

# The Story of My Life

## GA 28

### Chapter XXXII

In reading discussions of anthroposophy such as appear nowadays there is something painful in having to meet again and again such thoughts, for instance, as “that the World War has been the cause of moods in men's souls fitted to set up all sorts of ‘mystical’ and similar spiritual currents”; and then to have anthroposophy included among these currents.

Against this stands the fact that the anthroposophic movement was founded at the beginning of the century, and that nothing essential has been done within this movement since its foundation that has not been derived from the inner life of the spirit. Twenty-five years ago I had a content of spiritual impressions within me. I gave the substance of these in lectures, treatises, and books. What I did was done from spiritual impulses. In its essence every theme was drawn from the spirit. During the war I discussed also topics which were suggested by the events of the times. But in these there was nothing basic due to any intention of taking advantage of the mood of the time for propagation of anthroposophy. These discussions occurred because men desired to have certain events illuminated by the knowledge which comes from the spiritual world.

On behalf of anthroposophy no endeavour has ever been made for anything except that it should take that course of development made possible by its own inner force bestowed upon it from the spirit. It is as far as possible out of harmony with anthroposophy to imagine that it would desire to win something from the dark abysses of the soul during the World War. That the number of those interested in anthroposophy increased after the war, that the Anthroposophical Society increased in its membership – these things are true; only one ought to note that all these facts have never changed anything in the development of the anthroposophical reality in the sense in which this took its full form at the beginning of the century.

The form which was to be given to anthroposophy from inner spiritual being had at first to struggle against all sorts of opposition from the theosophists in Germany.

There was, first of all, the justification of spiritual knowledge before the “scientific” mode of thought of the time. That this justification is necessary I have stated frequently in this story of

my life. I took that mode of thought which rightly passes as “scientific” in natural knowledge and extended this into spiritual knowledge. Through this means, the mode of knowledge of nature became, to be sure, something different for the observation of spirit from what it is for the observation of nature, but the character which causes it to be looked upon as “scientific” was maintained.

For this mode of scientific shaping of spiritual knowledge, those persons who considered themselves representatives of the theosophical movement at the beginning of the century never had any feeling or interest.

These were the persons grouped about Dr. Hübbe-Schleiden. He, as a personal friend of H. P. Blavatsky, had established a theosophical society as early as the 'eighties, beginning at Elberfeld. In this foundation H. P. Blavatsky herself participated. Dr. Hübbe-Schleiden then published a journal, *Die Sphinx*, in which the theosophical world-conception should be upheld. The whole movement failed; and, when the German section of the Theosophical Society was founded, there was nothing existing except a number of persons, who looked upon me, however, as a sort of trespasser in their territory. These persons awaited the “scientific founding” of theosophy by Dr. Hübbe-Schleiden. They held the opinion that, until this should occur, nothing was to be done in this matter within German territory. What I began to do appeared to them as a disturbance of their “waiting,” as something utterly blameworthy. Yet they did not at once withdraw; for theosophy was their affair, and, if anything should happen in this, they did not wish to be absent.

What did they understand of the “science” that Dr. Hübbe-Schleiden was to establish, whereby theosophy would be “proven”? To anthroposophy they conceded nothing.

They understood by this term the atomistic bases of natural scientific theorizing. The phenomena of nature were “explained” when one conceived the “primal parts” of the world-substance as grouping into atoms and these into molecules. A substance was there by reason of the fact that it represented a certain structure of atoms in molecules.

This mode of thought was supposed to be figurative. Complicated molecules were constructed which were also to be the basis for spiritual effects. Chemical processes were supposed to be the results of processes within the molecular structure; for spiritual processes something similar must be found.

For me this atomic theory, in the significance given to it in natural science, was something quite impossible even within that science; to wish to carry this over into the spiritual seemed

to me a confusion of thought that one could not even seriously discuss.

In this field there have always been difficulties for my way of establishing anthroposophy. People have been assured from certain sides for a long time that materialism was overcome. To those who incline to this view, anthroposophy seems to be attacking windmills when it discusses materialism in science. To me, on the contrary, it was always clear that what people call a way of overcoming materialism is just the way unconsciously to maintain it.

