

The Story of My Life

GA 28

Chapter XXV

Associated with the Magazine group was a free Dramatic Society. It did not belong so intimately with the Magazine as did the Free Literary Society; but the same persons were on the board of directors here as in the other Society, and I was elected a member of this board immediately after I came to Berlin.

The purpose of this Society was that of producing plays which, because of their special character, because they fell outside the usual taste and tendencies and the like, were at first not produced by the theatres. It was no light task that rested upon the directors, to succeed in the midst of so many dramatic attempts with the “misunderstood” plays.

The productions were carried out in such a way that in each case a company of actors was made up of artists who played on the most varied stages. With these actors the play was given in the morning in a theatre rented or else lent freely by its managers. The actors proved to be very unselfish in relation to this Society, for it was not able by reason of its limited means to offer adequate compensation. But neither actors nor managers had any inner reason to object to the production of works of an unusual sort. They simply said: “Before the ordinary public and at an evening performance, this cannot be done, since it would cause financial injury to any theatre. The public is simply not ripe for the idea that the theatre should serve exclusively the cause of art.”

The activity associated with this Dramatic Society proved to be of a character in a high degree suited to me; most of all the part having to do with the staging of the plays. Along with Otto Erich Hartleben I took part in the rehearsals. We felt that we were real stage-managers. We gave the plays their stage forms. In this very art it became evident that all theorizing and dogmatizing are of no use unless they come from a vital artistic sense which intuitively grasps in the details the general requirement of style. One must steadfastly resist the resort to general rules. Everything which the circumstances in such a sphere render possible must appear in a flash from one's sure sense for style in action, in arrangement of the scenes. And what one then does, without any logical reflection but from the sense for style, gives a feeling of satisfaction

to every artist in the cast, whereas a rule derived from the intellect gives them the feeling that their inner freedom is being interfered with.

To the experiences in this field which were then mine, I had occasion afterwards again and again to look back with satisfaction.

The first play that we produced in this way was Maurice Maeterlinck's *L'intruse*.¹ Otto Erich Hartleben had made the translation. Maeterlinck was then considered by the aesthetes as the dramatist who was fitted to bring upon the stage before the eyes of the susceptible spectator the invisible which lies amid the gross events of life. That which is ordinarily called incident in drama, the form of development in dialogue, Maeterlinck so employs as to produce thereby upon the susceptible the effect of symbols. It was this symbolizing that attracted many whose taste had been repelled by the preceding naturalism. All who were seeking for the "spirit," but who did not desire a form of expression in which a world of spirit is directly revealed, found their satisfaction in a symbolism that spoke a language not expressed in naturalistic form and yet entered into the spiritual only to the extent that this was revealed in the vague blurred form of the mystic-presentimental. The less one could "tell distinctly" what lay behind the suggestive symbols, the more were many enraptured by them.

I did not feel at ease in the presence of this spiritual glimmering. Yet it was delightful to work at the management of such a play as *The Intruder*. For the representation of just such symbols by appropriate stage means required in an unusual degree a managerial function guided in the way described above.

Moreover, it became my task to precede the production with a brief introductory address. This practice, common in France, had at that time been adopted also in Germany in connection with individual plays. Not, of course, in the ordinary theatre, but in connection with such undertakings as were adapted to the Dramatic Society. This did not occur, indeed, at every production of the Society, but infrequently: when it seemed necessary to introduce the public to an artistic purpose with which it was unfamiliar. The task of giving this brief stage address was satisfying to me for the reason that it afforded me an opportunity to make dominant in my speech a mood radiated to me myself from the spirit. And I was happy to do this in a human environment which had otherwise no ear for the spirit.

Being vitally within this dramatic art was, at all events, really important for me at that period. From that time on I myself wrote the dramatic criticisms for the Magazine. Concerning such "criticism," moreover, I had my own views, which, however, were little understood. I consid-

ered it unnecessary that an individual should pass “judgment” upon a play and its production. Such judgments, as these were generally given, should really be reached by the public for itself alone.

He who writes about a theatrical production should cause to arise before his readers in an artistic-ideal picture what combination of fantasy-form stands behind the play. In artistically fashioned thoughts there should arise before the reader an ideal poetic reproduction as the living, though unconscious, germ from which the author produced his play. For to me thoughts were never merely something by means of which reality is abstractly and intellectually expressed. I saw that an artistic activity is possible in thought-conceptions just as in colours, in forms, in stage devices. And such a minor work of art should be created by one who writes about a theatrical production. But that such a thing should come about when a play is produced before an audience seemed to me a necessary co-operation in the life of art.

Whether a play is “good,” “bad,” or “mediocre” will be evident in the tone and bearing of such an “art-thought form.” For this cannot be concealed even though one does not say it in the form of crass judgments. Anything which is an impossible artistic structure will be visible in the thought art reproduction. For one there sets forth the thoughts, but they appear as utterly unreal if the work of art has not come from true and living fantasy.

Such a vital working in unison with the living art I wished to have in the Magazine. In this way something would have come about that would have given to the journal a character different from that of merely theoretical discussion and judgment upon art and the spiritual life. The Magazine would actually become a member of this spiritual life.

