

RUDOLF STEINER'S REPORT TO MEMBERS OF THE ANTHROPOSOPHICAL SOCIETY AFTER THE AGRICULTURE COURSE

Dornach, Switzerland

June 20, 1924

As you know, I have just returned from a trip to Breslau and Koberwitz? This trip, although it was also coupled with more general anthroposophical goals, served one goal in particular. A number of farmers in the Anthroposophical Society had requested a course on agricultural issues, and on this occasion the farmers in our Society came together from near and far for some earnest study of how anthroposophical research can contribute to this area of human endeavour. Of course, such an eminently practical area of life does not call for mere theories, but for perspectives applicable to practical work, so naturally people were expecting to hear specifics.

All the participants in this agriculture course, including those members of the Executive Council who could be present - Frau Dr. Steiner, Dr. Vreede, and Dr. Wachsmuth – were hosted at Koberwitz Manor by our good friend Count Keyserlingk. This meant that the conference was self-contained and unusually satisfying for the participants. The reception we were given was extraordinary by any standards. Koberwitz is forty-five minutes from Breslau, and it was no mean feat to welcome a company of more than a hundred conference guests every day, not only for the lectures but also for a substantial meal. Since the participants could not all stay overnight in Koberwitz, people had to come out from Breslau and usually arrived around eleven in the morning. Then the lecture began and lasted until around one o'clock, after which came the midday meal. During the break, which lasted until around quarter of two, the guests had practically the house and its very interesting grounds at their disposal. After this there was still a discussion on agricultural subjects which lasted until three o'clock. That was the Koberwitz side of the event, and since it went on for ten days, you can see how much hospitality was involved.

I must confess, however, that it was not easy for Count and Countess Keyserlingk to get this course off the ground. It had been promised for a long time, but I did not manage to get there until Count Keyserlingk's nephew came to the Christmas Conference in Dornach with strict instructions not to return home without a firm commitment from me to conduct the course within the next six months. So when this nephew, who has a knack for making the most unlikely things happen, showed up here under those auspices, he was so persuasive that I told him the course would take place at the first possible moment. This turned out to be at Whitsun. And so it was a lovely Whitsun celebration, a truly anthroposophical Whitsun festival.

There is something very unusual about the Koberwitz estate and its surroundings. Since the estate is one of the largest in the region, encompassing about 30,000 Morgen [ca. 7500 hectares or

18,500 acres], there is a lot of farming activity to be seen there, and we could indeed see a great deal since they were more than willing to show us. But one thing you notice as soon as you arrive in Koberwitz, or at least as soon as you go to wash your hands, is the iron stain in the sink. The soil around Koberwitz is extremely rich in iron, a fact which I believe could be utilized in a variety of ways. Iron comes to meet you everywhere. As I said in my greeting to our hosts that first day, everything in Koberwitz seems to have iron in it: the Count's nephew was iron-willed in his request when he came here at Christmas, the soil is full of iron there, and the whole atmosphere is so full of energy and purpose that I could only call our hosts the Iron Count and Countess. There was indeed something iron-like in their bearing.

With regard to the agriculture course, the first consideration was to outline what conditions are necessary in order for the various branches of agriculture to thrive. Agriculture includes some very interesting aspects - plant life, animal husbandry, forestry, gardening, and so on, but perhaps most interesting of all are the secrets of manuring, which are very real and important mysteries. We began by discussing the basic principles and relationships, which are especially relevant nowadays because under the influence of our modern philosophy of materialism, it is agriculture - believe it or not - that has deviated furthest from any truly rational principles. Indeed, not many people know that during the last few decades the agricultural products on which our life depends have degenerated extremely rapidly. In this present time of transition from the Kali Yuga to a new Age of Light, it is not only human moral development that is degenerating, but also what human activity has made of the Earth and of what lies just above the Earth. This degeneration can be confirmed statistically and is the subject of discussion in agricultural organizations, and yet it seems that nothing can be done about it. Even materialistic farmers nowadays - if they don't just live from day to day but give some thought to what is happening on a daily basis, or at least a yearly basis - can calculate in approximately how many decades their products will have degenerated to such an extent that they can no longer serve as human nourishment. It will certainly be within this century. This is a cosmic issue as well as an earthly issue. Precisely from the example of agriculture, we can see how necessary it is to derive forces from the spirit, forces that are as yet quite unknown. This is necessary not only for the sake of somehow improving agriculture, but so that human life on Earth can continue at all, since as physical beings we depend on what the Earth provides.

