

Can the State Survive?

Liberty, Authority and Function, by Ramiro de Maeztu.
New York: The Macmillan Co. \$1.35.

FEW things are more striking at the present time than the crisis in political theory. From 1870 until the outbreak of the present war the tendency of thought was towards a generalized collectivist activity. The legislation of that half-century gave to the state an ever-increasing function. In France, particularly, a vague socialism became the dominant political attitude. In Germany, if the Social Democratic party was unable to attain to power, the adherents of the monarchy did not shrink from stealing its ideas. England traveled more slowly; yet in the decade after the liberal rise to power in 1906 it is impossible to mistake the advent of a new and more socialized liberalism. In America, indeed, the movement has begun but recently to find a legislative expression. But no student of labor legislation can fail to see that here, too, it is in the state that the hopes of men have been centered.

In the main it is a faith in social solidarity that lies at the bottom of this attitude. Somehow, so it is believed, the nation is one; and it is the object of democratic endeavor to give expression to that unity. The whole movement can be strikingly seen by anyone who compares the opinions of Peckham and Brewer with those of the Supreme Court at the present time. The age of individualism has definitely passed. We have done with its easy falsehoods. It was economically wasteful and it found no justification in psychology. It was a faith tolerable, perhaps, in an age of pioneers. But it had no sort of validity in fact once the margin of easy subsistence had been reached. There is no special power to-day in observing the occidental counsel of Mr. Greeley. No man can hope to find economic salvation by the sheer force of individual exertion. We have established, so at least we seem to believe, the basic fact of social cohesion; and we have been attempting, simultaneously, the discovery of some political hypothesis which may help us to the interpretation of its meaning.

To-day, in fact, the state enjoys its beatification. We turn to it almost blindly in the sure faith that its ways spell salvation. Yet it needs no acute observation to detect in this state-worship the signs of political euthanasia. Even before the war men of ability were to be found who, while they were in no respect individualists, yet had a profound distrust of state-functioning. The whole syndicalist movement is no more than the translation of this mistrust into economic terms. Its critical attitude to the Marxian dogmas in nowise conceals the fact that upon the fundamental issue of the Marxian philosophy—the capitalist nature of the state—it has erected its superstructure of theory. The ablest syndicalists of France—Sorel, Lagardelle, Grif-fuelliès—make no secret of their contempt for so bourgeois an institution. Labriola in Italy has attempted the adaptation of socialist economics to meet the challenge of this criticism. In England, a band of enthusiasts, under the able guidance of Mr. A. R. Orage, has developed a new economic synthesis which, while it is patently defective on the side of construction, is yet a powerful and important critique of the basic system of modern society. It is to this school that Mr. Maeztu belongs. While his book is rarely original, it is yet a valuable index to an interesting attitude. Born, as he tells us, of war-speculation, it makes us realize that not even the state-omnipotence this crisis has engendered will serve to hinder the thoroughgoing revision of political

theory. The state which the years after the war will slowly form is likely to be a different organization from any we have thus far known.

Mr. Maeztu interprets the war as a conflict between liberty and authority. With both principles he feels a profound dissatisfaction. Liberty, he conceives as no more than the apotheosis of an individualism too selfish and too proud to devote its energies to the service of men. It does not minister to that principle of association upon which alone a new socialism can be founded. Nor is the principle of authority in better case. It is, indeed, more practical. It is a striking fact that its eminent utility is at all times manifest in moments of crisis. It is then that the fundamental littleness of the individual is undeniably brought home to the minds of men. But authority, in the last analysis, is no more than a consciousness of power. It lacks moral guaranties. Its history has been written in letters of blood and fire. It is a weapon of oppression rather than an instrument of good. It has failed to give us any factual assurance of democratic implications. It is elsewhere that political salvation is to be found.

It is in the fundamental fact of human association that Mr. Maeztu places his confidence. The state, he claims, is no more than a great public service corporation which must justify itself by its moral exertions. It lacks personality. For to Mr. Maeztu there is no reality in the will we are to-day accustomed to associate with collective exertions. He salutes in M. Leon Duguit the prophet of a new era; for M. Duguit finds the principle of social solidarity not in the fact of a common will (of which he denies the existence) but in the thing willed in common by a group of men. Upon the basis of this assumption Mr. Maeztu constructs a kind of economic federalism the units of which derive from the nature of their functions. The state, in such an analysis, becomes a center of linkage rather than a center of force. It is a least common multiple of general necessities. The theory for which Mr. Maeztu stands sponsor is a theory of rights based upon services, and the subject of those rights is not the individual but the group. He finds a justification of his standpoint in the syndicalist progress of the last decade. Men, as he insists, do bend to group themselves round the functions they fulfil. It seems then wise to base the rights they may enjoy upon the basis of those functions. And it is undoubtedly a step forward that Mr. Maeztu should give to right the implication of a claim scientific experience has validated rather than the broken stake against which Burke directed the heavy fire of an unshakable criticism.

Into the details of Mr. Maeztu's attitude it is not possible for me to enter. But it is important that we should realize how little there is of novelty in these principles. Against one thing at the outset it is necessary to enter a firm, if respectful protest. Nothing is more easy, and few things are more ignorant, than the romantic idealization of the Middle Ages. If Mr. Maeztu will go to the documents he will find that William Morris wrote not prose but poetry and that even guild socialism can become utopian where it ceases to be accurate. His dismissal of corporate personality on the basis of M. Duguit's criticisms suggests an unfamiliarity with a vital literature which has discussed those criticisms in detail and in circumstances. Mr. Maeztu seems never to have heard of Esmein or Hauriou, of Gierke or of Maitland; yet their thoughts on the nature of the state have an important relation to this type of thinking. He does not seem to know that economic federalism of the type he suggests is as old as Proudhon; and that in the hands of Paul Boncour and Maxime Leroy it has begotten

in France one of the most suggestive controversies of recent years. His book, in fact, strikes one reader at least as incurably insular. It needs pruning of countless personal divagations. Its treatment of the philosophy of the war is not only scrappy but has the air of being written rather from hurried acquaintance with a few popular manuals than from any profound thought upon a very complex problem. Most readers, one imagines, would be glad to skip Mr. Maeztu's somewhat childish personalia. And the book needs documentation. It is a serious work and, on its negative side at least, it has much in it that is well said and ably argued. It summarizes for English-speaking readers a political attitude of increasing importance. It cannot but be a matter of regret that Mr. Maeztu should not have given to his book the time and the care that such fundamental speculation unremittingly demands.

