means of this lecture I wished to show one of the ways in which the Beings of the spiritual world influence the evolution of life. It was thus that I strove to discover means by which I might bring to expression the spiritual world I experienced and yet in some way connect it with what is adapted to the ordinary consciousness. I was of the opinion that it was necessary to speak of the spirit, but that the forms in which one is accustomed to express oneself in this scientific age must be respected.

The other lecture I gave in Vienna at the invitation of the Scientific Club. It dealt with the possibility of a monistic conception of the world on the basis of a real knowledge of the spiritual. There I set forth that man by means of his senses grasps the physical side of reality "from without" and by means of his spiritual awareness grasps its spiritual side "from within," so that all which is experienced appears as an unified world in which the sensible manifests the spirit and the spirit reveals itself creatively in the sensible.

This occurred at the time when Haeckel had formulated his own monistic philosophy through his lecture on *Monismus als Band Zwischen Religion und Wissenschaft*.[1] Haeckel, who knew of my being in Weimar, sent me a copy of his speech. I reciprocated his courtesy by sending him the issue of the newspaper in which my lecture at Vienna was printed. Whoever reads this lecture must see how opposed I then was to the monism advanced by Haeckel when occasion rose for me to express what a man has to say about this monism for whom the spiritual world is something into which he sees.

But there was at that time another occasion for me to give thought to monism in the colouring given it by Haeckel. He seemed to me a phenomenon of the scientific age. Philosophers saw in Haeckel the philosophical dilettante, who really knew nothing except the forms of living creatures to which he applied the ideas of Darwin in the order in which he had rightly arranged them, and who explained boldly that nothing further is required for the forming of a world-conception than what can be grasped by a Darwinian observer of nature. Students of nature

saw in Haeckel a fantastic person who drew from natural-scientific observations conclusions which were arbitrary.

Since my work required that I should realize what was the inner temper of thought about the world and man, about nature and spirit, as this had been dominant a hundred years earlier in Jena, when Goethe interjected his natural-scientific ideas into this thought, I saw in Haeckel an illustration of what was then thought in this direction. Goethe's relation to the views of nature belonging to his period I had to visualize inwardly in all its details during my work. At the place in Jena from which came the important stimulations to Goethe to formulate his ideas on natural phenomena and the being of nature, Haeckel was at work a century later with the assertion that he could draw from a knowledge of nature the standard for a conception of the world.

In addition it happened that, at one of the first meetings of the Goethe Society in which I participated during my work at Weimar, Helmholtz read a paper on *Goethes Vorahnungen kommender naturwissenschaftlicher Ideen*.[2] I was then informed of much in later natural-scientific ideas which Goethe had "previsioned" by reason of fortunate inspirations; but it was also pointed out how Goethe's errors in this field bore upon his theory of colour.

When I turned my attention to Haeckel, I wished always to set before my mind Goethe's own judgment of the evolution of natural-scientific views in the century following that which saw the development of his own; as I listened to Helmholtz I had before my mind the judgment of Goethe by this evolution.

I could not then do otherwise than say to myself that, if one thought of the being of nature in the dominant spiritual temper of that time, that must necessarily result which Haeckel thought in utter philosophical naïveté; those who opposed him showed everywhere that they restricted themselves to mere sense-perception and would avoid the further evolution of this perception by means of thinking.

I had at first no occasion to become personally acquainted with Haeckel, about whom I was impelled to think very much. Then his sixtieth birthday came. I was invited to share in the brilliant festival which was being arranged in Jena. The human element in this festival attracted me. During the banquet Haeckel's son, whom I had come to know at Weimar, where he was attending the school of painting, came to me and said that his father wished to have me presented to him. The son then did this.

Thus I became personally acquainted with Haeckel. He was a fascinating personality. A pair of eyes which looked naïvely into the world, so mild that one had the feeling that this look must break when the sharpness of thought penetrated through. This look could endure only sense-impressions, not thoughts which reveal themselves in things and occurrences. Every movement of Haeckel's was directed to the purpose of admitting what the senses expressed, not to permit the ruling thoughts to reveal themselves in the senses. I understood why Haeckel liked so much to paint. He surrendered himself to physical vision. Where he ought to have begun to think, there he ceased to unfold the activity of his mind and preferred to fix by means of his brush what he had seen.

Such was the very being of Haeckel. Had he merely unfolded this, something human unusually stimulating would have been thus revealed.

But in one corner of his soul something stirred which was wilfully determined to enforce itself as a definite thought content – something derived from quite another attitude toward the world than his sense for nature. The tendency of a previous earthly life, with a fanatical turn directed toward something quite other than nature, craved the satisfaction of its passion. Religious politics vitally manifested itself from the lower part of the soul and made use of ideas of nature for its self-expression.

