

The Story of My Life

GA 28

Chapter XXIX

From the spiritual sphere new light on the evolution of humanity sought to break through in the knowledge acquired during the last third of the nineteenth century. But the spiritual sleep in which this acquired knowledge was given its materialistic interpretation prevented even a notion of the new light, much less any proper attention to it.

So that time arrived which ought by its own nature to have evolved in the direction of the spirit, but which belied its own being – the time wherein it began to be impossible for life to make itself real.

I wish to set down here certain sentences taken from articles which I wrote in March 1898 for the *Dramaturgische Blätter* (which had become a supplement of the Magazine at the beginning of 1898). Referring to the art of lecturing, I said: “In this field more than in any other is the learner left wholly to himself and to chance ... Because of the form which our public life has taken on, almost everybody nowadays has frequent need to speak in public ... The elevation of ordinary speech to a work of art is a rarity. We lack almost wholly the feeling for the beauty of speaking, and still more for speaking that is characteristic ... To no one devoid of all knowledge of correct singing would the right be granted to discuss a singer ... In the case of dramatic art the requirements imposed are far slighter ... Persons who know whether or not a verse is properly spoken become steadily scarcer ... People nowadays often look upon artistic speaking as ineffective idealism. We could never have come to this had we been more aware of the educative possibilities of speech ...”

What then hovered before me could come to a form of realization only much later, within the Anthroposophical Society. Marie von Sievers (Marie Steiner), who was enthusiastic on behalf of the art of speech, first dedicated herself to genuinely artistic speaking; and then for the first time it became possible with her help to work for the elevation of speech to a true art by means of courses in speaking and dramatic representations.

I venture to introduce this subject just here in order to show how certain ideals have sought their unfolding all through my life, though many persons have tried to find contradictions in

my evolution.

To this period belongs my friendship with the young poet, now dead, Ludwig Jacobowski. He was a personality whose dominant mood of soul breathed the breath of inner tragedy. It was hard for him to bear the fate that made him a Jew. He represented a bureau which, under the guidance of a liberal deputy, directed the union "Defence against Anti-Semitism" and published its organ. An excessive burden in connection with this work rested upon Ludwig Jacobowski. And a sort of work which renewed every day a burning pain; for it brought home to him daily the realization of the feeling against his people which caused him so much suffering.

Along with this he developed a fruitful activity in the field of folk-lore. He collected everything obtainable as the basis for a work on the evolution of the peoples from primitive times. Individual papers of his, based upon his rich fund of knowledge in this field, are very interesting. They were at first written in the materialistic spirit of the time; but, had Jacobowski lived longer, he would certainly have been open to a spiritualizing of his research.

Out of this activity streamed the poetry of Ludwig Jacobowski. Not wholly original; and yet born of deeply human feeling and filled with an experience of the powers of the soul. *Leuchtende Tage*¹ he called his lyrical poems. These, when the mood bestowed them upon him, were in his life-tragedy really something that affected him like days of spiritual sunlight. Besides, he wrote novels. In *Werther der Jude*² there lived all the inner tragedy of Ludwig Jacobowski. In *Loki, Roman eines Gottes*,³ he produced a work born of German mythology. The soulful quality which speaks from this novel is a beautiful reflection of the poet's love of the mythological element in a folk.

A survey of what Ludwig Jacobowski achieved leaves one astonished at its fulness in the most divers fields. Yet he associated with many persons and enjoyed social life. More over, he was then editing the monthly *Die Gesellschaft*,⁴ which meant for him an enormous burden of work.

He had a consuming passion for life, whose essence he craved to know in order that he might mould this into artistic form.

He founded a society, *Die Kommenden*,⁵ consisting of writers, artists, scientists, and persons interested in the arts. The meetings there were weekly. Poets read their poems; lectures were given in the most divers fields of knowledge and life. The evening ended in an informal social

gathering. Ludwig Jacobowski was the central point of his ever growing circle. Everybody was attached to the lovable personality, so full of ideas, who, moreover, developed in this club a fine and noble sense of humour.