For everything which the art of thinking can do for dramatic poetry is possible also for theatrical art. It is possible by means of thought-fantasy to bring into existence that which the art of the manager has introduced into the stage-conception; in this way it is possible to follow the actor, and, not through criticism but by “positive” presentation, cause that which is alive in him to stand forth. Then one becomes as a “writer” a formative participant in the artistic life of the time, and not a “judge” standing in the corner, “dreaded,” “pitied,” or even despised and hated. When this is practised for all branches of art, a literary-artistic periodical is in the midst of actual life.

But in such things one always has the same experience. If one seeks to bring them into effect with persons who are engaged in writing, they either fail completely to enter into these things, because they are contrary to the writer's habits of thought, or else they laugh and say: “Yes,

that's right, but I have always done so." They do not observe at all the distinction between what one proposes and what they themselves "have always done."

One who can go alone on his spiritual path need not be disturbed in mind by this. But whoever has to work among persons united in a spiritual group will be affected to the depths of his soul by these relationships. Especially so if his inner tendency is one so fixed, grown into him, that he cannot withdraw from this into another vitally real.

Neither my articles in the Magazine nor my lectures gave me at that time inner satisfaction. Only, anyone who reads them now and thinks that I intended to be a representative of materialism is mistaken. That I never wished to do.

This can clearly be seen from the essays and abstracts of lectures that I wrote. It is only necessary to set over against those individual passages which have a materialistic note others in which I speak of the spirit, of the eternal. So it is in the article *Ein Wiener Dichter*.² Of Peter Attenberg I say there. "What most interests the person who enters deeply into the world harmony seems foreign to him ... From the eternal ideas no light penetrates into Attenberg's eyes ..." (*Magazin*, July 17, 1897). And the fact that this "eternal world harmony" cannot be meant to signify something materialistic and mechanical becomes clear in utterances such as those in the essay on Rudolf Heidenhain (November 6, 1897): "Our conception of nature is clearly striving toward the goal of explaining the life of the organism according to the same laws by which the phenomena of inanimate nature must also be explained. General laws of mechanics, physics, chemistry are sought for in the bodies of animals and plants. The same sort of laws that control a machine must also be operative in the organism – only in immeasurably more complicated and scarcely comprehensible form. Nothing is to be added to these laws in order to render possible an explanation of the phenomenon we call life ... The mechanistic conception of the phenomena of life steadily gains ground. But it will never satisfy one who has the capacity to cast a deeper glance into nature's processes. Contemporary researchers in nature are too cowardly in their thinking. Where the wisdom of their mechanistic explanations fails, they say the thing is to us inexplicable ... A bold thinking lifts itself to a higher manner of perception. It seeks to explain by higher laws that which is not of a mechanical character. All our natural-scientific thinking remains behind our natural scientific experience. At present the natural-scientific form of thinking is much praised. In regard to this, it is said that we live in a natural-scientific age. But at bottom this natural-scientific age is the poorest that history has to show. Its characteristic is to hang fast to the mere facts and the mechanistic forms of explanation. Life will never be grasped by this form of thinking because such a grasp requires a higher manner of conceiving than that which belongs to the explanation of a machine."

Is it not obvious that one who speaks thus of the explanation of “life” cannot think materialistically of the explanation of “spirit”?

But I often spoke of the fact that the “spirit issues” from the bosom of nature. What is meant here by “spirit”? All that out of human thinking, feelings, and willing which begets “culture.” To speak of another “spirit” would then have been quite futile. For no one would have understood me if I had said: “That which appears in man as spirit and lies at the basis of nature is neither spirit nor nature, but the complete unity of both.” This unity – the creative Spirit which in its creating brings matter into existence and thereby is at the same time matter, but which also shows itself wholly as spirit – this unity is grasped by an idea which lay as far as possible from the habits of thought of that period. But it would have been necessary to speak of such an idea if one was to present in a spiritual form of thinking the primal state of the evolution of earth and man and the spiritual material Powers still active to-day in man himself, which on the one hand form his body and on the other cause to issue forth the living spiritual by means of which he creates culture. But external nature would have needed to be so discussed that in it the primal spiritual-material is represented as dead in natural laws.

All this could not be given.

It could be linked up only with natural-scientific experience, not with natural-scientific thinking. In this experience there was something present which could set in shining light before a man's own mind a true, spirit-filled thinking regarding the world and man – something out of which might again be found the spirit now lost from the sort of knowledge confirmed by tradition and accepted on faith. The perception of spirit-nature I desired to draw from the experience of nature. I wished to speak of what is to be found on “this side” as the spiritual-natural, as the essentially divine. For in the knowledge confirmed by tradition the divine had come to belong to “the beyond” because the spirit of “this side” was not recognized and was therefore sundered from the perceptible world. It had become something which had been submerged in man's consciousness into an ever increasing darkness. Not the rejection of the divine-spiritual, but its setting within the world, its calling to “this side,” lay in such sentences as the following in one of the lectures before the Free Literary Society: “I believe that natural science can give back to us the consciousness of freedom in a form more beautiful than that in which men have yet possessed it. In the life of our souls there operate laws which are just as natural as those which send the heavenly bodies round the sun. *But these laws represent something which is higher than all the rest of nature. This something is present nowhere save in man alone. Whatever flows from this, in that is man free. He lifts himself above the fixed necessity of laws of the inorganic and organic; he heeds and follows only himself.*” (The last sentences are itali-

cized here³ for the first time; they were not italicized in the Magazine. For these sentences see the Magazine of 12th February, 1898.)

1. *The Intruder.*
2. “*A Viennese Poet.*”
3. That is, in the German text.

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