

The Story of My Life

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Chapter XXXI

Another collective work which represented the cultural attainments of the nineteenth century was published at that time by Hans Kraemer. It consisted of rather long treatises on the individual branches of knowledge, technical production, and social evolution.

I was invited to give a description of the literary aspect of life. So the evolution of fantasy during the nineteenth century passed through my mind. I did not describe things like a philologist, who develops such things “from their sources”; I described what I had inwardly experienced of the unfolding of the life of fantasy.

This exposition also was important for me in that I had to speak of phenomena of the spiritual life without having recourse to the experience of the spiritual world. The real spiritual impulses from this world that manifest themselves in the phenomena of poetry were left unmentioned.

In this case likewise what was present to my mind was that which the mental life has to say of a phenomenon of existence when the mind is at the point of view of the ordinary consciousness without bringing the content of the consciousness into such activity that it rises up in experience into the world of spirit.

Still more significant for me was this experience of standing before the doorway of the spiritual world in the case of a treatise which I had to write for another work. This was not a centennial work, but a collection of papers which were to characterize the various spheres of knowledge and life in so far as human egoism is a motor force in each sphere. Arthur Dix published this work. It was entitled *Der Egoismus*¹ and was throughout applicable to the time – the turning-point between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The impulses of intellectualism, which had been effective in all spheres of life since the fifteenth century, have their roots in the “life of the individual soul” when these impulses are really genuine expressions of their own nature. When man reveals himself intellectually on the basis of the social life, this is not a genuine intellectual expression, but an imitation.

One of the reasons why the demand for a social feeling has become so intense in this age lies in the fact that this feeling is not experienced with original inwardness in intellectualism. Humanity in these things craves most of all that which it has not.

To my lot fell the setting forth for this book of *Egoismus in der Philosophie*.² My paper bears this title only because the general title of the book required this. The title ought really to have been *Individualismus in der Philosophie*.³ I sought to give in very brief form a survey of occidental philosophy since Thales, and to show how the goal of its evolution has been to bring the human individual to experience the world in ideal images, just as it is the purpose of my *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* to set this forth with reference to knowledge and the moral life.

Again in this paper I stand before the “gateway of the spiritual world.” In the human individual were pointed out the ideal images which reveal the world-content. They appear so that they may wait for the experience whereby the mind may step through them into the world of spirit. In my description I held to this position. There is an inner world in this article which shows how far mere thinking comes in its grasp of the world.

It is evident that I described the pre-anthroposophic life of the mind from the most varied points of view before devoting myself to the anthroposophic setting forth of the spiritual world. In this there can be found nothing contradictory of my coming forward on behalf of anthroposophy; for the world-picture which arises will not be contradicted by anthroposophy, but extended and continued further.

If one begins to represent the spiritual world as a mystic, any one has a right to say: “You speak from your personal experiences. What you are describing is subjective.” To travel such a spiritual road was not given me as my task from the spiritual world.

This task consisted in laying a foundation for anthroposophy just as objective as that of scientific thinking when this does not restrict itself to sensible facts but reaches out for comprehensive concepts. All that I set forth in scientific-philosophic manner, and in connection with Goethe's ideas is subject to discussion. It may be considered more or less correct or incorrect; but it strives after the character of the objective-scientific in the fullest sense.

And it is out of this knowledge, free of the emotional-mystical, that I have brought the experience of the spiritual world. It can be seen how in my *Mysticism and Christianity as Mystical Fact* the conception of mysticism is carried in the direction of this objective knowledge. And

let it be noted also how my *Theosophy* is constructed. At every step taken in this book, spiritual perception stands as the background. Nothing is said which is not derived from this spiritual perception; but, while the steps are being made, the perception is clothed at first in the beginning of the book in scientific ideas until, in rising to the higher worlds, it must occupy itself more and more in freely picturing the spiritual world. But this picturing grows out of the natural-scientific as the blossoms of a plant from the stem and leaves. As the plant is not seen in its entirety, if one fixes one's eye upon it only up to the blossom, so nature is not experienced in her entirety if one does not rise from the sensible to the spiritual.

Therefore that for which I strove was to set forth in anthroposophy the objective continuation of science, not to set by the side of science something subjective. It was inevitable that this very effort would not at first be understood. Science was supposed to end with that which antedates anthroposophy, and there was no inclination so to put life into the ideas of science as to lead to one's laying hold upon the spiritual. Men ran the risk of being excommunicated by the habit of thought built up during the second half of the nineteenth century.

They could not muster the courage to break the fetters of mere sense-observation; they feared that they might arrive at a region where each would insist upon his own fantasy.

