

The Story of My Life

GA 28

Chapter XX

The hospitable welcome I met in the family of the Keeper of the Records at the Goethe-Schiller Institute, Eduard von der Hellen, was of the most delightful character. This man stood in a peculiar relationship to the other collaborators at the archives. He had an extraordinary reputation among the philological specialists because of his remarkably successful initial work on Goethe's *Anteil an Lavaters Physiognomischen Fragmenten*.¹ Von der Hellen had in this work produced something which every contemporary philologist accepted forthwith as "complete." Only the author himself did not think so. He looked upon the work as a methodical achievement whose principles "could be learned" by anyone, whereas his own endeavour was to fill himself with inner spiritual content.

When there were no visitors, we sat for long spells together in the old collaborators' room of the Institute while this was still at the castle: three of us – von der Hellen, who was working at an edition of Goethe's letters; Julius Wahle, occupied with the journals; and I, with the natural-scientific writings. But the very requirements of von der Hellen's mental life gave rise to conversations in the midst of the work touching upon the most manifold aspects of public life, spiritual or other. In this connection, however, those interests which are bound up with Goethe always received their due. The notes written by Goethe in his journals, and letters of Goethe's revealing a standpoint so elevated and such comprehensive vision, these gave rise to reflections which led into the very depths of existence and the breadth of life.

Eduard von der Hellen was friendly enough to introduce me into his family, in order further to develop the relationship growing out of these meetings in the Institute, often so stimulating. A still further extension of the delightful companionship came about by reason of the fact that von der Hellen's family likewise mingled in the circles I have already described – such as those grouped about Olden, Gabrielle Reuter, and others.

Especially has the profoundly congenial personality of Frau von der Hellen always remained fixed in my memory. Hers was a nature wholly artistic. One of those persons who, but for other duties intervening in her life, possessed the capacity for achieving something beautiful in art. Such was her destiny that, so far as I am aware, the artistic side of this woman came to ex-

pression only in the early part of her life. But every word about art that one could exchange with her was a satisfaction. She showed a basic quality, as it were, of reserve; always cautious in judgment, and yet profoundly sympathetic in a purely human way. I seldom went away from such a conversation without carrying with me in long continued reflection what Frau von der Hellen had suggested rather than spoken.

Very lovable also were the father of Frau von der Hellen and his two daughters – the father a lieutenant-general who had fought through the war of the 'seventies as a major. While one was in this group of persons, one experienced vitally the most beautiful aspect of German spiritual life: that spiritual life which had flowed into all circles of the social life out of those religious, aesthetic, or popular-scientific impulses that for so long constituted the real nature of German spirituality.

Eduard von der Hellen's interests for some time brought me into touch with the political life of the times. Discontent with things philological drove von der Hellen into the lively political affairs of Weimar. There he seemed to find a broader perspective of life. And my friendly personal interest in him led me also – although without active participation in politics – to become interested in the movements of public life.

Much of that which has been found to be impracticable in our present-day life, or else, in a terrible metamorphosis, has given rise to absurd social forms, -much of this was to be seen at that time in its genesis, associated with all the hopes of a working class taught by trained and forceful leaders to believe that a new time must come for men in the forms of social life. The cautious and the altogether radical elements among the workers were enforcing their views. To observe them was all the more impressive since what there appeared was like a boiling up of the lower levels of the social life. In the upper levels there was something vital which could have expressed itself only in a worthy sort of conservatism bound up with a hope for everything that is human – a hope marked by capable and profound thinking and by vigorous activity. In the atmosphere then present there sprang up a reactionary party which considered itself as indispensable, and in addition the so-called National-Liberty Party.

So to adjust himself to all this that he might gain effective leadership and bring men out of this chaos – such was the interpretation one had to place upon the feeling of Eduard von der Hellen at that time. And one had to share in the experience through which he passed in this respect. He discussed among his circle of friends every detail of a brochure he was preparing. One was forced to take as deep an interest as Eduard von der Hellen himself in the conceptions – at that time accompanied by feelings quite unlike those of the present – of the materialistic interpretation of history, the class struggle, “surplus value.” One could not refrain from attending the nu-

merous gatherings at which he appeared as lecturer. Over against the theoretically formulated Marxian programme he proposed to set up another which should grow out of a good will toward social progress on the part of all friendly working men of every party. He was thinking of a sort of revival of the middle parties by the incorporation into their platforms of those impulses which would enable them to solve the social problem.

