

The Story of My Life

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Chapter XXI

Through the liberal politician of whom I have spoken I became acquainted with the owner of a book-shop. This book business had seen better days than those it was passing through during my stay in Weimar. This was still true when the shop belonged to the father of the young man whom I came to know as the owner. The important thing for me was the fact that this book-shop published a paper which carried sketchy articles dealing with contemporary spiritual life and whatever was then appearing in the fields of poetry, science, and art. This paper also was in a decline; its circulation had fallen off. But it afforded me the opportunity to write about much which then lay within the scope of my thinking or had a relation to this. Although the numerous essays and book reviews which I thus wrote were read by very few, it was an important thing to me to have a paper in which I could publish whatever I pleased to write. There was a stimulus in this which bore fruit later, when I edited the *Magazin für Literatur* and was therefore compelled to share intensely in thought and feeling in contemporary spiritual life.

In this way Weimar became for me the place to which my thoughts had often to turn back in later years. The narrow limits within which my life had been restricted in Vienna were now expanded, and I had spiritual and human experiences the results of which appeared later on.

Most important of all, however, were the relationships with men which were then formed.

When in later years I have recalled to memory Weimar and my life there, my mental gaze has often been directed to a house which had become dear to me in very special measure.

I became acquainted with the actor Neuffer while he was still engaged at the Weimar theatre. I appreciated in him at first his earnest and austere conception of his profession. Into his judgment concerning the art of the stage he allowed nothing of the dilettante to enter. This was satisfying for the reason that people are not always aware that dramatic art must fulfil genuinely artistic requirements in the same way as does, for instance, music.

Neuffer married the sister of the pianist and composer Bernhard Stavenhagen. I was introduced into his home. One was in this way received at the same time in friendly fashion in the

home of the parents of Frau Neuffer and Bernhard Stavenhagen. Frau Neuffer is a woman who radiates a spiritual atmosphere over everything about her. Her sentiments, deeply rooted in the soul, shone with wonderful beauty in the free and informal talk in which one shared while in her home. She brought forward whatever she had to say thoughtfully and yet graciously. Every moment that I spent with the Neuffers I had the feeling: "Frau Neuffer strives to reach truth in all the relationships of life in a way that is very rare."

That I was welcomed there was evidenced in the most varied incidents. I will choose one example.

One Christmas Eve Herr Neuffer came to my home, and – as I was not in – left the request that I must without fail come to his home for the ceremony of Christmas gifts. This was not easy, for in Weimar I always had to share in several such festivities. But I managed somehow to do this. Then I found, beside the gifts for the children, a special Christmas gift for me all nicely wrapped up, the value of which can be seen only from its history.

I had been one day in the studio of a sculptor. The sculptor wanted to show me his work. Very little that I saw there interested me. Only a single bust which lay out of sight in a corner attracted my attention. It was a bust of Hegel. In the studio, which belonged to the home of an old lady very prominent in Weimar, there was to be seen every possible sort of sculpture. Sculptors always rented the room for only a short time; and each tenant would leave there many things which he did not care to take with him. But there were also some things which had lain there for a long time unobserved, such as the Hegel bust.

The interest I had conceived in this bust led from that time on to my mentioning it here or there. So this happened once also in the Neuffer home; there also I added a casual remark to the effect that I should like to have the bust in my possession.

Then on the following Christmas Eve it was given to me as a present at Neuffer's. At lunch on the following day, to which I was invited, Neuffer told how he had procured the bust.

He first went to the lady to whom the studio belonged. He told her that some one had seen the bust in her studio, and that it would have a special value for him if he could procure it. The lady said that such things had been in her house for a long time past, but whether a "Hegel" bust was there – as to that she knew nothing. She appeared quite willing, however, to guide Neuffer around in order that he might look for it. Everything was "thoroughly searched"; not the most hidden corner was left uninspected; nowhere was the Hegel bust discovered. Neuffer was quite sad, for there had been something very satisfying to him in the thought of giving me

pleasure by means of the Hegel bust. He was already standing at the door with the lady. The maid-servant came along. She heard the words of Neuffer's: "Yes, it is a pity that we have not found the Hegel bust!" "Hegel!" interjected the maid: "Is this perhaps that head with the tip of the nose broken off which is under my bed in the servant's room?" Forthwith the final act of the expedition was carried out, and Neuffer actually succeeded in procuring the bust; before Christmas there was still time to supplement the defective nose.

