

DAVID CLEMENT AND THE B.D.A.A.

John Soper

It is quite impossible to separate the history of the bio-dynamic movement in Britain from the life and personality of David Clement. But as the former was already established before David met it and as there are probably only a few readers left who know about its origin, it may be appropriate to go right back to its arrival here.

In 1928 Mr. D. Dunlop, who had met Rudolf Steiner during his visits to this country, organised a conference at Friends House in London at which experts from the continent were invited to give accounts of activities there which had arisen as a result of Steiner's teachings. He had hoped that Count Keyserlingk would speak about bio-dynamics: the Count could not come and he sent Carl Mirbt (later to change his name to Mier) in his place. Dunlop was so impressed that next year he invited Carl to come over here with his family and make a start.

The Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation

He began work on the estate of Mrs. Marna Pease in Northumberland and the first preparations were made there. Mrs. Marna Pease soon came to live with her sister Mrs. Merry at the Old Mill House at Bray near Maidenhead. Carl Mier and his family also moved there. The garden was transformed by the intensive use of the preparations and soon became the Mecca for gardeners from many parts of the world. Mrs. Pease was chosen as leader and chairman of a new organisation known as the Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation (A.A.F.), a post which she held till 1946 when David took over from her. Carl Mier became the secretary until the outbreak of war: he was then conscripted and given the task of monitoring all German broadcasts.

With a view to increasing anthroposophical activity in the practical sphere Dunlop also invited Mr. F. Geuter to start work with mentally handicapped children: in this he was greatly assisted by Michael Wilson and his mother, and in 1929 a house was bought in Selly Oak, Birmingham. But it was soon filled to capacity and the demand grew. At this critical stage a large house, Clent Grove, came on the market and was eagerly snapped up: Fried Geuter, his wife and family moved in with their group of co-workers (by this time including David).

David had met anthroposophy by chance while still at school. He and his friend Adam Bittleston went up to Oxford together in 1930 with a determination to explore every chance of enlarging their knowledge of Steiner's ideas. In the meanwhile David's brother had started to follow the family tradition of a career in the army, but had met Fried Geuter and had agreed to join him as soon as possible; sadly, he died in India. So David at once gave up all prospects of getting a degree and in January 1932 took his brother's place at Selly Oak. The days started very early with a study of philosophy of Freedom which David maintains has stood him in good stead all his life. At Clent Grove Mrs. Maria Geuter (later to be *the author of Herbs in Nutrition*) was in charge of the kitchen where she worked with a number of students. I

Broome Farm

In 1933 Broome Farm came up for sale, and David was able to buy it with a timely legacy in order to supply

Sunfield with biodynamic milk and other produce. Meanwhile David had fallen in love with Hilla Geuter, but they had to wait some years before she was old enough to marry him.

Carl Mier moved to manage the farm, but was not very successful when directly faced with a purely practical task; after three years he was replaced by Derek Duffy. Derek had quite recently come across anthroposophy in Birmingham and was a persuasive talker. He took on several trainees in bio-dynamics, developed a service scheme, issued The Sunfield Agricultural Newsletter, ran an experimental garden and laboratory; but with all this activity the farm was sadly neglected. So in 1940, soon after their eventual marriage, Hilla and David decided to live on the farm, even though David had no previous farming experience.

One of David and Hilla's main efforts in those early years was to become part of the local farming community; their dairy herd was awarded second prize in the local competition, and it was not long before David found himself chairman of the local branch of the N.F.U. His chief problem, however, was to get the farm into "better heart". In this he was helped by Willy Wright who was employed by the Ministry of Agriculture to implement the wartime drive to increase food production. It was due to his good offices that the farm was not taken over by the government. At first artificial fertilisers were used to try and improve the phosphate and potash status, but David used very little artificial nitrogen.

Broome Farm itself, comprising about 250 acres, has some disadvantages. It is mostly situated on a terminal moraine and has no natural reserve fertility. The soil is extremely "greedy". It was once described as being able to swallow a flock mattress without leaving a trace! Even so it varies considerably from field to field. It needs continual boosting even to obtain moderate crop yields; but, possibly due to bio-dynamic treatment, crop quality is usually exceptionally high, especially in potatoes. Although the farmyard manure has always been treated with the bio-dynamic compost preparations, it has only been possible to dress each field about once every ten years; humus has to be built up from short term leys. Spraying preparations 500 and 501 was naturally irregular on such a large area until quite recently, when Tim, the Clements' youngest son, came on the scene. (The two elder sons had both shown little real interest in farming bio-dynamically.) With the help and encouragement of George Corrin who modified an Australian stirring machine holding 60 gallons, enough to cover a 20-acre field, he devised a spraying programme so that he could spray a field while the next batch of spray was being stirred in the machine.

The first bio-dynamic farm in the U.K. was Sleights Farm at Huby near Leeds, owned by Maurice Wood. He started to convert it in 1929 after joining the A.A.F. He was a man of many parts. and was determined that his precious wheat should be milled in such a way that it lost none of its excellent quality. His geological experience enabled him to find the best granite for his purpose and he personally carved out the grooves in the mill stones. Alas, like so many perfectionist projects, it died out with its author, though some copies of his mill are still functional.

