

## Rudolf Steiner, A Sketch

By G. Schubert

ON March 30th, 1925, Rudolf Steiner passed peacefully from this earth-life, at the Goetheanum in Dornach. It was here that with a truly amazing endurance and strength he had worked so long and arduously for the realization of his exalted aspirations.

The one great and special task, which claimed all his strength and attention to the very last moment of his earth-life, was the rebuilding of the destroyed Goetheanum, to provide a home for the centre, from which Anthroposophy could radiate into the whole world. The last years of his life were filled with a well-nigh unbelievable activity, with the aim, to spread the new knowledge of the spirit, which he had brought and to inspire every field of human activity with this new guiding light.

During the last months preceding his illness, his activity was intensified to such an extent, that for weeks he held even three to four lectures every day on all the different phases of human striving towards the spirit. In addition to all this he met, just as far as this was possible, the almost countless requests for advice from all those who sought help and guidance concerning their own personal efforts and problems of life. In no regard whatever did he ever spare his health nor his strength until finally his physical constitution could no longer stand the strain of this tremendous burden. But even though fastened physically to his sick-bed, his mental and spiritual activity continued with truly amazing force and clearness to the last moment. From his sickroom he directed all phases of the anthroposophical work and through numerous written communications he tried to reach those who could no longer listen to his spoken word.

The great task and aim of his noble lifework was to open again the portals of the spiritual world for humanity, which had just passed the dark age during which it had been thrown back entirely upon the forces and resources of the physical world only.

Rudolf Steiner was born on February 27th, 1861, at Kraljevic, a small village situated then on the Austro-Hungarian boundary line. His parents were simple people. His father occupied a small position on the Austrian Southern Railway.

After passing through school, Rudolf Steiner went to the technical University of Vienna and it was there, that with the utmost interest and joy he absorbed the scientific thought of his time, In addition to his studies, he devoted a large part of his time to the private instruction of children and his rich pedagogical experience dates from that time.

During these years at Vienna his meeting with Karl Julius Schroer was the most important event. It was this scholar of fine feeling who introduced Rudolf Steiner into literary history and philosophy and he now became Schroer's favorite pupil and friend. The strongest bond between these two men was their admiration and deep understanding of Goethe. And it was finally due to Schroer's recommendation that Rudolf Steiner was called to Weimar to help with the great new edition of Goethe's works we find him there occupied with this task during the following years. He edited especially the works of Goethe concerning on natural science. Having accomplished this, he moved to Berlin, where he became the editor of the weekly publication 'IHagazin für Literatur,' in which he discussed all the political, literary, artistic and social problems and questions of those days. At the same time he had continued his personal studies, finally graduating as Doctor of Philosophy after having written his dissertation on Truth and Science and other works on the theory of cognition. The fruit of his intensive study of the spiritual life of his time he had laid down in his books on Nietzsche and Haeckel, as its two typical representatives, Besides this he began to develop his thoughts on Christianity, which we find presented in his two books, 'Christianity as a mystical Fact' and 'The Mystics of the Renaissance.' This time also marks the beginning point of his intensive activity as a lecturer. He found a willing and interested audience, composed largely of members of the Theosophical Society. And so it was that Rudolf Steiner became connected with this society as a teacher. Even though never willing to present or teach anything but that which he had come to know as true through his own personal painstaking research, he was for a time made General Secretary of the German Section of the Theosophical Society until later on a further co-operation became impossible. It was already in the year 1902 that Frl. Marie von Sivers, now Frau Marie Steiner, joined him in the most faithful co-operation. It was

through her untiring devotion that later on the Anthroposophical Society could develop as an independent organization.

During the following years and even to his very last days of earth-life we find Dr. Steiner traveling through Central Europe, England, France, Italy, Finland, the Scandinavian Countries, Holland, etc., answering the invitations of the anthroposophical friends, carrying with him and spreading the new knowledge of the spirit everywhere. In the meantime his now famous books on Anthroposophy had been published.

Rudolf Steiner's life work reached a first culminating-point when he poured all his spiritual wisdom into artistic form and created his mighty mystery dramas. The presentation of these at Munich during 1910 and the following years truly marked an important epoch in the development of the anthroposophical movement. The desire sprang up to have a building which could be a fitting frame for these dramas. Owing to the great war and its accompanying circumstances this building, now known the world over as the Goetheanum, was not erected in Germany, as originally intended, but instead on Swiss territory, at Dornach. And while the world's nations waged war upon each other, here at Dornach the membership composed of more than a dozen different nationalities, worked and laboured in peaceful harmony to make this masterpiece of architecture a reality, guided in their efforts by Rudolf Steiner's suggestions, embracing even the smallest details of this wonderful edifice.

