

THE BIRTH OF THE BIODYNAMIC MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN

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After Dr. Steiner had given the Agriculture Course at Koberwitz, Count Keyserlingk wished to carry the new principles and methods out into the world. He prepared a memorandum in considerable detail to present to the various agricultural authorities in Germany but for all his ability, will and devotion he was unable to make headway; then quite suddenly he died during the Christmas nights of 1928. It was he who said that with these methods we must create green islands in the deserts which will be brought about by modern agriculture.

Earlier in 1928 Daniel Dunlop, the convenor of the World Anthroposophical Conference held at Friends House in London, invited Count Keyserlingk to come and speak of these new inspirations for agriculture. He was unable to accept, but sent in his place Dr. Carl Alexander Mier (or Mirbt as he then was). And so began Biodynamic work in this country. The following year, again at Dunlop's instigation, Dr. Mier and his family moved to England and the Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation (the forerunner of the B.D.A.A.) came into being. Some members will remember among those most active at this time Mrs. Pease, Miss Cross, George Adams and Maurice Wood. It was Maurice Wood, who began in 1929, to convert Sleights Farm at Huby in Yorkshire to Biodynamic methods—the first B.D. farm in the United Kingdom. Here the first Biodynamic wheat was grown, and in 1942 the Huby mill was set up.

Dr. Mier had two most valuable qualities—enthusiasm and a warm friendly approach to all he met. In those early days he met and interested a number of well-known agriculturists, among others Sir George Stapledon, Sir Albert Howard, Laurence Easterbrook, Duncan Skilbeck, who later became head of Wye College, S. L. Bensusan, the writer, and Alma Baker, who farmed extensively in New Zealand and Malaya. He struck up a close friendship with Baker and, if I remember rightly, helped him to write both his short books, *The Soil and Its Products* and *Peace with the Soil*. Of the former, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, the then (1938) Minister of Agriculture, wrote to Alma Baker "I have read this paper with the greatest possible interest and do realise that it is a document of first-class importance." Both publications were distributed far and wide—some 50,000 copies, I believe—to Ministers, Members of Parliament and agricultural authorities throughout the English-speaking world. Then, again through the agency of Dr. Mier, S. L. Bensusan collaborated with Baker in writing the much larger volume *The Labouring Earth* which was also distributed widely. To me this book is an outstanding example of how one man with knowledge and technique can enter into the soul of another who has not these abilities—so that an impassioned urgent book was written by one out of the very soul of the other. They were both elderly men. Baker being in his eighties. Lord Addison wrote a warmly appreciative introduction. Then the war was upon us and nothing outwardly came of all these labours.

Then came L. Kolisko's *Agriculture of Tomorrow*, a book she and her husband Dr. E. Kolisko intended to write together. Owing to his sudden death she had to complete it on her own, but she nevertheless considered it their joint work. (They had settled in England in 1936.) It was finished early in the war but not published until 1946. It brought cosmology to the aid of agricultural science, giving chapter and verse for the activity of cosmic forces in earthly matter, and, in particular, the growing plant. Once again, there was little positive response, which is perhaps not surprising as its real value is not so immediately understood. Dr. Pfeiffer's two books appeared, the one on *Soil Fertility*, and the other, *The Earth's Face*, prefigured the ecological approach to the landscape. This second book had an introduction by Sir George Stapledon, who wrote with warm approval.

Meanwhile the Bio-Dynamic Agricultural Association had come into being and was quietly developed by those relatively few people who supported it. Rudolf Steiner's name and these methods gradually

became increasingly known throughout the world.

It is extraordinary how far deterioration can go before governments or even individual people are prepared to think new thoughts or alter their ways. This is so in every domain of life and nowhere has it been more clearly demonstrated than in man's treatment of nature. The warning signs were evident before the First War, but sixty years have had to elapse before there has been any general concern. There are still many who shut their eyes and shout " scare- mongers! " Meanwhile the position has become progressively more dangerous. However, now many people are very much concerned, many ideas for which in the past there was no interest, let alone understanding, are now listened to and often lead to serious discussion. The suggestion that plant growth, or indeed all the kingdoms of nature are subject to cosmic forces is no longer so strange. I remember, in the thirties, attending a lecture by Mrs. Kolisko on the moon and plant growth, and reading afterwards the headline in an evening newspaper - "Moon worshippers meet in London drawing room " ! We have moved a long way since then, though there is still a terrible inertia towards new ideas. They percolate through very slowly; it seems that positive change comes only through catastrophe and suffering. The fact that cosmic forces are forces of soul and spirit is still denied by a great many people; it is nonetheless the truth and will eventually be realised.

I have mentioned only a very few people and few events in our history, but in particular those whose books carried these ideas out to as wide a public as possible and who possibly may be forgotten. It is good that in this fiftieth anniversary year a book that covers the whole range of Bio-Dynamics has appeared in Germany. It is *Biologische Landwirtschaft* by H. Koepf, B. Petterson and W. Schaumann. We hope it will soon be translated and made available to the English speaking world.

Although we may see little result after our greatest labours we must remember that nothing is ever lost and the brave attempt has its consequences as surely as the sun rises.