So you can see what a very broad theme this is. The principles given in the course - showing how plants develop under various conditions, how animals develop, the principles of manuring and of combatting weeds and pests as well as parasites and plant diseases - are all very pressing issues in agriculture today. After discussing these principles, we went on to talk about what actually needs to be done in order to reform the methods of manuring and the methods of combatting weeds,

pests, parasites, and plant diseases.

In conjunction with the course and the daily discussions that accompanied it, the anthroposophical farmers in attendance established a "Circle," as Count Keyserlingk called it, which will work very closely with the Natural Science Section here at the Goetheanum. It will be up to the Natural Science Section to work out general principles based on the geological nature of the soil and other soil characteristics, and information on the types of fodder available, sources of manure, proximity to forest, climatic conditions, and anything else that might come into consideration. Once the farmers have provided these details, the Natural Science Section will then work out guidelines for setting up further experiments so that the practical pointers given in the course and in the accompanying discussions can actually be tried out. Thus in future everyone will be able to say, "*We have tried it, and it works,*" even though some of these things may still seem strange right now. Towards this end, the farmers' Circle will work very closely with the Natural Science Section, and also with Dr. Vreede, because astronomical information will be needed too. Of course, the whole School of Spiritual Science, and the Medical Section in particular, will also be involved in a variety of ways. This is in accordance with the intentions worked out by our friends Herr Stegemann' and Count Keyserlingk during the course, and it means that the whole venture will stand a much better chance of practical success than certain other recent undertakings that were not so well managed.

One condition for success, however, was strongly and repeatedly emphasized: for the time being, the content of the course must remain the spiritual property of the Circle of practicing farmers. Although some people only casually interested in agriculture were also present at the course, they were not permitted to join the Circle and were expressly instructed not to fall into the usual anthroposophical habit of immediately talking about everything with everyone. These things will only be able to live up to their true potential if the content of the course remains in the hands of the specialists and is tested by the farmers. Some things will require four years to try out. In the meantime, the practical pointers that were given are not supposed stray outside the agricultural community. These things are meant enter right into practical life, so it does no good just to talk about them. Anyone who heard these things and goes around talking about them will be doing them an injustice.

To begin with, that's what I wanted to tell you about the agriculture course, which I believe was quite fruitful. Alongside the agriculture course itself, which took place out in Koberwitz from about quarter past eleven until three in the afternoon, many other events were going on. These other events took place in Breslau, including a eurythmy performance on Whitsunday morning which was very well attended and exceptionally well received. Each day concluded with a lecture for members of the Anthroposophical Society on questions relating to karma, which for some weeks

has been the subject of our considerations here in Dornach. In Breslau, however, the subject was condensed into nine lectures. I have already written a brief report on all these things for the newsheet included in the issue of Das Goetheanum that has just come out today.

Let me emphasize once again something that has been discernable in many different places - in Prague, in Bern, in Paris, and now again in Breslau: The new esoteric quality that now permeates the whole Anthroposophical Society since its refounding is being received in a most satisfying way, in an extraordinarily warm-hearted way. Now that the Anthroposophical Society has won its spirituality through the Christmas Conference, there is every reason to hope that the esoteric Executive in Dornach will work with this in a consciously spiritual manner. It is everywhere apparent that the hearts of the members are warmly coming to meet this stream as it flows outward.