HAROLD J. LASKI.

Sub Specie Aeternitatis

Mors et Vita, by Alfred Loisy. Paris: E. Nourry. Fr. 1.50.

M. ALFRED LOISY, under the great emotion of France's effort and sacrifice in the war, has written a small volume on life and death which is likely to stand in liberal eyes as one of the classics of this period. To understand its full significance Americans must recall that M. Loisy was a few years ago a Catholic parish priest who, by the weight of his critical writings, became a leader among French modernists. His aim was to apply to dogma the interpretation of history, to show its human structure and composition, to adapt it to the needs of the twentieth century. The church, however, cast him out with other disinterested reformers, and his delicate intellectual detachment and his learning were later confirmed by his appointment to a chair of comparative religion at the Collège de France. He writes his *Mors et Vita*, then, as a scholar versed in Christian origins, as a religious philosopher to whom the claims of that French Catholic renaissance, of which we have heard so much, cannot be indifferent. The book, in fact, summarizes the most recent stage in the long struggle between Roman Catholicism and free scientific thought in France. But it has a gravity, an irony, an eloquent humanity, a high fervor for truth, a critical fecundity which raise it high above the level of the authors whom it seeks to refute.

Abstract views of life and death probably count for little in the development of humanity, Loisy suggests; they have certainly played little part in the present gigantic war where men have lived and died in haste, quite regardless of their private views of eternity, to defend their country, their society, their ideal of humanity. They have thereby demonstrated once more a principle "already superabundantly demonstrated by history"; a principle "which has really governed the existence of men in all human societies; that is, that individuals brought up and sustained by the social groups to which they belong, owe themselves more or less, or even altogether to the collectivity which carries them." By comparison with this law which Loisy calls "the law of life," our metaphysical notions of life and death, heaven and hell, which have varied with times and peoples, seem "a complement, an ornament, a symbol where the intelligence rests to satisfy its own inquietude."

It is chiefly men at the back who feel the need of interpretation and symbolism. Mass in the trenches is one thing, the propaganda carried on by the literary prophets

of the Roman church is another. For religion is affirmed, not proved, and Catholicism in particular holds faith to be a grace of God, not a reasoned conviction. The church has, of course, an official demonstration by miracle and revelation, but in our age this convinces only the believer. Hence the lay writers who are her chief apologists in France have inevitably entered into their adversaries' doubts, and adopting the language and ideas of the century, have themselves become conscious or unconscious modernists, who would be quickly disavowed were Rome's responsibility engaged.

Loisy deals first with the "academic and worldly apologetic" of M. Paul Bourget, as expressed in his novel called *The Meaning of Death*. It is the story of a materialist doctor who does not know how to die, of a Catholic officer who does, and the woman they both love; divested of romance its high claim is that only a Catholic with a belief in immortality as a reward for sacrifice can nobly give his life. Americans may swallow this thesis because of the perfection of its sentimental casuistry, but to Loisy it seems outrageous exploitation of a common grief, perversion of the "admirable gesture" of the dead. "Let them not be made to bear witness against the ideal of liberty for which they died. We are witness of what they had at heart."

Loisy, indeed, sends Bourget back to his catechism. To the real Catholic believer, as he says, immortality is a recompense, not a reason proposed for sacrifice. But the origins of the Catholic interpretation of death are known to us: they are an amalgam of the prophetic belief in the reign of justice, of the Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead, of the Hellenic belief in the immortality of the soul. "The imagination of Christian centuries has worked on this synthesis" and the result is a vision, a dream more complete but no more demonstrable than that of other religions. Moreover, if it be psychologically and pragmatically true that the believer lives by his faith, what of the faith which supports Jew, Mohammedan and Protestant? Death, says Bourget, has no meaning if it be an end; it has one if it be a sacrifice. Death, replies Loisy, is indeed an end; it marks a profound and lamentable loss since it cuts down young lives which promised to be fruitful: "The true sacrifice, the veritable sacred action is not in the death but in the devotion, it is the generous devotion with which one risks one's life that is effective, it is this that is fecund."

The non-Catholic soldiers of France are not dying in stoical despair. Some of them court death with a sort of natural bravery and insouciance, others from a moral necessity; all with the confidence and consolation of contributing to the preservation of what they hold dearest in the world. The most poignant pages of Loisy's book describe the death in battle of three "neighbors of his heart and mind" who range from fifty to six-and-twenty; all three, like himself, detached for love of truth from the old symbols of the Christian faith. "But they had a faith, certainly, and profound and powerful and noble it was, a faith which they hold in common with your dead, and which made them all brothers. France has not two categories of heroes of which one, yours, is greater, more beautiful and holy than the other, that of the so-called unbelievers. France recognizes all those who believe in her, and never will she admit this humiliating division."

The insincere foundations of Bourget's "languorous" and "bastard" faith crumble before Loisy's gleaming irony, his subtle intellectual analysis. The second half of his book deals, however, with a young Catholic writer who is undoubtedly both sincere and representative: Ernest