

ADDRESS TO MEMBERS OF THE AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENTAL CIRCLE

Koberwitz Wednesday, June 11, 1924

A resolution to form the “Experimental Circle of anthroposophical farmers of the Anthroposophical Society “ was read out.

Dr Steiner then spoke.

First of all, let me express my profound satisfaction that the Experimental Circle proposed by Count Keyserlingk has now been formed and has also been expanded to include all those concerned with agriculture who were present at the first meeting¹. This all began when Herr Stegemann, in response to various requests, expressed his willingness to share something of what he and I had discussed over the past few years regarding all kinds of guidelines for agriculture, as well as something of his own admirable efforts to try out some of these things on his farm. This led to the discussion between our good friend Count Keyserlingk and Herr Stegemann, which in turn led to a conversation in which they formulated the resolution that was read aloud just now. That is how we have been brought together again today.

It is deeply gratifying that a group of people have now come together as a carrier for the experiments involved with the guidelines to be given here in these lectures, so that these guidelines - and they cannot be more than that - can be confirmed and demonstrated in practice. One thing we must be aware of, however, on the occasion of such an auspicious beginning, is the need to make use of the experience we have gained from our efforts in other practical fields within the anthroposophical movement; namely, to avoid the mistakes that became so apparent during the years when the transition was made from anthroposophical activity that was more central, so to speak, to activity that was more peripheral, that is to say, to the introduction of *what anthroposophy* can and should be in the various fields of *practical endeavor*. In particular, of course, our experience in *introducing anthroposophy* into the general scientific world will be of *relevance to the* work that this agricultural community will have to *accomplish*.

You see, when it came to that transition, the people who had in their way been faithfully and devotedly administering our central anthroposophical activity, and those who were standing on the periphery and wanting to apply it to a particular area of practical activity, generally did not see eye to eye. We experienced this particularly when working together with our scientific research

¹ The First meeting took place on Sunday June 8 in the 'Bockschen Saal in Breslau – no transcript available but [Manfred Klett](#) seems to have heard some stories from there. He said: “The foundation was agreed after a very sharp discussion between Count Keyserlingk and Ernst Stegemann. The later put the main emphasis on the esoteric side, while count Keyserlingk preferred a practical exoteric orientation.”

institutes. On the one hand there are the anthroposophists as such, those who live within this core of anthroposophy and who live it as their philosophy of life, perhaps even carrying it with inner intensity every minute of the day. These are the anthroposophists who love and live anthroposophy and make it the content of their lives. Usually, though not always, they think something significant has been accomplished when one or more persons have been won over to anthroposophy. In terms of outward activity, all they aspire to achieve is to win people over, and they seem to think that people must let themselves be won over absolutely - university professors of natural science, for instance, who are in the midst of their scientific work. Anthroposophists of this kind, with all their love and good intentions, will naturally imagine that from one day to the next they can also completely win over farmers, along with their land and everything on it and everything the farm produces for market. That is the opinion of the "central" anthroposophists. They are mistaken, of course. And though many of them claim to be faithful followers of mine, it is often the case that they are faithful followers at heart but are deaf to what I have to say at decisive moments. For instance, they don't hear it when I say it is naïve to think that a professor or other scientist nowadays can be won over to anthroposophy from one day to the next. That doesn't work. Such a person has to make a complete break with twenty or thirty years of his or her past, and this means leaving behind a chasm. Things in life must be accepted as they are. Anthroposophists often think that thinking is all there is to life. But that is not true. These things must be said, so that they may also fall on fertile

On the other hand, those with good and faithful hearts who want anthroposophy to unite with some field of practical endeavour - perhaps even a scientific one - did not make things quite clear themselves when they began working within anthroposophy. They always proceeded from the mistaken opinion that they should do things in exactly the same manner as science has done them up to now. For example, there are a number of perfectly nice anthroposophists working with us who are active in the field of medicine who believed that physicians should apply what comes from anthroposophical medicine in the same way that they had practiced medicine before. (In this regard, Dr. Wegman is a notable exception; she saw very clearly what was necessary within our Society.) So, what did we experience as a result? Here I am speaking not so much of spreading the central core of anthroposophy, but of spreading anything anthroposophical out into the world. We experienced that the people said: "Well, we've been doing this all along, we are the experts here, we can master this with our methods, and we can certainly pass judgment on this. What you bring is in contradiction to what we have found with our methods." Thus they say it is wrong. We experienced that when we try simply to imitate their methods, the scientists say that they can do it better. And in these cases there is no doubt that they can, if only because in recent years science has been consumed by methodology. Methods are all that remain of the sciences. They don't address their subject any more; they have been consumed by their methods. Nowadays we have

research, but without any content. Thus we experienced that these scientists with their highly refined methods were furious when anthroposophists came along and did not do anything other than use these same methods. What does this go to show? It shows that in spite of all the nice things we could do, and the excellent investigations carried out by the Biological Institute, the only thing that came of it was that people were furious when scientists gave lectures based on these same methods. They were furious because they heard things that they were used to hearing in *different contexts*. But we also experienced something else, which is important: Some of our scientists at last brought themselves to depart from the methods they had been copying from others; that is, they used them only half the time, so that in the first part of their lectures they were thoroughly scientific in applying the methods of science. Their audiences became furious: "What are they doing meddling in our business? These impertinent amateurs are meddling in our science!" in the second part, when the speakers got down to real life, presenting it not as something derived in the old way, but as anthroposophical content derived from super-earthly worlds, the same people who had been furious suddenly became terribly attentive, were eager for more, and even began to get enthusiastic! They liked the anthroposophy well enough, but they couldn't stand the sloppy patchwork of anthroposophy and science. That will not bring us forward at all.