So it was that I came by the Hegel bust which is one of the few things that later accompanied me to many different places. I always liked to look again and again at this head of Hegel (by Wassmann, the year 1826) when I was deeply immersed in the world of Hegel's ideas. And this, as a matter of fact, happened very often. This countenance, whose features are the most human expression of the purest thought, constitutes a life-companion wielding a manifold influence.

So it was with the Neuffers. They spared no pains when they wished to give someone pleasure by means of something that had a special relation to him. The children that came one by one into the Neuffer home had a model mother. Frau Neuffer brought them up less by what she did than by what she is – by her whole being. I had the happiness of being godfather to one of the sons. Every visit to this house was the occasion of an inner satisfaction. I was privileged to make such visits also in later years after I had left Weimar but returned to and fro to deliver lectures. Unfortunately this has not been possible now for a long while. It thus happens that I have not been able to see the Neuffers during the years in which a painful fate has broken in upon them; for this family is one of those most sorely put to the test by the World War.

A charming personality was the father of Frau Neuffer, the elder Stavenhagen. Before this time he had been engaged in a practical occupation, but he had then settled down to rest. He now lived wholly in the contents of the library he had acquired for himself; and it was a thoroughly congenial picture to others – the way in which he lived there. Nothing self-satisfied or top-lofty had entered into the lovable old man, but rather something that revealed in every word the sincere craving for knowledge.

The relationships in Weimar were then of such a character that souls which felt elsewhere unsatisfied would turn up here. So it was with those who made a permanent home there, but so also with those who loved to come again and again as visitors. One had this feeling about many persons: "Visits to Weimar are different for them from visits to other places."

I had this feeling in a very special way about the Danish poet, Rudolf Schmidt. He came first for the production of his play, *Der verwandelte König*.¹ During this very first visit I made his acquaintance. Later, however, he appeared on many occasions which brought visitors from elsewhere to Weimar. The fine figure of a man with those wavy locks was often among these visitors. The way in which a man "is" in Weimar had in it something that drew his soul. He was a very sharply marked personality. In philosophy he was an adherent of Rasmus Nielson. Through this man, who derived his thought from Hegel, Rudolf Schmidt had the most beautiful understanding of the German idealistic philosophy. And if Schmidt's opinions were thus clearly stamped on the positive side, they were no less so on the negative. Thus he became biting, satirical, utterly adverse when he spoke of Georg Brandes. There was something artistic in seeing a person revealing an entire expansive field of experience poured out before you in his antipathy. Upon me these revelations could never make any impression except an artistic one; for I had read much from Georg Brandes. I had been especially interested in what he had written, in a manner rich in spiritual wealth and out of a wide range of observations and knowledge, about the spiritual currents of the European peoples. But what Rudolf Schmidt brought forward was subjectively honest, and because of the character of the poet himself it was really captivating.

At length I came to feel the deepest and most heartfelt love for Rudolf Schmidt; I rejoiced on the days when he came to Weimar. It was interesting to hear him talk about his northern homeland, and to perceive what significant capacities had sprung up in him from the fountain-head of his northern experiences. It was no less interesting to talk with him about Goethe, Schiller, Byron. Then he spoke very differently from Georg Brandes. The latter is always in his judgments the international personality, but in Rudolf Schmidt there spoke the Dane. For this very reason he talked about many things and in many connections in a more interesting way than Georg Brandes.

During the latter part of my stay in Weimar, I became an intimate friend of Conrad Ansorge and his brother-in-law, von Crompton. Conrad Ansorge later developed in a brilliant way his great artistic powers. Here I need speak only of what he was to me in a beautiful friendship at the close of the 'nineties, and how he then impressed me.

The wives of Ansorge and von Crompton were sisters. Because of this relationship, our gatherings took place either at von Crompton's home or at the hotel Russischer Hof.

