The Story of My Life
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Chapter IX

It was at this time (1888) that I took my first journey into Germany. This was made possible through the invitation to participate in the Weimar edition of Goethe, which was to be prepared by the Goethe Institute under a commission from the Grand-duchess Sophie of Saxony. Some years earlier Goethe's grandson, Walther von Goethe, had died. He had left as a legacy to the Grand-duchess the manuscripts of Goethe. She had thereupon founded the Goethe Institute and, in conjunction with a number of Goethe specialists – chief among whom were Hermann Grimm, Gustav von Loeper, and William Scherer – had determined to prepare an edition of Goethe in which his already known works should be combined with the unpublished remains.

My publications concerning Goethe were the occasion of my being requested to prepare a part of Goethe's writings on natural science for this edition. I was called to Weimar to make a general survey of the natural-scientific part of the remains and to take the first steps required by my task.

My sojourn for some weeks in Goethe's city was a festival time in my life. For years I had lived in the thoughts of Goethe; now I was permitted to be in the places where these thoughts had arisen. I passed these weeks in the elevated impression arising from this feeling. I was able from day to day to have before my eyes the papers in which were contained the supplements to that which I had already prepared for the edition of Goethe for the Kürschner *National-Literatur*.

My work in connection with this edition had given me a mental picture of Goethe's world-conception. Now the question to be settled was how this picture would stand in view of the fact that hitherto unpublished material dealing with natural science was to be found in these literary remains. With the greatest intensity I worked at this portion of the Goethe legacy.

I soon thought I could recognize that the previously unpublished material afforded an important contribution toward the very task of more thoroughly understanding Goethe's form of cognition.

In my writings published up to that time I had conceived this form of cognition as consisting in the fact that Goethe perceived vitally. In the ordinary state of consciousness man is at first a stranger to the being of the world by which he is surrounded. Out of this remoteness arises the impulse first to develop, before knowing the world, powers of knowledge which are not present in ordinary consciousness.

From this point of view it was highly significant for me when I came upon such directing thoughts as the following among Goethe's papers: –

"In order to get our bearings to some extent in these different sorts [Goethe here refers to the different sorts of knowledge in man and his different relationships to the outer world] we may classify these as: practising, knowing, perceiving, and comprehending.

"1. Practical, benefit-seeking, acquisitive persons are the first who, so to speak, sketch the field of science and lay hold upon practice. Consciousness gives a sort of certitude to these through experience, and necessity gives them a certain breadth.

"2. Knowledge-craving persons require a serene look free from personal ends, a restless curiosity, a clear understanding, and these stand always in relationship with the previous type. They likewise elaborate what they discover, only they do this in a scientific sense.

"3. The perceptive are in themselves productive; and knowledge, while itself progressing, calls for perception without intending this, and goes over into perception; and, no matter how much the knowers may make the sign of the cross to shield themselves from imagination, yet they must none the less, if they are not to deceive themselves, call in the aid of the imagination.

"4. The comprehending, whom one may call in a proud sense the creative, are in themselves in the highest sense productive; beginning as they do with the idea, they express thereby the unity of the whole, and it is in a certain sense in accord with the facts of nature thus to conform themselves with this idea."

It becomes clear from such comment that Goethe considered man in his ordinary consciousness as standing *outside* the being of the external world. He must pass over into another form of consciousness if he desires knowingly to unite with this being. During my sojourn in Weimar the question arose within me in more and more decisive form: How must a man build further upon the foundations of knowledge laid by Goethe in order to be guided knowingly over from Goethe's sort of perceptions to that sort which can take up into itself actual experience in the spirit, as this has been given to me?

Goethe goes forward from that which is attained on the lower stages of knowledge, by “practical” persons and by those “craving knowledge.” Upon this he causes to shine in his mind whatever can shine in the “perceiving” and the “comprehending” through productive powers of the mind upon the content of the lower stages of knowledge. When he stands thus with the lower knowledge in the mind in the light of the higher perception and comprehension, then he feels that he is in union with the being of things. To live knowingly in the spirit is, to be sure, not yet attained in this way; but the road to this is pointed out from one side, from that side which results from the relation of man to the outer world. It was clear to my mind that satisfaction could come only with a grasp upon the other side, which arises from man's relation to himself.

When consciousness becomes *productive*, and therefore brings forth from within itself something to add to the first pictures of reality, can it then remain within a reality, or does it float out of this to lose itself in the unreal? What stands against consciousness in its own “product” – it is this thing that we must look into. Human consciousness must first effect an understanding of itself; then can man find a confirmation of the experience of pure spirit. Such were the ways taken by my thoughts, repeating in clearer fashion their earlier forms, as I pored over Goethe's papers in Weimar.