It was never a matter of moment to me that atoms should be conceived either in a purely mechanical or other activity in connection with processes in matter. What was important to me was that the thoughtful consideration of the atom – the smallest image of the world – should go forward and seek for an issue into the organic, into the spiritual. I saw the necessity of proceeding from the whole. Atoms, or atomic structure, can only be the results of spiritual action or organic action. From the perceived primal phenomena, and not from an intellectual construction, would I take the way leading out into the spirit of Goethe's view of nature. Profoundly impressive to me was the meaning of Goethe's words that the factual is in itself theoretical, and that one should seek for nothing behind this. But this demands that one must receive in the presence of nature that which the senses give, and must employ thought solely in order to go past the complicated derivative phenomena (appearances), which cannot be surveyed, and arrive at the simple, the primal phenomena. Then it will be noted that in nature one has to do with colour and other sense-qualities within which spirit is actually at work; but one does not arrive at an atomic world behind the sense-world.

That in this direction progress has occurred in the conception of nature the anthroposophic mode of thinking cannot admit. What appears in such views as those of Mach, or what has recently appeared in this sphere, is really the beginning of an abandonment of the atomic and molecular constructions; yet all this shows that this construction is so deeply rooted in the mode of thought that abandoning it means losing all reality. Mach has spoken now of concepts only as if they were economical generalizations of sense-perceptions, not something which lives in a spiritual reality; and it is the same with recent writers.

Therefore what now appears as a battle within theoretical materialism is no less remote from the spiritual being in which anthroposophy lives than from the materialism of the last third of the nineteenth century. What has been brought forward, therefore, by anthroposophy against the customary thinking of the physical sciences holds good to-day, not in lesser but in greater measure.

The setting forth of these things may appear to be theoretical obtrusions in this story of my life. To me they are not; for what is contained in these analyses was for me an experience, the strongest sort of experience, far more significant even than what came to me from without.

Immediately upon the foundation of the German section of the Theosophical Society, it seemed to me a matter of necessity to have a publication of our own. So Marie von Sievers and I established the monthly *Luzifer*. The name was naturally in no way associated at that time with the spiritual Power whom I later designated as *Lucifer*, the opposite of Ahriman. The content of anthroposophy had not then been developed to such an extent that these Powers could have been discussed. The name was intended to signify only "The Light-bearer."

Although it was at first my intention to work in harmony with the leadership of the Theosophical Society, yet from the beginning I had the feeling that something must originate in anthroposophy which evolves out of its own germ without making itself in any way dependent upon what theosophy causes to be taught. This I could accomplish only by means of such a publication. And what anthroposophy is to-day has really grown out of what I then wrote in that monthly.

It was thus that the German section was established under the patronage and in the presence of Mrs. Besant. At that time Mrs. Besant delivered a lecture in Berlin on the goal and the principles of theosophy. Somewhat later we requested her to deliver Lectures in a number of German cities. Such was the case in Hamburg, Berlin, Weimar, Munich, Stuttgart, Cologne. In spite of all this – and not by reason of any measures taken by me, but because of the inner necessities of the thing – theosophy failed, and anthroposophy went through an evolution determined by inner requirements.

Marie von Sievers made all this possible, not only because she made material sacrifices according to her ability, but because she devoted her entire effort to anthroposophy. At first we had to work under conditions truly the most primitive. I wrote the greater part of *Luzifer*. Marie von Sievers carried on the correspondence. When an issue was ready, we ourselves attended to the wrapping, addressing, stamping, and personally carried the copies to the post office in a laundry basket.

Very soon *Luzifer* had so far increased its circulation that a Herr Rappaport, of Vienna, who published a journal called *Gnosis*, made an agreement with me to combine this with mine into a single publication. Then *Luzifer* appeared under the title *Luzifer-Gnosis*. For a long time also Herr Rappaport had a share in the undertaking.

*Luzifer-Gnosis* made the most satisfactory progress. The publication increased its circulation in a highly satisfactory fashion. Numbers which had been exhausted had to be printed a second time. Nor did it “fail.” But the spread of anthroposophy in a relatively short time took such a form that I was called upon to deliver lectures in many cities. From the single lectures there grew in many cases cycles of lectures. At first I tried to maintain the editorship of *Luzifer-Gnosis* along with this lecturing; but the numbers could not be issued any longer at the right time – often coming out months later. And so there came about the remarkable fact that a periodical which was gaining new subscribers with every number could no longer be published, solely because of the overburdening of the editor.

In *Lucifer-Gnosis* I was able for the first time to publish what became the foundation of anthroposophic work. There first appeared what I had to say about the strivings that the human mind must make in order to attain to its own perceptual grasp upon spiritual knowledge. *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten*<sup>1</sup> came out in serial form from number to number. In the same way was the basis laid for anthroposophic cosmology in serial articles entitled *Aus der Akasha-Chronik*.<sup>2</sup>

It was from what was thus given, and not from anything borrowed from the Theosophical Movement, that the Anthroposophical Movement had its growth. If I gave any attention to the teachings carried on in the Society when I composed my own writings on spiritual knowledge, it was only for the purpose of correcting by a contrasting statement one thing or another in those teachings which I considered erroneous.

