The Story of My Life
GA 28

Chapter V

I could not at that time bring myself to reflections concerning public life in Austria which might have taken a deeper hold in any way whatever upon my mind. I merely continued to observe the extraordinarily complicated relationships involved. Expressions which won my deeper interest I could find only in connection with Karl Julius Schröer. I had the pleasure of being with him often just at this time. His own fate was closely bound up with that of German Austria-Hungary. He was the son of Tobias Schröer, who conducted a German school in Presburg and wrote dramas as well as books on historical and aesthetic subjects. The last appeared under the name *Christian Oeser*, and they were favourite text-books. The poetic writings of Tobias Gottfried Schröer, although they are doubtless significant and received marked recognition within restricted circles, did not become widely known. The sentiment that breathes through them was opposed to the dominant political current in Hungary. They had to be published in part without the author's name in German regions outside of Hungary. Had the tendencies of the author's mind been known in Hungary, he would have risked, not only dismissal from his post, but also severe punishment.

Karl Julius Schröer thus experienced the impulse toward Germanism even as a young man in his own home. Under this impulse he developed his intimate devotion to the German nature and German literature as well as a great devotion to everything belonging to Goethe or concerning him. The history of German poetry by Gervinus had a profound influence upon him. He went in the fortieth year of the nineteenth century to Germany to pursue his studies in the German language and literature at the universities of Leipzig, Halle, and Berlin. After his return he was occupied in teaching German literature in his father's school, and in conducting a *Seminar*. He now became acquainted with the Christmas folk-plays which were enacted every year by the German colonists in the region of Presburg. There he was face to face with Germanism in a form profoundly congenial to him. The roving Germans who had come from the west into Hungary hundreds of years before had brought with them these plays of the old home, and continued to perform them as they had done at the Christmas festival in regions which no doubt lay in the neighbourhood of the Rhine. The Paradise story, the birth of Christ, the coming of the three kings were alive in popular form in these plays. Schröer then pub-

lished them, as he heard them, or as he read them in old manuscripts that he was able to see at peasants' homes, using the title *Deutsche Weinachtspiele aus Ungarn*.[1]

The delightful experience of living in the German folk life took an even stronger hold upon Schröer's mind. He made journeys in order to study German dialects in the most widely separated parts of Austria. Wherever the German folk was scattered in the Slavic, Magyar, or Italian geographical regions, he wished to learn their individuality. Thus came into being his glossary and grammar of the Zipser dialect, which was native to the south of the Carpathians; of the Gottschze dialect, which survived with a little fragment of German folk in Krain; the language of the Heanzen, which was spoken in western Hungary.

For Schröer these studies were never merely a scientific task. He lived with his whole soul in the revelation of the folk-life, and wished by word and writing to bring its nature to the consciousness of those men who have been uprooted from it by life. He was then a professor in Budapest. There he could not feel at home in the presence of the prevailing current of thought; so he removed to Vienna, where at first he was entrusted with the direction of the evangelical schools, and where he later became a professor of the German language and literature. When he already occupied this position, I had the privilege of knowing him and of becoming intimate with him. At the time when this occurred, his whole sentiment and life were directed toward Goethe. He was engaged in editing the second part of *Faust*, and writing an introduction for this, and had already published the first part.

When I went to call at Schröer's little library, which was also his work-room, I felt that I was in a spiritual atmosphere in the highest degree beneficial to my mental life. I understood at once why Schröer was maligned by those who accepted the prevailing literary-historical methods on account of his writings, and especially on account of his *Geschichte der Deutschen Dichtung im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*.[2] He did not write at all like the members of the Scherer school, who treated literary phenomena after the fashion of investigators in natural science. He had certain sentiments and ideas concerning literary phenomena, and he spoke these out in frank, manly fashion without turning his eyes much at the moment of writing to the “sources.” It had even been said that he had written his exposition “from the wrist out.”

