

The Story of My Life

GA 28

Chapter XVI

I must number among the happiest hours of my life those which I passed with Gabrielle Reuter, with whom I had the privilege of intimate friendship by reason of this circle. A personality she was who bore within her profound quest of humanity, and who laid hold of them with a certain radicalism of the heart and the sensibilities. In regard to everything which seemed to her a contradiction in the social life she stood with her whole soul half-way between traditional prejudices and the primal claims of human nature. She looked upon woman, who both by life and by education is forced from without into subjection to this traditional prejudice, and who must experience in sorrow that which from the depths of the soul would fain come forth in life as “truth”. Radicalism of the heart expressed in a manner serene and sagacious suffused with artistic feeling and marked by an impressive gift for form – this revealed itself as some thing great in Gabrielle Reuter. Extraordinarily delightful were the conversations one could have with her while she was working at her book *Of a Good Family*. As I reflect upon the past I see myself standing with her at a street corner, in the blazing heat of the sun, discussing for more than an hour questions by which she was stirred. Gabrielle Reuter could talk in the finest manner, never for a moment losing her serene bearing, about things over which other persons become at once visibly excited. “Exulting to heaven, grieved even to death” – this, indeed, was her feeling within, but it remained in the soul and did not find its way into her words. Gabrielle Reuter laid strong emphasis upon what ever she had to say, but she did so not by means of the voice but only through the soul. I believe that this art of keeping the articulation entirely a matter of the soul, while the audible conversation flows evenly along, was peculiar to her, and it seems to me that in writing she has developed this unique art into her very charming style.

The admiration felt for Gabrielle Reuter in the Olden circle was something inexpressibly beautiful. Hans Olden said to me many times very solemnly: “This woman is great. Would that I also,” he added, “could rise to such a height and place before the outer world that which moves in the depths of my soul!”

This circle shared in its own way in the Weimar Goethe affairs. It was in a tone of irony, but never of frivolous scoffing, and yet often aesthetically angry, that the “present” here passed

judgment on the “past.” A whole day long would Olden work at his typewriter after a Goethe gathering in order to write an account of the experience, which, according to his feeling, would give the judgment of a man of the world concerning the Goethe prophets.

Into this tone soon fell also the one other man of the world, Otto Erich Hartleben. He seldom ever missed a Goethe meeting. Yet at first I could never discover why he came.

It was in the circle of journalists, theatre people, and writers who gathered on the evenings of the Goethe festivals at the Hotel Chemnitz, apart from the learned celebrities, that I became acquainted with Otto Erich Hartleben. Why he was sitting there I could at once perceive. For he was in his element when he could live himself out in conversations such as were then customary. There he would remain for a long while. He could not go away. In this way I once chanced to be with him and others. The rest of us were “of necessity” the next morning at the Goethe meeting; Hartleben was not there. But I had already become fond of him and was concerned at his absence. So at the close of the meeting I looked for him at his hotel room. He was still sleeping. I woke him, and told him that the principal meeting of the Goethe Society was already at an end. I did not understand why he had wished to participate in the Goethe festival in this fashion. But he answered in such a way that I saw it was entirely natural to him to come to Weimar to attend a Goethe gathering in order to sleep during the programme – for he slept away the chief thing for which the others had come.

I got close to Otto Erich Hartleben in a peculiar fashion. At one of the suppers to which I have referred there was a prolonged conversation regarding Schopenhauer. Many words of admiration and of disapproval had been uttered concerning the philosopher. Hartleben had for a long while been silent. Then he entered into the tumultuous revelations of the conversation: “People are aroused by him, but he means nothing for life.” Meanwhile he was looking at me with a childish helplessness; he wished me to say something, for he had heard that I was then occupied with Schopenhauer. I said “Schopenhauer I must consider a narrow-minded genius!”

Hartleben's eyes sparkled; he became restless; he emptied his glass and filled another. In this moment he had locked me up in his heart; his friendship for me was fixed. “Narrow minded genius!” – that suited him. I might just as well have used the expression about some other personality, and it would have been the same thing to him. It interested him deeply to think that one could hold the opinion that even a genius could be narrow-minded.

For me the Goethe gatherings were fatiguing. For most persons in Weimar during these meetings were either in one circle or the other according to their interests – either in that of the dis-

coursing or dining philologists or in that of the Olden and Hartleben colouring. I had to take part in both.

My interests impelled me in both directions. That went very well since the sessions of one came at night and of the other during the day. But I was not privileged to live after the manner of Otto Erich. I could not sleep during the day sessions. I loved the many-sidedness of life, and was really just as happy at midday in the Institute circle with Suphan, with whom Hartleben had never become acquainted – since this did not appeal to him – as I was in the evenings with Hartleben and his like-minded companions.

The philosophical tendencies of a succession of men revealed themselves to my mind during my Weimar days. For in the case of each one with whom it was possible to converse about questions of the world and of life, such conversations developed in the intimate relationships of that time. And many persons interested in such discussions came through Weimar.

