

The Story of My Life

GA 28

Chapter XXXVII

While anthroposophic knowledge was brought into the Society in the way that results in part from the privately printed matter, Marie von Sievers and I through our united efforts fostered the artistic element especially, which was indeed destined by fate to become a life-giving part of the Anthroposophical Movement.

On one side there was the element of recitation, looking toward dramatic art, and constituting the objective of the work that must be done if the Anthroposophical Movement was to receive the right content.

On the other hand, I had the opportunity, during the journeys that had to be made on behalf of anthroposophy, to go more deeply into the evolution of architecture, the plastic arts, and painting.

In various passages of this life-story I have spoken of the importance of art to a person who enters in experience into the spiritual world.

But up to the time of my anthroposophic work I had been able to study most of the works of human art only in copies. Of the originals only those in Vienna, Berlin, and a few other places in Germany had been accessible to me.

When the journeys on behalf of anthroposophy were made, together with Marie von Sievers, I came face to face with the treasures of the museums throughout the whole of Europe. In this way I pursued an advanced course in the study of art from the beginning of the century and therefore during the fifth decade of my life, and together with this I had a perception of the spiritual evolution of humanity. Everywhere by my side was Marie von Sievers, who, while entering with her fine and full appreciation into all that I was privileged to experience of perception in art and culture, also shared and supplemented all this experience in a beautiful way. She understood how these experiences flowed into all that gave movement to the ideas of anthroposophy; for all the impressions of art which became an experience of my soul penetrated into what I had to make effective in lectures.

In the actual seeing of the masterpieces of art there came before our minds the world out of which another configuration of soul speaks from the ancient times to the new age. We were able to submerge our souls in the spirituality of art which still speaks from Cimabue. But we could also plunge through the perception of art into the spiritual battle which Thomas Aquinas waged against Arabianism.

Of special importance for me was the observation of the evolution of architecture. In the silent vision of the shaping of styles there grew in my soul that which I was able to stamp upon the forms of the Goetheanum.

Standing before Leonardo's *Last Supper* in Milan and before the creations of Raphael and Michelangelo in Rome, and the subsequent conversations with Marie von Sievers, must, I think, be felt with gratitude to have been the dispensation of destiny just then when these came before my soul for the first time at a mature age.

But I should have to write a volume of considerable size if I should wish to describe even briefly what I experienced in the manner indicated.

Even when the spiritual perception remains in abeyance, one sees very far into the evolution of humanity through the gaze which loses itself in reflection in the *School of Athens* or the *Disputa*.

And if one advances from the observation of Cimabue to Giotto and to Raphael, one is in the presence of the gradual dimming of an ancient spiritual perception of humanity down to the modern, more naturalistic. That which came to me through spiritual perception as the law of human evolution appeared in clear revelation before my mind in the process of art.

I had always the deepest satisfaction when I could see how the anthroposophical movement received ever renewed life through this prolonged submergence in the artistic. In order to comprehend the elements of being in the spiritual world and to shape these as ideas, one requires mobility in ideal activity. Filling the mind with the artistic gives this mobility.

And it was necessary constantly to guard the Society against the entrance of all those inner untruths associated with false sentimentality. A spiritual movement is always exposed to these perils. If one gives life to the informative lectures by means of those mobile ideas which one derives from living in the artistic, then the inner untruths derived from sentimentality which remain fixed in the hearers will be expelled. The artistic which is truly charged with experi-

ence and emotion, but which strives toward luminous clarity in shaping and in perception, can afford the most effective counterpoise against false sentimentality.

And here I feel that it has been a peculiarly fortunate destiny for the Anthroposophical Society that I received in Marie von Sievers a fellow-worker assigned by destiny who understood fully how to nourish from the depths of her nature this artistic, emotionally charged, but unsentimental element.

A lasting activity was needed against this inwardly untrue sentimental element; for it penetrates again and again into a spiritual movement. It can by no means be simply repulsed or ignored. For persons who at first yield themselves to this element are in many cases none the less seekers in the utmost depths of their souls. But it is at first hard for them to gain a firm relation to the information imparted from the spiritual world. They seek unconsciously in sentimentality a form of deafness. They wish to experience quite special truths, esoteric truths. They develop an impulse to separate themselves on the basis of these truths into sectarian groups.

The important thing is to make the right the sole directive force of the Society, so that those erring on one side or the other may always see again and again how those work who may call themselves the central representatives of the Society because they are its founders. Positive work for the content of anthroposophy, not opposition against outgrowths which appeared – this was what Marie von Sievers and I accepted as the essential thing. Naturally there were exceptional cases when opposition was also necessary.

At first the time up to my Paris cycle of lectures was to me something in the form of a closed evolutionary process within the soul. I delivered these lectures in 1906 during the theosophical congress. Individual participants in the congress had expressed the wish to hear these lectures in connection with the exercises of the congress. I had at that time in Paris made the personal acquaintance of Edouard Schuré, together with Marie von Sievers, who had already corresponded with him for a long time, and who had been engaged in translating his works. He was among my listeners. I had also the joy of having frequently in the audience Mereschkowski and Minsky and other Russian poets.

In this cycle of lectures I gave what I felt to be ripe within me in regard to the leading forms of spiritual knowledge for the human being.

This “feeling for the ripeness” of forms of knowledge is an essential thing in investigating the spiritual world. In order to have this feeling one must have experienced a perception as it rises

at first in the mind. At first one feels it as something non-luminous, as lacking sharpness of contour. One must let it sink again into the depths of the soul to “ripen.” Consciousness has not yet gone far enough to grasp the spiritual content of the perception. The soul in its spiritual depths must remain together with this content, undisturbed by consciousness.

In external natural science one does not assert knowledge until one has completed all necessary experiments and observations, and until the requisite calculations are free from bias. In spiritual science is needed no less methodical conscientiousness and disciplined knowledge. Only one goes by somewhat different roads. One must test one's consciousness in its relationship to the truth that is coming to be known. One must be able to “wait” in patience, endurance, and conscientiousness until the consciousness has undergone this testing. It must have grown to be strong enough in its capacity for ideas in a certain sphere for this capacity for concepts to take over the perception with which it has to deal.

In the Paris cycle of lectures I brought forward a perception which had required a long process of “ripening” in my mind. After I had explained how the members of the human being – physical body; etheric body, as mediator of the phenomena of life; and the “bearer of the ego” – are in general related to one another, I imparted the fact that the etheric body of a man is female, and the etheric body of a woman is male. Through this a light was cast within the Anthroposophical Society upon one of the basic questions of existence which just at that time had been much discussed. One need only remember the book of the unfortunate Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter*¹ and the contemporary poetry.

But the question was carried into the depths of the being of man. In his physical body man is bound up with the cosmos quite otherwise than in his etheric body. Through his physical body man stands within the forces of the earth; through his etheric body within the forces of the outer cosmos. The male and female elements were carried into connection with the mysteries of the cosmos.

This knowledge was something belonging to the most profoundly moving inner experiences of my soul; for I felt ever anew how one must approach a spiritual perception by patient waiting and how, when one has experienced the “ripeness of consciousness,” one must lay hold by means of ideas in order to place the perception within the sphere of human knowledge.