

THE BOOK OF THE MONTH¹

BY F. M. COLBY

A DOZEN years ago or so, M. Guesde, then, as now, the leader of the French orthodox Socialists, remarked, apropos of M. Millerand's entrance into the French Cabinet, that while "Socialists formerly showed their devotion by dying at the barricades, now they are devoted up to the point of accepting a portfolio." On the other hand, M. Millerand was praised by the unorthodox for "jumping into the breach." It was plain even then that pure Socialist theory had been terribly ravaged by common sense. Everywhere Socialists were compromising with earthly means under the temptation of opportunity, and Marxism was no longer unspotted by the world. Even in Germany professed believers were at least on speaking terms with the "vampire that sucks the blood of the workingman." Socialism, in fact, had long since become a mere mundane business. As to the holding of office, M. Guesde was quite right. It was absurd that a man should try to take his Marxism with him into office, for the chances were ten to one that as an officeholder he would soon cease to yearn for the "revolution" which as a Marxist it was his duty to do. Yearning for one's own overthrow is uphill work.

It has been plain even to the casual observer during the past twenty years that any man who wanted to keep his Marxism pure ought to have gone away and lived alone with it. Very few Socialists have done this, and the result is that there is hardly any pure Marxism left in the world to-day. The only pure political party is an asymptotic party—that is to say, one that follows a line of policy which will not meet the affairs of men, how far so ever it be produced, for obviously no other course will escape the corruption of contact.

¹ *Marxism versus Socialism.* By Vladimir C. Simkhovitch, Ph.D. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1913.

Guesdists, Impossibilists, Young Irrelevants, Malapropists, Inopportunist, whatever the names of those various and comparatively unearthly groups may be, have, no doubt, some high and almost inapplicable purpose, but they are not absolutely asymptotic, and so their Marxism is debased. As to the rank and file of Socialists, they have, according to Professor Simkhovitch, quite fallen away.

The rank and file of the American and German Socialist parties claim to be Marxist, but even they are far less orthodox than they claim to be. They have toned down their Marxian doctrine as they have liberalized their policies. They have refrained from sacrilegiously revising Marx as a whole, but they have piously reinterpreted parts of his teaching—all with much loyalty to the memory of Marx, but with little respect for the intellectual consistency of the doctrine.

This pious reinterpretation is necessary because

The Marxian doctrine, which helped the development of Socialism throughout the world as no other doctrine has, turned into a fetter, a trap, a pitfall from which there seems to be no escape. In the same compelling manner in which Marxism once assured its followers of the inevitability of the cataclysm and social revolution, precisely so does it indicate to-day their impossibility.

I doubt if Professor Simkhovitch's compact and lucid account of the matter will be of much interest to the partisan, for it is not in the least warlike or exciting. It lacks the passionate certitude on the subject of mankind as a whole to which we are accustomed even in light literature. He comes not to slay Marxism or to bury it, but merely to ascertain why it is "that so many of the Socialist thinkers are so arduously revising and reinterpreting their traditional doctrine, while others are grasping for a new one." For close students of contemporary Socialism, it will, I suppose, have little novelty. Its chief value is for those who, though inquisitive, are, like myself, a little lazy and have slept through a good many recent arguments. When summer brings its bitter and regular Socialist contentions and the French Disembodied Socialist is attacking the French Solidified Socialist, and the North German Orthodox is rebuking the South German Heterodox, and the South German Heterodox is answering back, I know at the time that the issue is important, but afterward somehow I am unable to recall the details. For, after all, the chief difficulty about latter-day Socialism is the difficulty of keeping awake. Take even so stirring a personage as Mr. Bernard Shaw.

In a speech described as very remarkable (with a \$500 prize offered for the best answer) occurs this somewhat stertorous language:

If you allow the purchasing power of one class to fall below the level of the vital necessities of subsistence, and at the same time allow the purchasing power of another class to rise considerably above it into the region of luxuries, then you find inevitably that those people with that superfluity determine production to the output of luxuries, while at the same time the necessities that are wanted at the other end cannot be sold, and are therefore not produced.

This led no man toward Socialism and drove no man away. It led him only to some drowsy recollections of John Stuart Mill. Such words can never change the listener's position, but, on the other hand, are apt to settle him almost too comfortably in his present seat. One remains awake so long as Mr. Shaw shows that present society is ridiculous; but the moment he begins to prove that a Shavian society would be less so the eyelids close.

