

David Clement's Memories of the early Bio-Dynamic Impulse
June 2002

When Carl Alexander Mirbt (later changed to Meir) brought the Bio-Dynamic impulse to this country in 1929 at D.N. Dunlop's initiative, the organisation was straight way formed called the Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation (the name Bio-Dynamic had not yet been thought of) and at the same time the "Experimental Circle of Anthroposophical Farmers and Gardeners" was formed. The latter was composed of those members of the Foundation who were Anthroposophists.

The first meeting I attended was held in Yorkshire at the farm of Maurice Wood at Huby near Harrogate in about 1934. We were not very many, about 6 or 8. We ate in the farm house and met in a wooden building in the garden which was a kindergarten classroom which their daughter Janet ran. Dr. Kolisko was our lecturer. Our hosts, Maurice and Etta Wood cared for us most generously. Mrs. Pease was there. She was Hon Sec. to both the Foundation and the Circle and, with Maurice, formed the backbone of the Association. George Kaufman took a close interest and was a source of strength to them both. He later, during the war, changed his name to Adams. The meeting was warm and enthusiastic; Kolisko's lectures were a tremendous stimulus. I was present because I had lately bought Broome Farm to develop B.D., with Carl as it's first director.

I don't remember other Circle meetings in those first years; but it was at that time that George Kaufman translated Dr. Steiner's Agricultural Course. He did it staying with the Woods at Huby Farm. Each day in the lunch hour when Maurice came in from the farm George would read to him what he had translated during the morning. In after years Maurice would tell how he came in each day with endless expectancy and how the reality always surpassed his expectations. Those he would say were the most golden days of his life.

These lectures were not freely available and were only given out to a few people. Each copy was numbered. They were typed; just the diagrams photographed, and were bound. About twenty years later George Corrin revised these lectures. He copied the diagrams from the originals when he was in Dornach. These were printed in colour. He took great care over the whole job. The lectures were properly printed and bound and were by that time freely available.

One of my main memories of those pre-war days is Carl's enthusiasm and his capacity to make human contacts. Already when he first came he and Mama Pease had made the first preparations together at her home at Otterburn, Northumberland. He made a good connection with Duncan Skilbeck, the head of Wye College in Kent. I remember accompanying them to hear Albert Howard (he was not yet knighted) give his famous lecture to the Royal Society on his Indore system of composting which he had developed in India. Carl had a good connection with Lawrence Easterbrook at that time the agricultural correspondent to the News Chronicle. He met and talked with many in agriculture at that time. Hard to believe now is that on the outbreak of war, together with Fried Geuter and Michael Wilson, he got into No.10, Downing Street and gave into the hand of the then

Minister, I think a man called Morrison, plans for conducting our agriculture during hostilities!

He interested Alma Baker, an elderly man with wide possessions of land in New Zealand and tin mines and rubber plantations in Malaya. It was Wachsmuth's book on the *Etheric Formative Forces* which fascinated Mr. Baker. From that he was straightaway interested in BD. He wrote, with Carl's help, two booklets, which at his own expense, he published and sent to governments and agricultural colleges throughout the world.

Not content with that he employed Bensusan to write a full length book called "*The Labouring Earth*". Bensusan was the author of a number of books and was at that time the agricultural correspondent of, I believe, "The Spectator". He was a member of the Foundation with a real confidence in Rudolf Steiner and Bio-Dynamics. Lord Addison the Minister of Agriculture wrote the introduction, which opened with the words: "*This is a challenging book. It challenges much that is common practice in present-day farming methods. It challenges many of the food habits that have become prevalent during late years. It challenges powerful vested interests in more ways than one.*" and towards the end of his introduction: "*An immense knowledge of agricultural research and writing is displayed throughout the book and it is written with passionate conviction — often eloquently expressed.*" We felt it to be an important book. At vast expense Mr. Baker sent it to governments and universities across the world. But it was 1940 and "The Labouring Earth's" clarion call was soon drowned in the din of war; and shortly after Alma Baker died.

Throughout the war the Foundation just ticked over, kept alive by Mrs. Pease - Carl Meir, as he now was having been naturalised, monitored German broadcasts for the BBC. Deryck Duffy who, since 1937, had run Broome Farm, moved up to Scotland to begin his work there and I took over Broome.