I passed through these experiences during that period of life in which the soul is inclined to turn strongly to the outer life; when it must find its firm union with that life. To me the philosophies there expressing themselves were a fragment of the outer world. And I was forced to realize that even until that time I had really lived but very little in touch with an external world. When I withdrew from some living intercourse, then I always became aware at once that up to that time the only trustworthy world for me had been the spiritual world, which I saw in inner vision. With that world I could readily unite myself. So my thoughts often took the direction of saying to myself how hard had been the way for me through the senses to the outer world during all my childhood and youth. It was always difficult for me to fix in my memory such external data, for example, as one must assimilate in the realm of science. I had to look at a natural object again and again in order to know what it was called, in what scientific class of objects it was listed, and the like. I might even say that the sense-world was for me somewhat like a shadow or a picture. It passed before my soul in pictures, whereas my relationship to the spiritual bore always the character of reality.

All this I experienced in the highest degree during the 'nineties in Weimar. I was then giving the final touches to my *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*. I wrote down – so it seemed to me – the thoughts which the spiritual world had given me up to my thirtieth year. All that had come to me from the outer world was only in the nature of a stimulus.

This I experienced especially when in vital intercourse with men in Weimar. I discussed questions of philosophy. I had to enter into them, into their way of thinking and emotional inclinations; they by no means entered into that which I had inwardly experienced and was still expe-

riencing. I entered with vital intensity into that which others perceived and thought; but I could not cause my own inner spiritual activity to flow over into this world of experience. In my own being I had always to remain behind, within myself. Indeed, my world was separated, as if by a thin partition, from all the outer world.

In my own soul I lived in a world that bordered on the outer world, but it was always necessary for me to step across a boundary if I wished to have anything to do with the outer world. I was in the most vital intercourse with others, but in every instance I had to pass from my world, as if through a door, in order to engage in this intercourse. This made it seem to me as if each time that I entered into the outer world I was making a visit. Yet this did not hinder me from giving myself up to the most vital participation with one whom I was thus visiting; indeed, I felt entirely at home while on such a visit.

Thus it was with persons, and thus also with world-concepts. I liked to go to Suphan; I liked to go to Hartleben. Suphan never went to Hartleben; Hartleben never went to Suphan. Neither could enter into the characteristic ways of thinking and feeling of the other. With Suphan, and equally with Hartleben, I was as if at home. But neither Suphan nor Hartleben really came to me. Even when they came to me, they still remained by themselves. To my spiritual world they could, in actual experience, make no visit. I perceived the most varied world-concepts before my mind – the natural-scientific, the idealistic, and many shades of each. I felt the impulse to enter into these, to move about in them; but into my spiritual world they cast no light. To me they were phenomena standing before me, not realities in which I could truly have lived.

Thus it was in my soul when life thrust me into immediate contact with such world-concepts as those of Haeckel and Nietzsche. I realized their relative correctness. With my attitude of mind I could never so deal with them as to say “This is right; that is wrong.” In that case I should have felt what was vital in them to be something alien to me. But I found one no more alien than the other; for I felt at home only in the spiritual world of my perception, and I could feel as if at home in every other.

When I describe the thing thus it may seem as if everything were to me fundamentally a matter of indifference. But such was by no means the case. In this matter I had an entirely different feeling. I was conscious of a full participation in the other because I did not alienate myself from it by reason of the fact that I bore my own along with me both in judgment and feeling.

I had, for instance, innumerable conversations with Otto Harnach, the gifted author of *Goethe in der Epoch seiner Vollendung*¹ who often came at that time to Weimar as he was working at Goethe's art studies. This man, who later became involved in a terrible tragedy, I really loved. I could be wholly Otto Harnach while I was talking with him. I received his thoughts, entered into them as a visitor – in the sense I have indicated – and yet as if at home. It did not even occur to me to invite him to visit me. He could only live alone. He was so woven into his own thought that he felt as something alien to himself everything that was not his own. He would have been able to listen to talk about my world only in such a way that he would have treated it as the Kantian “thing in itself” which lies on the other side of human consciousness. I felt spiritually obliged to deal with his world as such that I did not have to relate myself to it in Kantian fashion but must carry my consciousness over into it.

I lived thus not without spiritual perils and difficulties. Whoever turns away from everything that does not accord with his way of thinking will not be imposed upon by the relative correctness of the various world-concepts. He can without reserve experience the fascination of that which is thought out in a certain direction. Indeed, this fascination of intellectualism is now in the life of very many persons. They easily adapt themselves to thought which is quite unlike their own. But whoever possesses a world of vision, such as the spiritual world must be, such a person sees the correctness of various “standpoints”; and he must be constantly on guard within his soul not to be too strongly drawn to the one side or the other.

But one becomes conscious of the “being of the outer world” if one can with love yield oneself up to it and yet must always turn back to the inner world of the spirit. But one also learns in this process really to live in the spiritual. The various intellectual “standpoints” repudiate one another; spiritual vision sees in them simply “standpoints.” Seen from each of these the world appears differently. It is as if one should photograph a house from various sides. The pictures are different; the house is the same. If one walks around the actual house one receives a comprehensive impression. If one stands really within the spiritual world one allows for the “correctness” of a standpoint. One looks upon a photographic impression from one “standpoint” as some thing “correct.” Then one asks about the correctness and the significance of the standpoint.

It was in this way that I had to approach Nietzsche, and likewise Haeckel. Nietzsche, I felt, photographs the world from one standpoint to which a profound human personality was driven in the second half of the nineteenth century if he had to live upon the spiritual content of that age alone, if the perception of the spiritual would not break into his consciousness, and yet his will in the subconscious strove with unusual force toward the spiritual. Such was the picture of

Nietzsche that lived in my soul; it showed me the personality that did not perceive the spiritual but in which the spirit battled against the unspiritual views of the time.

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