This interested me very little. I experienced a spiritual warmth when I was with him. I could sit by his side for hours. Out of his inspired heart the Christmas plays lived on his lips, the spirit of the German dialect, the course of the life of literature. The relation between dialect and cultured speech became perceptible to me in a practical way. I experienced a real joy when he spoke to me, as he had already done in his lectures, of the poet of the Lower Austrian di-

alect, Joseph Misson, who wrote the splendid poem, *Da Naaz, a niederösterreichischer Bauernbua, geht ind Fremd*.[3] Schröer then constantly gave me books from his library in which I could pursue further what was the content of this conversation. I always had, in truth, when I sat there alone with Schröer, the feeling that still another was present – Goethe's spirit. For Schröer lived so strongly in the spirit and the work of Goethe that in every sentiment or idea which entered his soul he feelingly asked the question, "Would Goethe have felt or thought thus?"

I listened in a spiritual sense with the greatest possible sympathy to everything that came from Schröer. Yet I could not do otherwise even in his presence than build up independently in my own mind that toward which I was striving in my innermost spirit. Schröer was an idealist, and the world of ideas as such was for him that which worked as a propulsive force in the creation of nature and of man. I then found it indeed difficult to express in words for myself the difference between Schröer's way of thinking and mine. He spoke of ideas as the propelling forces in history. He felt life in the idea itself. For me the life of the spirit was behind the ideas, and these were only the phenomena of that life in the human soul. I could then find no other terms for my way of thinking than "objective idealism." I wished thereby to denote that for me the reality is not in the idea; that the idea appears in man as the subject, but that just as colour appears on a physical object, so the idea appears on the *spiritual object*, and that the human mind – the subject – perceives it there as the eye perceives colour on a living being.

My conception, however, Schröer very largely satisfied in the form of expression he used when we talked about that which reveals itself as "folk-soul." He spoke of this as of a real spiritual being which lives in the group of individual men who belong to a folk. In this matter his words took on a character which did not pertain merely to the designation of an idea abstractly held. And thus we both observed the texture of ancient Austria and the individualities of the several folk-souls active in Austria. From this side it was possible for me to conceive thoughts concerning the state of public life which penetrated more deeply into my mind.

Thus my experience at that time was strongly bound up with my relationship to Karl Julius Schröer. What, however, were more remote from him, and in which I strove most of all for an inner explanation, were the natural sciences. I wished to know that my "objective idealism" was in harmony with the knowledge of nature.

It was during the period of my most earnest intercourse with Schröer that the question of the relation between the spiritual and natural worlds came before my mind in a new form. This happened at first quite independently of Goethe's way of thought concerning the natural sci-

ences. For even Schröer could tell me nothing distinctive concerning this realm of Goethe's creative work. He was happy whenever he found in one or another natural scientist a generous recognition of Goethe's observations concerning the beings of plants and animals. As regards Goethe's theory of colour, however, he was met on all sides by natural scientific conceptions utterly opposed. So in this direction he developed no special opinion.

My relationship to natural science was not at this time of my life influenced from this side, in spite of the fact that in my intercourse with Schröer I came into close touch with Goethe's spiritual life. It was determined much more by the difficulties I experienced when I had to think out the facts of optics in the sense of the physicist.

I found that light and sound were thought of in an analogy which is invalid. The expressions "sound in general" and "light in general" were used. The analogy lay in the following: The individual tones and sounds were viewed as specially modified air-vibrations; and objective sound, outside of the human perception, was viewed as a state of vibration of the air. Light was thought of similarly. That which occurs outside of man when he has a perception by means of phenomena caused by light was defined as vibration in ether. The colours, then, are especially formed ether-vibrations. These analogies became at that time an actual torment to my inner life. For I believed myself perfectly clear in the perception that the concept "sound" is merely an *abstract* union of the individual occurrences in the sphere of sound; whereas "light" signifies a concrete thing over against the phenomena in the sphere of illumination. "Sound" was for me a composite abstract concept; "light" a concrete reality. I said to myself that light is really not perceived by the senses; "colours" are perceived *by means of light*, which manifests itself everywhere in the perception of colours but is not itself sensibly perceived. "White" light is not light, but that also is a colour. Thus for me light became a reality in the sense-world, yet in itself not perceptible to the senses. Now there came before my mind the conflict between nominalism and realism as this was developed within scholasticism. The realists maintained that concepts were realities which lived in things and were simply reproduced out of these by human understanding. The nominalists maintained, on the contrary, that concepts were merely names formed by man which include together a complex of what is in the things, but names which have no existence themselves. It now seemed to me that the sound experience must be viewed in the nominalist manner and the experiences which proceed from light in the realist manner.