The effort proved futile. Only I am confident that I could not have participated in the public life of that period so intensely as I did had I not shared in this struggle of von der Hellen's.

Yet public life had its influence upon me from another direction also, though far less intensely. Indeed, it always seemed that a mild repugnance arose within me – which was not true in relation to von der Hellen – in the very proximity of anything political. There lived in Weimar at that time Dr. Heinrich Fränkel, a liberal politician, an adherent of Eugen Richter and also active in politics in the same spirit. We became acquainted. A brief acquaintance which was later brought to an end by reason of a misunderstanding, but to which I often look back with pleasure; for the man was, in his way, extraordinarily lovable, had a strong political will, and was led by his good purpose and far-sighted-views to the belief that it was necessary to create an enthusiasm among men on behalf of a right way of progress in public affairs. His life became a succession of disillusionments. Unluckily, I myself had to be the occasion of one of those for him. He was working just at the time that I knew him at a brochure which he hoped to circulate in very great numbers. What concerned him was the desire to oppose the establishment of a combination between big industry and the agrarians, which was already beginning to take form in Germany and which, according to his view, would certainly bring devastating results in the train of its later development. His brochure bore the title, *Kaiser, werde hart!*² He thought he could dissuade the entourage of the Kaiser from what he believed to be harmful. The man accomplished not the slightest result by this effort. He saw that the party to which he belonged and for which he laboured could not bring to birth those forces which were needed to lay down a foundation for the policies thought out by him.

This led him to conceive the idea of exerting himself to revive the *Deutsche Wochenschrift*, which I had edited for a short time a few years before in Vienna. By means of this he wished to set up a political current which would have enabled him to move forward from the “liberalism” of that time into a more national-liberal activity. It occurred to him that I could do something along with him in this direction. That was impossible; even for the mere revival of the *Deutsche Wochenschrift* I could do nothing. The manner in which I informed him of this led to misunderstandings which in a short time put an end to our friendship.

But another friendship grew out of this one. The man had a very dear wife and a dear sister-in-law, and he had introduced me into his family. This in turn brought me in touch with another family. And then something came to pass that seemed like a repetition of the remarkable relationship which destiny had brought me once in Vienna. I was intimately associated with a family there, but in such a way that the head of the family remained always unseen, and yet he came so close to me in soul and spirit that after his death I delivered the address at his funeral as if he had been my best friend. The whole spiritual being of this man stood before my mind by means of his family.

And now I entered into almost the same relationship with the head of the family into which I was brought in a roundabout way by the liberal politician. The head of this family had died a short while before; the widow's life was filled with pious thoughts about her dead husband. It came about that I left the home in Weimar in which I had lived till then, and took up my residence with the family. There was the library of the dead man. A man of interesting spirit in many ways, but living just like that one in Vienna, refusing all relationships with men; living like that one in his own "mental world"; considered by the world to be a recluse, as the other had been.

I felt this man like that one-though I had never met him in the flesh-entering into my destiny "from behind the veils of existence." In Vienna there came about a beautiful relationship between the family of the "unknown" thus known and myself; and in Weimar there came about between the second "unknown" and myself a relationship even more significant.

When I must speak in this way of the two "unknown known" I am aware that what I have to say will be called by most men "mad fantasy." For this has to do with the way in which I was able to draw near to the two men in that sphere of the world in which they were after they had passed through the portal of death.

Everyone has the inner right to exclude from the group of subjects which interest him all statements in regard to this sphere; but to characterize such statements as merely fantastic is something quite different. When anyone does this, then I must emphasize the fact that I have always sought in such exact branches of science as mathematics and analytical mechanics for the sources of that temper of soul which qualifies one to make assertions concerning things spiritual. When, therefore, I assert what here follows I cannot justly be accused of mere careless talk unsupported by the requisite knowledge.