Away from all this he was snatched by an early death, when he had just reached thirty years. He was taken off by an inflammation of the brain, caused by his unceasing labours.

There remained to me only the duty of giving the funeral address for my friend and editing his literary remains.

A beautiful memorial of him was made by his friend, Marie Stona, in the form of a book consisting of papers by friends of his.

Everything about Ludwig Jacobowski was lovable: his inner tragedy, his striving outward from this to his "luminous days," his absorption in the life of movement. I keep always alive in my heart thoughts of our friendship, and look back upon our brief association with an inner devotion to my friend.

Another friend with whom I came to be associated at that time was Martha Asmers, a woman philosophically thoughtful but strongly inclined to materialism. This tendency, however, was modified through the fact that Martha Asmers kept intensely alive the memory of her brother Paul Asmers, who had died early, and who was a decided idealist.

During the last third of the nineteenth century Paul Asmers had lived, like a philosophical hermit, in the idealism of the time of Hegel. He wrote a paper on the ego, and a similar one on the Indo-Germanic religion – both characteristically Hegelian in form, but both thoroughly independent.

This interesting personality, who had then long been dead, was brought really close to me through the sister Martha Asmers. It seemed to me that in him the spirit-tending philosophy of the beginning of the century flamed forth like a meteor toward its end.

Less intimate, but of constant significance for a long time thereafter, were the relationships which came about between the "Friedrich Hageners" – Bruno Wille and Wilhelm Bölsche – and myself. Bruno Wille is the author of a work entitled *Philosophie der Befreiung* durch das reine Mittel*.⁶ Only the title coincides with my *Philosophie der Freiheit*. The content moves in an entirely different sphere. Bruno Wille became very widely known through his important

Offenbarungen des Wachholderbaumes,⁷ a philosophical book written out of the most beautiful feeling for nature, permeated by the conviction that spirit speaks from every material existence. Wilhelm Bölsche is known through numerous popular writings on the natural sciences which are extraordinarily popular among the widest circles of readers.

From this side came the founding of a Free Higher Institute, into which I was drawn. I was entrusted with the teaching of history. Bruno Wille took charge of philosophy, Bölsche of natural sciences, and Theodor Kappstein, a liberally minded theologian, the science of religion.

A second foundation was the Giordano Bruno Union. In this the idea was to bring together such persons as were sympathetic toward a spiritual-monistic philosophy. Emphasis was placed upon the idea that there are not two world-principles – matter and spirit – but that spirit constitutes the sole principle of all existence. Bruno Wille inaugurated the Union with a very brilliant lecture based upon the saying of Goethe: “Never matter without spirit.” Unfortunately a slight misunderstanding arose between Wille and me after this lecture. My words following the lecture – that long after Goethe had coined this beautiful expression, he had supplemented it in impressive fashion, in that he had seen polarity and ascent as the concrete spiritual shapings in the actual spiritual activity in existence, and that in this way the general saying first received its full content – this remark of mine was interpreted as a reflection upon Wille's lecture, which, however, I had fully accepted in the sense he himself intended.

But I brought upon myself the direct opposition of the leadership of the Giordano Bruno Union when I read a paper on monism. In this I laid stress upon the fact that the crude dualistic conception, “matter and spirit,” is really a creation of the most recent times, and that likewise only during the most recent centuries were spirit and nature brought into the opposition which the Giordano Bruno Union would oppose. Then I indicated how this dualism is opposed by scholastic monism. Even though scholasticism withdrew from human knowledge a part of existence and assigned this part to “faith,” yet scholasticism set up a world-system marked by a unified (monistic) constitution, from the Godhead and the divine all the way to the details of nature. I thus set even scholasticism higher than Kantianism.

This paper of mine aroused the greatest excitement. It was supposed that I wished to open the road for Catholicism into the Union. Of the leading personalities, only Wolfgang Kirchbach and Martha Asmers stood by me. The rest could form no notion as to what I really meant to do with the “misunderstood scholasticism.” In any case, they were convinced that I was likely to bring the greatest confusion into the Giordano Bruno Union.

