

THE SCHOOL OF WISDOM AT DARMSTADT¹

BY ALESSANDRO DE BOSDARI

[Two interesting New Thought movements have developed in Germany since the war. That of the Anthroposophists, with its bizarreries and Goethe cult, has just lost by death its leader, Rudolph Steiner. The second, which is described here, comes more definitely within the compass of the schools. Its leader, Count Hermann Keyserling, is author of *Das Reisetagebuch eines Philosophen*, an English translation of which is to appear this spring, and extracts from which have been previously printed in our columns. Count Keyserling is a Baltic German who lost his property through the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent unsettlement in his native land, Esthonia. He is perhaps the most original and widely read philosophical writer in Europe to-day.]

I WAS struck first of all by the great disparity between the physical equipment of the School of Wisdom and that institution's ambitious purpose, which is to reform mankind. But the things of the spirit are never disclosed to many, and all the world's great revelations are contained in a few words spoken by a single man or a few individuals who have possessed the gift of expressing truth convincingly. When life loses its meaning it loses likewise its will to survive. We must become conscious of this meaning if we are to fulfill our destiny in the universe. A comprehension of this inner life is the principal element of what Keyserling

calls 'creative consciousness.' Only those who are conscious of this inner life and its function can give to their external life a new meaning, which is the chief need of the present day. The principal object that the School of Wisdom at Darmstadt has set before itself is precisely to give this new significance to life.

It is not proposed to create a new faith, but to arrive at a deeper comprehension of old faiths; not to teach a special doctrine, but to attain a state of understanding that transcends the limits of any single doctrine.

Consequently the School of Wisdom cannot have a hard and fast curriculum or organization. Its programme is fundamentally ethical, to make each individual vividly conscious of his own personal destiny and personal responsibility, to give him faith in his own vision, to inculcate the habit of living on a lofty moral and rational plane.

It is not possible to prescribe methods for such a school. The following are provisional and more or less tentative: (1) Personal conversation. A private talk with the right person in the right spirit and at the right moment has often done more for the vital evolution of a person than years of assiduous study. (2) Courses of training in which the development of the student's faculties are correlated with the acquisition of the special knowledge that he needs in order to lead a complete life. (3) Meetings of the 'Free Philosophy Society,' the principal sessions of which are held at Darmstadt every September. At such meetings a speaker is not

¹ From *Nuova Antologia* (Rome Liberal literary semimonthly), April 16

expected to deal with any theme outside his personal specialty. Among the most memorable of these meetings was that of 1921, in which Rabindranath Tagore took part, and where the relation between appearance and reality was the central theme. (4) Attentive reading of the annual called *The Torch* and of a biennial publication entitled *The Path of Perfection*. It is thus that those who are not able to attend the meetings keep informed of their discussions.

Membership in the society does not impose any obligations. No member is compelled to adopt a particular belief or point of view, because Darmstadt does not deal with such externals, but only with internal discipline. Each retains his own religious faith, personal philosophy, and liberty of judgment. Literal beliefs and proselytism are contrary to the spirit of the School. Membership involves merely entering upon a definite quest for knowledge. Absolute independence, the personal responsibility of each individual, are the fundamental assumptions of the School of Wisdom.

This much I knew when I undertook the arduous mental labor of listening through the nine addresses that constituted the programme of last September's session. They were devoted to the theme of 'Becoming and Ceasing.' Count Keyserling himself delivered the introductory lecture, in which he emphasized and developed the concepts that underlie the School of Wisdom. He told us that in following the coming lectures and discussions we should not assume a critical attitude, but merely open our minds receptively to the impressions they produced. We should listen to what was said, as we might listen to a concert. Music itself has a cosmic quality for man. The Pythagoreans believed that there was an interdependence between music and

the movements of the stars. Angels singing in the Christian Heaven. Buddhism speaks of a music of the spheres. Music uses a profounder medium of expression than any other art employs. Schopenhauer speaks of it as different from all the other arts, standing in a relation to them analogous to that of the human will to the brain's mental concepts and images. It functions in a different dimension, and has the power to express the inexpressible. Life and music stand alone in their relation to becoming and ceasing; one tone must die before another can be born. It is the same with life. All life is a growing and enlarging, a producing without cessation. It has no repetitions, no recurrings of identical events. No proverb is more untrue than 'There is nothing new under the sun.' Music and life imply the flow of time. Heraclitus said that we could not cross the same river twice. When we survey life from the higher point of view, becoming and ceasing are absolutely the same thing — whatever exists must die in order that it may live again.