This was especially apparent at the evening lectures for the members in Breslau. And the warm response to the Breslau and Koberwitz lectures also became evident in a spiritual-organizational way: the deep anthroposophical understanding they aroused was transformed into physical reality. I will only mention the social gathering, which took the place of a lecture on Monday evening in Breslau and brought the whole affair to a close. People had traveled to Breslau from all over - from southern Germany and western Germany, as well as from closer by - so that the halls were overflowing with members. It has been a long time since the members in Germany have experienced such an event. At the social gathering on Monday night, after very many people had already had to leave on Sunday, there were still about three hundred and seventy present, all of whom were treated to supper in Breslau by the Keyserlingks. You can just imagine the trucks arriving at a restaurant, full of everything needed to feed three hundred and seventy anthroposophists who on this evening, as I noticed as I walked around all seemed to have exceptionally good appetites. I know that it happens when you visit art museums - nothing makes you hungrier than looking at paintings - but the same thing seems to happen at anthroposophical lectures, and of course the effect had been building for ten days! But the nicest thing about it was that there was plenty to go around, and even a lot left over, in spite of the three hundred and seventy hungry anthroposophists.

The days there were framed by the agriculture course and by the lectures for anthroposophical members at the end of the day. In between, a course on artistic speech-formation was given by Frau Dr. Steiner, and there were also two meetings with the Breslau youth group and two Class Lessons. And on the last Sunday we were also given something extra. Herr Kugelmann arrived with his troupe of actors, who have taken up the suggestions given during the speech course here at the Goetheanum two years ago and are using them to develop new artistic forms for stage dramas. Their performance of Iphigenia proved to be a very promising development. The days

were full indeed, but it was good to be able to offer something to the members who had gone for so long without being able to take part in any anthroposophical gathering at all. Among all these goings-on, was still time for tours of the farms. We saw all there was to see including, of course, some signs of Central Europe's collapsing economy. The Koberwitz estate is admirably run, and farming has to continue regardless, but the economic situation in Germany is certainly terrible.

By Monday night around eleven o'clock the whole thing was over. Then on Tuesday I traveled to Lauenstein, near Jena, where a number of our younger friends are working with Dr. Ilse Knauer to establish a curative-educational home for children who are not merely retarded, but seriously constitutionally handicapped; there they will be educated and their development furthered as much as possible. As I said, this institute is just getting established. I was able to see the very first children they have admitted, and help the place get on its feet a bit.

After that I came here by way of Stuttgart. The general situation in Germany is depressing enough, but what is particularly depressing in Stuttgart is the financial situation of the Waldorf school. Educationally and spiritually, however, the school is making great progress. Just this morning I had to arrange for the two fifth grades to be split into three, so that they now have grades 5a, 5b, and 5c. The sixth grade also has three parallel classes, while most of the other grades have two classes, even the highest. There are over eight hundred students in the school. So from an educational point of view, and also spiritually, the school is thriving, but financially the situation is just about hopeless, really hopeless. Just before Christmas, the Waldorf school's monthly budget was 6-8,000 marks, but given the tremendous inflation rate in Germany, this amounts to 25-27,000 marks by now, which is a terrible state of affairs. Just recently the financial situation got so bad that we weren't able to cover 15-17,000 marks of this monthly budget; that is, we have to deal with a deficit of 15-17,000 gold marks a month. This is a very depressing state of affairs. It weighs heavily on the soul, for the school is well established, with a faculty of over forty teachers and a student body of over eight hundred. Of course, it is extremely difficult to keep a venture of that size going under the present economic conditions in Germany, which do not look like they are going to get better very soon. For the past four or five months, sacrifices on the part of some of our anthroposophical friends have enabled them to come up with about 10,000 marks a month, so we were only left to cover a deficit of 6-7,000 marks. We did manage to do this, but the truth is, my dear friends, that here in the Anthroposophical Society there are some rather impractical ways of behaving when it comes to practical matters. You need only consider what I said recently at a meeting of the Waldorf School Association - and I hope that this is spread far and wide, since it is much more important than some of the other things anthroposophists spread around. I said that since at a conservative estimate there are 10,000 anthroposophists in Germany, if they would just

