

KARL MARX AND MODERN SOCIALISM

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Karl Marx and modern socialism by F. R. Salter

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F. R. SALTER

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PREFACE

THIS book is not in any way an anti-collectivist pamphlet ; nor does it claim to be either an original or a profound study of Marxism. But the life of Marx is so little known, either by friend or foe, and his teaching so often reduced to a few bald shibboleths, that there may perhaps be room for a sketch of him as he was in relation to the thought and the circumstances of his age, describing at the same time, in rough outline, the development of the labour movements of Europe to whose growth he contributed so much. The writer is one of those who are so genially described in certain quarters as "class-biassed teachers in Universities," but he can plead practical knowledge of W.E.A. Tutorial Classes as, in some sense at least, a corrective to academic prejudice, and he is anyhow old-fashioned enough to doubt whether the writing of history must of necessity be only a class, or mass, interpretation of the past. Marx has certainly had less than justice done him hitherto because class interpretations have made him out as either an impeccable hero or a worthless ruffian : this deluge of praise and blame, in each case so often entirely indiscriminating, has had the effect of turning into an inhuman and almost legendary figure one who was in point of fact a very lovable, very exasperating but essentially real, though often wrong-headed, enthusiast.

MAGDALENE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE,
November, 1920.

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CHAPTER I

KARL MARX: PERSONALITY AND EARLY HISTORY

(1) *Biographical Outline*

KARL MARX was born at Trèves in 1818: he may be summed up, as far as his earliest stage of political activity is concerned, as a Journalist who would have liked to have been a Don; and he was thwarted from realising this ambition not by any innate inferiority of intellect but by the official Prussian attitude towards the religious position even of a christianised Jew and towards advanced views in general. After an elaborate education in both Law and Philosophy at the Universities of Bonn and Berlin, Marx reluctantly came to the conclusion, based on the unfortunate experience of his friend Bruno Bauer, that the Government, always a controlling force in a German University, would never leave him alone were he to become a teacher. To a natural rebel, such as he was, against the existing social and political régime in Germany, the circumstances attending the abandonment of an academic life did not lead to any increase of submissiveness, and in 1842, being even then only 24, he started, in partnership with Bauer, the publication of a radical newspaper. This was quickly suppressed by the Government and Marx in 1843 migrated to Paris, continuing there the economic investigations on which he had already embarked and

which were to be the dominant interest of his life. In 1844 began his life-long friendship with Friedrich Engels, who was destined to collaborate with him in the famous Communist Manifesto of 1848, and to remain throughout his life the partner of his literary labours, political activities and domestic joys and sorrows. Engels was the son of a wealthy Rhineland manufacturer, whose firm owned a cotton mill near Manchester, and thither Friedrich Engels had been sent in 1842. He, like Marx, was a close student of economic problems and conditions: he sympathised warmly with the Chartist movement, then at the height of its second phase, and was a personal friend of many of its leaders. In 1845 he published, in German, a study of the condition of the working classes in England.¹ On returning to England in this same year, after one of his business trips to the Continent, he induced Marx to return with him, and this first visit, short though it was, served to introduce Marx not only to the land which was so soon to become his permanent place of exile, but also to the great body of radical and socialist literature which even then existed, and which he started to read with avidity. But he had four more years of Continental activity before him, during which he sorely tried the patience of the Governments under which he lived. After Paris, Brussels and then again Paris were the scenes of his labours, which included radical journalistic propaganda directed towards Germany, while in 1848 the Communist Manifesto appeared. When Marx finally settled down in London in 1849 he had enjoyed the distinction of being expelled from three European countries, and of having seen three of his journalistic ventures perish untimely. One of these newspapers had the

¹ Translated in 1892 by Wischnewetsky, *The Condition of the Working Classes in England in 1844*.

now familiar title of *Vorwärts*; it was published weekly in Paris, and made a speciality of shewing up the absurdities of the little princes of Germany: another paper, the *Franco-German Year Book*, actually died from lack of support, but if it *had* lasted longer, it would almost without doubt have been suppressed.

Marx therefore entered on his English period as an "International Man" by necessity rather than choice, and he added another Continent to his purview by becoming London correspondent of the *New York Times*. But there was much more in him than disgruntled cosmopolitanism of a negative kind. The following extract from a letter written about this time shews well enough how far his mind had travelled and how clear he was already as to the objects which he had in view:—"Nothing prevents us from combining our criticism¹ with the criticism of politics, from participating in politics, and consequently in real struggles. We will not, then, oppose the world like doctrinaires with a new principle: 'here is truth, kneel down here. We expose new principles to the world out of the principles of the world itself. We don't tell it, 'Give up your struggles; they are rubbish; we will shew you the true war cry.' We explain to it only the real object for which it struggles, and consciousness is a thing it *must* acquire even if it objects to it."

Michael Bakunin, the famous Russian revolutionary and anarchist, gives an interesting account of what he thought of Marx when he met him at Paris in 1843. "We saw each other rather often, for I respected him deeply for his science and for his passionate and serious devotion, although always mingled with personal vanity, to the cause of the proletariat; and I sought with eagerness

¹ *I.e.* of the economic structure of society.