It would be hard to find so clear and impartial a statement of Marxian doctrine as Professor Simkhovitch has compressed into the two opening chapters of his volume. He places the emphasis where it belongs. The Marxian philosophy does not stand or fall with the labor theory of value.

It is quite true that his theory of value is the central theory upon which his economic analysis of the capitalistic system rests—in short, the foundation of his economic doctrine; but this theory plays no rôle whatsoever in his Socialistic doctrine, which purports to be nothing more than a demonstration that Socialism is inevitable.

The essential point in Marx's teaching is the "economic interpretation of history." He held that in every period of history the prevailing mode of production and exchange determined the social structure. It alone explains the past and decides the future.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman—in a word, oppressor and oppressed—stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight—a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

Feudalism gave way to the régime of the bourgeoisie, and this in turn will give way to the régime of the proletariat.

Modern society, having called into existence unparalleled means of exchange and gigantic means of production, is like the sorcerer who can no

longer cope with the powers of the nether world which his incantations have conjured up.

There was no need of any world-reformer to bring the change about. The revolution was inevitable. At one pole was the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, and at the other pole was the increasing misery of the great mass of mankind. The absolutely certain result was the "expropriation of the expropriators." History to Marx was merely the record of class struggles. The increase of the general misery, the disappearance of the middle class, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, the increasing anarchy of competitive production, the increasing frequency of commercial crises, clearly indicated that the revolution was at hand. Marxism was the philosophy of impending revolution.

In their faith in the approaching *dies irae* Marx and his followers did not differ from the Second Adventists. Nearly every commercial depression since 1850 was heralded by them as the beginning of the end of capitalism. If they did not, like the Millerites, attire themselves in white ascension robes to meet the coming of the Day, it was because their ritual was different. They did notify the proletarians of all lands to "get ready." In 1896 the International Socialist Congress passed the following resolution: "The economic and industrial development is going on with such rapidity that a crisis may occur within a comparatively short time. The Congress, therefore, impresses upon the proletariat of all countries the imperative necessity of learning, as class-conscious citizens, how to administer the business of their respective countries for the common good." Socialist literature, both popular and scientific, has constantly dwelt on the coming collapse of the capitalist mode of production, for which conclusive proofs were always at hand.

The reasons why the Socialists are revising Marxism, or explaining it away, appear from the course of events during the last sixty years. In 1850, on seeing the model of an electric engine in London, Marx, "all flushed and excited," pronounced the economic revolution at hand, and believed the political revolution would soon follow. His rigid historical method led to similar predictions again and again. The impending revolution has been indefinitely postponed. And so with his other predictions—the small farmer has not been extinguished, but, on the contrary, has multiplied, the middle class instead of sinking into the proletariat has increased, the concentration of capital has not proceeded at the expected rate, the conditions of the working classes have improved, class struggles seem on the whole less acute,

and commercial crises are less destructive. Professor Simkhovitch's little volume consists in the main of an orderly and moderate setting forth of these matters. It does not discredit Socialism as a faith, but only as a science.

Marxian Socialism calls itself "scientific Socialism" because of its economic interpretation of history. With the help of this method it claims to unveil to us the real story of the past; with the help of the same method it claims to reveal to us the future.

But the breaking down of the method does not diminish the splendor of the attempt, and Marx was, after all, a prophet in the older sense, a great spiritual leader, an inspirer of men. We have only to contrast him with the social soothsayers of our own time to realize it. Nowadays we have grown almost as used to social prophecy as to advertisements. A wonder-working air and an assurance that human nature will be uprooted in a few years have become a mere form of emphasis. When, for example, they started the People's Palaces in Paris, they declared it the final step in social regeneration. There were to be just three stages in social progress, said the augurs at the time: First, popular universities were to bring about the emancipation of the proletariat; second, the co-operation of ideas was to produce a convergence of efforts; third, People's Palaces were to insure social solidarity. After that was to come the period of bliss—constant, inexpugnable social bliss in equal shares for all. Education, convergence, solidarity, bliss—one, two, three, four—that was all there was to it. From the language of the founders one might have inferred that evil could be got rid of in about three weeks. There is nothing to hinder social prophecy, says Professor Simkhovitch, with exasperating mildness, "but there is also no guarantee of its fulfilment." One does not have to remain long in this battered old world to lay by a large fund of perfect certainty as to its non-fulfilment.