In this connection I must mention something which is constantly brought forward by our opponents, wrapped in a fog of misunderstandings. I need say nothing whatever about this on any inner ground, for it has had no influence whatever on my evolution or on my public activities. As regards all that I have to describe here the matter has remained a purely “private” affair. I refer to my forming “esoteric schools” within the Theosophical Society.

The “esoteric schools” date back to H. P. Blavatsky. She had created for a small inner circle of the Society a place in which she gave out what she did not wish to say to the Society in general. She, like others who know the spiritual world, did not consider it possible to impart to the generality of persons certain profound teachings.

All this is bound up with the way in which H. P. Blavatsky came to give her teachings. There has always been a tradition in regard to such teachings which goes back to the ancient myster-

ies. This tradition was cherished in all sorts of societies, which took strict care to prevent any teaching from permeating outside each society.

But, for some reason or other, it was considered proper to impart such teaching to H. P. Blavatsky. She then united what she had thus received with revelations which came to her personally from within. For she was a human personality in whom, by reason of a remarkable atavism, the spiritual worked as it had once worked in the leaders of the mysteries, in a state of consciousness which – in contrast with the modern state illuminated by the consciousness-soul – was dreamlike in character. Thus, in the human being, “Blavatsky,” was renewed that which in primitive times was kept secret in the mysteries.

For modern men there is an infallible method for deciding what portion of the content of spiritual perception can be imparted to wider circles. This can be done with everything which the investigator can clothe in such ideas as are current both in the consciousness-soul itself and also in appropriate form in acknowledged science.

Such is not the case when the spiritual knowledge does not live in the mind, but in forces lying rather in the subconsciousness. These are not sufficiently independent of the forces active in the body. Therefore the imparting of such teachings drawn from the subconscious may be dangerous; for such teachings can in like manner be taken in only by the subconscious. Thus both teacher and learner are then moving in a region where that which is wholesome for man and that which is harmful must be handled with the utmost care.

All this, therefore, does not concern anthroposophy, because this lifts all its teachings entirely above the subconscious.

The inner circle of Blavatsky continued to live in the “esoteric schools.” I had set up my anthroposophic activity within the Theosophical Society. I had therefore to be informed as to all that occurred in the latter. For the sake of this information, and also because I considered a smaller circle necessary for those advanced in anthroposophical spiritual knowledge, I caused myself to be admitted as a member into the “esoteric school.” My smaller circle was, of course, to have a different meaning from this school. It was to represent a higher participation, a higher class, for those who had absorbed enough of the elementary knowledge of anthroposophy. Now I intended everywhere to link up with what was already in existence, with what history had already provided. Just as I did this in regard to the Theosophical Society, I wished to do likewise in reference to the esoteric school. For this reason my “more restricted circle” arose at first in connection with this school. But the connection consisted solely in the plan and not in that which I imparted from the spiritual world. So in the first years I selected as my

more restricted circle a section of the esoteric school of Mrs. Besant. Inwardly it was not by any means whatever the same as this. And in 1907, when Mrs. Besant was with us at the theosophical congress in Munich, even the external connection came to an end according to an agreement between Mrs. Besant and myself.

That I could have learned anything special in the esoteric school of Mrs. Besant is beyond the bounds of possibility, since from the beginning I never participated in the exercises of this school except in a few instances in which my participation was for the sole purpose of informing myself as to what went on there.

There was at that time no other real content in the school except that which was derived from H. P. Blavatsky and which was already in print. In addition to these printed exercises, Mrs. Besant gave all sorts of Indian exercises for progress in knowledge, to which I was opposed.

Until 1907, then, my more restricted circle was connected, as to its plan, with that which Mrs. Besant fostered as such a circle. But to make of these facts what has been made of them by opponents is wholly unjustifiable. Even the absurd idea that I was introduced to spiritual knowledge entirely by the esoteric school of Mrs. Besant has been asserted.

In 1903 Marie von Sievers and I again took part in the theosophical congress in London. Colonel Olcott, president of the Theosophical Society, was also present, having come from India. A lovable personality, as to whom, however, it was easy to see how he could become the partner of Blavatsky in the founding, planning, and guiding of the Theosophical Society. For within a brief time the Society had in an external sense become a large body possessing an impressive organization.

