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FRIED GEUTER

A Personal Appreciation - by Michael Wilson

More than anyone I ever met, Fried Geuter was awake to the workings and beckonings of human Destiny. He lived in the supreme conviction that if one would only use one's heart to look and to listen to what the daily events of life had to say to one, then there would be no need to worry about the future, for the means to carry out one's tasks would never be lacking. His faith in the powers of Destiny was of the quality that moves mountains.

When he was a boy he had an accident with a gun, which caused a friend the loss of an eye. He made a solemn vow that he would never carry a gun again, in spite of his liability for military service. Though the vow remained unspoken, the tasks allotted to him during his years in the army never required him to handle a gun. This happened before he knew of Anthroposophy, for it was only through meeting Herbert Hahn as a fellow interpreter in an international prisoner-of-war camp that he first heard about Rudolf Steiner.

It was this quality of awareness that made things happen wherever he was. He had little use for convention, and for him a conversation had no sense unless he felt that heart could speak to heart. This was what produced such a sense of warmth in all his dealings with people. When I first met him, I did not like him. I suppose I was too English to appreciate his warmth and his enthusiasm. But what was far more important was that here was someone who could not only talk intelligently about the things that interested me, but could answer my questions in the kind of way that made a difference for the whole of my life. I knew that a door was being opened for me, through which I must decide to go. For the first time in my life I experienced that sense of complete inner certainty as to the next step that had to be taken. This had nothing whatever to do with wishes, or likes and dislikes, nor was it a compulsion that left me unfree. I was just content to follow the plan as it unfolded itself. For the next twelve months after we met, we lived through a chain of the most improbable events. So improbable, in fact, that it was only the very next step

that ever seemed to make any sense at all. I used to look at the events in which we were involved and say to myself that I could believe them if they were happening on the stage or in a fairy tale, but to believe them in real life was asking too much. Fried Geuter never questioned the future. He simply said 'Things come out right in the end, you wait and see.' On the 16th November, 1930, just one year after our first meeting, we opened Sunfield. Our little handful of workers included Mrs Geuter and Helen Martin, both of whom are still with us. During the following year, a number of other young people, including David Clement, joined us. Their experience on meeting Fried Geuter was much the same as mine. Life suddenly began to make sense for them in a way it had not done before. There was no conflict between their ideals and the claims of the daily work. This was a very special feature of the work with the retarded children in those early years. Curative education was not the application of a system that had already been worked out. It was a way of living. Fried Geuter made this very clear to us from the start. It was our task to take on our shoulders the destinies of these children and build a life around them in such a way that their destinies could be given their true direction. In some cases the results of our work might not show outwardly at all, but if we could give the children the help they were seeking in this incarnation, it would have its real effect in the next one. Such work could not be confined to school hours, neither could the work of teaching be confined to the teachers. The entire Household was brought into the work. The requirements for working successfully with these children had very little to do with what one knew intellectually. It depended much more on that kind of creative activity, combined with great presence of mind, which enabled one to turn to good account every situation with which the children would present one. This ability, amounting to something like an instinct, gave Fried Geuter his unique quality as a curative teacher. His early intellectual background had been rather sketchy, and he often used to lament that he had not been endowed with any outer skills. He longed to be able to express himself through music, painting, modelling, writing and acting, and what he did achieve in these directions always had an immediate social and human value. Perhaps if he had possessed the outer talents for which he so longed, his unique powers of immediate and intuitive perception would not have developed in the way that they did.

In his meetings with Rudolf Steiner, it was just this quality of immediacy and reality, together with an ethical exactness, which had so much impressed him. He would often relate incidents which showed how scrupulously Rudolf Steiner would respect the freedom of the individual, and how meticulously exact he was in keeping functions and personalities separate. At the same time, he could be extremely drastic in his efforts to make people wake up to the realities of what was happening around them. He would also show infinite patience in prolonging a discussion among colleagues until the bare truth of the particular issue would show itself, however personal and uncomfortable this might be. In business dealings and in matters of punctuality, Rudolf Steiner was scrupulously correct. He would never let the claims of his spiritual tasks become the excuse

for any slipshod thinking or for promises not kept. These were the qualities which Fried Geuter sought to instil into our growing circle of helpers in the children's home. The ethical basis for all this was, of course, the study of the book *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity!* - a study which began as soon as Sunfield came into being, and has continued in one or more forms ever since. In those early days this book was not generally considered a necessity for English people. The change that has come about since then we owe largely to the enthusiasm with which Fried Geuter introduced the study of it.