When the war ended Mrs. Pease wanted to retire; and she asked me if I had George Adams' help I would take on her job? We called a meeting at Rudolf Steiner House for all those interested. We needed Carl to return and appealed for support to make that possible. Commander and Mrs Brocklebank then and there offered home for Carl and his wife Gertrude and his family of three children to live in their house with them at Longbridge in Wiltshire for no charge. What inspiring, heart-warming generosity.

We met at Rudolf Steiner House every month hosted by George Adams and Olive Whicher in her studio — the large room at the top of Rudolf Steiner House. We were a group determined to develop BD. We began each meeting with the study of a lecture. I remember we began with the lecture cycle on "The Four Archangels and the Seasons". We then took "Man as Symphony of the Creative Word". They were inspiring meetings. Carl and I would stay at the Farmers Club and the following morning in the empty club lounge (it was a Monday morning) we would work out all that had been decided the previous day. Those were basically Experimental Circle meetings; and by meeting every month we formed the basis for the continuation of the work.

Sadly, after not much more than a year Commander Brocklebank died. A home was found for Carl and his family at Clent, so our work went on. "Notes and Correspondence" was

edited by Doris Davy, the wife of Charles Davy, herself also a professional journalist. She had already helped Mrs. Pease and was a great asset to the movement. The Foundation was from the beginning largely financed by gardeners. Farmers were very thin on the ground and we had many more private gardeners. Some of them had very beautiful gardens.

Mrs Pease's was the most outstanding, at Bray-on-Thames. She was also a keen beekeeper and had a lovely bee garden. We had a number of bee-keeper members in those days. One I remember called Nichols wrote several articles for "Notes and Correspondence". The Brocklebanks too had a beautiful garden and I remember hearing how particular their gardener was that Dr. Meir's instructions should be carried out "to the letter". Carl now had a car and was travelling round the country meeting people advising and lecturing.

Already in 1946 or 7 we started holding annual Circle Conferences. The first seven or eight years were at Michael Wilson's Goethean Science Foundation at Clent. We had visiting lecturers. Among them were: Ernst Lehrs, Herman Popplebaum, Rudolf Hauschka, Bernard Lievegoed, Karl Konig. They were warm, enthusiastic occasions to which about twenty members and invited guests came. Four lectures were given between Friday evening and Sunday midday and one session for members questions and any business that had to be done. From the beginning the Experimental Circle owned nothing. It was financed by the Foundation. In subsequent years we met at Camphill Thornbury and Newton Dee; following which, we met for a number of years at Peredur, East Grinstead invited by Siegfried and Joan Rudel - I remember George Adams giving a course there also Willi Sucher and for a second time Rudolf Hauschka and gradually we provided our own content. They were important meetings which really provided us with the enthusiasm to work through the year as each of us was largely on his own. Originally we met in January but changed to the autumn after a difficult journey home in the snow.

"Notes and Correspondence" became the journal of the Circle when Doris Davy edited and produced "Star & Furrow" for the Foundation.

In 1935 Ita Wegman and Elisabeth Vreede were expelled from the Anthroposophical Society and with them D N Dunlop and George Adams; and many others including ourselves were excluded. So from then on we had no communications with the Goetheanum. We carried on Dr. Wegman telling us "Where Anthroposophy is truly alive there is the spiritual Goetheanum". An unfortunate consequence was that we did not know of a conference held shortly before the war at which Ehrenfried Pfeiffer was present. It was a meeting held by several big landowners who were greatly concerned at the way farming was developing. George Stapleton and a number of other interesting people were there. We only heard about it some years later from Mr Rasmussen of Denmark who was himself present. It must have been some twenty years before Margaret Cross, John Jeffree and Kate Thornton asked if they might attend our Circle Conference. They and some others had stayed connected with the Goetheanum. We gladly welcomed them. That was the beginning of our all coming together, though it was still some long time before the Anthroposophical Societies united. Those staying connected with the Goetheanum had formed their own society which they called by the name "Bio-Dynamic, a name which was becoming general throughout the world. When we united we called the new organisation "Bio-Dynamic Agricultural Association".

It was about this time that Faber & Faber having published Ernst Lehrs "*Man or Matter*" published Dr. Pfeiffer's "*Bio-Dynamic Farming & Gardening*" and his book on landscape, "*The Earth's Face*". To the latter George Stapleton wrote the introduction.