take up a weekly collection and each contribute only half a mark, that would up to 5,000 marks a week. This could be managed easily enough; it is just a question of actually doing it. In the Anthroposophical Society our undertakings are so poorly organized that people who would actually gladly donate money - and I have experienced this - are often at a complete loss to know how to go about doing it. The situation of the Waldorf school is very difficult indeed, but let me take this opportunity to mention that because of the sacrifices on the part of friends here in Switzerland, some significant support has recently been forthcoming. This has been partly in the form of direct contributions, but primarily in the form of sponsorships for the children, with each sponsor paying 25-27 marks a month on behalf of one student. Still, the situation at the Waldorf School remains very depressing and the outlook remains grim. If we could come up with an additional 250 to 300 sponsors, if more contributions from members would come in, if collections were taken up, and so on, it would not be difficult at all. Part of the picture, of course, is the indescribable shortage of money in Germany at the moment. It's not that goods aren't available, but currency is so scarce that almost no circulation is possible. The economy of Central Europe is certainly in very bad shape.

That's about the extent of the report I wanted to give to you: These things all show what a potent force for our times is present in anything undertaken out of the spiritual core of the anthroposophical movement. The way the Waldorf School has developed demonstrates the strength inherent in anthroposophy, and it shows in other things as well. There is a great need for everything anthroposophy has to offer. Recently there was a course in artistic speech-formation for example, which had to be squeezed into a few hours because there was simply no more time available. But still, about 160 people registered for it. Since it is impossible to teach speech to 160 people in 5 hours the way it had to be arranged was that the thirty people or so who sat in the front got some proper instruction, while the rest only got to listen. The need for anthroposophy is obviously there as a very deep and far reaching need. We must only be prepared to activate the forces that are already available to us, so that we can really make some headway in our anthroposophical activities.

The fact is that an event like the Breslau gathering is a real tribute to all the work put into it by the Iron Count and Countess Keyserlingk, and by our old friend Herr Bartsch. Herr Bartsch was a young man when he became an anthroposophist and has been active in the anthroposophical movement almost since its inception. He has recently retired as a school principal, but still feels so youthful when he gets together with other people that at the first evening lecture he introduced me as "the father" - which he was teased about for the next ten days!

That's what I wanted to report about this gathering, which I was sure would be of interest to you because it shows the real possibility of bringing something originating in anthroposophy right into

practical life. It shows that it is possible for anthroposophy to work from both the most highly spiritual side and from the most practical. In actuality we are only working in the right way when these two sides are woven together in complete harmony. When we work anthroposophically, it is all too easy to make the mistake of not letting things on the spiritual side break through into real life, of having them remain as some kind of theory or mere faith in words - not even faith in the thought content, but faith in the words. We fail to grasp the fact that spiritual things can really enter into immediate, practical life. Just take as an example the fact that nobody understands the essence of manuring anymore. Of course, manuring is still done because old instinctive traditions are carried on, but actually nobody understands it. Except for those who have access to spiritual sources of knowledge, nobody really understands the significance of the manure for the fields, and why it is indispensable in certain areas, and how it should be handled. No one realizes today that all the mineral fertilizers are just what are contributing most to the degeneration of the products of agriculture that I mentioned earlier. Nowadays people simply think that a certain amount of nitrogen is needed for plant growth, and they in makes no difference how it's prepared or where it comes from.

Where it comes from, however, is not a matter of indifference. There is a big difference between nitrogen and nitrogen, between the dead nitrogen that is found in the air along with oxygen, and another kind of nitrogen. I am sure you wouldn't deny that there is a difference between a human corpse and a person who is alive and walking and one of them is dead, the other is alive and ensouled. The same thing applies to nitrogen and to other substances. Dead nitrogen exists; it is mixed with the oxygen in the air around us and plays a role in on entire breathing process and interaction with the air. This kind of nitrogen cannot be alive for the simple reason that if it was, if we had to live in air that was alive, we would always be unconscious. In order for people to be conscious and think clearly, the air they breathe has to be dead; both its nitrogen and its oxygen have to be dead. But the nitrogen in the soil, the nitrogen that must enter the soil with the manure, this nitrogen must be formed under the influence of the entire heavens; this nitrogen must be alive. Thus there are two kinds of nitrogen: the nitrogen above ground, which is dead, and the nitrogen below ground, which is alive.