In such contradictory fashion lived two beings in Haeckel. A man with mild love-filled sense for nature and in the background something like a shadowy being with incompletely thought-out, narrowly limited ideas breathing out fanaticism. When Haeckel spoke, it was with difficulty that he permitted the fanaticism to pour forth into his words; it was as if the softness which he naturally desired blunted in speech a hidden demonic something. A human riddle which one could but love when one beheld it, but about which one could often speak in wrath when it expressed opinions. Thus I saw Haeckel before me as he was then preparing in the nineties of the last century what led later to the furious spiritual battle that raged over his tendency of thought at the turning-point between the centuries.

Among the visitors to Weimar was Heinrich von Treitschke. I had the opportunity of meeting him when Suphan included me among the guests invited to meet Treitschke at luncheon. I received a deep impression from this very comprehensive personality. Treitschke was quite deaf. Others conversed with him by writing whatever they wished to say on a little tablet which Treitschke would hand them. The effect of this was that in any company where he chanced to be his person became the central point. When one had written down something, he then talked about this without the development of a real conversation. He was present in a far more intensive way for the others than were these for him. This had passed over into his whole attitude of

mind. He spoke without having to reckon upon objections such as meet another when imparting his thoughts in a group of men. It could clearly be seen how this fact had fixed its roots in his self-consciousness. Since he could not hear any opposition to his thoughts, he was strongly impressed with the worth of what he himself thought.

The first question that Treitschke addressed to me was to ask where I came from. I replied that I was an Austrian. Treitschke responded: “The Austrians are either entirely good and gifted men, or else rascals.” He said such things as this, and one became aware that the loneliness in which his mind dwelt because of the deafness drove him to paradoxes, and found in these a satisfaction. Luncheon guests usually remained at Suphan's the whole afternoon. So it was this time also when Treitschke was among them. One could see this personality unfold itself. The broad-shouldered man had something in his spiritual personality also through which he impressed himself upon a wide circle of his fellow-men. One could not say that Treitschke lectured. For everything he said bore a personal character. An earnest craving to express himself was manifest in every word. How commanding was his tone even when he was only narrating something! He wished his words to lay hold upon the emotions of the other person also. An unusual fire which sparkled from his eyes accompanied his assertions. The conversation touched upon Moltke's conception of the world as this had found expression in his memoirs. Treitschke objected to the impersonal way – suggestive of mathematical thinking – in which Moltke conceived world-phenomena. He could not judge things otherwise than with a ground-tone of strongly personal sympathies and antipathies. Men like Treitschke, who stick so fast in their own personalities, can make an impression on other men only when the personal element is at the same time both significant and also interwoven deeply with the things they are setting forth. This was true of Treitschke. When he spoke of something historical, he discoursed as if everything were in the present and he were at hand with all his pleasure and all his displeasure. One listened to the man, one received the impression of the personal in unmitigated strength; but one gained no relation to the content of what he said.

With another visitor to Weimar I came into a friendly intimacy. This was Ludwig Laistner. A fine personality he was, in harmony with himself, living in the spiritual in the most beautiful way. He was at the time literary adviser to the Cotta publishing house, and as such he had to work at the Goethe Institute. I was able to spend with him almost all the leisure time we had. His chief work, *Das Rätzel des Sphinx*[3] was then already before the world. It is a sort of history of myths. He follows his own road in the interpretation of myths. Our conversation dealt very much with the field which is treated in that very important book. Laistner rejected all interpretation of fairy-lore, of the mythical, which maintains the more or less consciously symbolizing fantasy. He sees in dreams, and especially in nightmares, the original source of the

myth-making conception of nature formed by the folk. The oppressive nightmare which appears to the dreamer as a tormenting questioning spirit becomes the incubus, the elf, the demonic tormentor; the whole troop of the spirits arise for Ludwig Laistner out of the dreaming man. The riddling sphinx is only another metamorphosed form of the simple midday-woman who appears to the sleeper in the fields at midday and puts questions to him which he has to answer. All that the dream creates by way of strange and fanciful and meaningful, tormenting and delightful shapes – all this Ludwig Laistner traces out in order to point to it again in the images of fairy-lore and myths. In every conversation I had the feeling: "The man could so easily find the way from the creative subconscious in man, which works in the dream-world, to the super-conscious which touches the real world of spirit." He listened to my explanations of this sort with the utmost good will; opposed nothing against these, but gained no inner relationship to them. In this matter he, too, was hindered by the fear belonging to that time of losing the "scientific" ground from under him the moment he should enter into the spiritual as such. But Ludwig Laistner stood in a special relationship to art and poetry by reason of the fact that he traced the mythical into the real experiences of dreams and not into the abstraction-creating imagination. Everything creative in man thus took on, according to his view, a world-significance. In his rare inner serenity and mental self-sufficiency he was a discriminating poetic personality. His utterances in regard to every sort of thing had a certain poetic quality. Conceptions which are unpoetic he simply did not know at all. In Weimar, and later during a visit in Stuttgart, when I had the pleasure of living near him, I spent the most delightful hours in his company. Beside him stood his wife, who entered completely into his spiritual nature. For her Ludwig Laistner was really all that bound her to the world. He lived only a short while after his sojourn at Weimar. The wife followed her vanished husband after an exceedingly brief interval; the world was empty for her when Ludwig Laistner was no longer in it. An altogether lovable woman, in the true sense of that word. She always knew how to be absent when she feared she might disturb; she never failed when there was anything requiring her care. Like a mother she stood by the side of Ludwig Laistner, whose refined spirituality was contained in a very delicate body.