I carried this orientation into the optics of the physicist. I had to reject much in this science. Then I arrived at perceptions which gave me a way to Goethe's colour theory.

On this side the door opened before me through which to approach Goethe's writings on natural science. I first took to Schröer brief treatises I had written on the basis of my views in the field of natural science. He could make but little of them; for they were not yet worked out on the basis of Goethe's way of thinking, but I had merely attached at the end this remark: “When men come to the point of thinking about nature as I have here set forth, then only will Goethe's researches in science be confirmed.” Schröer felt an inner pleasure when I made such a statement, but beyond this nothing then came of the matter. The situation in which I then found myself comes out in the following: Schröer related to me one day that he had spoken with a colleague who was a physicist. But, said the man, Goethe opposed himself to Newton, and Newton was “such a genius”; to which Schröer replied: But Goethe “also was a genius.” Thus again I felt that I had a riddle to solve with which I struggled entirely alone.

In the views at which I had arrived in the physics of optics there seemed to me to be a bridge between what is revealed to insight into the spiritual world and that which comes out of researches in the natural sciences. I felt then a need to prove to sense experience, by means of certain experiments in optics in a form of my own, the thoughts which I had formed concerning the nature of light and that of colour.

It was not easy for me to buy the things needed for such experiments; for the means of living I derived from tutoring was little enough. Whatever was in any way possible for me I did in order to arrive at such plans of experimentation in the theory of light as would lead to an unprejudiced insight into the facts of nature in this field.

With the physicist's usual arrangements for experiments I was familiar through my work in Reitlinger's physics laboratory. The mathematical treatment of optics was easy to me, for I had already pursued thorough courses in this field. In spite of all objections raised by the physicists against Goethe's theory of colour, I was driven by my own experiments farther and farther away from the customary attitude of the physicist toward Goethe. I became aware that all such experimentation is only the establishing of certain facts “about light” – to use an expression of Goethe's – and not experimentation with light itself. I said to myself: “The colours are not, in Newton's way of thinking, produced out of light; they come to manifestation when obstructions hinder the free unfolding of the light.” It seemed to me that this was the lesson to be learned directly from my experiments. Through this, however, light was for me removed from the properly physical realities. It took its place as a midway stage between the realities perceptible to the senses and those visible to the spirit.

I was not inclined forthwith to engage in a merely philosophical course of thinking about these things. But I held strongly to this: *to read the facts of nature aright*. And then it became con-

stantly clearer to me how light itself does *not* enter the realm of the sense-perceptible, but remains on the farther side of this, while colours appear when the sense perceptible is brought into the realm of light. I now felt myself compelled anew to press inward to the understanding of nature from the most diverse directions. I was led again to the study of anatomy and physiology. I observed the members of the human, animal, and plant organisms in their formations. In this study I came in my own way to Goethe's theory of metamorphosis. I became more and more aware how that conception of nature which is attainable through the senses penetrates through to that which was visible to me in spiritual fashion.

If in this spiritual way I directed my look to the soul-activity of man, thinking, feeling, and willing, then the "spiritual man" took form for me, a clearly visible image. I could not linger in the abstractions in which men generally think when they speak of thinking, feeling, and willing. In these living manifestations I saw creative forces which set "the man as spirit" there before me. If I then turned my glance to the sense-manifestation of man, this became complete to my observation by means of the spirit-form which ruled in the sense-perceptible.

I came upon the sensible-supersensible form of which Goethe speaks and which thrusts itself, both for the true natural vision and for the spiritual vision, between what the senses grasp and what the spirit perceives.