Marie von Sievers and I came closer to Mrs. Besant by reason of the fact that she lived with Mrs. Bright in London and we also were invited for our second London visit to this lovable home. Mrs. Bright and her daughter, Miss Esther Bright, constituted the family; persons who were like an embodiment of loveliness. I look back with inner joy upon the time I was privileged to spend in this home. The Brights were loyal friends of Mrs. Besant. Their endeavour was to knit a closer tie between us and the latter. Since it was then impossible that I should stand with Mrs. Besant in certain things – of which some have already been mentioned here – this gave pain to the Brights, who were bound with bands of steel – utterly uncritical they were – to the leader of the Theosophical Society.

Mrs. Besant was an interesting person to me because of certain of her characteristics. I observed that she had a certain right to speak from her own inner experiences of the spiritual

world. The inner entrance of soul into the spiritual world she did possess. Only this was later stifled by certain external objectives that she set herself.

To me a person who could speak of the spirit from the spirit was necessarily interesting. But, on the other hand, I was strongly of the opinion that in our age the insight into the spiritual world must live within the consciousness-soul.

I looked into an ancient spiritual knowledge of humanity. It was dreamlike in character. Men saw in pictures through which the spiritual world revealed itself. But these pictures were not evolved by the will-to-knowledge in full clarity of mind. They appeared in the soul, given to it like dreams from the cosmos. This ancient spiritual knowledge came to an end in the Middle Ages. Man came into possession of the consciousness-soul. He no longer had dream-knowledge. He drew ideas in full clarity of mind by his will-to-knowledge into the soul. This capacity first became a living reality in the sense-world. It reached its climax as sense-knowledge in natural science.

The present task of spirit-knowledge is to carry the experience of ideas in full clarity of mind into the spiritual world by means of the will-to-knowledge. The knower then has a content of mind which is experienced like that of mathematics. One thinks like a mathematician; but one does not think in numbers or in geometrical figures. One thinks in pictures of the spiritual world. In contrast to the ancient waking dream knowledge of the spirit, it is the fully conscious standing within the spiritual world.

Within the Theosophical Society one could gain no true relationship to this new knowledge of the spirit. One became suspicious as soon as full consciousness sought to enter the spiritual world. One knew a full consciousness solely for the sense-world. There was no true feeling for the evolving of this to the point of experiencing the spirit. The process was only to the point of a return to the ancient dream consciousness with the suppression of full consciousness. And this turning back was true of Mrs. Besant also. She has scarcely any capacity for grasping the modern form of knowledge of the spirit. But what she said of the world of spirit was, nevertheless, from that world. So she was to me an interesting person.

Since among the other leaders of the Society also there was present this opposition to fully conscious knowledge of the spirit, my mind could never feel at home in the Society as regards the spiritual. Socially I enjoyed being in these circles; but their temper of mind in reference to the spiritual remained alien to me.



For this reason I was also hindered from founding my lectures upon my own experience of the spirit. I delivered lectures which anyone could have delivered even though he might have no perception of spirit. This perception found expression in the lectures which I delivered, not at the meetings of branches of the Society, but before those which grew out of what Marie von Sievers and I arranged from Berlin.

Then arose the Berlin, Munich, and Stuttgart work. Other places joined. Later the content of the Theosophical Society gradually disappeared; and there came into existence that which was congenial to the inner force living in anthroposophy.

While carrying out the plans together with Marie von Sievers, for the external activities, I elaborated the results of my spiritual perception. On the one hand I had, of course, a fully developed standing – within the spiritual world; but I had in about 1902 – and in the succeeding years also as regards many things – “imagination, inspirations, and intuitions.” These gradually shaped themselves into what I then gave out publicly in my writings.

Through the activity developed by Marie von Sievers there came about from a small beginning the philosophical anthroposophical publication business. A small pamphlet based upon notes of a lecture I delivered before the Berlin Free Higher Institute to which I have referred was the first matter thus published. The necessity of getting possession of my *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* – which could no longer be distributed by the former publisher – and of attending personally to its distribution gave the second task. We bought the remaining copies and the publisher's rights for this book.

All this was not easy for us. For we were without any considerable means. But the work progressed, for the very reason that it could not rely upon anything external but solely upon inner spiritual circumstances.

1. *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and Its Attainment*. The content of this book appeared in English at first in two volumes: *The Way of Initiation*, and *Initiation and Its Results*.

2. *From the Akashic Record*.

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