With Ludwig Laistner I could talk as with few other persons regarding the idealism of the German philosophers-Fichte, Hegel, Schelling. He had a vital sense for the reality of the ideal that lived in these philosophers. When I spoke to him once of my solicitude regarding the one-sidedness of the natural-scientific world-conception, he said: "Those people have no sense of the significance of the creative in the human soul. They do not know that in this creative within man there lives a cosmic content just as in the phenomena of nature."

In dealing with the literary and the artistic, Ludwig Laistner did not lose touch with the directly human. Very distinctive were his bearing and approach; whoever possessed an under-

standing for such things felt the significant element in his personality very quickly after forming his acquaintance. The official researchers in mythology were opposed to his view; they scarcely paid any attention to it. Thus there remained scarcely observed at all in the spiritual life of the time a man to whom by reason of his inner worth belonged the very first place. From his book *The Riddle of the Sphinx* the science of mythology might have received entirely fresh impulses; it remained almost wholly without influence. Ludwig Laistner had at that time to undertake for the Cotta *Bibliothek der Weltliteratur* editions of the complete works of Schopenhauer and of selections from Jean Paul. He entrusted both of these to me. And thus I had to unite with my Weimar tasks the thorough working through of the pessimistic philosopher and of the paradoxical genius, Jean Paul. I devoted myself to both undertakings with the deepest interest, because I loved to transplant myself into attitudes of mind utterly opposed to my own. Ludwig Laistner had no ulterior motive in making me the editor of Schopenhauer and of Jean Paul; the assignment was due entirely to the conversations we had held about the two persons. Indeed, the thought of entrusting these tasks to me came to him during a conversation.

There were then living in Weimar Hans Olden and Frau Grete Olden. They gathered about them a special group of those who desired to live in "the present" in contrast with everything which considered the very central point in a spiritual existence to consist in the furtherance, through the Goethe Institute and the Goethe Society, of a life that was past. Into this group I was admitted; and I look back upon all that I experienced there with great appreciation. However fixed one's idea might have become in the Institute through association with the "philological method," they must again become free and fluid when one entered the home of the Oldens, where every one was received with interest who had the idea in his head that a new way of thinking must find place among men, but likewise every one who in the depths of his soul found painful many an old cultural prejudice and was thinking about future ideals. Hans Olden was known to the world as the author of slight theatrical pieces such as *Die Offizielle Frau*[4] in his Weimar circle at that time his life expressed itself quite otherwise.

He had a heart receptive to the highest interests which were manifest in the spiritual life of that time. What lived in the plays of Ibsen, in what thundered in the spirit of Nietzsche – in regard to these things there were endless discussions in his house, but always stimulating.

Gabrielle Reuter, who was then writing the novel, *Aus guter Familie*[5] which soon afterward won for her by storm her literary place, was a member of Olden's circle, and filled it with earnest questions of all sorts which were then stirring men in reference to the life of woman.

Hans Olden could be captivating when, with his rather sceptical way of thinking, he instantly put an end to a conversation which was about to lose itself in sentimentality; but he himself could become sentimental when others fell into easy-going ways. The desire in this circle was to evolve the deepest “understanding” for everything “human”; but criticism was unsparing of whatever did not suit one in this or that human thing. Hans Olden was penetrated through and through with the idea that it was the only sensible course for a man to apply himself through literature or art to the great ideals about which there was a good deal of talk in his circle; but he was too scornful of men to realize his ideals in his own productions. He thought that ideals could live in a social circle of select men, but that any one would be “childish” who should think that he could bring forth such ideals before a greater public. At that very time he was making a beginning toward the artistic realization of wider interests by means of his *Klüge Käte*.[6] This play had only a moderate success in Weimar. This confirmed him in the view that one should give to the public that to which it has now attained, and should keep one's higher interests for the small circle which has an understanding for these.

To a far greater degree than Hans Olden was Frau Grete Olden filled with this idea. She was the most complete feminine sceptic in her estimation of the world's capacity for receiving things spiritual. What she wrote was plainly derived from a certain form of misanthropy.

What Hans Olden and Grete Olden offered to their circle out of such a temper of mind breathed in the atmosphere of an aestheticizing world-feeling, which was capable of reaching up to the most earnest matters, but which did not hesitate to pass by many of the most serious questions with a vein of light humour.

1. *Monism as a Bond between Religion and Science.*
2. *Goethe's Previsions of Coming Scientific Ideas.*
3. *The Riddle of the Sphinx.*
4. *The Official Wife*
5. *Of a Good Family.*
6. *Clever Kate.*