Anatomy and physiology struggled through step by step to the sensible-supersensible form. And in this struggling I through my look fell, at first in a very imperfect way, upon the threefold organization of the human being, concerning which – after having pursued my studies regarding this for thirty years in silence – I first began to speak openly in my book *Von Seelenrätzeln*.[4] It then became clear to me that in that portion of the human organization in which the shaping is chiefly directed to the elements of the nerves and the senses, the sensible-supersensible form also stamps itself most strongly in the sense-perceptible. The head organization appeared to me as that in which the sensible-supersensible becomes most strongly visible in the sensible form. On the other hand, I was forced to look upon the organization consisting of the limbs as that in which the sensible-supersensible most completely submerges itself, so that in this organization the forces active in nature external to man pursue their work in the shaping of the human body. Between these poles of the human organization everything seemed to me to exist which expresses itself in a rhythmic manner, the processes of breathing, circulation, and the like. At that time I found no one to whom I could have spoken of these perceptions. If I referred here or there to something of this, then it was looked upon at once as the result of a philosophic idea, whereas I was certain that I had disclosed these things to my-

self by means of an understanding drawn from unbiased anatomical and physiological experimentation.

For the mood which depressed my soul by reason of this isolation in my perceptions I found an inner release only when I read over and over the conversation which Goethe had with Schiller as the two went away from a meeting of the Society for Scientific Research in Jena. They were both agreed in the view that nature should not be observed in such piece-meal fashion as had been done in the paper of the botanist Batsch which they had heard read. And Goethe with a few strokes drew before Schiller's eyes his “archetypal plant.” This through a sensible-supersensible form represents the plant as a whole out of which leaf, blossom, etc., reproducing the whole in detail, shape themselves. Schiller, because he had not yet overcome his Kantian point of view, could see in this “whole” only an “idea” which human understanding formed through observation of the details. Goethe would not allow this to pass. He saw spiritually the whole as he saw with his senses the group of details, and he admitted no difference in principle between the spiritual and the sensible perception, but only a transition from the one to the other. To him it was clear that both had the right to a place in the reality of experience. Schiller, however, did not cease to maintain that the archetypal plant was no experience, but an idea. Then Goethe replied, in his way of thinking, that in this case he perceived his ideas with his eyes. There was for me a rest after a long struggle in my mind, in that which came to me out of the understanding of these words of Goethe, to which I believed I had penetrated Goethe's perception of nature revealed itself before my mind as a spiritual perception.

Now, by reason of an inner necessity, I had to strive to work in detail through all of Goethe's scientific writings. At first I did not think of undertaking an interpretation of these writings, such as I soon afterward published in an introduction to them in Kürschner's *Deutsche National Literatur*. I thought much more of setting forth independently some field or other of natural science in the way in which this science now hovered before me as “spiritual.” My external life was at that time not so ordered that I could accomplish this. I had to do tutoring in the most diverse subjects. The “pedagogical” situations through which I had to find my way were complex enough. For example, there appeared in Vienna a Prussian officer who for some reason or other had been forced to leave the German military service. He wished to prepare himself to enter the Austrian army as an officer of engineers. Through a peculiar course of fate I became his teacher in mathematics and physical-scientific subjects. I found in this teaching the deepest satisfaction; for my “scholar” was an extraordinarily lovable man who formed a human relationship with me when we had put behind us the mathematical and scientific developments he needed for his preparation. In other cases also, as in those of students who had completed their work and who were preparing for doctoral examinations, I had to give the instruction, especially in mathematics and the physical sciences.

Because of this necessity of working again and again through the physical sciences of that time, I had ample opportunity of immersing myself in the contemporary views in these fields. In teaching I could give out only these views; what was most important to me in relation to the knowledge of nature I had still to carry locked up within myself.

My activity as a tutor, which afforded me at that time the sole means of a livelihood, preserved me from one-sidedness. I had to learn many things from the foundation up in order to be able to teach them. Thus I found my way into the "mysteries" of book-keeping, for I found opportunity to give instruction even in this subject.

Moreover, in the matter of pedagogical thought, there came to me from Schröer the most fruitful stimulus. He had worked for years as director of the Evangelical schools in Vienna, and he had set forth his experiences in the charming little book, *Unterrichtsfrage*.[5] What I read in this could then be discussed with him. In regard to education and instruction, he spoke often against the mere imparting of information, and in favour of the evolution of the full and entire human being.

1. *German Christmas Plays from Hungary.*
2. *History of German Poetry in the Nineteenth Century.*
3. *Ignatius, a peasant boy of Lower Austria, goes abroad.*
4. *Riddles of the Soul.*
5. *Questions on Teaching.*