It was summer. Little was to be seen of the contemporary art life of Weimar. One could yield oneself in complete serenity to the artistic, which represented, as it were, a memorial to Goethe's work. One did not live in the present; one was drawn back to the time of Goethe. At the moment it was the age of Liszt in Weimar. But the representatives of this age were not there.

The hours after work I passed with those who were connected with the Institute. In addition there were others sharing in the work who came from elsewhere for longer or shorter visits. I was received with extraordinary kindness by Bernhard Suphan, the director of the Goethe Institute; and in Julius Wahle, a permanent collaborator, I found a dear friend. All this, however, took on a definite form when I went there two years later for a longer period, and it must be narrated at the point where I shall tell about that period of my life.

More than anything else at that time I craved to know personally Eduard von Hartmann, with whom I had corresponded for years in regard to philosophical matters. This was to take place during a brief stay in Berlin which followed that in Weimar.

I had the privilege of a long conversation with the philosopher. He lay upon a sofa, his legs stretched out and his upper body erect. It was in such a posture that he passed by far the

greater part of his life from the time when the suffering with his knee began. I saw before me a forehead which was an evident manifestation of a clear and keen understanding, and eyes which in their look revealed that assurance felt in the innermost being of the man as to that which he knew. A mighty beard framed in the face. He spoke with complete confidence, which showed how he had woven certain basic thoughts about the whole world-concept and thus in his way illuminated it. In these thoughts everything which came to him from other points of view was at once overwhelmed with criticism. So I sat facing him while he sharply passed, judgment upon me, but in reality never inwardly listened to me. For him the being of things lay in the unconscious, and must ever remain hidden there so far as concerned human consciousness; for me the unconscious was something which could more and more be raised up into consciousness through the strivings of the soul's life. During the course of the conversation about this, I said that one should not assume beforehand that a concept is something severed from reality and representing only an unreality in consciousness. Such a view could never be the starting-point for a theory of cognition. For by this means one shuts oneself off from access to all reality in that one can then only believe that one is living in concepts and that one can never approach toward a reality except, through hypothetical concepts – that is, in an unreal manner. One should rather seek to prove beforehand whether this view of the concept as an unreality is tenable, or whether it rises out of a preconception. Eduard von Hartmann replied that there could be no argument as to this; in the very definition of the term “concept” lay the evidence that nothing real is to be found there. When I received such an answer I was chilled to the soul. Definitions to be the point of departure for conceptions of life! I realized how far removed I was from contemporary philosophy. While I sat in the train on my return journey, buried in thoughts and recollections of this visit, which was nevertheless so valuable to me, I felt again that chilling of the heart. It was something which affected me for a long time afterward.

Except for the visit to Eduard von Hartmann, the brief sojourns I made at Berlin and Munich, while passing through Germany after my stay at Weimar, were given over entirely to absorption in the art which these places afforded. The broadening of the scope of my perception in this direction seemed to me at that time especially enriching to my mental life. So this first long journey that I was able to take was of very comprehensive significance in the development of my conceptions as to art. A fullness of vital impressions remained with me when I spent some weeks just after this visit in the Salzkammergut with the family whose sons I had already been teaching for a number of years. I was further advised to find my vocation in private tutoring, and I was inwardly determined upon the same course because I desired to bring forward to a certain point in his life evolution the boy whose education had been entrusted to me some years before, and in whom I had succeeded in awakening the soul from a state of absolute sleep.

After this, when I had returned to Vienna, I had the opportunity to mingle a great deal in a group of persons bound together by a woman whose mystical, theosophical type of mind made a profound impression upon all the members of this group. The hours I spent in the home of this woman, Marie Lang, were in the highest degree useful to me. An earnest type of life-conception and life-experience was present in vital and nobly beautiful form in Marie Lang. Her profound inner experiences came to expression in a sonorous and penetrating voice. A life which struggled hard with itself and the world could find in her only in a mystical seeking a sort of satisfaction, even though one that was incomplete. So she almost seemed created to be the soul of a group of seeking men. Into this circle had penetrated theosophy initiated by H. P. Blavatsky at the close of the preceding century. Franz Hartmann, who by reason of his numerous theosophical works and his relations with H. P. Blavatsky, had become widely known, also introduced his theosophy into this circle – Marie Lang had accepted much out of this theosophy. The thought-content which is there to be found seemed in many respects to harmonize with the characteristics of her mind. Yet what she took from this source had attached itself to her in a merely external way. But within herself she had mystical possession which had been lifted into the realm consciousness in a quite elementary fashion out of a heart tested by life.