The power of the spiritual vision which I then bore in my soul made it possible for me to enter into a close union with these two souls after their earthly death. They were unlike other dead persons. These immediately after their earthly death go through a life which, in essence, is in

close relationship with the earthly life, and which only gradually comes to resemble the life one experiences in that purely spiritual world where one's existence continues till the next earthly life.

The two “unknown known” had been rather familiar with the thinking of this materialistic age. They had elaborated in concepts within themselves the natural-scientific way of thinking. The second, whom Weimar brought to me, was indeed well acquainted with Billroth and other natural scientific thinkers. On the other hand, during their earthly lives both had remained aloof from a spiritual conception of the world. The spiritual conception which they might have encountered at that time would have repelled them, since they were forced to believe that “natural-scientific thinking,” according to the habits of thought of the time, was demanded by the facts.

But this union with the materialism of the time remained wholly in the world of ideas of the two persons. They did not share in the habits of life which followed from the materialism of this thinking, and which were predominant in the case of all other men. They became “recluses from the world”; lived in more primitive ways than were then customary and would have been natural to men of their means. Thus they did not carry over into the spiritual world that which a union with the materialistic “will-evaluations” would have given to their individualities, but only that which the materialistic “thought-evaluations” had planted in these individualities. Naturally this worked itself out for the souls mostly in the unconscious. And now I could see how these materialistic thought-evaluations are not something which alienates man after death from the world of the divine and spiritual, but that this alienation comes about only through materialistic will-evaluations. Both the soul which had come close to me in Vienna and also the one which I came to know spiritually in Weimar were, after death, noble shining spiritual forms whose soul-content was filled with conceptions of those spiritual beings who are at the foundation of the world. And the only result of their acquaintance with those ideas by means of which they mastered the material in thought during their previous earthly life was that after death also they were able to develop such a relationship with the world as included a capacity for judgment. This would not have been the case if the corresponding ideas had remained unknown to them.

In these two souls there had crossed my predestined path beings through whom the significance of the natural-scientific way of thought was revealed to me directly from the spiritual world. I could see that this way of thought in itself need not lead away from a spiritual perception. In the case of these two personalities this had happened during their earthly life because they found no opportunity there to elevate the natural-scientific way of thinking into the sphere where spiritual experience begins. After death they accomplished this in the most com-

plete fashion. I saw that one can achieve this elevation of thought if one brings inner mood and force to the task during the earthly life. I saw also, through my participation in that which is significant in the spiritual world, that humanity had of necessity to evolve to the scientific way of thinking. Earlier ways of thinking could unite humanity with the supersensible world; they could lead man, especially if he entered into self-knowledge (the foundation of all knowledge), to know himself as a copy, or even a member, of the spiritual world; but they could not bring him to the point where he could feel himself to be a self-sufficient, self-enclosed spiritual being. Therefore the advance had to be made to the grasp of an ideal world which is not kindled from the spirit itself, but is stimulated out of matter – which is, indeed, spiritual, but not derived from the spirit.

Such a world of ideas cannot be generated in man in that spiritual world where he has his vital relationships after death and before a new birth, but only in the earthly existence, because only there does he stand face to face with materialist forms.

I could realize, therefore, through these two human souls what man wins for the totality of his life, including his spiritual life after death, by reason of his being woven into the natural-scientific way of thinking. But in the case of others who had taken into themselves during their earthly lives the effects of the crass natural-scientific way of thinking upon the will, could see that these estranged themselves from the spiritual world; that they had, so to speak, arrived at a totality of life in which man is less man in his full humanity with the natural-scientific way of thinking than without it.

Both these souls had been recluses from the world because they did not wish to lose their humanity during the earthly life; they had accepted the natural-scientific way of thinking in its full comprehensiveness because they wished to reach that stage of the spiritual man which cannot be attained without this.

It might well have been impossible for me to attain to these perceptions in the case of these two souls if I had encountered them within the earthly existence as physical personalities. In order to perceive the two individualities in the spiritual world in which they were to reveal to me their being, and through this also many other things, I needed that sensitiveness of the soul's perception in relationship to them which is easily lost when that which has been experienced in the physical world conceals what is to be experienced spiritually, or at least interferes with this.

I was forced, therefore, to perceive that the manner in which both souls entered into my earthly life was something ordained by way of destiny along my path to knowledge.