If the becoming and the ceasing of individual men have a fixed relation with the universe, how is a living being distinguished from what does not have life? Precisely in the same way that music is distinguished from noise. Both music and life obey laws of polarity, of harmony and rhythm. Each has its historical counterpoint. The Romans did not diffuse their own culture, but that of Greece; the Arabs revived the ancient poetry of the Persians. In our day we thought to fight the last war, but instead have prepared the way for new wars. In our effort to save democracy we are creating a new aristocracy. This is the same counterpoint in history that we find in harmony. Each becoming and ceasing in itself is an initial phenomenon — not the ultimate end, but the medium through which the

spirit expresses itself. The ultimate end is the melody, and not any single note through which the melody is expressed.

Professor Dreischl, a biologist well known in Italy, where he taught for several years at the University of Naples, followed Count Keyserling. He is a man of Socratic aspect, with an ability to discuss the most abstract topics in a lucid and convincing manner. Continuing Keyserling's metaphor that throughout the mutations of nature we witness processes that might be compared to noise and other processes that might be compared to music, he illustrated this theme at length from the latest researches and discoveries in embryology. He said in conclusion that in facing the question whether a directing mind rules the universe, in which it became more apparent the deeper we delve into its secrets that there is a melody composed of an infinity of notes and not merely a noise, the exacting scientist stops when he has said all that he knows, and is silent regarding that which he suspects but does not know.

The following day another distinguished German scientist, Dr. Hattinberg, spoke on the subject 'Between Life and Death.' The lecturer is well known in Germany and abroad as a pioneer in psychic analysis. His lecture was disappointing for many, who had expected from a positive scientist, who is also a practising physician, an address like the one preceding — that is, a clear and methodical exposition based upon experimental observations of the nature of the transition from life to death. Instead of this, however, the speaker wandered into ideological divagations, the meaning and bearing of which were not always clear.

On the third day Count Keyserling again spoke upon the theme 'History as Tragedy.' He said that all human history was tragic — that there was not a

civilization or a nation that had not eventually been destroyed. In the long run folly has always conquered wisdom, and baser appetites have overcome nobler aspirations. The Greeks were right when they said that the gods were intent upon destroying whatever was exceptionally good and great in the world. The men who have labored for the welfare of humanity have been crucified and made martyrs. The World War was the greatest, as it was the most recent, of these human catastrophes, and has hastened the biological decline of the human race. It is because the true story of history is so tragic that men have ever busied themselves with falsifying its records in order to give them a pleasanter aspect. They have falsified the past as they falsify the present.

No character in history saw this so clearly as Buddha. The negation of reality that he taught is literally true. Man wishes not only to live, but also to die, and the longing for annihilation is visible all around us. What Hegel said, that everything that nature does has a deep meaning, is not true. On the contrary, it is quite probable that nature has filled the world with peoples who have no just title to existence and must inevitably disappear.

Goethe's saying that every mistake and fault has its penalty is eternally true, and therefore the history of erring mankind is eternally tragic. This tragedy springs from the struggle between freedom and necessity. The ancients believed that no progress was possible without wrongdoing: new gods had destroyed old gods, the son had destroyed the father, and all that was destroyed had become evil, although divine in origin. Every human life is absolutely tragic, and is the more tragic the loftier it is. Abolish tragedy and we should abolish history.

When I reflected upon this address

and compared its conclusions with Nitti's *Tragedy of Europe*, I thought to myself that if all history is tragedy then it is wrong to conceive any single period in history as necessarily more tragic than that which preceded it, and consequently that no nation — far less humanity as a whole — ought to despair of its future.

On the afternoon of the third day we listened to a rather remarkable individual, a genuine Buddhist, not coming from India or China, but of pure German stock. This was Professor Dalhke, a little fragile man whose whole aspect suggested something queer and exotic. All sorts of odd stories are told about him. He is said to live on half a tomato a day, and it seems to be a fact that he has preached Buddhism with some success in Brandenburg, where he has founded several convents that practise Buddha's discipline in its purest form. He spoke for more than three hours in a strident, monotonous voice. Only a few listened to the end, and when he finally finished and noticed that his audience had grown so thin, he said proudly that he ought to have talked until only three or four remained — the only ones capable of understanding him. I was able to salvage only a few ideas from his immense deluge of words. When, at the end of his discourse, someone asked him if there was not some ultimate goal toward which we might all equally strive, he shook his head and answered: 'We have nothing in common, because you affirm and I deny.'

