

Book Review

Crispian Villeneuve -- Rudolf Steiner: The British Connection

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Crispian Villeneuve had documented Rudolf Steiner's ten visits to Britain in two volumes (1902 - 1921) and (1922 - 1925) published by Temple Lodge in 2004 and revised in 2009.

The present book of 704 pages with many pictures and additional Notes goes back in time before Steiner's first visit to Britain. With all its volume, it does not compete with any of the extant biographies, but widens the horizon by following up brief descriptions and references given by Rudolf Steiner in his auto-biography. We learn interesting details of his early life, including testimonies of former school mates and stimuli received through particular teachers. Edmund Reitlinger, in his science lessons, had adopted wide historical views and quoted extensively from a book in English which was later identified as Whewell's 'Inductive Sciences'. The book 'Freie Blicke', written by the same teacher, was also an inspiration.- In order to convey briefly the wide scope of the present book, the twelve chapters should be named:

1) The Continental Situation 2) The Fine Book 'Freie Blicke 3) Cantabrigian Correlations 4) Whewell's Book on Inductive Sciences 5) The Schroerian Mission 6) The Viennese Continuation 7) The Weimar Progression 8) The Historical Relation 9) The Darwinian Dimensions 10) The Goethian Assertions 11) The 'Magazine' Contributions 12) The Berlin Conclusions.

Under these headings the author recorded freely his research into many outstanding pioneers of science, especially highlighting Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, William Whewell and Charles Darwin. Equally German personalities and their views are introduced to the English-speaking readership, in particular Goethe, Schroer and Haeckel. Apart from presenting Goethe as a scientist, it is amazing to learn, how well-read Goethe was in English literature and the British scientific developments of his time. To an English visitor Goethe once expressed: should he visit England one day, he would be no stranger! The same becomes evident in the text re: Rudolf Steiner. He, too, was abreast with all the British literature and the personalities behind it. In a similar way this held good also of many educated people in Germany who were conversant with Shakespeare's works and other literature.

At this point, admiration should be expressed to the author of the book under review: The translations of the texts by Rudolf Steiner and others, are his. The amazing insights offered to the reader bear witness of the author's devotion to the subject and his high degree of vision and erudition, quite apart from the wide-ranging meticulous research which opens windows to the background of Steiner's personal and social life and work, not otherwise available.

This said, the interested and willing reader may be at times overwhelmed by the sheer volume of facts and details which do not always enhance the flow of the narrative. In order to have done justice to this observation, a comprehensive register of names and page numbers would have been necessary for cross references. This, however, would have added much work and expenses. Even so, it makes an impressive reading.

It is beyond the scope of this Review to cite the many astonishing topics exemplified in this book, often quoted in their original form and context. For instance: having taken note of Steiner's selection for addressing seven thousand printers at the Gutenberg quint-centenary celebration, we read in articles for the 'Magazine' (which Rudolf Steiner edited), his own excellent contribution on the cultural impact which the art of printing has brought about: a transition from the Middle Ages to the modern times.

The last two chapters give rare insights into Rudolf Steiner's pre-anthroposophical activities in Berlin. We see him engaged with and reflected by many searching young people. In spite of all his openness to the prevailing social and spiritual situation, he was deeply concerned in finding an answer to the Darwinian views which had flooded the mental outlook of his time. Rudolf Steiner lived actively engaged in two worlds.

The book that brought the answer was '*Christianity as a Mystical Fact*'. It was published in 1902, and set the mark both as a conclusion of his general cultural engagements and the beginning of his theosophical/anthroposophical commitments, prior to his first visit to Britain.

'Rudolf Steiner: The British Connection' is of high value to students of the western development of science, as well as the continental approach, highlighted by Goethe and Rudolf Steiner. The subject is not only a matter of the past, but also opens up important future perspectives.

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