But nothing whatever of a spiritistic sort can be associated with this way of relating oneself to souls in the spiritual world. Nothing could ever count with me in the relationship to the spiritual world except the genuine spiritual perception which later discussed publicly in my anthroposophic writings. Moreover, the Viennese family and all its members, as well as that of Weimar, were far too sane for a communion with the dead by the help of mediums.

Wherever such things have been under discussion, I have always taken an interest also in such a seeking on the part of human souls as is manifested in spiritualism. Modern spiritualism is a way toward the spirit for such souls as would seek for the spirit in external – almost experimental – ways because they cannot any longer experience the real, the true, the genuine in a spiritual manner. It is just the sort of person who interests himself in an entirely objective manner in spiritualism, without himself having the desire to investigate something by means of it, who can see through to correct conceptions of the purpose and the errors of spiritualism. My own research moves always by a different path from that of spiritualism in any of its forms. Indeed, there were opportunities in Weimar for interesting intercourse with spiritualists; for there was an intense interest for a long time among the artists in this way of seeking to relate oneself to the spiritual.

But there came to me from my intercourse with the two souls – he of Weimar was named Eunicke – an access of strength for the writing of my *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*. What I aspired to do in that book was this: First, the book is the product of my way of philosophical thinking during the eighties; in the second place, it is the product also of my general concrete perception in the spiritual world; but in the third place, it was reinforced through my participation in the spiritual experiences of those two souls. In these I had before me the ascent which man owes to this natural-scientific world-conception. But I had in them also the fear which noble souls feel of entering vitally into the will-element of this world-conception. These souls shrank back from the moral effects of such a world-conception.

Now I sought in my *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* for that force which leads from the ethically neutral ideal world of natural science into the world of moral impulse. I sought to show how the man who knows himself as a self-enclosed being of a spiritual sort because he lives in ideas which are no longer streaming out from the spirit but are stimulated by material being, can nevertheless evolve out of his own being an intuition for the moral. In this way the moral shines in the individuality now made free as individual impulsion toward the moral, just as ideas arise from the perception of nature.

The two souls had not pressed on to this moral intuition. Hence they shrank back (unconsciously) from life because this could have been maintained only in the sense of natural-scientific

tific ideas not as yet extended further.

I spoke at that time of “moral fantasy” as the source of the moral in the isolated human individuality. I was far from any intention of referring to this source as to something not wholly real. On the contrary, I wished to point out in fantasy the force which helps the spiritual world in all its aspects to break through into the individual man. Of course, if one is to attain to a real experience of the spiritual, then it is necessary that the spiritual forces of knowledge should enter into one – imagination, inspiration, intuition. But to a man conscious of himself as an individual the first ray of a spiritual revelation comes by means of fantasy; and we observe, indeed, in Goethe the way in which fantasy holds aloof from everything fantastic, and becomes a picture of the spiritually real.

In the family left behind by the Weimar “unknown known,” I lived for much the greater part of the time that I remained in Weimar. I had a part of the house for myself; Frau Anna Eunicke, with whom I was soon on terms of intimate friendship, watched over all my needs in the most devoted fashion. She valued greatly the fact that I stood beside her in her heavy responsibilities for the education of the children. She had been left after Eunicke's death a widow with four daughters and a son.

The children I saw only when there was some occasion for me to do so. That happened frequently, since I was looked upon just as if I belonged to the family. My meals, however, except the morning coffee and supper, I took elsewhere.³

In this place where I had formed so delightful a family connection it was not only I who felt at home. When young visitors from Berlin who had formed intimate ties with me, attending the meetings of the Goethe Society, wished for once to be quite “cozy” together, they came to me at the Eunicke home. And I have every reason to assume from the way in which they acted that they felt very much at ease there.

Otto Erich Hartleben also was happy to be there whenever he was in Weimar. The *Goethe Breviary* that he published was there put together by us two in the space of a few days. Of my own larger works, *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* and *Nietzsche as the Adversary of His Age* there took form.