That is the way it is with everything. In the course of this materialistic age of ours, we've lost the knowledge of what it takes to continue to care for the natural world. The most important things are no longer known. Because of certain healthy instincts, things are continued, but these instincts are gradually disappearing; the traditions are vanishing. People fertilize scientifically now; and the grains potatoes and everything else become ever worse. People know they confirm it statistically, yet today there is only resistance to practical measures that derive from what can be gained in spiritual vision.

It is tremendously important to have some insight when to things like this. I have said many times that if you have a needle, which always points in the same direction - one magnetic north, the other end toward magnetic south – people would find it childish if you said the reason for this lay in the needle itself. They would tell you that it is the Earth's magnetic north pole and south pole that determine the needle's alignment. You have to look away from the needle itself and take into account the entire Earth in order to explain how the needle behaves. People will think you are quite childish if you believe that the cause is inherent in the needle. But it is equally childish to believe that what you see in a plant depends on what science discovers in the immediate surroundings of that plant. In fact, the whole starry heaven is involved in the growth of plants. We have to know this and start to take it seriously. We have to convince ourselves that it is just as childish to discuss botany the way we do nowadays, as it is to talk about a compass needle determining its alignment all by itself.

And there are certain things that can be comprehended by any educated person, if they have a sense for at least the most elementary conditions of anthroposophy. What I indicated for the first time last year in Penmaenmawr is extremely important. People nowadays don't even know how human beings and animals are nourished, let alone plants. They think nourishment consists in our eating the substances that are around us. First these go into the mouth, and then into the stomach. Then some of them are deposited in the body and some of them are excreted. Next the deposited portion is used up and also gets excreted, after which it is again replaced. People conceive of nutrition in the most superficial fashion. But the fact is that the foodstuffs taken in through the stomach do not build up our bones, muscles, and other tissues - they only build up our head. Everything that enters the body by way of the digestive organs, and is then metabolized and distributed, only provides materials to be deposited in the head, in what belongs to the nerve-sense system. On the other hand, the substances we need for building up our limbs or our metabolic organs - the long bones in our legs or arms, or our intestines, for instance - these substances do not come from the food taken in by way of our mouth and stomach; instead they are absorbed from our whole environment by means of our breathing, and even via our sensory organs. Within each human being, the following process is continually taking place: What is taken in through our stomach streams upward and is put to use in our head while what comes from the air and the rest of our surroundings is taken in through our head - our nerve-sense system - and then streams downward to build up the organs of our digestive system or our limbs. So, if you want to know what kind of substance your big toe is made up of, you must not look to your food. On the other hand if you ask where the substance of your brain comes from, then have to look to your food. However, regarding the substance of your big toe, insofar as this is not sense-perceptible substance (to that it too is nourished via the stomach), but rather insofar as it consists of framework-substance, that is, insofar as it is pervaded by warmth and so on, this substance is

taken in through your breathing and through your senses, partially even through your eyes. As I have often mentioned, these substances flow through the organs in a seven-year cycle, so that as far as our metabolic-limb system is concerned, we are built up out of cosmic substance; only our nerve-sense system is built up out of earthly substance.

This fact is of such fundamental significance that the human and animal physical body cannot be rightly assessed unless it is known. Modern science, however, does not tell us about it at all, it doesn't even give us the ways and means to discover something like this. It is impossible to know this through present-day science; with the methods science uses, it cannot possibly come to something like this. It is impossible, absolutely out of the question.

These are the kinds of things we have to consider seriously. They account for the separation between theory and practice that exists today. Practical activity nowadays is an empty routine devoid of spirit; but anything that truly does come from the spirit is also always preeminently practical.