

The Story of My Life

GA 28

Chapter XXXV

The beginning of my anthroposophic activity belongs to a time when there was a sense of dissatisfaction among many persons with the tendencies in knowledge characterizing the immediately preceding period. There was a desire to find a way out of that realm of being in which men were shut up by reason of the fact that only what was grasped by means of mechanistic ideas was allowed to pass as “sure” knowledge. These endeavours of many contemporaries toward a form of spiritual knowledge came very close to me. Biologists such as Oskar Hertwig – who began as a student under Haeckel but had then abandoned Darwinism because, according to his opinion, the impulse which this theory recognized could give no explanation of the organic process of becoming – were to me personalities in whom was revealed the longing of the age for knowledge.

But I felt that a heavy burden rested upon all this longing. This burden was the ripe fruit of the belief that only what can be investigated in the realm of the senses by means of mass, number, and weight can be recognized as knowledge. Man dared not unfold an active inner process of thought in order thereby to live in closer contact with reality as one experiences reality through the senses. Thus the situation continued to be such that men said: “With the means which have been used hitherto in interpreting even the higher forms of reality, such as the organic, we can advance no further.” But when men ought to have reached something positive, when they ought to have said what is at work in the activities of life, they moved about in indeterminate ideas.

In those who were attempting to escape from the mechanistic explanation of the world there was chiefly lacking the courage to admit that whoever wished to overcome that mechanism must also overcome the habits of thought which have led to it. Such a confession as the time needed would not come forth. This should have been the confession: – With one's orientation towards the senses one penetrates into what is mechanistic. In the second half of the century men had accustomed themselves to this orientation. Now that the mechanistic leaves men unsatisfied they should not desire to penetrate into the higher realms with the same orientation. The senses in man are self-unfolding, but the unfolding which the senses undergo will never enable one to perceive anything save the mechanistic. If one wishes to know more, then out of

oneself one must give to the deeper-lying forces of knowledge a form which nature gives to the forces of the senses. The forces of knowledge for the mechanistic are in themselves awake; those for the higher forms of reality must be awakened.

This self-confession on the part of the endeavour to attain knowledge appeared to me to be a necessity of the time.

I felt happy when I became aware of spokesmen for this. So there lives in beautiful memory within me a visit in Jena. I had to deliver lectures in Weimar on anthroposophical themes. There was also arranged a lecture to a smaller group in Jena. After this I happened to be with a very little group. There was a desire to discuss what theosophy had to say. In this group was Max Scheler, who was at that time a *dozent*¹ in philosophy in Jena. In a verbal statement of what he had felt in my lecture he soon began our discussion; and I felt at once the profound characteristic which dominated in his striving after knowledge. It was with inner tolerance that he met my view, – the very tolerance which is necessary for one who desires really to know.

We discussed the confirmation of spiritual knowledge on the basis of theories of cognition. We talked of the problem as to how the penetration into spiritual reality on the one side must be established on foundations of the theory of cognition, just as that into the sense-world must be on the other side.

Scheler's mode of thought made an agreeable impression upon me. Even till the present I have followed his way of knowledge with the deepest interest. Inner satisfaction was always my feeling when I could again meet – very seldom, unfortunately – the man who at that time became so congenial to me.

Such experiences were important for me. Every time that these occurred there was an inner need to test anew the certainty of my own way of knowledge. And in these constantly recurring tests the forces were evolved which then embraced wider and wider spheres of spiritual existence.

Two results had now come from my anthroposophic work: first my books published to the whole world, and secondly a great number of lectures which were at first to be considered as privately printed and to be sold only to members of the Theosophical (later the Anthroposophical) Society. These were really reports on the lectures more or less well made and which I, for lack of time, could not correct. It would have pleased me best if spoken words had remained spoken words. But the members wished the printed copies. So this came about.

If I had then had time to correct the reports, the restriction “for members only” would not have been necessary. For more than a year now, this restriction has been allowed to lapse.

At this point in my life story it is necessary to say, first of all, how the two things – my published books and this privately printed matter – combine into that which I elaborated as anthroposophy.

Whoever wishes to trace my inner struggle and labour to set anthroposophy before the consciousness of the present age must do this on the basis of the writings published for general circulation. In these I explained myself in connection with all which is present in the striving of this age for knowledge. Here there was given what more and more took form for me in “spiritual perception,” what became the structure of anthroposophy – in a form incomplete, to be sure, from many points of view.

Together with this purpose, however, of building up anthroposophy and thereby serving only that which results when one has information from the world of spirit to give to the modern culture world, there now appeared the other demand – to face fully whatever was manifested in the membership as the need of their souls or their longing for the spirit.

Most of all was there a strong inclination to hear the Gospels and the biblical writings generally set forth in that which had appeared as the anthroposophic light. Persons wished to attend courses of lectures on these revelations given to mankind.

While internal courses of lectures were held in the sense then required, something else arose in consequence. Only members attended these courses. These were acquainted with the elementary information coming from anthroposophy. It was possible to speak to them as to persons advanced in the realm of anthroposophy. The manner of these internal lectures was such as it would not have been in writings intended wholly for the public.

In internal groups I dared to speak about things in a manner which I should have been obliged to shape quite differently for a public presentation if from the first these things had been designed for such an audience.

Thus in the two things, the public and the private writings, there was really something derived from two different bases. All the public writings are the result of what struggled and laboured within me; in the privately printed matter the Society itself shares in the struggle and labour. I hear of the strivings in the soul-life of the membership, and through my vital living within what I thus hear the bearing of the course is determined.

Nothing has ever been said which was not to the utmost degree an actual result of the developing anthroposophy. There can be no discussion of any concession whatever to preconceptions or to previous experiences of the members. Whoever reads this privately printed material can take it in the fullest sense as that which anthroposophy has to say. Therefore it was possible without hesitation – when accusations became too insistent in this direction – to depart from the plan of circulating this printed matter among the members alone. Only it will be necessary to remember there are errors in the lectures which I did not revise.

The right to an opinion in regard to the content of such privately printed material can naturally be admitted only in the case of one who knows what is taken as the pre-requisite basis of this judgment. For most of those pamphlets such a pre-requisite will be at least the anthroposophic knowledge of man and of the cosmos, in so far as its nature is set forth in anthroposophy, and of that which is found in this information as “anthroposophic history” as it is taken from the spiritual world.

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