And I think that numbers of Weimar friends also spent many a happy hour – or several hours – with me at the Eunicke home. In this connection I think most of all about the man to whom I was bound in intimate love and friendship – Dr. August Fresenius. He had become a perma-

ment collaborator at the Museum. Before that he had been editor of the *Deutsche Literaturzeit.*⁴ His editorial work was universally considered as the standard of excellence. I had many things in my heart against philology, especially as the science was then pursued by the adherents of Scherer. August Fresenius armed me over and over again by the way in which he was a philologist. And he never for a moment made any secret of the fact that he wished to be a philologist, and only a true philologist. But with him philology was really the love of words, which filled the whole man with its vital force; and the word was to him that human revelation in which all the laws of the universe are mirrored. Whoever wishes to see into the mysteries of words must possess an insight into all the mysteries of existence. The philologist, therefore, must do nothing less than pursue an universal knowledge. True philological methods rightly applied can move outward from the utterly simple until they cast a powerful illumination upon extensive and important spheres of life.

Fresenius showed this at that time in an example which took a strong hold upon my interest. We had discussed the matter a great deal before he published it in a brief but weighty article in the *Goethe Year Book*.

Until the discovery by Fresenius, everyone who had busied himself with the interpretation of Goethe's *Faust* had misunderstood a statement made by Goethe five days before his death to Wilhelm von Humboldt. Goethe made this statement: "Es sind über sechzig Jahre, dass die Konzeption des *Faust* bei mir, jugendlich *von vornherein* klar, die weitere Reihenfolge hingegen weniger ausführlich, vorlag."⁵ The commentators had understood *von vornherein* to mean that from the beginning Goethe had had an idea, a plan, of the entire *Faust* drama in which he had at that time more or less elaborated the details. Even my beloved teacher and friend, Karl Julius Schröer, was of this opinion. Consider: If this were correct, then we should have in Goethe's *Faust* a work which Goethe had conceived in main outline as a young man. We should have to assume that it was possible for such a temper of soul as Goethe's so to work outward from a general idea that the work of elaboration could go on for sixty years and yet the idea remain fixed. That this is not so was proved irrefutably by Fresenius's discovery. He maintained that Goethe never used the expression *von vornherein* in the way ascribed to him by the commentators. He said, for example, that he had read a book "von vornherein, das weitere nicht mehr."⁶ He used the expression *von vornherein* only in a spatial sense. It was thus shown that all *Faust* commentators were wrong, and that Goethe had said nothing about a plan of the *Faust* existing *von vornherein* – from the first – but only that the first parts were clear to him as a young man, and that here and there he had developed something in the latter parts.

Thus an important light was cast upon the whole psychology of Goethe by the correct application of the philological method.

At that time I only marveled that something which ought to have had the most far-reaching effects upon the conception of Goethe's mind really produced very little impression, after it was published in the *Goethe Year Book*, among those who ought to have been chiefly interested in it.

But other things than mere philology were the topics of conversations with August Fresenius. Everything that stirred the men of that time, everything interesting to us which happened in Weimar or elsewhere, became the subject of long conversations between us; for we spent much time together. At times we grew excited in conversations about many things; but they all ended in complete harmony, for we were convinced of the earnestness with which our respective views were held even though opposed. So much the more distressing must it be to me to reflect upon the fact that even my friendship with August Fresenius sustained a rupture in connection with the misunderstandings associated with my relationship to the Nietzsche Archives and to Frau Dr. Förster-Nietzsche. These friends could form no conception of that which really had happened. I could do nothing to satisfy them. For the truth is that nothing at all had happened. Everything rested upon misconceptions and illusions which had become fixed in the Nietzsche Archives. What I was able to say is contained in my article published later in the *Magazin für Literatur*. I felt this misunderstanding deeply, for the friendship with August Fresenius was firmly rooted in my heart.

Another friendship to which I have often looked back was that which I formed with Franz Ferdinand Heitmüller, who had just then – later than Wahle, von der Hellen, and I – become a collaborator at the Institute.

