

Goetheanum Naturwissenschaftliche Sektion Abt. Landwirtschaft

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Dornach, 16 September 2002

Manfred Klett

Dear Michael Atherton,

I am so sorry to be so late in answering your letter, asking for some information about origin and tasks of the Experimental Circle. In fact my retirement has not yet provided me with a single grain of spare time. The work has changed, the load remained the same.

I very much appreciate your engagement to reveal the history of the Experimental Circle and thus to find out what its present task could be. According to my knowledge there are three very different organisations existing, which, concerning name and goal, refer somewhat to the original Experimental Circle, founded 1924 at Koberwitz after the third lecture. It is the "Forschungsring" in Germany, situated in Darmstadt, the "Nordisk Forskningsring", situated in Järna Sweden, and the Experimental Circle in Britain. The "Forschungsring" founded 1946 in Stuttgart, was meant to be a kind of rebirth after the disastrous events during the time between 1933 and 1945. During the Nazi-time the so called "Reichsverband für biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise", banned in 1941, already was as a kind of metamorphosis the carrier of the biodynamic impulse.

At Whitsun Saturday, the 7.6.1924, the opening day of the Agricultural Course there was a preliminary discussion at the "Bock" hall at Breslau about the founding of an agricultural experimental circle. The foundation was agreed after a very sharp discussion between Count Keyserlingk and Ernst Stegemann. The latter put the main emphasis on the esoteric side, while Count Keyserlingk preferred a practical exoteric orientation. In those early days experimental circles among farmers were widely known. Their task was to perform on-farm research by comparative trials in order to convert scientific findings into practical operations. The predominating intention of the farmers attending the Agricultural Course was to found such a circle and to perform exactly this, to introduce spiritual research by experiment into practical work. The foundation finally took place after the third lecture, 11th June 1924, with an address by Rudolf Steiner

In this address he outlines simply in two sentences what the task should be: literally translated "only what we need in Dornach, is a representation of each, who is willing to cooperate in the circle, what he has under the earth and what he has above the earth and how these two things work together. And what Dornach provides as science must be such, that it is well understood by even the most conservative peasant head".

Initially all members of the Experimental Circle were anthroposophists, members on

Anthroposophical Society. This is the reason why originally the name was "Experimental Circle of anthroposophical farmers of the Anthroposophical Society". In 1933, when more and more farmers, who were not acquainted with Anthroposophy became interested, the name was changed into Experimental Circle of biodynamic farmers.

No doubt the Experimental Circle has been the original vessel, provided exoterically by the historical process, to receive, carry and foster the esoteric content of Agriculture Course. When it was founded, it was Rudolf Steiner who combined the esoteric factual aspects of the farm with the esoteric stream and thus the Experimental Circle became an organ of the Anthroposophical Society. Rudolf Steiner was very practical minded. On the one hand he promoted on-farm research in order to improve farming and to deliver spiritual insights into this field of life, on the other hand his intention was to form a body linked to the Anthroposophical Society and, by some of its leading members, to the High School of Spiritual Science. This body was meant to connect the life of each single farm in the far periphery to the Natural Science Section at the Goetheanum. Initially Rudolf Steiner intended to incorporate the later so called biodynamic work into the Medical Section. As Ita Wegman, the lead of this section, refused to take on this additional load he integrated it into the Natural Science Section and spoke in his address after the third lecture of the Natural Science Section and the Experimental Circle as being like Siamese Twins, having a common thinking and feeling.

This unique disposition of an active interrelationship between periphery and centre, that is the High School of Spiritual Science, never really came into being. The early death of Rudolf Steiner left it as a legacy to us, the generations to come. The tragedy of the following decades was a threefold one. First! the historical events of the 20th century, especially the evil impact of the Nazi-regime in Middle Europe and World War II smashed this tender germ. Second the unity of the Anthroposophical Society broke and parts and pieces disconnected from one another and from the Goetheanum. I assume the historical becoming of the Experimental Circle in Great Britain, and somewhat its isolation and uncertainty about its tasks must be seen and can be understood on this background. Third and in my opinion the most essential reason for the general inability to fulfil the intentions of Rudolf Steiner was and to a certain extent still is the fact that they are not fully understood in their practical and spiritual dimensions. They were and still are too modern, too much related to an advanced stage of the consciousness soul. The situation slightly has changed to the better during the last one or two decades.