Parallel with this study, and very deeply connected with it, was the theme of Parsival. This theme had to do with our very first meeting: and the children's play at Sunfield on the occasion of Dr Wegman's first visit to the home, was a simple version of the Parsival story. It was out of the inspiration of this moment that our song 'In the Quest of the Holy Grail' came into being. Fried Geuter was very deeply connected with Dr Wegman and all that she stood for. It had been on her advice that he devoted his life to Curative Education in the first place, and it was she more than anyone else who represented the ideals of Sunfield. The separation brought about by the War, both from her and from his other devoted friends at Arlesheim and elsewhere, caused him great pain, and indeed we were never to see Dr Wegman again.

During and after the war, many of us felt that our task was to reorganise and consolidate the work at Sunfield and to give more responsibility to the next generation of workers. Perhaps we were too late and too slow in this, but it is certain that Fried Geuter began to feel that his creative impulse was beginning to be hampered. At the same time his personal Karma brought complications into his life, and eventually took a direction which caused him and those around him a great deal of suffering and separated him from many of his former colleagues. But right up to the day of his death, he did not for one moment waver in his conviction that his direction was the right one and that he was carrying out the tasks which his destiny demanded of him. His work at Ravenswood for the Jewish Community had given him again opportunities which his creative spirit needed, and he could throw the extent of his energies into a piece of pioneer work for which no precedent had been set, and no conventions had grown up. Though a first-hand description of his work in these last years would have to come from another pen than mine, his achievements were remarkable, both in the actual work with the children and in the confidence and enthusiasm which he created among those with whom he worked. The measure of appreciation expressed on behalf of the Jewish Community by the Rabbi who spoke after his death - gratitude that a Christian and a disciple of Rudolf Steiner should have given the last years of his life to the problems of the Jewish People - was of a very high order indeed.

Throughout his life the friendship of Goethe and Schiller had been a kind of archetypal picture for him - Goethe's eye and Schiller's heart - and the preparation for the lecture on Schiller which he

gave just two months before his death, brought him still nearer to the heart of this problem, and gave him great joy. Here I would like to put on record that my own studies of Goethe's Colour Theory, which began in 1936, were undertaken at Fried Geuter's suggestion; and ten years later the offer which he made - that if I would devote myself to a study of Light and Colour, he would shoulder the burden of the administration of Sunfield - led directly to the beginning of the Goethean Science Foundation. Had it not been for his vision and initiative, I think that none of this work would have come into being at all.

During the last few years of his life, he became increasingly conscious of the need that a new spirituality should pervade human thinking and action. He had already had warnings of his own heart trouble, and knew that he had not much time left, and he felt that what he still had to say was of apocalyptic urgency. In effect it was this. In "The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity", Part I is devoted to the Science of Thinking and the overcoming of the supposed limits of knowledge. Part II is devoted to the achievement of the Free Deed, the deed of the morally free man. For nearly thirty years he had been trying to teach us that true thinking is the substance out of which the world is formed, but in his later life it became still more important to understand that the way in which we use our senses and our thinking today, will determine the pattern into which the fabric of future worlds is woven. Human senses must become radiant and must give back some of the light which brought them into being. Taking must be transformed into Giving, Knowledge must be transformed into moral deed, Wisdom into Love. Without this, Anthroposophy would remain an empty theory. Shortly before last year's Ripon Conference, he summarised this by sending me Benedictus' words from the First Mystery Play:

Des Lichtes webend Wesen, es erstrahlot durch Raumesweiten,
zu füllen die Welt mit Sein

Des Lichtes webend Wesen, es erstrahlet von Mensch zu Mensch,
zu füllen alle Welt mit Wahrheit.

With regard to the last chapter of Fried Geuter's work, Isabel Ceuter writes:

'Early in the 1950's, Jewish people were looking to the followers of Rudolf Steiner for help for their afflicted children, but this seemed a baffling task which none could solve. It was only when Mr Charles David, Chairman of the Jewish Association to Aid Backward Children, put the following question to him: "Did Dr Steiner then deny his help to the Jewish people?" that Fried Geuter recognized that he stood in front of a challenge which would in the future, come again and again to Anthroposophists: Could those who professed to seek for knowledge and understanding of Man and his Destiny, bring such understanding to the ways of another people, that those people would

be able to accept the help they needed and yet know that in so doing, nothing they held dear or sacred would be disturbed? Respect for what is sacred to one another, breeds respect. And out of respect, comes understanding, comes brotherhood and peace.

So Fried Geuter, in the last seven years of his life on earth, accepted the challenge and found the way to bring help to the Jewish people at the Curative Education Settlement at Ravenswood in Berkshire. To him, the deed was more than an extension of his work for children. What grew up was a sign that he had been able to fulfil the task set him by his friend and teacher, Rudolf Steiner. So, in peace and fulfilment, he passed, united with all his loved ones, surrounded by the friends who shared his labours - on his lips the words: "O blessed Day".