The Story of My Life
GA 28

Chapter XIX

The loneliness I then experienced in respect to that which I bore in silence within me as my world-conception, while my thoughts were linked to Goethe on one side and to Nietzsche on the other – this loneliness was my experience also in relation to many other personalities with whom I felt myself united by bonds of friendship but who none the less energetically opposed my spiritual life.

The friend whom I had gained in early years but whose ideas and my own had become mutually so divergent that I had to say to him: "Were that true which you think concerning the essential reality of life, then I had rather be the block of wood under my feet than a man" – this friend still continued bound to me in love and loyalty. His welcome letters from Vienna always carried me back to the place which was so dear to me, especially because of the human relationships in which I was there privileged to live.

But if this friend undertook in his letters to speak about my spiritual life, a gulf then opened between us.

He often wrote me that I was alienating myself from what is primal in human nature, that I was "rationalizing the impulses of my soul." He had the feeling that in me the life of feeling was changed into a life of mere thought, and this he sensed as a certain coldness proceeding from me. Nothing which I could bring to bear against this view of his could do any good. I could not avoid seeing that the warmth of his friendship gradually diminished because he could not free himself of the belief that I must grow cold as to what was human since I passed my soul-life in the region of thought.

That, instead of being chilled in this life of thought, I had to take with me into this life my full humanity in order by this means to lay hold upon reality in the spiritual sphere – this he would never grasp.

He failed to see that the purely human persists, even when it is raised to the realm of the spirit; nor could he see how it is possible to live in the sphere of thought; it was his opinion that one

can there merely think and must lose oneself in the cold region of abstractions.

Thus he made me out a “rationalist.” In this view of his I felt there was the grossest misunderstanding of what was reached by my spiritual paths. All thinking which turns away from reality and spends itself in the abstract – for this I felt the innermost antipathy. I was in a condition of mind in which I would develop thought drawn from the sense world only to that stage at which thought tends to veer off into the abstract; at that point, I said to myself, it ought to lay hold upon the spirit. My friend saw that I moved in thought out of the physical world; but he failed to realize that in that very moment I stepped over into the spiritual. Therefore, when I spoke of the really spiritual, this was to him quite non-existent, and he received from my words merely a web of abstract thoughts.

I was deeply grieved by the fact that, when I was really uttering that which had for me the profoundest import, yet to my friend I was talking of a “nothing.” Such was my relationship to many persons.

What so entered into my life I had to perceive also in my conception of the understanding of nature. I could recognize as right only that method of nature-research in which one applies one's thought to the task of looking through the objective relationships of sense-phenomena; but I could not admit that one should by means of thought elaborate concerning the region of sense-perception hypotheses which then are to be referred to a supersensible reality but which, in fact, constitute a mere web of abstract thoughts. At that moment in which thought has completed its work in fixing that which is rendered clear by the sense-phenomena themselves, when rightly viewed, I did not desire to begin with the framing of hypotheses, but in perception, in the experiencing of the spiritual which in reality lives, not behind the sense world, but within it.

What I then held firmly as my own view in the middle of the 'nineties I later set down briefly as follows in an article I published in 1900 in No. 16 of the *Magazin für Literatur*: “A scientific analysis of our activity in cognition leads ... to the conviction that the questions which we have to address to nature are a result of the peculiar relationship in which we stand to the world. We are limited individualities, and for this reason we can become aware of the world only in fragments. Each piece, of and for itself, is a riddle; or, otherwise expressed, it is a problem for our understanding. But the more we come to know the details, the clearer does the world become to us. One act of becoming aware makes clear the others. Questions which the world puts to us and which cannot be answered with the means which the world gives us – these do not exist. For monism, therefore, there are on general principles no limits to knowledge. At one time this or that may not be clarified, because we are not yet in position, as to ei-

ther space or time, to find the things which are there concerned. But what is not found to-day may be found to-morrow. Limits determined in this manner are only accidental, such as will vanish with the progress of experience and of thought. In such cases the formation of hypotheses legitimately comes into play. Hypotheses should not be formed in regard to anything which by its nature is inaccessible to our understanding. The atomic hypothesis is utterly without foundation when it is considered, not merely as an aid to abstract thought, but as a declaration regarding real being beyond the reach of our qualitative experience. A hypothesis must be merely an opinion regarding a group of facts which, for accidental reasons, is inaccessible to us but which belongs by nature to the world given to us."