Such was my orientation of mind when, in 1902, Marie von Sievers and I entered upon the leadership of the German section of the Theosophical Society. It was Marie von Sievers who, by reason of her whole being, made it possible to keep what came about through us far removed from anything sectarian, and to give to the thing such a character as won for it a place within the general spiritual and educational life. She was deeply interested in the art of the drama and of declamation and recitation, and had completed courses of study in these art forms, especially in the best institutions in Paris, which had given to her talent a beautiful development. When I became acquainted with her in Berlin she was still continuing her studies in order to learn the various methods of artistic speech.

Marie von Sievers and I soon became great friends, and on the basis of this friendship there developed an united work in the most varied intellectual spheres and over a very wide area. Anthroposophy, but also the arts of poetry and of recitation, to cultivate these in common became for us the very essence of life.

Only in this unitedly cultivated spiritual life could the central point be found from which at first anthroposophy would be carried into the world through the local branches of the Theosophical Society.

During our first visit to London together, Marie von Sievers had heard from Countess Wachtmeister, an intimate friend of H. P. Blavatsky, much about the latter and about the tendencies and the evolution of the Theosophical Society. She was entrusted in the highest measure with that which was once revealed as a spiritual content to the Society and the story of how this content had been further fostered.

When I say that it was possible to find in the branches of the Theosophical Society those persons who desired to have knowledge imparted to them from the spiritual world, I do not mean that those persons enrolled in the Theosophical Society could be considered before all others as being of such a character. Many of these, however, proved very soon to have a high degree of understanding in reference to my form of spiritual knowledge.

But a large part of the members were fanatical followers of individual heads of the Theosophical Society. They swore by the dogmas given out by these heads, who acted in a strongly sectarian spirit.

This action of the Theosophical Society repelled me by the triviality and dilettantism inherent in it. Only among the English theosophists did I find an inner content, which also, however, rested upon Blavatsky, and which was then fostered by Annie Besant and others in a literal fashion. I could never have worked in the manner in which these theosophists worked. But I considered what lived among them as a spiritual centre with which one could worthily unite when one earnestly desired the spread of spiritual knowledge.

So it was not the united membership in the Theosophical Society upon which Marie von Sievers and I counted, but chiefly those persons who were present with heart and mind whenever spiritual knowledge in an earnest sense was being cultivated.

This working within the existing branches of the Theosophical Society, which was necessary as a starting-point, comprised only a part of our activity. The chief thing was the arrangement for public lectures in which I spoke to a public not belonging to the Theosophical Society that came to my lectures only because of their content.

Of persons who learned in this manner what I had to say about the spiritual world and of those who through the activity in one or another theosophical tendency found their way to this mode of learning – of these persons there was comprised within the branches of the Theosophical Society that which later became the Anthroposophical Society.

Among the various charges that have been directed against me in reference to my work in the Theosophical Society – even from the side of the Society itself – this also has been raised: that to a certain extent I used this Society, which already had a standing in the world, as a spring-board in order to render easier the way for my own spiritual knowledge.

There is not the slightest ground for such a statement. When I accepted the invitation into the Society, this was the sole institution worthy of serious consideration in which there was present a real spiritual life. Had the mood, bearing, and work of the Society remained as they then were, the withdrawal of my friend and myself need never have occurred. The Anthroposophical Society might only have been formed officially within the Theosophical Society as a special section.

But even as early as 1906 things were already beginning to be manifest and effective in the Theosophical Society which indicated in a terrible measure its deterioration.

If earlier still, in the time of H. P. Blavatsky, such incidents were asserted by the outer world to have occurred, yet at the beginning of the century it was clearly true that the earnestness of spiritual work on the part of the Society constituted a compensation for whatever wrong thing had taken place. Moreover, the occurrences had been left behind.

But after 1906 there began in the Society, upon whose general direction I had not the least influence, practices reminiscent of the growth of spiritualism, which made it necessary for me to warn members again and again that the part of the Society which was under my direction should have absolutely nothing to do with these things. The climax in these practices was reached when it was asserted of a Hindu boy that he was the person in whom Christ would appear in a new earthly life. For the propagation of this absurdity there was formed in the Theosophical Society a special society, that of “The Star of the East.” It was utterly impossible for my friend and me to include the membership of this “Star of the East” as a branch of the German section, as they desired and as Annie Besant, president of the Theosophical Society, especially intended. We were forced to found the Anthroposophical Society independently.

I have in this matter departed far from the narration of events in the course of my life; but this was necessary, for only these later facts can throw the right light on the purposes to which I bound myself in entering the Society at the beginning of the century.

When I first spoke at the congress of the Theosophical Society in London in 1902, I said that the unity into which the individual sections would combine should consist in the fact that each one should bring to the centre what it held within itself; and I gave sharp warning that I should

expect this most especially of the German section. I made it clear that this section would never conduct itself as the representative of set dogmas but as composed of places independent of one another in spiritual research, which desired to reach mutual understandings in the conferences of the whole Society in regard to the fostering of genuine spiritual life.

1. *Egoism.*
2. *Egoism in Philosophy.*
3. *Individualism in Philosophy.*

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