In 1936 Dr. and Mrs. Kolisko came from the continent to settle in Gloucestershire and to continue the scientific work they had been doing under the personal guidance of Dr. Steiner himself. Their experiments covered a very wide range, mainly directed to demonstrate the effects of heavenly bodies and forces both on inert matter and on living plants. Owing to the untimely death of her husband Mrs. Kolisko was left on

her own to round off their work and eventually to publish their results in book form under the title Agriculture of To-morrow. Apart from the effects of the moon on plant growth, very little has since been done here except perhaps by L. Edwards. Much development still awaits tomorrow! Possibly in response to Rudolf Steiner's address to the Koberwitz gathering (p. 57 of the Agriculture course), the Experimental Circle was formed and monthly meetings were held to study selected lectures; but as in its German counterpart, little if any actual experimental work has been instigated. There was a possibility that this body might become the spiritual organ of the Association, but it never attained such a function. More recently, however, there are indications that it might be moving in this direction.

Birth of the B.D.A.A.

In 1935 there was a rift in the Council at the Goetheanum in Dornach and Ita Wegman with her followers were "excommunicated". The rift was reflected here in Britain, and as agricultural branch arose in Kings Langley, where Miss Cross with Lady Mackinnon and others formed the Bio-dynamic Association. It had its own journal and was regularly advised and visited by Dr Pfeiffer. The Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation continued to be run from Bray and, together with the Anthroposophical Society in Great Britain, associated itself with Dr. Ita Wegman. From this time on David worked his hardest to bring about a reconciliation. But it was not until 1944 that he finally succeeded and the present B.D.A.A. was born, with David as chairman and Doris Davy as editor of the new journal Star and Furrow. This was the first healing of the rift worldwide.

With the amalgamation of the two associations the management of the BD Trust was taken over. This Trust had been set up by Lady Mackinnon to hold property and investments and receive legacies. but unfortunately it had never been registered as a charity. It became a useful vehicle for financing publications. But the bookkeeping got rather complicated even for our auditors. Very recently the Trust was dissolved and the funds went into the Association account.

After the war the Miers, following a year as guests of Commander and Mrs. Brocklebank, moved into Clent Cottage (in fact quite a large house) and Carl established the Association office in an outbuilding, while his wife Gertrude made and distributed the preparations. This arrangement suited David who was able to keep a close eye on things from Broome only a mile or two away. Carl was a very methodical person and soon had loose-leaf records of every member with their subscription payments and other personal details. He also made full use of the newly purchased duplicator. In 1955 the Miers decided to join Camphill and went to Botton where he soon found it impossible to continue his duties as secretary.

Botton, the first Camphill Village founded a year or two earlier by Dr. Karl König, was for mentally handicapped adults; it soon comprised three small farms each of which was managed by a trained bio-dynamic farmer, and they made their own preparations. The movement has continued to expand all over the British Isles, and indeed the world, nearly always with some land on which to grow the bio-dynamic food so essential to assist their healing work.

The Office Moves to Broome Farm

David was now (1957) in a fix: but Lady Chance, who had long associations with Sunfield and the A.A.F.,

stepped into the breach. Out of her own resources she built an office in a corner of her garden at Holy Cross, Clent. It did not last for long as, following her divorce, Cynthia Chance moved to Wales. From there she continued to send out regular newsletters, arrange BD conferences and the memorable Michaelmas festivals at Rudolf Steiner House, London. Again this arrangement was short-lived, and David had no other option but to move everything to Broome where there was a bungalow behind the main house. Maria Geuter had come to live in it soon after the break-up of her marriage. For a time she and two or three helpers grew plants for bio-dynamic seeds and to accommodate their work a large room was built on at the back, but it had become disused when the seed project was taken over by Evetts, and was ready to receive the main office paraphernalia when it arrived from Wales in the early 1960s. Here it remained for about 20 years.

George Corrin accepted the task of making the preparations at the farm: he had already learnt the details when working with the Miers. But David had to bear the burden of all the administrative work single handed except for a typist who came in once a week. Quite soon however there was a meeting of the Experimental Circle in London which I attended while still on retirement leave from the tropics. David was there and despairingly asked if I could not help him out by becoming treasurer. I accepted the challenge though I could see that my living in Hampshire would present problems.

At that time George Corrin working with George Adams had prepared a new translation of the Agriculture lectures, and George Corrin had obtained copies of Steiner's blackboard drawings which he (George) coloured and got plates made for printing. Permission for the publication was obtained from Dornach, and funds had been raised through personal loans and gifts. Previously the course, consisting of typed sheets bound in hard covers and each copy numbered, had only been available to selected members on loan. Such were the conditions imposed on Carl by Dornach originally, but now they had relented and the English-speaking world could freely study this important material.

To help with the preparation making George enlisted the services of one who was to become a key worker for many years at headquarters- Jo Willetts. David had taken her on for light work in the farm garden, but she soon found more congenial tasks all of which she undertook with meticulous care. She made up all orders for preparations, packed them, made out the invoices and posted them; she did the same for book orders and made it her business to keep the office clean and tidy.

George Corrin and Carl first met soon after the war when George was looking for something better and more spiritually inspiring than the work of an agricultural labourer. Carl recognised his qualities and took him under his wing but refused to try and train him as a field adviser — this he must learn from his own experience. In addition to his innate love for the land in all its manifestations, George had an inventive mechanical flair for labour-saving devices, both of which qualities were invaluable assets in his future advisory work. David in addition to his farm and office work has continued his connection with Sunfield as a director and as a trustee of Elmfield School. Not content with all this he has been involved with the running of the Clent and Stourbridge group of the Anthroposophical Society. He lives up to one of his favourite Steiner verses “We are not granted a rest on any step...

(To be continued) ...