I stated this view regarding the forming of hypotheses because I wished to show that "limitations of knowledge" were not proven, and that the limitations of natural science were a necessity. At that time I did this as to the understanding of nature only in a side reference. But this way of forming thoughts had always laid down the road for me to advance farther by means of the knowledge of spirit beyond that point at which one dependent upon the knowledge of nature reached the inevitable "limitation."

A contentment of soul and profound inner satisfaction were mine at Weimar by reason of the artistic element brought into the city by the art school and the theatre, and the musical people associated with these.

In the teachers and students of painting in the art school there was revealed what was then struggling out of the ancient traditions toward a new and direct perception and reflection of nature and life. A good many among these painters might properly have been considered "seekers." How that which the painter had as colour on his palette or in his colour-pot could be applied to the surface in such a way that what the artist created should bear a right relationship to Nature as she lives and becomes visible to man's eyes in creating – this was the question which was constantly heard in the most varied forms, in a manner stimulating, often pleasantly fanciful, and from the artistic experience of which there originated the numerous paintings that were displayed by Weimar artists in the frequent art exhibitions.

My artistic experience was not then so broad as my relation to experiences in the realm of knowledge. Yet I sought in the stimulating intercourse with the Weimar artists for a spiritual conception of the artistic.

To retrospective memory, that which I then experienced in my own mind seems very chaotic – when the modern painter who sensed the mood of light and atmosphere and wished to give these back took up arms against the "ancients" who knew from tradition how this or that was

handled. There was in many of them a spiritualized striving – derived from the most primitive forces of the soul – to be “true” in the reproduction of nature.

Not thus chaotic, however, but in most significant forms appeared to my mind the life of a young painter whose artistic way of revealing himself harmonized with my own evolution in the direction of artistic fantasy. This artist, then in the bloom of youth, was for some time in the closest intimacy with me. Him also life has borne far away from me; but I have often recalled in memory the hours we spent together.

The soul-life of this young man was all light and colour. What others expressed in ideas he uttered by means of “colours in light.” Indeed, his understanding worked in such a way that he combined things and events of life as one combines colours, not as mere thoughts combine which the ordinary man shapes from the world.

This young artist was once at a wedding festival to which I also had been invited. The usual festival speeches were being made. The pastor took as content of his talk the meaning of the words bride and groom. I endeavoured to discharge the duty of speaking – which rested upon me because I was a frequent visitor at the friendly home from which the bride came – by talking of the delightful experiences which the guests were permitted to enjoy at that home. I spoke because I was expected to speak. And I was expected to make the sort of speech “belonging to” a wedding feast. So I took little pleasure in “the role” I had to play. After me arose the young painter, who also had long been a friend of the family. From him no one expected anything; for everybody knew that such ideas as are embodied in toasts simply did not belong to him. He began somewhat as follows: “Over the glimmering red crest of the hill the glance of the sun poured lovingly. Clouds breathing above the hill and in the gleam of the sun; glowing red slopes facing the sunlight, blending into triumphal arches of spiritual colours giving a pathway to earth for the downward striving light. Flower surfaces far and wide; above these the air, gleaming yellow, slips into the flowers awakening the life in them ...” He spoke in this way for a long while. He had suddenly forgotten all the wedding merriment about him and begun “in the spirit” to paint. I do not know why he ceased thus to speak in painter fashion; I suppose his coat-tail was pulled by someone who was very fond of him, but who also wished equally that the guests should come to a peaceful enjoyment of the wedding roast meat.

The young painter's name was Otto Fröhlich. He often sat with me in my room, and we took walks and excursions together. While Otto Fröhlich was with me, he was always painting “in the spirit.” In his company one could forget that the world has any other content than light and colour.

Such was my feeling about this young friend. I know that whatever I had to say to him I placed before his mind clothed in colours in order to make myself intelligible to him.

And the young painter really succeeded in so guiding his brush and so laying on the colours that his pictures were in a high degree a reflection of his own luxuriant, living colour fantasies. When he painted the trunk of a tree, there appeared on the canvas, not the delineated shapes of a picture, but rather that which light and colour reveal from within themselves when the tree-trunk gives them the opportunity to manifest their life.

In my own way I was seeking for the spiritual substance of colour in light. In him I was forced to see the secret of the being of colour. In Otto Fröhlich there stood beside me a man who individually bore instinctively within him as his experience that which I was seeking for the taking up of the colour-world through the human soul.

