

My First Teacher:

In Germany in the 1930s

by Felix Boniface



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Sovereign Illuminated Order
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WHETHER IT WAS BECAUSE OF the Practice of Magic, however ineptly conceived, or the esoteric atmosphere of the Halls of Academia, I arrived in Germany in 1931 a virtual child in outlook and demeanour. It had been arranged that I stay with a fellow lecturer while I taught Physics at a University there; and, although this was not stated to all and sundry, while I pursued my interest in Alchemy with, at long last, a teacher.

My landlord, Klaus, was a small man, blond, brown eyed and merry. He was sturdy and reminded me of a British Naval Officer. He spoke like one too. Two Heidelberg scars adorned a handsome face. One imagines the German nature to be dour and philosophically verbose, humourless. Not so, Klaus, whose whole demeanour was pleasant, courteous and generous. I settled easily into his house. On the other hand, I could not easily wait to meet my teacher, to whom I was promised an introduction, "soon" . . .

A Tea Party

On my first Sunday afternoon, a small, English tea party was held in my honour. Imagine my surprise as guest after guest came to me, saying "Herr Professor Klaus tells me that you are in need of instruction in Mediaeval Latin and High German. I have time available on Thursdays." "Doktor Klaus says you need refurbishment of your Chemistry . . . I am happy to be of service . . ." "I understand that you like to tramp. We have now a Club . . ." And

when I looked across the room at Klaus, there he was, urbanely smiling and raising his cup to me.

He looked too young. After, he spoke gently to me, "Felix, be patient; nine-tenths of the work you and I will do lies in the preparation." He would teach as if we were students preparing for exams together. He was also politically acute, a gift I would never be able to emulate.

Two things he repeated often.

First: "Felix, you think of yourself as a colonial and of England as "home". You do not yet realise your own power and knowledge, or suspect that others might covet it." I think that is important for all young people even today: To understand your own power and worth is to be able to act; and not to be driven or pushed.

Second: the essence of discipline is to find a pattern in which you are comfortable, and to work within it as graciously as possible.

How courteous he was. When one day, after months of work, my experiment failed, I was angry and disappointed. I blamed him for not stopping me wasting my time. I thought myself a total failure.

"But is it ?" he asked, "Is it wasted? A negative answer is data still."

Then generously he sat me down and worked through my notes with me. "The hard part [of alchemy or magic] is to understand your text. When you have reduced substance and method to subject and predicate, you have an Instruction; all that remains is the timing."

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Every Thursday afternoon, Klaus went to a secret meeting of which the most he ever said was, "Darkness is a waste of breath and weariness of soul."

The Third Reich

In early 1938, I received a letter from the Third Reich equivalent of the Department of Internal Affairs, asking this poor colonial boy to assist them in their research.

Klaus counselled me to leave Germany at once. He told me to go to the scientific meeting in Stockholm to which I had been invited and not to return, but I was flattered and wanted to leave for Berlin at once. Klaus became agitated and almost angry. "Have you the strength to believe that the earth is hollow!" he shouted. "Go! Go now!"

I was hurt; but that evening he came to me and talked.

"You are a child. You want the philosophers' stone to make everything

perfect and to stay the same. I begin to think that stasis is the essence of Evil, and that the ability to change is the ability to become good. Your hero was Oates who walked into the Antarctic snow to save his friends, but I say to you that life itself is too precious. The purity of everlasting ice has seduced you; but you must not worship the ice, but the act of transformation."

He drove me out, and then he secretly married the owner of our building, a Jewess, and sent her with me to Stockholm and thence to Great Britain, where she told me that Klaus had saved my life.

After the war, I returned, thinking to find Klaus, my courteous, gracious teacher. The building, the very street was gone, and I never saw him again. Yet, I have in my possession still his foil. I feel even now that we are waiting for him and that one day I will look up from my chair and see him, waiting till I finished what I am doing, so that we may talk.

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