This Goetheanum was the seat of the University of Spiritual Science. Here the first great gatherings and courses of instruction were held, traversing wide fields of Religion, Art and Science, and attended by an audience which literally came from every point of the globe.

Here it was also that a new art was developed: Eurhythmy, the new art of movement, based upon an intimate spiritual knowledge of the laws underlying human speech. This new art, as well as the recitation and declamation accompanying it, was further developed and perfected through the indefatigable devotion of Frau Marie Steiner to this particular field.

After the great war, Rudolf Steiner, cognizant of its true causes, tried to point out the means by which alone further social disaster could be prevented. Humanity, however, heedless of his advice, preferred to follow the path which leads through new catastrophes.

On New Year's Eve 1922-1923 the wonderful Goetheanum, erected during ten years of sacrificing effort, through the interference of forces, ever hostile to human progress, went up in flames. But even this great disaster could not bend Rudolf Steiner's will, nor cause him to interrupt his labours even for one moment. It is true that with the destruction of the first Goetheanum a part of Rudolf Steiner's life-force went with it. From this hour he was no longer the man whose inexhaustible strength flowed from nature, but one, who continued his tremendous lifework merely by his own will power, intensified and increased to an unbelievable degree, fanned into a living flame again and again through his contact with the Spirit.

One of Dr. Steiner's creations, dearest to him, is the Waldorf School at Stuttgart, now known the world over, in which he tried to put into practical use his rich pedagogical wisdom, based upon his spiritual knowledge of human nature. For this purpose he educated and inspired with enthusiasm a body of noble-hearted teachers and with tender care he directed the education of every one of hundreds of children placed in this school.

Also religious life received a mighty new impulse through Rudolf Steiner, after having been requested by a number of theologians, to tell them how religion could be awakened to new life. As a result the new Christian Community came into existence, which, while independent from the Anthroposophical Society, is permeated by Rudolf Steiner's spirit.

Two years after the destruction of the Goetheanum, he laid the foundation for the new, present form of the Anthroposophical Society. This he did during the extremely important Christmas meeting of 1923. From now on he was no longer, as heretofore, only the teacher and adviser, but became the executive head of the Anthroposophical Society, directing also all its practical affairs. Through this step the Anthroposophical Society became the only authorized carrier of all anthroposophical life and effort on earth.

With a mighty new burst of energy he now took active charge of the Society's practical affairs, at the same time leading his pupils into ever higher realms of spiritual knowledge. He showed them their true place within world history so that they should become all the better able to grasp his spiritual intentions and shape their future work accordingly as true and fully conscious carriers of the impulse which radiated from him.

Naturally the erection of the new Goetheanum now received most of his care and attention, but nevertheless he continued to visit the most important centres of anthroposophical life in the different cities of Europe. His last visits were those to Torquay and London in August, 1924. After this his physical strength gave way. But even in his sickroom he remained intimately connected with the progress of the Goetheanum and the work within the Anthroposophical Society. Once more, gathering up his last strength, on September 28, 1924, he addressed the members here at Dornach, pointing out to them in mighty words their task within the course of the world's events. The winter of 1924 and the spring of 1925 passed in fond hopes that Rudolf Steiner might yet be restored to physical health and resume his leadership. Fate however decreed otherwise and on March 30th, 1925, Rudolf Steiner passed from earthly life.

What his pupils owe to him can perhaps be expressed best by those words Albert Steffen spoke at the occasion of Rudolf Steiner's last birthday on February 27th, 1925: '. . . because this teacher has lived, everyone may say: It is my right to walk on earth, called to love humanity, no longer trying to flee from existence, no longer a prey to the anxious dream of darkness. . . .

He, who takes from us the blindness, the nightmare, the fall into abysmal depth, the shackles of earthly weight, through the heralding of the Holy Spirit, by whom his work is carried, he, who gives to us a new vision, a new speech and new forces to create and to shape fate through the living word, he, who shows us the new birth in Christ, to him may flow the gratitude of those, born anew in the Spirit! '