I am therefore very pleased that as a result of Count Keyserlingk's initiative, the professional farming community has chosen to join forces with the Natural Science Section that has now been founded in Dornach. Like everything else that is being presented here, the Natural Science Section is a result of the Christmas Conference. That means that what should be coming from Dornach, will be coming: we will find the most exact scientific methods and guidelines out of anthroposophy itself.

But I cannot agree, of course, with what Count Keyserlingk said about this professional community being merely an organ of implementation. You will soon realize that the kind of guidelines and indications offered by Dornach will require those who wish to participate, to be full-fledged co-workers at their various posts. In fact, the basis for the work we will have to do in Dornach, will first have to come from you. This will become apparent by the end of the lectures when the first guidelines will have been given. These guidelines will be given in such a way that only on the basis of the answers we get from you, will we in Dornach be able to do something. So from the very beginning, we will need co-workers who are as active as possible, not just people who implement what is proposed.

As a case in point, take what Count Keyserlingk and I have discussed several times: the fact that a farm is always an individuality in the sense that one farm is never the same as another. The climate and soil conditions are the very foundation of a farm's individuality. A farm in Silesia is not

the same as one in Thuringia or southern Germany. They really are individualities. From the perspective of anthroposophy, generalities and abstractions are of no value, least of all when we want to tackle something practical. It does no good to talk in generalities about practical things like farms. In general, if you keep to things that are concrete, you will be able to figure out what measures need to be taken. Naturally, you must take what is presented in these lectures and use it as you do the letters of the alphabet, because only in bringing things together will you find what you are expecting.

If we want to speak about practical matters based on this group of sixty co-workers, then it really is a matter of coming up with practical advice and guidance for these particular sixty farmers. So the first thing to do will be to pull together what we already know. Only then can the very first series of experiments come about; then we will have to get down to real practical work. For that we will need members who are as active as possible. In fact, that's what we need in the Anthroposophical Society as a whole – real practical people who will not be deterred by the fact that real life involves things that cannot be accomplished overnight. When the "central" anthroposophists, as I called them, think that a professor or a farmer or a doctor can embrace anthroposophical convictions from one day to the next, after having been immersed for decades in a specialized milieu, they are certainly mistaken. This will become clear enough in the case of farming. It is possible that anthroposophical farmers, if they were idealistic enough, could switch over to an entirely anthroposophical way of farming quite quickly, say from their twenty-ninth to their thirtieth year; but what about the fields, and the whole organization of the farm, what about all the people who mediate between the farm and the consumers, and so on. They cannot be made into anthroposophists from one year to the next

Once you begin to realize this, you can easily lose heart. But that is just the point, that you not lose heart, that you realize that momentary successes are less important than persevering work. Just do as is possible in the moment. One person will be able to do more another less. In the end you will actually be able to accomplish more – paradoxical as this may sound - if the acreage you start out working according to our methods is more limited. After all, there's less to ruin if you are dealing with a smaller area! On the other hand, any improvements that result from the anthroposophical guidelines will take effect very quickly, since you don't have to change as much. Thus also the positive effects will be more apparent than they would on a larger area.

But in a sphere of life that is as practical as farming is, there must really be agreement on things if this group is to have success. And here we have a peculiar fact. The disagreement between Count Keyserlingk and Herr Stegemann at the first meeting has been the occasion for much good-natured discussion. I myself almost began to wonder on that evening whether we shouldn't fetch someone or other - perhaps the anthroposophical Executive Council - in order to

keep the peace! Gradually, however, I became convinced of something entirely different, namely, that what occurred there - despite the rough exterior – was actually the foundation for an intimate tolerance among farmers, for an intimate attitude of "live and let live" amongst colleagues. It is actually true that farmers, more so than many other people, need to protect their skin, since all too often it happens that outsiders interfere in things that only farmers can understand. But beneath this exterior, farmers are fundamentally quite tolerant. These are the kinds of things that must be properly appreciated in this group, and I comment on it here only because I really feel it is necessary that we start off on the right foot.