It gave me pleasure to be able through this very search of mine to give the young friend many a stimulus. The following was an instance. I myself experienced in a high degree the intensive colours which Nietzsche describes in the *Zarathustra* chapter on “the most hateful man.” This “Valley of Death,” described like a painting by Nietzsche, held for me much of the secret of the life of colour.

I gave Otto Fröhlich the advice to paint poetically the picture done by Nietzsche in word colours of Zarathustra and the most hateful man. He did this. And now something really remarkable came to pass. The colours concentrated themselves, glowing and very expressive, in the figure of Zarathustra. But this figure as such did not come out fully, since in Fröhlich the colours themselves could not yet unfold themselves to the extent of creating Zarathustra. But so much the more living did the colour variations boil up into the “green snakes” in the valley of the most hateful man. In this part of the picture all of Fröhlich lived. But now the “most hateful man” There it would have required the line, the characteristic of painting. This Fröhlich refused. He did not yet know how there actually lives in colour the secret of causing the spiritual to take on form through the very handling of the colour itself. So “the most hateful man” became a reproduction of the model called by the Weimar painters “Füllsack.” I do not know whether this was really the name of the man always used by the painters when they wished to deal with the characteristically hateful; but I know that “Füllsack's” hatefulness was no longer merely conventional, but had something of genius in it. But to place him thus unchanged as a copy in the picture where Zarathustra's soul revealed itself shining in countenance and in apparel, when the light conjures forth true colour-being out of its intercourse with the green snakes – this ruined the painting of Fröhlich. Thus the picture failed to become what I had hoped might come to pass through Otto Fröhlich.

Although I could not but realize the sociability in my nature, yet at Weimar I never felt in overwhelming measure the impulse to betake myself where the artists, and all who felt socially bound up with them, spent the evenings.

This was in a romantic “Artists' Club” remodeled out of an old smithy opposite the theatre. There, united together in a dim-coloured light, sat the teachers and students of the Academy of Painting; there sat actors and musicians. Whoever sought for sociability must feel himself impelled to go to this place in the evenings. And I did not feel so impelled just for the reason that I did not seek companionship, but thankfully accepted it when circumstances brought it to me.

In this way I became acquainted with individual artists in other social groups, but did not come to know the artistic world.

To know certain artists at Weimar in those days was of vital value. For the tradition of the Court and the extraordinarily sympathetic personality of the Grand-duke Carl Alexander gave to the city an artistic standing which drew to Weimar, in one relation or another, everything artistic which was active in that period.

There, first of all, was the theatre with the good old traditions – disinclined in its leading representatives to allow a naturalistic flavour to come into evidence. And where the modern would fain show itself and expunge many a pedantry, which nevertheless was always associated with good traditions, there modernity was kept far away from that which Brahm propagated on the stage and Paul Schlenther through the press as the “modern conception.” Among these “Weimar moderns” the chief of all was that wholly artistic noble fire-spirit, Paul Wiecke. To see such men take in Weimar the first steps of their artistic career gave one an ineradicable impression, and was a comprehensive school of life. Paul Wiecke used the basement of a theatre which, because of its traditions, annoyed the elemental artist. Very stimulating hours have I spent at the home of Paul Wiecke. He was on terms of intimate friendship with my friend Julius Wahle, and because of this I came very close to him. It was often delightful to hear Wiecke grumbling over almost everything that he must endure when he had to do the dress rehearsals for a new performance. Then, with this in mind, to see him play the role that he had so abused, and which nevertheless, through his noble endeavour after style and through his beautiful spiritualizing fire, afforded one a rare enjoyment.

Richard Strauss was then making his beginning in Weimar. He was second director along with Lassen. The first compositions of Richard Strauss were performed in Weimar. The musical craving of this personality revealed itself as a piece of the very spiritual life of Weimar. Such a joyful unreserved acceptance of something which in the act of its acceptance became an excit-

ing problem of art was then possible at Weimar alone. Round about one the peace of the traditional – a highly prized and worthy mood; now enters amid this Richard Strauss with his *Zarathustra Symphony* or even his music for the buffoon. Everything wakes up in tradition, reverence, worth; but it wakes up in such a way that the assent is lovable, the dissent harmless – and the artist can find in the most beautiful way the reaction to his own creation.

How many hours long we sat at the first performance of Richard Strauss's music drama *Guntram*, in which the lovable and humanly so distinguished Heinrich Zeller played the leading role and almost sang himself out of voice!

