

WHITSUN-1924

Dr. C. A. Mier

During the first nine months of 1924, Rudolf Steiner gave over four hundred lectures. Many of these were courses of the utmost significance not only for the lives of the listeners, but for whole vocations. One can even say they created vocations, they defined spheres of human activities hitherto unrecognised and even now not yet always fully grasped in their full implications. These nine months, fifty years ago, were the culminating period in Rudolf Steiner's work as lecturer; in the remaining six months of his earthly life he still wrote a great deal, but could no longer address an audience. And in all this pressure and intensity we must remember an endless number of meetings and personal talks, and journeys made by train and car, not by plane. He made frequent trips to Stuttgart and there were separate journeys from Dornach to Berne, to Paris and Prague, to Arnheim in Holland, to Torquay and London and to Breslau and Koberwitz in what was then Eastern Germany and is now part of Poland.

We stand in amazement before the sheer volume of work in these last nine months of his public activity, and have the feeling that everything he did, the themes he chose and the way he dealt with them was significant; nothing was left to chance, all was meaningful and well may it be that even after fifty years we have not grasped the full meaning

It is against this background that something is to be said about Whitsun, 1924. From Whit-Saturday, 7th June, to Monday, 16th June, Rudolf Steiner gave the Course on Agriculture at Koberwitz, near Breslau. In the evenings nine lectures were given in Breslau on "Karma and its Formative Influence upon Human Destiny", a theme on which he had lectured all that last summer in Dornach and elsewhere. A course on agriculture had for some years been asked for by quite a few farmers but it was not until Count Carl von Keyserlingk joined forces with those others that Rudolf Steiner agreed. He may have recognised that now the right vessel was offered to receive what he wanted to give. Count and Countess Keyserlingk acted as hosts not only to Rudolf and Marie Steiner, some leading anthroposophists and a group of Dornach Eurythmists, but to all those admitted to the course. With few exceptions, only farmers and gardeners, all members of the Anthroposophical Society, were allowed to be present.

Perhaps a word may be said about the Keyserlingks and about Koberwitz. At that time Count Carl von Keyserlingk was in charge of all the agricultural estates and larger and smaller farms belonging to a firm called "Von Rath, Schoeller and von Skene" which had also substantial industrial interests elsewhere. Countess Keyserlingk came from the von Skene branch. Castle Koberwitz was the official residence of the Keyserlingks, shared with a professor of agriculture working for the same firm but not at all in sympathy with Count Keyserlingk's ideas and ideals. Koberwitz is situated some twelve to fifteen miles south of Breslau (now Wroclaw). It may be added that soon after 1924 the differences between Count Keyserlingk and the management of the firm became so great that he had to leave, and he acquired the estates of Sasterhausen and Raaben, not very far away. It was in Sasterhausen that I was able to meet him for the last time in summer, 1928. In summer, 1972, my

wife Gertrude and I were able to visit Koberwitz again. It is rather the worse for wear, but now in good hands. We met the director of the State Maize Breeding Station, who lives and has his laboratories in the castle. He was very interested when we told him how the different rooms had been used before. He has been given funds to restore the fabric of the castle and is engaged in writing its history. He is also warmly interested in what has become known as the Koberwitz Impulse, and we hope to meet him again this year.

But now back to Whitsun, 1924. This is not the place to report on the content of the eight lectures, they must be studied in detail and in depth. When during the course Rudolf Steiner one morning met Count Keyserlingk and asked him how he liked the lectures, the latter with great politeness (which never left him) and still greater sincerity and simplicity said: "I do not understand anything". And he possibly voiced what many felt, what many a reader now feels at first reading. It was such an utterly new way in which Rudolf Steiner spoke. The reader today must never lose sight of the fact that these lectures were given fifty years ago. To characterise the situation: When I came to England in 1928, one could not then nor for some years afterwards, take for granted that an audience of farmers or gardeners understood what was meant by "compost" or "organic manure", to name only two concepts completely familiar today.

What was so fundamentally new was that Rudolf Steiner placed the whole subject of the course into an incredibly wide and new setting. He showed how farming is interwoven with the whole of human life, that the farmer's work is not merely concerned with soil, plants and animals, but that cosmic heights and earthly depths, the whole wide range of cosmic and terrestrial forces is involved. And we must learn the ABC of this new language, and that is difficult, is painful, takes time.

There were many in the audience then, as there are many readers of the Koberwitz Course today who looked for simple instructions about what to do, how to cope with this or that practical problem. In a way, these lectures are full of what one calls "practical advice, if only one is willing to follow Rudolf Steiner's advice seriously and exactly.

The great lesson of the last fifty years is this: We must bear in mind that the lectures at Koberwitz were given in 1924, i.e. after the Christmas Foundation Meeting, when Rudolf Steiner re-founded the Anthroposophical Society in the hearts of its members. From that event onwards, all his words, spoken and written, address themselves to man as a thinking, feeling and willing being. One sees so clearly how attempts to implement the Koberwitz lectures were doomed to fail where these three soul qualities were not in harmony; but where conscious efforts were made to take the content of these lectures as an outcome of anthroposophically orientated spiritual science, astonishing results were achieved.

In more recent years many friends working in this field have recognised the importance of the human factor, the inner effort of the farmer or gardener, the social aspect both of farm and garden, and the relation between producer and consumer. Where these factors are tackled quite consciously, the purely practical aspects can thrive. There are many passages in the Agricultural Course which one has not taken

seriously enough, which contain a whole programme how to act (e.g. the reference to stirring and how this problem can be solved by making it a social event...)

One can also look upon the Koberwitz Course from quite a different aspect. Today, in the mid-seventies, we are very familiar with 'ecology, with Friends of the Earth, with Whole Food and a host of concepts or at least words pointing towards a wider, more comprehensive, often a saner, at times even less egoistic approach to our surroundings. However, we must admit if we are honest that much of all this is based on and caused by fear and is an expression of the crassest egoism, eat your way to good health and avoid pain and postpone death. We see all this happening around us, are even quite pleased about it at times. But in all seriousness, we must say to ourselves: if only the world had taken note of what Rudolf Steiner said at Whitsun, 1924, we would by now be much further on. I do not accuse. We are all at fault. We who knew the Koberwitz lectures should have worked much harder and have made our voices heard more widely. Those who are in authority" in this case mainly on the thrones of science have certainly retarded progress and have done so against better knowledge. It should have been their duty to know, but with the help of that dreadful and so very powerful weapon "Silence" they have fought against progress. The name of Rudolf Steiner, and such concepts as bio-dynamic", were taboo. And yet it was Rudolf Steiner who supplied as long ago as 1924 a true basis of a sound ecology, of a treatment of soil, plant and animals in accordance with the needs and dignity of man, bearing in mind his responsibility towards his fellow human beings, towards the creatures below him, and the Divine World within and above him. And Rudolf Steiner established this, and gave fundamental orientation, within the compass of eight lectures.

Lest this may seem a somewhat bitter note to end with, let us look once again at the diary of Rudolf Steiner's travels in 1924. On Tuesday, 17th June, he addressed a group of young people, and this Koberwitz Youth Address was an inspiration for those present that morning, and still fifty years later it fires our enthusiasm and helps us recognise our true task on earth. Dr. Guenther Wachsmuth, who accompanied Rudolf Steiner on his journey home, tells how in the train, after a long silence, he suddenly with joyful and strong emphasis said: Now we have accomplished also this important work". And Wachsmuth adds that he has seldom seen Rudolf Steiner after the completion of a lecture course or the like so joyfully moved and so visibly happy.