Asking now for the future tasks of the Experimental Circle I am convinced we will not find a real answer, if we do not remind the original intention of Rudolf Steiner. This of course means to seek for a real sound understanding in terms of an imaginative picture of all that came forth out of the Christmas Foundation Meeting in 1923 and what Rudolf Steiner gently tried to shape within the

following nine months till Michaelmas 1924. Therefore the first task could be to study for example the letters to the members, the foundation stone being laid into the hearts of the members, the constitution of the High School and its subdivision in Sections. A further task could be to clarify the significance and functions of the Sections in general and in particular of the biodynamic movement being linked to the Natural Science Section

Concerning the section work in relation to future tasks of the Experimental Circle I would like to add a few remarks: Rudolf Steiner states: *The task of the High School is to advance by spiritual research ever deeper into the esoteric as well as to work in the highest possible intensity into the public. "The knowledge of initiation must become the knowledge of civilisation"*. According to my understanding the Sections are not only the gateway of the High School into public life, but are more like a field, which stretches out between two poles. In our case the one pole is the Section, located at the Goetheanum, the other pole are all biodynamic farms and whatever related initiatives all over the world. Each biodynamic farm should be looked at as being attached to the Goetheanum and vice versa. Centre and periphery are just two sides of the same coin. Since Rudolf Steiner's time the peripheral activities and initiatives have tremendously grown. Anthroposophy in fulfilment of Rudolf Steiner's intention has in some fields really penetrated and individualized public life. But in doing so the initiatives have become independent. They have separated from the centre. Thus the dialogue between centre and periphery that is section work, has never really prospered: the section field remained unploughed. There are only a few furrows going to and fro. It is not simply a matter of a lot of travelling, to be out in the world and reverse. Of course we must meet and our annual biodynamic conference at the Goetheanum is a marvellous occasion to warm up mutual contacts. What is lacking is the spiritual consciousness of this field *in between*, this active creation of being in accord with everybody involved from both sides.

If one becomes aware of this existing abyss - it is a matter of a supreme overlooking spiritual consciousness - new tasks spring up. The most essential one is to work towards such a consciousness, that is learning to think, to feel and to will out of the Goetheanum impulse, that is to may and widen the Experimental Circle into a Section Circle, having the task to become the carrier of the Goetheanum impulse of and within the biodynamic work and be a partner of the Section in Dornach.

"The Goetheanum is present where ever one works out of its spirit". From this point of view the Experimental-Section Circle being responsible for the spiritual foundation of the biodynamic work in Britain in accord with the Section in Dornach and other such circles in other countries, the members ought to be representatives of Anthroposophy, that is members of the High School of Spiritual Science.

Having such a perspective for the work of the Experimental Circle in Britain it would become the spiritual guardian of the biodynamic work, it would give impulses to and coordinate research, training, consulting, it would promote and organize conferences, cooperate in close relationship with BDAA and other bd-organizations in the country and - very important - to seek close collaboration with the Anthroposophical Society and the High School activities in Britain.

Well, this sounds unachievable, reaching beyond all existing capacities. No doubt it does. But to become aware of these tasks, which the time spirit in accord with the being of Anthroposophy puts to us, we must know the aim and thus take the effort, the stern will to work towards it. Thus the tasks become visible and any effort will be blessed by spiritual credit.

Almost 80 years have passed since the Agricultural Course. All failures and achievements of individuals mark partial, significant, preparatory steps towards an eventual understanding of what Rudolf Steiner actually meant by building the High School of Spiritual Science. Though we are still at the beginning of this understanding, we thank our predecessors to have paved the path on which we are now able to consciously connect to the original impulse and in accordance to do first cautious steps.

To repeat once again, I feel deeply moved by your concern to ask for new perspectives of the Experimental Circle in Britain. My answer is, to renew the relationship with the origin and seek for a metamorphosis in accord with the time spirit and the spiritual being of Anthroposophy.

In case my deliberations give rise to other questions, please don't hesitate to continue correspondence.

Yours sincerely

Manfred Klett