Heitmüller's life was that of a fine soul with the sensibilities of an artist. He made all his discriminations through his artistic sense. Intellectualism was remote from him. Through him something artistic entered into the whole tone of our conversations in the Institute. He had already published stories marked by a delicate refinement. He was by no means a bad philologist, and he did no worse than others in what he had to work at as a philologist for the Institute. But he always maintained a sort of inner opposition to what was worked out in the Institute – especially to the way in which this work was conceived. Through him it came about that for a long time we felt very deeply the fact that Weimar had once been the place giving birth to the most inspired and famous productions but that men now contented themselves with going back to the things once produced, “fixing the readings,” and giving the best interpretations with superstitious care. Heitmüller published anonymously what he had to say about this

in S. Fischer's *Neue Deutsche Rundschau* in the form of a story – *Die Versunkene Vineta*.⁷ How men then tried to discover who had made of the once spiritually flourishing Weimar a drowned city!

Heitmüller lived in Weimar with his mother, a wonderfully lovable woman. She became a friend of Frau Anna Eunicke, and enjoyed coming to her home. And so I then had the happiness of frequently seeing the Heitmüllers also in the house in which I lived.

One friend I have to recall who came into my circle rather early during my stay in Weimar, and with whom I was associated in intimate friendship until I left, and, indeed, even after that, when I went backwards and forwards on visits to Weimar. This was the painter Joseph Rolletscheck. He was a German Bohemian, and had been attracted to Weimar by the art school. A personality he was who impressed one as altogether lovable, and to whom one gladly laid open one's heart. Rolletscheck was sentimental and slightly cynical at the same time; he was a pessimist on one side, and inclined on the other side to value life so little that it did not seem to him worth the trouble to lay so much stress upon those things which give ground for pessimism. When he was present, the talk had to deal much with the injustices of life; and he could storm endlessly over the injustice which the world had done to poor Schiller in contrast with Goethe, the chosen of destiny before his birth.

Although daily contact with such persons kept up a constant and stimulating exchange of thought and feeling, yet it was impossible for me to speak directly during this Weimar period about my experience of the spiritual world even to those with whom I was otherwise on terms of intimacy. I maintained that men must come to see that the true way into the spiritual world must lead first to the experience of pure ideas. The thing for which I argued in every sort of form was this: that, just as man can have in his conscious experience colour, tone, and heat qualities, so also he can experience pure ideas uninfluenced by any perception of the external, but appearing with the fulness of man's experience of himself. And in these ideas there is real and living spirit. All other experience of the spirit in man, so I then said, must spring up within consciousness as the result of this experience of ideas.

The fact that I sought for the experience of the spirit first in the experience of ideas led to the misunderstanding of which I have already spoken – that even intimate friends did not see the living reality in ideas, and considered me a rationalist, or intellectualist.

Firmer in maintaining an understanding of the living reality of the ideal world was a young man who came frequently to Weimar – Max Christlieb. It was rather early after the beginning

of my stay in Weimar that I saw him, a seeker after the knowledge of the spirit. He had completed his preparation for the evangelical ministry, was just then taking his doctor's examination, and was getting ready to go to Japan to engage in some sort of missionary work, as he soon afterward did.

This man saw – inspired, I dare say – that man is living in the spirit when he lives in pure ideas, and that, since all of nature must shine forth before the understanding in the world of pure ideas, therefore in everything material we have only appearance (illusions); that all physical being is revealed by means of ideas as spirit. It was profoundly satisfying to me to find a person who possessed an almost complete understanding of spiritual being. It was an understanding of the spiritual being within the idea. There, of course, the spirit so lives that feeling and creative spiritual individualities do not yet separate themselves for the conscious vision from the sea of general ideal spirit-being. Of these spirit individualities I could not yet speak to Max Christlieb This would have shocked too much his beautiful idealism. But genuine spirit-being – of this one could speak with him.

He had read with thorough understanding everything that I had written up to that time. And I had the impression at the beginning of the 'nineties: “Max Christlieb has the gift of entering into the spiritual world through the spirituality of the ideal in the way that I must consider the most suitable.”

The fact that he did not later wholly maintain this direction of mind, but took a somewhat different course – of this there is now no occasion to speak.

1. *Goethe's Share in Lavater's Physionomic Fragments.*
2. *Kaiser, Be Stern!*
3. In Germany the midday meal is the principal occasion for the whole family to be together.
4. *German Literary News.*
5. “For more than sixty years the conception of *Faust* has been present to my mind – the earlier parts clear in my youth, the latter parts less fully developed.”
6. “As to the earlier parts but not the latter.”
7. *Venice Submerged.*