After the Buddhist had spoken, we listened to a rabbi, Dr. Baeck, a well-balanced man of fluent and ornate eloquence and sacerdotal mien, perfectly satisfied with his own life and his own convictions. He spoke upon 'Death and Resurrection' along conventional Biblical and Talmudical lines, so that his address was more like

a sermon than a scientific discourse.

The last speaker was Professor Arseniev, a Russian émigré of noble family, who now occupies Kant's chair at Königsberg. He spoke upon the Resurrection, a favorite dogma in his Orthodox religion, in a poetical and sentimental way that reminded me of Chateaubriand's *Genius of Christianity*. On the morning of the day when we broke up Count Keyserling spoke for the third time by way of concluding the conference. He tried to gather up the scattered threads of what had been said under the formula 'Becoming and Ceasing.' His own view was summarized in the following sentence: 'If you ask me what position I personally take toward this ultimate question, the only reply I can give you is: "I do not know how to prove it, but I believe firmly in immortality."'

When I left Darmstadt, filled with pleasant memories of the interesting time I had enjoyed there, I asked myself: 'What does it all amount to? Is this science? Is it religion? Is it both? Or is it neither?' I have heard many doubts as to the methods of the School of Wisdom expressed in Germany by some of the most esteemed representatives of German science and philosophy. I have heard men deplore the existence of the School as reflecting upon the standing of German learning. Several have characterized it as dilettantism and intellectual snobbism. I shall not presume to express an opinion on this point. It would take more data than I have gathered to enable me to express anything like a matured opinion. In a provisional and tentative way I can say that I did not get many new and interesting ideas from the Darmstadt lectures.

Nevertheless, so far as the fundamental purpose of the School is concerned, of awakening in its members a craving for a higher and more

satisfactory spiritual, intellectual, and moral life, I believe that these few days of close association and intercourse with men who do live such a life are by no means wasted. I felt my own spirit reinvigorated, and was conscious of a revived interest in the things that are, after all, of most permanent value in

human existence. Upon the whole it was well worth the while to spend a week in a delightful city among interesting, stimulating people, and to listen to able and solid discourses, even if I did not in every instance entirely understand what was said or agree with the speaker's conclusions.

THE RICE RIOTS¹

WHEN THE POPULACE IN JAPAN BEGINS TO MOVE

BY KAGAWA TOYOHICO

[The following account of the rice riots in Kobe in 1918 is translated from Mr. Kagawa's latest book, *Kabe no Koe kiku toki*, a continuation of *Across the Death-line*. Its author is a Christian reformer, a graduate of Princeton University, a man of remarkable spirituality, and probably the best-known social worker in Japan.]

RICE had gone up to fifty sen five rin that morning, and the women from the tenement houses, gathered round the water-cock in the street, were abusing the rice-dealers. It was the first of August.

Katsunosuke Yamanouchi was not inclined to go out selling syrup that morning. Instead he wandered round the city. All was still quiet in Shin-kawa, but Ujigawa was in an ugly mood. The Young Men's Society was making itself very busy, but as all had gone to work the district was yet quiet.

In the afternoon a newspaper an-

nounced that rice riots had broken out at Kyoto. The stock-market had been closed in the afternoon in Kobe, and there appeared to have been some disorder in Motomachi. A large crowd collected in Shinkaichi and the Minatogawa Park in the evening, evidently in the expectation of something happening. Of course Katsunosuke was there. The picture-shows were as full as usual, and there seemed to be an expectation that something would be said about the high price of rice.

Conditions in the park were a little different. Groups of people were gathered here and there talking to each other. In one group a man was making a loud attack on the Hanaki Company; in another group an old man was denouncing the local rice-dealers for their outrageous prices.

'Last night the price was fifty-two sen five rin, but this morning that had been all blacked out and it was marked fifty-nine sen. What do you think of that?'

A voice from the crowd cried out an imprecation, but nobody had the cour-

¹ From the *Japan Weekly Chronicle* (Kobe Anglo-Japanese weekly), March 26