

The Story of My Life

GA 28

Chapter XXXVI

A certain institution which arose within the Anthroposophical Society in such a way that there was never any thought of the public in connection with it does not really belong to the chapters of this exposition. Only it has to be described for the reason that attacks made upon me have been based upon material derived from this.

Some years after the beginning of the activity in the Theosophical Society, Marie von Sievers and I were entrusted by certain persons with the leadership of a society similar to others which have been maintained in preservation of the ancient symbolism and cultural ceremonies that embody the “ancient wisdom.” I never thought in the remotest degree of working in the spirit of such a society. Everything anthroposophic should and must spring from its own sources of knowledge and truth. There should not be the slightest deviation from this standard. But I had always felt a respect for what was historically given. In this lives the spirit which evolves in the human process of becoming. And so wherever possible I also favoured the linking of the newly given to the historically existent. I therefore took the diploma of the society referred to, which belonged to the stream represented by Yarker. It had the forms of Free Masonry of the so-called high degrees; but I took nothing else – absolutely nothing – from this society except the merely formal authorization, in historic succession, to direct a symbolic-cultural activity.

Everything set forth in content in the “ceremonies” which were employed in the institution were without historic dependence upon any tradition whatever. In the formal granting of the diploma only that was fostered which resulted in the symbolizing of anthroposophic knowledge. And our purpose in this matter was to meet the needs of the members. In elaborating the ideas in which the knowledge of spirit is given in a veiled form, the effort is made to arrive at something which speaks directly to perception, to the heart; and such purposes I wished to serve. If the invitation from the society in question had not come to me, I should have undertaken the direction of a symbolic-cultural activity without any historic connection.

But this did not create a “secret society.” Whoever entered into this practice was told in the clearest possible manner that he was not dealing with any “order,” but that as participant in ceremonial forms he would experience a sort of visualization, demonstration of spiritual

knowledge. If anything took on the forms in which the members of traditional orders had been inducted or promoted to higher degrees, this did not signify that such an order was being founded but only that the spiritual ascent in the soul's experience was rendered visible to the senses in pictures.

The fact that this had nothing to do with the activity of any existing order or the mediation of things which are mediated in such orders is proved by the fact that members of the most various types of orders participated in the ceremonial exercises which I conducted and found in these something quite different from what existed in their own orders.

Once a person who had participated with us for the first time in a ceremonial came to me immediately afterward. This person had reached a very high degree in an order. Under the influence of the experience now shared, the wish had arisen to hand over to me the insignia of the order. The feeling was that, after having once experienced real spiritual content, one could no longer share in that which remained fixed in mere formalism. I put the matter right; for anthroposophy dare not draw any person out of the association in which he stands. It ought to add something to that association and take away nothing from it. So this person remained in the order, yet continued to participate further with us in the symbolic exercises.

It is only too easily understood that, when such an institution as the one here described becomes known, misunderstandings arise. There are, indeed, many persons to whom the externality of belonging to something seems more important than the content which is given to them. And so even many of the participants spoke of the thing as if they belonged to an "order." They did not understand how to make the distinction that things were demonstrated among us without the environment of an order which otherwise are given only within the environment of an order.

Even in this sphere we broke with the ancient traditions. Our work was carried on as work must be carried on if one investigates in spiritual-content in an original manner according to the requirements of full clarity in the mind's experience.

The fact that the starting-point for all sorts of slanders was found in certain attestations which Marie von Sievers and I signed in linking up with the historic Yarker institution means that, in order to concoct such slanders, people treated the absurd with the grimace of the serious. Our signatures were given as a "form." The customary thing was thus preserved. And while we were giving our signatures, I said as clearly as possible: "This is all a formality, and the practice which I shall institute will take over nothing from the Yarker practice."

It is obviously easy to make the observation afterwards that it would have been far more “discreet” not to link up with practices which could later be used by slanderers. But I would remark with all positiveness that, at the period of my life here under consideration, I was still one of those who assume uprightness, and not crooked ways, in the people with whom they have to do. Even spiritual perception did not alter at all this faith in men. This must not be misused for the purpose of investigating the intentions of one's fellow-men when this investigation is not desired by the man in question himself. In other cases the investigation of the inner nature of other souls remains a thing forbidden to the knower of the spirit; just as the unauthorized opening of a letter is something forbidden. And so one is related to men with whom one has to do in the same way as is any other person who has no knowledge of the spirit. But there is just this alternative – either to assume that others are straight-forward in their intentions until one has experienced the opposite, or else to be filled with sorrow as one views the entire world. A social co-operation with men is impossible for the latter mood, for such co-operation can be based only upon trust and not upon distrust.

This practice which gave in a cult-symbolism a content which is spiritual was a good thing for many who participated in the Anthroposophical Society. Since in this, as in every sphere of anthroposophical work, everything was excluded which lies outside the region of clear consciousness, so there could be no thought of unconfirmed magic, or suggestive influences, and the like. But the members obtained that which, on the one hand, spoke to their ideal conceptions and yet in such a way that the heart could accompany this in direct perception. For many this was something which also guided them again into the better shaping of their ideas. With the beginning of the War it ceased to be possible to continue the carrying on of such practices. In spite of the fact that there was nothing of the nature of a secret society in this, it would have been taken for such. And so this symbolic-cultural section of the anthroposophical movement came to an end in the middle of 1914.

The fact that persons who had taken part in this practice – absolutely unobjectionable to anyone who looked upon it with a good will and a sense for truth – became slanderous accusers is an instance of that abnormality in human conduct which arises when men who are not inwardly genuine share in movements whose content is genuinely spiritual. They expect things corresponding with their trivial soul life; and, since they naturally do not find such things, they turn against the very practice to which they previously turned – though with unconscious insincerity.

Such a society as the Anthroposophical could not be formed otherwise than according to the soul-needs of its members. It could not lay down an abstract programme which required that in the Anthroposophical Society this and that should be done. The programme had to be elabo-

rated out of reality. But this very reality is the soul-need of its members. Anthroposophy as a content of life was formed out of its own sources. It had appeared before the world as a spiritual creation, and many who were drawn to it by an inner attraction tried to work together with others. Thus it came about that the Society was the formation of persons of whom some sought the religious, others rather the scientific, and others the artistic. And it was necessary that what was sought should be found.

Because of this working out from the reality of the needs of the members, the private printed matter must be judged differently from that given to the public from the beginning. The content of this printed matter was intended as oral, not printed, information. The subjects discussed were determined by the soul-needs of the members as these needs appeared with the passage of time.

What is contained in the published writings is adapted to the furtherance of anthroposophy as such; in the manner in which the private printed matter evolved, the configuration of soul of the whole Society has co-operated.

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