



“Zen without bells and whistles.”

Martin Heidegger

The Fieldpath

translated by Berrit Mexia

It runs from the court-garden gate to Ehnried. The old linden trees of the castle-garden gaze after it over the wall, whether it shines brightly between the growing crops and awakening meadows at Easter time, or disappears under snowdrifts behind the next hill at Christmas time. From the fieldcross it bends toward the forest. Onward, past its edge it greets a tall oak, under which a roughly hewn bench stands.

Occasionally there lay on the bench some writing or other of the great thinkers, which a young awkwardness attempted to decipher. Whenever the riddles pressed upon each other and no way out was in sight, the Fieldpath helped, for it quietly guided the foot on a turning path through the expanse of the barren land.

Time and again, thinking follows in the same writings, or goes by its own attempts on the trail where the Fieldpath passes through the field. The Fieldpath remains as close to the step of the Thinker as to that of the farmer who walks to his mowing in the early morning. As the years pass, the oak in its path more often carries one off to reminiscence of early play and first choices. Occasionally when an oak fell under the blow of a wood axe in the middle of

the forest, Father, crossing through woodland and over sunny clearings, was seeking the cord allotted him for his workshop. Here he spent the time, thoughtfully, during pauses in his service at the tower clock and the bell, which keep their own relationship to time and temporality.

From the oak's bark, however, the boys cut out their ships which, equipped with rudder and tiller, floated in the Metten brook or in the school well. The worldwide voyages still reached their goal easily and returned to shore again. The reverie in such voyages remained concealed in an erstwhile yet hardly visible splendour which lay over all things. Mother's eye and hand surrounded their empire. It was as if her unspoken care watched over all beings¹. These journeys of play did not yet know of wanderings in which all shores remain behind. Meanwhile, the hardness and scent of the oakwood began to speak more distinctly of the slowness and steadiness with which the tree grows. The oak itself said that. "In such growth alone is grounded that which lasts and fructifies"; growing means : to open oneself to the expanse of the heavens as one takes root in the darkness of the earth ; that everything genuine thrives only when man is both in right measure : ready for the claim of the highest heavens and elevated in the protection of the bearing earth. Again and again the oak says it to the Fieldpath passing se-



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curely by. Whatever has its being coming-to-presence² around the Fieldpath it gathers, and to each who walks on it, it bears what is his. The same fields and meadow slopes follow the Fieldpath each season with a constantly changing nearness. Whether the mountains of the Alps above the forest sink away into the evening twilight, whether there where the Fieldpath swings itself over a hilly ridge a lark ascends in the summer morning, whether the wind from the East roars across from the region where Mother’s native village lies, whether a woodcutter lugs his faggot to the hearth at nightfall, whether a harvesting wagon plods homeward in the furrows of the Fieldpath, whether children pluck the first cowslips on the edge of the meadow, whether day after day the mist casts its gloom and burden over the fields, always and from everywhere there is around the Fieldpath the message of the Same.

The Simple preserves the riddle of the abiding and the great. Spontaneously it takes abode in men, yet needs a long time for growth. In the unpretentiousness of the Ever-Same it conceals its blessing. The expanse of all grown things which dwell around the Fieldpath bestows the world. It is only in the unspoken of their language that, as the old master of letter and life, Eckhart, says, God is God.

But the message of the Fieldpath speaks

only as long as there are human beings who, born in its air, are able to hear it. They are hearers of their Origin, but not servants of machination. Man in vain attempts to bring the globe in order through his plans whenever he is not in harmony with the message of the Fieldpath. The danger threatens that men of today remain hard of hearing to its language. They have ears only for the noise of the media, which they take to be almost the voice of God. So man becomes fragmented and pathless. To the fragmented the Simple seems monotonous. The monotonous becomes wearisome. Those who are weary find only uniformity. The Simple has fled. Its quiet power is exhausted.

Indeed, the number of those who still recognize the Simple as their acquired possession is quickly diminishing. But the few will everywhere be the abiding. From the gentle might of the Fieldpath they will some day be able to outlast the gigantic power of atomic energy, which human calculation has artifacted for itself and made into a fetter of its own doing.

The message of the Field path awakens a spirit which loves the open air and, at a favourable place, leaps over even heaviness into an ultimate serenity. This protects against the nuisance of mere toil, which promotes only futility when pursued for itself.



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In the seasonally changing air of the Fieldpath the knowing serenity, whose expression often seems melancholy, thrives. This serene knowing is a *Kuinzige*. Nobody gains it, who does not have it. Those who have it, have it from the Fieldpath. On its trail the storm of winter and the day of harvest encounter each other, the agile thrill of springtime and the calm demise of fall meet each other, the play of youth and the wisdom of the aged behold each other. But in one single harmony, whose echo the Fieldpath carries with it silently to and fro, everything is made serene.

The knowing serenity is a gate to the eternal. Its doors swing on hinges which were once forged from the riddles of existence³ by a skilful smith. From Ehnried the way turns back to the court-garden gate. After passing over

the last hill its narrow ribbon leads through an even slope till it reaches the town wall. Dimly it shines in the starlight. Behind the castle soars the tower of St. Martin's Church. Slowly, almost hesitatingly, eleven strokes of the hour fade away in the night. The old bell, on whose ropes boys' hands often were rubbed hot, trembles under the striking of the hour hammer, whose dark-droll face no one forgets.

The silence becomes, with the last stroke, more silent. It reaches those who were sacrificed before time through two world

wars. The Simple has become yet simpler. The Ever-Same appears strange and releases. The message of the Fieldpath is now quite clear. Is the soul speaking? Is the world speaking? Is God speaking?

Everything speaks the renunciation unto the Same. The renunciation does not take. The renunciation gives. It gives the inexhaustible power of the Simple. The message makes us feel at home in a long Origin.

1. *Wesen*: essence, being, nature. Related to *Anwesen*, it also means “coming to presence”.

2. *Ibid*

3. *Dasein*

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