Ansorge was an energetically artistic man. He was active both as pianist and as composer. During the time of our Weimar acquaintance he set to music poems of Nietzsche and of

Dehmel. It was always a delightful occasion when the friends who were gradually drawn into the Ansorge-Crompton circle were permitted to hear a new composition.

To this group belonged also a Weimar editor, Paul Böhler. He edited the *Deutschland*, which had a more independent existence side by side with the official journal, the *Weimarische Zeitung*. Many other Weimar friends besides these appeared in this circle: Fresenius, Heitmüller, Fritz Koegel, too, and others. When Otto Erich Hartleben came to Weimar, he also always appeared in this circle, after it had been formed.

Conrad Ansorge had grown out of the Liszt circle. Indeed, I speak nothing but the truth when I assert that he considered himself one of the pupils of the master who understood him in an artistic sense most truly of all. But it was through Conrad Ansorge that what had come in living form from Liszt was brought before one's mind in the most beautiful way.

For everything musical which came from Ansorge arose out of an entirely original, individual human being. This humanity in him might be inspired by Liszt, but what was delightful in it was its originality. I express these things just as I then experienced them; how I was afterward related to them or am now related is not here under discussion.

Through Liszt, Ansorge had once at an earlier period been bound to Weimar; at the time of which I am here speaking, his soul was freed from this state of belonging to Weimar. Indeed, the characteristic of this Ansorge-Crompton circle was that it was in a very different relationship to Weimar from that of the great majority of persons of whom I have hitherto been able to state that they came into close touch with me.

Those persons were at Weimar in the way I have described in the preceding chapter. The interests of this circle reached outward from Weimar, and so it came about that at the time when my Weimar work was ended and I had to think about leaving the city of Goethe, I had formed the friendship of persons for whom the life in Weimar was not especially characteristic. In a certain sense one "lived oneself" out of Weimar while among these friends.

Ansorge, who felt that Weimar put fetters upon his artistic development, moved at nearly the same time as I did to Berlin. Paul Böhler, although editor of the most widely read paper in Weimar, did not write in the contemporary "spirit of Weimar," but expressed many a sharp criticism, drawn from a broader range of view, against that spirit. It was he who always raised his voice when dealing with this theme to place in the true light what was born of opportunism and littleness of soul. And in this way it happened that, just at the time when he was a member of this circle, he lost his place.

Von Crompton was the most lovable personality one could imagine. In his house the circle passed the most delightful hours. Frau von Crompton was there the central figure, a richly spiritual and gracious personality like sunlight to those who were privileged to be about her.

The whole group stood, so to speak, in the sign of Nietzsche. They looked upon Nietzsche's view as possessing greater interest than all others; they surrendered themselves to that mood of soul which manifested itself in Nietzsche, considering it as representing in a certain way the flowering of a genuine and free humanity. In both these aspects von Crompton especially was a representative of the Nietzsche followers in the 'nineties. My own attitude toward Nietzsche did not change at all within this circle. But the fact that I was the one who was questioned when any one wished to know something about Nietzsche brought it about that the relation in which the others stood to Nietzsche was assumed to be my own relation also.

But I must say that this circle looked up in a more understanding fashion to that which Nietzsche believed that he knew, and that they sought to express in their lives what lay in the Nietzsche ideals of life with greater understanding than was present in many other cases where *Superman* and *Beyond Good and Evil* did not always bring forth the most satisfying blossoms.

For me the circle was important because of a strong and vital energy that bore one along with it. On the other hand, however, I found there the most responsive understanding for everything which I thought it possible to introduce into this circle.

The evenings, made brilliant by Ansorge's musical compositions, its hours filled with interesting talk about Nietzsche in which all shared, when far-reaching and weighty questions concerning the world and life formed, so to speak, a satisfying converse, – these evenings were, indeed, something to which I can look back with contentment as having given a beautiful character to the last part of my stay at Weimar.

