

# **A HOLIDAY WITH A HEGELIAN**

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A holiday with a Hegelian by Francis Sedlák

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**FRANCIS SEDLÁK**

**A HOLIDAY WITH  
A HEGELIAN**



To my dear friend  
Edith Holloway.

Francis Sedgwick.

Whiteway. Jan. 1911.

A Holiday with a Hegelian

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By  
Francis Sedlák

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## Contents

Chapter	Page
I. What is Thought? . . . . .	7
II. God is . . . . .	17
III. Tears and Laughter . . . . .	24
IV. The Problem of Post-mortem Existence . . . . .	31
V. An Introduction to the Science of Logic . . . . .	39
VI. First Act of Thought (First Cycle) . . . . .	51
VII. Second Act of Thought (Second and Third Cycles) . . . . .	58
VIII. Comments . . . . .	67
IX. Third Act of Thought (Fourth Cycle) . . . . .	73
X. Fourth Act of Thought : A. Fifth Cycle . . . . .	80
XI. Fourth Act of Thought : B. Sixth Cycle . . . . .	86
XII. Fifth Act of Thought (Seventh Cycle) . . . . .	103
XIII. Sixth Act of Thought : A. Eighth Cycle . . . . .	115
XIV. Sixth Act of Thought : B. Ninth Cycle . . . . .	127
XV. Seventh Act of Thought (Tenth Cycle) . . . . .	142
XVI. The Meaning of Planetary Distances . . . . .	162
XVII. Our Destiny . . . . .	179





# A Holiday with a Hegelian

## CHAPTER I

### WHAT IS THOUGHT?

ONLY a short time ago, a pretence to the knowledge of absolute Truth would have seemed to me foolish. Nothing appeared more evident than that our knowledge must needs remain only relative, and that every endeavour to transcend facts of observation can result only in a web of subjective fancies. Not that I was a confessed disciple of some notable thinker. I read what came to hand, but I never attached much importance to labels, preferring above everything else to remain in close touch with sound common-sense. The various authors I read were to me simply contributors of material to be moulded by my own mental spontaneity. This may seem conceited; but let me say that I have never troubled myself as to whether my endeavour to stand on my own legs might strike others as arrogant or not. Nevertheless, I myself came to realise on what tottering legs I was trying to steady myself.

I spent my last holiday in an out-of-the-way place in Moravia. I hired a room in the most decent house in the village Tetchitse, arranged for my meals in the public-house, and looked forward to making acquaintance with the routine and mental horizon of the sturdy Czech population. It so happens that I am thoroughly at home in Russian (as I have frequently occasion to visit Russia), and once one knows one Slav language, the rest is comparatively easy.

## 8 A Holiday with a Hegelian

The village nestled at the foot of an extensive wood, covering the slopes of a range of hills. Eastward from the northern end, there stretched a valley, the recesses of which roused my exploring instincts the very next morning of my stay. The valley twisted after a bit slightly towards the south, and shortly after there disclosed itself on the opposite slope a little cottage. At first sight I thought it might be the abode of the gamekeeper, and as it was barely seven o'clock, I decided to wait about on the chance of catching him starting for his round, as an opportunity to learn something about the local poachers, or, at least, to learn my way about.

It was a beautiful morning, and I enjoyed pacing up and down along the cart-road opposite to the cottage. Whenever I find myself in some secluded place on the Continent, I feel as if my whole being were renewed. People who spend their life in the same rut can never have an idea what a vivifying effect even a short stay among a strange people exercises on all one's faculties. It is not so much change of scenery that appeals to me; in this respect I am unlike most Englishmen. I like to experience vividly a change of manners, language, temperament, religion—a change, in short, in mental horizon. When I realise that what in one country is considered a matter of course, if not a *sine qua non*, of life—say, the carrying of sleeping garments with us—is of no consequence in another, I feel strangely free.

In watching the cottage and the waving forest on either side of that remote valley, I could not help musing how narrow, after all, is individual life. Up till now I had been quite oblivious of the very existence of these parts. So far as I was concerned, all has come to be only now. Yet, in spite of my obliviousness, human hearts were throbbing here with joy and distress, with hope and despair.

Of course, this goes without saying. Who does not know that he is not the measure of universal life? But, then, why should a vivid realisation of this common reflection strike one so wondrously? Why should one start with surprise at the idea that something could happen or exist in seeming independence of one's own existence and interest?

Surely, the fascination exercised over our imagination by

old castles and remnants of the historic past is at bottom due to the thrilling wonder that people lived and suffered even before our birth. One may have passed a particular place a hundred times in complete indifference: let it, however, become known to one that the place was once a Roman camp or cemetery, and with what interest will one gaze at it! Imagination tries to conjure up the dead past. The idea suddenly presents itself that the place existed long, long ago when one was not, and one cannot help feeling astonished again and again, as though the thought had struck one just for the first time.

In my endeavour to analyse and voice the something pressing within me for expression, I became quite oblivious of my surroundings, and did not notice steps approaching from behind until a pleasant voice roused me from my self-absorption. "*Dobré jitro*" (good morning), it was saying, and, looking up, I saw a man of about forty years of age, tall as I (six feet), clothed in an easy grey summer suit, head covered by a wide-brimmed straw hat, from under which I saw a pair of most sympathetic eyes beaming at me. The lower portion of his face was covered by a most luxuriant growth of blonde beard, without hiding a well-cut mouth. So little prepared was I for this meeting that I fell into talking English.

"Ah, you are an Englishman!" exclaimed my new acquaintance in fluent English. "Perhaps you were seeking me. Well, if I can be of any use to you, pray dispose of me. My name is Joseph Veverka."

He was evidently under the impression that I was directed to him as the one person in the neighbourhood with whom I might converse in my own language. Having learned of my stay in the village, and the reason of my pacing up and down before his cottage, he remarked genially:

"Well, the fact is, my cottage was originally a game-keeper's abode. Though, however, fate has made me its occupant, this need not mean your forgoing a ramble through the wood. Only you will have to do without the anticipated information about the local poachers. I have no knowledge of them."