I must call attention to this paper because it belongs to a time during which, according to the later views of many persons, I was a materialist. But at that time this materialist passed with many persons as the one who would swear afresh by medieval scholasticism.

In spite of all this I was able later to deliver before the Giordano Bruno Union my basic anthroposophic lecture, which became the point of departure for my anthroposophic activity.

In imparting to the public that which anthroposophy contains as knowledge of the spiritual world, decisions are necessary which are not altogether easy. The character of these decisions can best be understood if one glances at a single historical fact.

In accordance with the quite differently constituted temper of mind of an earlier humanity, there has always been a knowledge of the spiritual world up to the beginning of the modern age, approximately until the fourteenth century. This knowledge, however, was quite different from anthroposophy, which is adapted to the conditions of cognition characterizing the present day.

After the period mentioned, humanity could at first bring forth no knowledge of the spiritual world. Men could only confirm the “ancient knowledge,” which the mind had beheld in the form of pictures, and which was also available later only in symbolic-picture form.

This “ancient knowledge” was practised in remote times only within the “mysteries.” It was imparted to those who had first been made ripe for it, the “initiates.” It was not to reach the public because there the tendency was too strong to use it in an unworthy manner. This practice has been maintained only by those later personalities who received the lore of the “ancient knowledge” and continued to foster it. They did this in the most restricted circles with men whom they had previously prepared.

And thus it has continued even to the present time.

Of the persons maintaining such a position in relation to spiritual knowledge whom I have encountered, I may select one who was active within the Viennese circle of Frau Lang to which I have referred but whom I met also in other circles with which I was associated in Vienna. This was Friedrich Eckstein, the distinguished expert in the “ancient knowledge.” While I was associated with Friedrich Eckstein, he had not written much. But what he did write was filled with the spirit. No one, however, sensed from his essays the intimate expert in the “ancient knowledge.” This was active in the background of his spiritual work. Long after life had removed

me from this friend also, I read in a collection of his writings a very significant paper on the Bohemian Brothers.

Friedrich Eckstein represented the earnest conviction that esoteric spiritual knowledge should not be publicly propagated like ordinary knowledge. He was not alone in this conviction; it was and is that of almost all experts in the “ancient wisdom.” To what extent this conviction of the guardians of the “ancient wisdom,” strongly enforced as a rule, was broken through in the Theosophical Society founded by H. P. Blavatsky – of this I shall have occasion to speak later.

Friedrich Eckstein wished that, as “initiate in the ancient knowledge,” one should clothe what one treats publicly in the force which comes from this “initiation,” but that one should separate the exoteric strictly from the esoteric, which should remain within the most restricted circles of those who fully understood how to honour it.

If I was to develop a public activity on behalf of spiritual knowledge, I had to determine to break with this tradition. I found myself faced by the requirements of the contemporary intellectual life. In the presence of these the preservation of mysteries such as were inevitable in ancient times was an impossibility. We live in the time which demands publicity wherever any sort of knowledge appears. The point of view favouring the preservation of mysteries is an anachronism. The sole and only possibility is that persons should be taught spiritual knowledge by stages, and that no one should be admitted to a stage at which the higher portions of this knowledge are to be imparted until he knows the lower. This, indeed, corresponds with the practice in lower and higher schools even of an ordinary sort.

Moreover, I was under no obligation to anyone to guard mysteries, for I received nothing from the “ancient wisdom”; what I possess of spiritual knowledge is entirely the result of my own researches. When any knowledge has come to me, only then I set beside it whatever of the “ancient knowledge” has already been made public from any side, in order to point out the harmony in mood and, at the same time, the advance which is possible to contemporary research.

So, after a certain point of time, it was quite clear to me that in coming before the public with spiritual knowledge I should be doing the right thing.

1. *Luminous Days.*
2. *Werther the Jew.*
3. *Philosophy of Freedom through the Pure Means.*
4. *Society*

5. The Coming Ones

6. *Philosophy of Freedom through the Pure Means.*

7. *Revelations of the Juniper Tree.*

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