Reformers as a class seem never to understand the danger of over-statement. The reformer and his cause are like those embarrassing engaged couples who will not in the presence of visitors refrain from caresses. He seems to think the only way to advance a cause is to pay it outrageous compliments in public, counting on a degree of softness in the heads of the beholders that really is not to be found. Good, sensible little plans for a People's Palace, or an eight-hour law, or co-operative consumption, or uni-

versity extension, or more comfortable clothes for women, never begin as mere good little plans. They begin as the dawns of new eras. Born and bred to this hyperbolic custom, with regeneration always in the wind, we have no difficulty in keeping our expectations completely under control. The Marxian prophetic example may have been bad for these lesser breeds of the present day, but of one thing we may be certain: If he were living to-day he would not by any chance be a Marxist, for in that case he would not be bearing the same intellectual ratio to the men and things of his time.

As to the part Marx really plays in present Socialism Professor Simkhovitch has this to say in the concluding pages of his book:

Now that the Socialist parties have become in reality reform parties, they may become even tamer than they are to-day; but why should they give up the old phrases? Talk about the "social revolution" may sound fantastic, in view of the existing economic conditions and tendencies, but it is more than talk. The inevitable cataclysm and social revolution have a mystical quality, and hence they are assets. A social movement that is quite sensible, quite reasonable, is the wildest of all utopias. Such a movement can no more keep alive without faith than faith can keep alive without miracles, wrought or prophesied. The social revolution that is to come has all the essential characteristics of the standard miracle: it is to be sudden, and it is to be final. What element of the miraculous would there be in a slow but steady convalescence? And how unsatisfactory a miraculous cure would be if it had to be repeated! Social reform cannot arouse the passionate ardor that is kindled by the apocalyptic vision of the social cataclysm. The road to social reform is flat and dusty; the journey along it is hard and dull. It is a wise instinct, therefore, that moves the Socialists who have become social reformers to cling to the earlier vision and intone, as of old, their imprecatory psalms. But the contrast between their policies and their theories, between what they do and what they say, tempts one to say to them, inverting the Biblical quotation: "The hands are the hands of Jacob, but the voice is the voice of Esau."

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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

THE THEORY OF SOCIAL REVOLUTIONS. By BROOKS ADAMS. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913.

Human intelligence hardly seems as yet to have reached such a degree of development as to make feasible the practical application of those abstract principles, such as they are, which may be drawn from history. Nations, it has been observed, have their periods of rise and decline; in art, supreme achievement is followed by decadence; in each era and in every form of activity similar causes are found at work producing similar effects with a kind of fatal regularity. Such, at least, is likely to be the view of the philosopher of history—often rather a grim prophet, who gives a dry and not too hopeful interpretation of the writing on the wall. Viewing progress as an affair of repeated phases, of actions and reactions, of ups and downs, he holds out little hope that philosophy will ever be able to make the human race march in a level line. He merely plots the curve of social tendencies.

It is the rise and conjectural fall of the capitalist class which Mr. Adams endeavors after a fashion to map out. This class, he believes, shows phenomena analogous to those exhibited in the past by other dominant classes. The inflexibility of the capitalists and their alleged assertion of superiority to the law are not, it would seem, fundamentally different from the attitude of the French aristocrats at the time of the Revolution. Not that we are likely to have in this country an immediate or violent overthrow of the established order. Nor are the capitalists themselves, in Mr. Adams's view, other than conscientious men. It is simply that as the dominant class they have reached, or are reaching, the summit beyond which lies the declining slope—a slope that may be gradual or abrupt. "Why," Mr. Adams inquires, "should a type of mind which has developed the highest prescience when advancing along the curve which has led it to ascendancy be stricken with fatuity when the summit of the curve is passed and when a miscalculation touching the velocity of the descent must be destruction?" The question, he thinks, admits of no definite, conclusive answer, though perhaps we may satisfy ourselves with the explanation that the mind of the ruling class becomes in time too highly specialized to permit of easy adaptation to new conditions.

In America, the trend toward social revolution has gone on subject to two principal influences: the rapid change in material conditions that has taken place during the last two centuries, and the peculiar American legal system. It is with the latter of these two factions that Mr. Adams is chiefly concerned. Elaborately, by parable and precedent, he seeks to show that a profound error was committed by the founders of the Republic when they