Carl Meir, besides organising study week-ends for making compost and gaining knowledge of the preparations, also organised two continental trips; the first about 1951. This started in Holland, at Loverendale. Hans Heinze, the chief consultant for Germany, was there and accompanied us throughout. We visited the B.D school at Warmond and continued into Germany where we met Herr Vogele who had attended the Agricultural Course in 1924. We visited a number of farms and the Centre at Darmstadt. It was a most inspiring tour. Another tour took place the following year. I did not go on it but I think it was just such a stimulating occasion.

By this time Lady Eve Balfour has launched The Soil Association and written her book "*The Living Earth*". We had a good connection with her and she visited us several times. I remember on one occasion, her saying to George Adams that the organic movement looked to us to provide the philosophy behind the organic movement. Maurice Wood was a member of their first counsel and Deryck Duffy on their panel of experts.

The editor of "*Mother Earth*", the Soil Association journal, Sam Waller, once said that B.D. was the poetry of the organic movement. So, from the start, we had our connections with the Soil Association - though from the start we also experienced opposition.

It was Carl who invited George Corrin to attend a Circle Conference. I shall always remember how, at the end of the conference, he got up and thanked the Circle for inviting him, saying his life would never be the same again. George, a very intelligent man, had opted out of "civilisation" and lived on a small holding with his wife in mid-Wales saying he wanted to bring up his children on healthy foods and true human values. On Carl's moving up to Camphill Scotland and later becoming one of the pioneers of Botton Village, we asked George if he would be our consultant; so began a long and most fruitful collaboration. When Carl joined Dr. Koenig in Aberdeen Cynthia Chance took up the duties of hon secretary. Hugh Chance, her husband, built a handsome room on to their house in Clent for Cynthia to run the Association: and hold Anthroposophical meetings. She set about her job with great enthusiasm, enlarging the Secretary's Letter with an article by Willi Sucher in each issue. She organised conferences at Hoddesden and Holmbury St Mary; and at one of them invited Mr. Rasmussen from Denmark. He gave us a splendid course out of his rich experiences as the BD adviser. He invited us to visit him and see the work of his members. We went, members and non-members in June 1959. Sam Mayall, the Soil Association's best known farmer, came with us. We started in the west where the soil is near sand and the farmers worked in the winter in the state forests and on the farms in the summer. From there we went east and the soils get progressively richer and the farmers and market gardeners more prosperous. No farmer owned a car, the trains being so good and the distances not great. There were bicycles in plenty. Their houses were a picture, with window boxes full of flowers and beautifully kept gardens round them. They were most hospitable, giving us strawberries and cream at every farm, from their own farms and gardens. This was, we felt,

largely, to do honour to Mr. Rasmussen who was a father figure to them all. We had perfect June weather and returned home full of good resolves.

Unfortunately shortly afterwards Cynthia Chance “found me impossible” and downed tools then and there. I could find no replacement for this honorary work so I was left with no alternative but to do the secretary’s work myself. I was unable to carry out all she had done. I had to cancel the next members conference. I employed a typist one day a week and on that day attended to all I could to keep things going. This lasted for some years.

Now, there was a member who joined before the war. He had become the director of Agriculture for Tanjanyaka, had just retired and was living in Alton, Hampshire. This was John Soper. I met him and told him we were in great need of help and that he should bear us in mind before taking up any job. Within a few days Lady Eve Balfour approached him. He told her he was already committed. I was indeed thankful. He straightaway took on the job of treasurer, which I had also been doing. After a few years he and Marjorie decided to move to Clent. They lived with us at the farm while getting their house *The Laurels* ready. We made him an office at the back of Mrs. Geuter’s bungalow and provided a strip of garden for the experiments he and George Corrin now started. From the first he and George worked splendidly together. Some irreverent members referred to us in those days as the “three Broom heads”. For me they were good days.

Marjorie Soper took on the editing of “Star & Furrow” from Doris Davy. Many new initiatives were set on foot. Annual conferences for members and friends were once again taking place. George Corrin sent out his “Bulletin” two or three times a year. This he kept up for twenty five years without a break. They were notable for good sense and good English. He also helped John considerably with his book “Bio-Dynamic Gardening”.

There must be today a number of members who remember those days — so here I close with my bio—dynamic memories.

David Clement

P.S. These thoughts are my memories others may have different recollections in one or other particular but in the main I believe this is a true account of all those years.