

REVIEWS

BOOK FOR THE MONTH

THIS book¹ is an exposition of the Social Theory of Rudolph Steiner, adapted and re-presented for English conditions of life. The name of Rudolph Steiner suggests, outside the circle of his followers, a vague and exotic Neo-Mysticism; 'Anthroposophy,' as the present author admits, 'has affinities with Theosophy,' in its claim to esoteric knowledge, 'but it differs sharply from Theosophy in belonging to a Western, rather than an Eastern tradition, and still more in the central place held by Christianity in its scheme of things. It differs also in the wealth of practical activities to which its stimulus extends.' This stimulus, indeed, finds expression in an explicit social theory, the conception of a Three-fold Social Order, cultural, economic and political, in contrast to the prevalent concentration on a politico-economic unity.

This theory of the threefold social order was expounded by Steiner in 1919 under the title: 'Die Kernpunkte der Sozialfrage,' and had, so it is claimed, considerable influence in Germany. Although the original book was then translated into English, it was intrinsic to the theory that its actual form and application must develop from the native traditions of each country, and must take different forms at different times. The present book is thus an attempt to re-adapt the German exposition of 1919 to the English situation of 1946.

Without some knowledge of Steiner's original work, it is impossible to estimate how closely the present book follows his teaching, or how far the author has taken advantage of the principle of re-adaptation. Certainly, as it stands, the present thesis shows a degree of moderation and common sense too often lacking in the more usual plans for reconstructions.

The Threefold Social Order is admittedly an attempt to safeguard and revivify the spiritual freedom of the individual in face of an encroaching state control, and as such, it is opposed to any form of nationalisation which would involve a political invasion of either the cultural or economic sphere. Although there should be financial aid from the State for both cultural and economic purposes, in the New Order, he who pays the piper must, emphatically, not call the tune. The three spheres, spiritual, economic and cultural, must be regarded as autonomous, though intersecting, spheres of life, and different principles apply to each. It is as important, for instance, to safeguard 'the natural inequalities' in the spiritual or cultural sphere, as to preserve the 'equal human rights' of the individual, politically. 'The fundamental human right of individuals, . . . is the equal right to be unequal. Room must be left for the unfolding of the vast and varied

¹ *The Three Spheres of Society*. By Charles Waterman. (Faber 12s. 6d.)

inequalities of human endowment. This right is an aspect of the right to spiritual freedom and it cannot be divorced from human beings when they enter the economic sphere. But, at the same time, there must be a place, a sphere of social authority, where men are treated as equals, and where the grounds of equal opportunity are guaranteed for all alike. . . . Every man is a member of as many classes as his abilities enable him to enter, but he is also, and simultaneously, a member of the great "classless class"; the class of equal citizens to which all men belong.' (p. 218).

It would need considerable economic knowledge to criticise the proposed plan in detail. The various suggestions for price and wage regulation, for debts and loans, and the reorganisation of industry suggest an exhaustive study of these problems, but for the general reader, the impression left is rather of the 'sweet reasonableness' and compromise of an old-fashioned Liberalism. The principle of 'conditional ownership' together with an almost impassioned insistence on spiritual and intellectual liberty strikes a note that is old-fashioned enough to seem quite new!

'What is required is nothing revolutionary but a recovery of the old conception that the ownership of property should always and automatically carry social obligations, and an extension of these obligations to cover not only selected cases but the whole field of human rights.' (p. 28).

This element of a return to the past is recognised, but there is no sentimental nostalgia in Mr Waterman's appeal to tradition. His criticism of the old Liberalism is as clear-sighted as it is of the present totalitarian danger.

'The tragedy of Liberalism has been its transposition of spiritual freedom into an economic key; with the result that spiritual freedom itself is widely threatened and in some countries has been lost.' (p. 222).

'Just as freedom of belief led not to a deepening of spiritual experience but to the wilting of religion in a desert of material wealth, so freedom of thought led to a vast increase of power over nature without the wisdom to direct it to human good. In the narrowly rationalistic climate of that age it was hard to believe in the creative faculties of the human spirit; hard to understand that unless men bring to bear on extensions of knowledge a corresponding enhancement of spiritual activity they become victims of illusions in the realm of thought, and in the world of action, the prisoners of their own inventions. . . . And the philosophy of Liberalism, . . . reveals very clearly and strangely the results of transposing the great theme of spiritual freedom into the materialistic key.' (p. 212).

The essence of the Threefold Social Order is in fact summed up in the adapted slogan: 'Spiritual liberty, political equality, economic fraternity.'

Although this book is primarily concerned with the practical social theories of Rudolph Steiner, the need for spiritual re-orientation is

implicit in the whole approach. In his indictment of mechanistic materialism and of social injustice and other present evils, the author is often in far closer accord with Catholic teaching than might have been expected, and there is much in the whole presentation that is both interesting and stimulating.

ROSALIND MURRAY

RELIGION IN THE POST-WAR WORLD. Vol. I: Religion and our Divided Denominations. Edited by Willard L. Sperry. (Harvard University Press; Cumberlege; 8s. 6d.)

There was recently reviewed in BLACKFRIARS Dean Sperry's survey of American religion. That was specifically undertaken in order to explain American religion to ourselves. This is now being followed by a series which analyses the state of American religion for Americans. It makes somewhat sad reading. For while it concerns the denominational divisions which have gone to such extremes in the United States, it reveals that these denominations, with one exception, are deeply divided each within itself: that exception, of course, is the Catholic Church. Although the other writers are all more or less concerned about the denominational differences between one another, and within themselves, and are seeking for closer union, they are obviously shy and critical of Catholic unity. Yet here are statistics to be considered: the churches which are not only disunited from one another, but are in considerable disunion within themselves, number thirty-eight-and-a-half millions, and these numbers are divided into 243 denominations! The Church which is at unity with itself numbers twenty-three millions: now the largest united religious body in the States. The point is that the largest church is a united church: in short, *is a Church*. There is a lingering feeling observable, however, that Catholic unity is purchased at too great a price, while there is also felt to be something spiritually healthy about 'proliferous Protestantism,' for while it has gone to extremes, it is to be resolved by a kind of federal unity, which will really leave things pretty much as they are; only, none of those united Churches will exclude any other from their recognition, while greater forbearance will prevent them splitting up again over dogmas, ceremonies or social and racial distinctions.

The book is slight but suggestive. It has been compelled to group together only four constituent aggregates for examination. Dean Sperry, however, writes the introduction. He seems here to lament that, among other disadvantages of the denominational cleavages, they make it impossible to present a compact front against national religious decline, or to make a united impression on national government. These divided denominations have no *locus standi* in the thoroughly disestablished basis of the national constitution, which is frankly secular. It almost seems as if Dean Sperry would favour an establishment of some kind, at least for the purpose of bringing reli-