The architects, littérateurs, and other persons whom I met in the home of Marie Lang would scarcely have been interested in the theosophy offered by Franz Hartmann had not Marie Lang to some extent participated in this. Least of all would I myself have been interested in it; for the way of relating oneself to the spiritual world which was evidenced in the writings of Franz Hartmann was absolutely opposite to the bent of my own mind. I could not concede that it was possessed of real and inner truth. I was less concerned with its content than with the manner in which it affected men who, nevertheless, were truly seekers.

Through Marie Lang I became acquainted with Frau Rosa Mayreder, who was a friend of hers. Rosa Mayreder was one of those persons to whom in the course of my life I have given the greatest reverence, and in whose development I have had the greatest interest. I can well imagine that what I have to say here will please her very little; but this is the way that I feel as to what came into my life by reason of her. Of the writings of Rosa Mayreder which since that time have justly made so great an impression upon so many persons, and which undoubtedly gave her a very conspicuous place in literature, nothing had at that time appeared. But what is revealed in these writings lived in Rosa Mayreder in a spiritual form of expression to which I had to respond with the strongest possible inner sympathy. This woman impressed me as if she possessed each of the gifts of the human mind in such measure that these in their harmonious interaction constituted the right expression of a human being. She united various artistic gifts with a free, penetrating power of observation. Her paintings are just as much marked by individual unfoldings of life as by absorption in the depths of the objective world. The stories with

which she began her literary career are perfect harmonies made up of personal strivings and objective observations. Her later works show this character more and more. Most clearly of all does this come to light in her late two-volume work, *Kritik der Weiblichkeit*.[1] I consider it a beautiful treasure of my life to have spent many hours during the time about which I am here writing together with Rosa Mayreder during the years of her seeking and mental strivings.

I must in this connection refer again to one of my human relationships which took its rise and reached a vital intensity above the sphere of thought-content, and, in a sense, quite independently of this. For my world-conception, and even more my emotional tendencies, were not those of Rosa Mayreder. The way by which I ascended from that which is in this respect recognized as scientific into an experience of the spiritual cannot possibly be congenial to her. She seeks to use the scientific as the foundation for ideas which have as their goal the complete development of human personality without permitting the knowledge of a world of pure spirit to find access into this personality. What is to me a necessity in this direction to her means almost nothing. She is wholly devoted to the furtherance of the present human individuality and pays no attention to the action of spiritual forces within these individualities. Through this method of hers she has achieved the most significant exposition yet produced of the nature of womanhood and the vital needs of woman.

Neither could I ever satisfy Rosa Mayreder in respect to the view she formed of my attitude toward art. She thought that I denied true art, because I sought to get a grasp upon specific examples of art by means of the view which entered my mind by reason of my experience of the spiritual. Because of this she maintained that I could not sufficiently penetrate into the revelation of the sense-world and thus arrive at the reality of art, whereas I was seeking just this thing – to penetrate within the full truth of the sensible forms. But all this did not detract from the inner friendly interest in this personality which developed in me at the time, during which I owe to her some of the most valuable hours of my life – an interest which in truth remains undiminished even to the present day.

At the home of Rosa Mayreder I was often privileged to share in conversations for which gifted men gathered there. Very quiet, seemingly with his gaze inward upon himself rather than listening to those about him, sat Hugo Wolf, who was an intimate friend of Rosa Mayreder. One listened inwardly to him even though he spoke so little. For whatever entered into his life was communicated in mysterious fashion to those who might be with him. With heartfelt affection was I attached to the husband of Frau Rosa, Karl Mayreder, so fine a person both as man and as artist, and also to his brother, Julius Mayreder, so enthusiastic in regard to

art. Marie Lang and her circle and Friedrich Eckstein, who was then wholly given over to the spiritual tendencies and world-conception of theosophy, were often present.

This was the time when my *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* was taking more and more definite form in my mind. Rosa Mayreder is the person with whom I talked most concerning this form at the time when my book was thus coming into existence. She relieved me of a part of the inner loneliness in which I had lived. She was striving for a conception of the actual human personality; I toward a revelation of the world which might seek for this personality at the basis of the soul by means of spiritual eyes thus opened. Between the two there were many bridges. Often in later life has there arisen before my grateful spirit one or another picture from this experience, for example, memory pictures of a walk through the noble Alpine forests, during which Rosa Mayreder and I discussed the true meaning of human freedom.