So let me once again express my profound satisfaction with what has been accomplished here today. I believe that we have taken the experiences of the Anthroposophical Society into account, that what has been inaugurated will prove to be a great blessing, and that we can count on Dornach's energetic cooperation with everyone who wants to be an active participant in this work. We have every reason to be pleased with the beginning we have made here in Koberwitz although Count Keyserlingk keeps referring to the burden I have taken on in coming here, I would like to ask - without meaning to start another heated discussion! - just what kind of effort have I had to make? All I had to do was get here and enjoy the best and most pleasant conditions, with everyone else doing the difficult parts. All I have to do is lecture each day - though I do have a healthy respect for this, since it is breaking new ground. My trouble is not so great. When I see all the trouble that Count Keyserlingk and his whole household have gone to with so many of us descending on them, all the countless details that had to be arranged in order for us to be here together, then I must say this seems to me to completely dwarf my coming here and setting myself down in the midst of everything once it was ready. I cannot agree with the Count on this point. Therefore, please direct to him whatever appreciation or gratitude you may feel for the fact that this course is now taking place, and please also keep in mind that if he had not thought and sent his representative to Dornach, if he had not had such an iron sense of purpose, it is likely – considering all that has to be undertaken from Dornach - that this course of lectures in this easternmost corner of the country would never have taken place. I cannot agree at all that the feelings of gratitude should be directed to me - they really belong in the fullest sense to Count Keyserlingk and his entire household.

That is what I wanted to interpose into the discussion.

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For the time being, there is not too much more to be said, except that from each one of you who wants to work in this Circle, we in Dornach will need a description of your farm in terms of what is above ground and what is below ground, and how these two things are working together. After all, if our advice is to be of any use, we need to know your circumstances quite

exactly. What is meant here is what you know from your daily practice much better than we can know in Dornach: the soil structure of your individual farm, the amount and type of woodland, the crops that have been grown on the farm in the *last few years*, how the yields were, and so on. In short, everything that farmers themselves need to know in order to run their farms with intelligence - with peasant wisdom. What is on the farm, and what your individual experience with it has been - that is the kind of information we will need initially. This does not take long to describe. The way in which these things should be put together will emerge in the course of this conference as we touch on further perspectives that will help you comprehend the relationship between what the soil ultimately produces, and the true nature of the soil and its environment. With that I believe I have adequately described what! Count Keyserlingk hopes for from the members of this Circle.

In his kind words to us, our esteemed friend the Count has made a delicate distinction between the farmers and the scientists, whereby all the farmers are found in this Circle and all the scientists sit in Dornach. This distinction cannot remain this way. We must grow together. As much peasant wisdom as possible must prevail in Dornach, in spite of the science there; and the science that goes forth from Dornach must be of a sort that makes sense even to the most hardheaded conservative farmer. I hope it was also only a special kind of polite modesty that made Count Keyserlingk say he did not understand me, for I think that Dornach and this Circle will be able to grow together like twins. Indeed, in the end he referred to me as the "grand" farmer. This is a sign that he too feels that we will be able to grow together. But I surely don't deserve that title on the strength of the little bit of manure-stirring that I had to undertake before coming here. The manure, in fact, needed to be stirred for a long time - for longer than I could do it. I could only make a beginning, then someone else had to take over!

Well, that is a trivial point, but at least my background speaks in my favour. I grew up among peasants - I indicated this in my autobiography - and in my heart I'm still at home there. I have also planted potatoes in my time, though on a smaller scale than on the big estate here; and although I did not raise horses, I at least worked closely with our neighbours' pigs and cows. All these things were part of my life for a long time; the fact that I grew up surrounded by agriculture means that I grew up loving it, which is more important for the present than the little bit of manure-stirring. And in this sense I must also say that I am not in complete agreement on something for as I look back over my life, it is not the "grand" farmer who is most valuable, but rather the small farmer, who worked in farming a peasant boy. If this initiative of ours should now start to happen on a larger scale, and become more scientific, it will have truly "grown out of a peasant's skull," as they say in Lower Austria. This background serves me better than anything I have undertaken since. So I would you to think of me as the small farmer who learned to love

agriculture who recalls his peasant heritage and for this reason can understand what lives among farmers today. You may be assured that this is understood in Dornach.

I have always been of the opinion – and it was not meant ironically, though that's how it seems to have been taken - that the alleged stupidity or foolishness of farmers and peasants actually becomes wisdom in the eyes of God, in the eyes of the spiritual world. I have always found what farmers and peasants thought about things much more intelligent than what scientists thought. I always did, and I still do. I would much rather listen to the experiences of people who work directly on the fields, than to all the ahrimanic statistics we get from science. I was always glad when I would get a chance to listen to the peasants, because I always found them extraordinarily wise. And it is just in this area of practicality, of practical implementation, that have always found science to be extremely stupid. Thus, in order make this science more intelligent, we in Dornach are trying to be some "peasant stupidity" into it. Then this stupidity will become wisdom in the eyes of God.

Deciding to work together like this will be a solidly conservative and yet also extremely radical and progressive beginning. It will remain with me as a lovely memory if this conference can be starting point for genuine peasant wisdom to enter into the methods of science, which have become perhaps not stupid - that might be too insulting - but which have indeed become dead. Dr. Wachsmuth also rejected this dead science and has called for a living science fructified by peasant wisdom. In this sense, may Dornach and the Circle grow together like Siamese twins! It is said that twins feel and think alike, then we will the best possible progress in our common endeavour.