

**THE LAST EPISODE OF THE
FRENCH REVOLUTION; BEING A
HISTORY OF GRACCHUS BABEUF
AND THE CONSPIRACY OF THE
EQUALS**

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The Last Episode of the French Revolution; Being a History of Gracchus Babeuf and the Conspiracy of the Equals by Ernest Belfort Bax

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ERNEST BELFORT BAX

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BY
M. M. M. M.

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GRACCHUS BABEUF

From an engraving in E.-F. De Saint Martin's "Voix d'un Peuple" (1804)

H.F.B.
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BY

ERNEST BELFORT BAX

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"MAKAT: THE PEOPLE'S FRIEND,"

"THE STORY OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION,"

"THE SOCIAL SIDE OF THE REFORMATION IN GERMANY,"

ETC., ETC.



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NOTE ON AUTHORITIES

As the principal sources that have been used in the preparation of the following study may be mentioned:—

- (1) The careful and exhaustive *Histoire de Gracchus Babeuf et du Babouisme*, largely based on hitherto unpublished documents, by M. Victor Advielle. 2 vols. (Paris, 1884).
- (2) *Gracchus Babeuf et le Conspiration des Égaux*, by Philippe Buonarroti (Paris, 1830), a first-hand narrative by one of the principal actors in the drama he describes.
- (3) *Babeuf et le Socialisme en 1796*, par Edouard Fleury (Paris, 1851), a book preserving some interesting details, but prejudiced and not altogether reliable.
- (4) Among the contemporary sources for the history of the movement, the *Copie des Pièces saisies dans le local que Babeuf occupoit lors de son arrestation* (Paris, Nivôse, Ann. V.) occupies an important place. It consists in a volume officially published by the High Court immediately after the trial, containing a complete collection of the *pièces de conviction* which formed the basis of the prosecution.
- (5) The collection of the numbers of Babeuf's journals, the *Journal de la Liberté de la Presse* and the *Tribun du Peuple*, together with the few numbers of the *Éclaireur*, a journal published for a short time by Babeuf's friend Sylvain Maréchal, to be found in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

Other, minor, references are given in the text.

Allusions to, and accounts of, the movement are, of course, to be found in all the journals of the time, but they are for the most part utterly prejudiced, and contain no facts of importance not given by Buonarroti or contained in the officially published documents.

PREFACE

OF all the leading actors in the great drama of the French Revolution, there is probably none less known to the average reader of history than the subject of the present volume. All that has appeared in English in book form up to the present time consists, I believe, in Brontcrre O'Brien's translation of Buonaroti's account of the Movement of the "Equals," now long since out of print. The reason for this neglect, and for the lack of interest generally shown in Babeuf, is probably in part to be looked for in the fact that Babeuf's public activity consisted of a kind of aftermath of the great historical events of the Revolution. The Revolution, properly speaking, had run its course before Babeuf appeared on the scene. The principal leaders were fallen or dispersed, the ragged levies of the people's quarters of St Antoine and St Marceau had risen *en masse* for the last time, and had been beaten and disarmed by the forces of the new governing class that had installed itself in the

seats of the old royal and feudal authorities. François Noel Babeuf, the subsequent Gracchus, played no political rôle of any importance while the Revolution was at its zenith. His name became first prominent in the year IV. (1795), when the Society, which later on met near the Pantheon, was formed. The usual fate of secret movements, of conspiracies, overtook Babeuf's. It was killed by treachery—killed, as its promoters fondly believed, on the eve of success. In a word, the movement was a failure, and its memory with the great world soon tended to pass into oblivion. Nevertheless, for students of the earlier democratic movements, and of the precursors of modern Socialism, the agitation of Babeuf in the last decade of the eighteenth century must be of keen interest.

I may mention that the following monograph represents the carrying out of a wish, expressed some years before he died, of my old friend, William Morris, who thought that a clear and concise account of the Babeuf incident in English was wanted, and who urged me to undertake the task. Whether this little volume answers the requirements of the case must be left for the reader to judge.

E. B. B.

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