Indeed, this profoundly sympathetic man, Heinrich Zeller – even he had to leave Weimar in order to become what he did become. He had the most beautiful elemental gift of song. He needed for his unfolding an environment which, with the utmost patience, permitted that such a gift should in developing itself experiment over and over again. And so the evolution of Heinrich Zeller is to be numbered among the most human and beautiful things which one could ever experience. Besides, Zeller was such a lovable personality that one must count the hours one could spend with him among the most stimulating possible.

And thus it came about that, although I did not often think of going in the evening to the Artists' Club, yet, if Heinrich Zeller met me and said I must go with him, I always yielded gladly to this demand.

The state of things at Weimar had also its dark side. That which is traditional and peace-loving often held the artist back as if in a sort of seclusion. Heinrich Zeller became very little known to the world outside of Weimar. What was at first suited to enable him to spread his wings later crippled these wings. And so it was always with my dear friend Otto Fröhlich. He needed, like Zeller, the artistic soil of Weimar, but the dim spiritual atmosphere absorbed him too much in its artistic comfort.

And one felt this “artistic comfort” in the pressure of Ibsen's spirit and that of other moderns. There one shared with everything – the battle waged by the dramatist, for example, in order to find the style for a *Nora*. Such a seeking as one could there observe occurs only where, through the propagation of the old stage traditions, one meets with difficulties in the effort to represent what comes from poets who have begun, not like Schiller with the stage, but like Ibsen with life.

But one also shares in this reflection of this modernism out of the “artistic comfort” of the theatrical public. One ought to find a middle way between the two circumstances: first, that one is

a dweller in “classical Weimar,” and, on the other hand, that what has made Weimar great has been its constant understanding for the new.

It is with great happiness that I remember the productions of Wagner's music dramas at which I was present in Weimar. The Director von Bronsart developed a specially understanding devotion to this type of theatrical productions. Heinrich Zeller's voice then reached its most exquisite value. A remarkable gift as a singer belonged to Frau Agnes Stavenhagen, wife of the pianist Bernhard Stavenhagen, who was also for a long time director at the theatre. Frequent music festivals brought the representative artists of the time and their works to Weimar. One saw there, for example, Mahler as director at a music festival when he was just getting his start. Ineradicable was the impression of the way in which he used the baton – not aiding music in the flood of forms, but as the experience of a supersensible hidden something visibly pointing amid the forms.

What came before my mind from these Weimar events – seemingly quite unrelated to me – is really deeply united with my life. For these were excitations and states which I experienced as pertaining in the deepest manner to me. Often afterwards, when I have encountered a person, or the work of a person, with whom I have shared experiences at his beginning at Weimar, I have recalled with gratitude this Weimar period through which so much became intelligible because so much had gathered from elsewhere there to pass through its germinal stage. Thus I then experienced in Weimar the artistic strivings in such a way that in regard to most of these I had my own opinion, often very little in harmony with those of other persons. But at the same time I was just as intensely interested in everything which others felt as in my own feelings. Here also there came to pass within me a twofold mental life.

This was a genuine discipline of the mind, brought to me by life itself in the course of destiny, in order that I might find my way out from the “either or” of abstract intellectual judgment. This sort of judgment erects barriers separating the mind from the spiritual world. In this there are not beings and occurrences which admit of such an “either or” judgment. In the presence of the supersensible one must become many-sided. One must not merely learn theoretically, but must take everything to dwell in the innermost emotions of the soul's life, in order to view everything from the most manifold points of view. Such standpoints as materialism, realism, idealism, spiritualism, as these have been elaborated in the physical world by personalities with abstract ways of thinking into comprehensive theories in order that they may signify something for things in themselves, – these lose all interest for one who knows the supersensible. He knows, for example, that materialism cannot be anything else but the view of the world from that point from which it reveals itself in material phenomena.

It is a practical training in this direction when one finds oneself in the midst of an existence which brings the life whose waves beat outside of one's own so inward as to become as close as one's own judgments and feelings. But for me this was true of much in Weimar. It seems to me that at the close of the century this ceased to be true there. Until then the spirit of Goethe and of Schiller still rested upon everything. And the lovable old Grand-duke, who moved about with such distinction in Weimar and its vicinity, had as a boy seen Goethe. He truly felt very strongly his “Your Highness,” but he always showed that he felt himself a second time ennobled through the work that Goethe did for Weimar.

It was the spirit of Goethe which worked so powerfully from all directions at Weimar that to me a certain side of the experience of what was happening there became the practical mental discipline in the right conception of the supersensible worlds.