Since everything which had a living expression in this circle was derived from a direct and serious artistic experience and sought to permeate itself with a world-conception which held to the true human being as its central point, one could not cherish any sense of dissatisfaction if there was manifested something opposed to the Weimar of that time. The tone was different from that which I had experienced previously in the Olden circle. There much irony found expression; one looked upon Weimar also as “human, all too human” as one would have seen other places if one had been in these. In the Ansorge-Crompton circle there was present rather --I mean to say – the earnest feeling: “How can the evolution of German culture progress further if a place like Weimar does so little to fulfil its foreordained tasks?”

Against the background of this social intercourse my book *Goethe's World-Conception* came into being, with which I ended my work at Weimar. Some time ago, when I was preparing a new edition of this book, I sensed in the way in which I then shaped my thoughts for the volume an echo of the inner nature of the friendly gatherings of the circle I have here described.

In this book there is somewhat more of the personal than would have been the case had there not re-vibrated in my mind while I was writing it what had over and over resounded in this circle with strong and avowed enthusiasm about the "nature of Personality." It is the only one of my books of which I would say just this. All of them I can assert to have been personally experienced in the truest sense of the word; not, however, in this way, when one's own personality so strongly enters into the experiences of the personalities about one.

But this concerns only the general bearing of the book. The philosophy of Goethe, as revealed in relation to the realm of nature, is there set forth as this had already been done in my Goethe writings of the 'eighties. Only in regard to details my views had been broadened, deepened, or confirmed by manuscripts first discovered among the Goethe archives.

In everything which I have published in connection with Goethe the thing that I have striven to do has been to set Goethe's "world-conception" before the world in its content and its tendency. From this was to appear, as a result, how that in Goethe which is comprehensive and spiritually penetrating into the thing leads to detailed discoveries in the most varied fields of nature. I was not concerned to point out these single discoveries as such, but to show that they were the flowers of the plant of a spiritual view of nature.

To characterize this view of nature as a part of what Goethe gave to the world – such was my purpose in writing descriptions of this portion of Goethe's work as a thinker and researcher. But I aimed at the same objective in arranging Goethe's papers in the two editions in which I collaborated, that in *Kürschner's Deutsche National-Literatur* and, also the Weimar Sophie edition. I never considered it a task which could fall to my lot because of the entire work of Goethe to bring to light what Goethe had achieved as botanist, zoologist, geologist, colour-theorist, in the manner in which one passes judgment upon such an achievement before the forum of competent scientists. Moreover, it seemed to me inappropriate to do anything in this direction while arranging the papers for the two editions.

So that part also of the writings of Goethe which I edited for the Weimar edition became nothing more than a document for the world-conception of Goethe as revealed in his researches in nature. How this world-conception cast its special light upon things botanical, geological, etc., this must be brought to the fore. It has been felt, for instance, that I ought to have arranged the

geological-mineralogical writings differently in order that “Goethe's relationship to geology” might be seen from the contents of these. But it is only necessary to read what I said about the arrangement of the writings of Goethe in this field in the introductions to my publications in *Kürschner's Deutsche National-Literatur*, and there could be no doubt that I would never have agreed to the point of view urged by my critics. In Weimar this could have been known when the editing was entrusted to me. For in the Kürschner edition everything had already appeared which had become fixed in my point of view before the idea had ever arisen of entrusting to me a task in Weimar. The task was entrusted to me with full knowledge of this circumstance. I will by no means deny that what I have done in many single details in working up the Weimar edition may be pointed out as “errors” by specialists. This may be rightly maintained. But the thing ought not to be so presented as if the nature of the edition rested upon my competence or lack of competence, and not upon my fundamental postulates. Especially should this not be done by those who admit that they possess no organ for perceiving what I have maintained in regard to Goethe. When the question concerns individual errors of fact here and there, I might point out to those who criticize me in this respect many much worse errors in the papers I wrote as a student in the Higher Technical Institute. I have made it very clear in this account of the course of my life that, even in childhood, I lived in the spiritual world as in that which was self-evident to me, but that I had to strive earnestly for everything which pertained to a knowledge of the outer world. For this reason I am a man slow in development as to all the aspects of the physical world. The results of this fact appear in details of my Goethe editions.

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