

THE REVOLUTIONARY TRADITION IN  
EUROPE AND THE RISE OF SOCIALISM

EDMUND WILSON

*To The*

*Vico*

*Saint-Simon*

FINLAND

*Taine*

STATION

*Michelet*

*Fourier*

*Marx*

*A Study in the Writing*

*Engels*

*and Acting of History*

*Lenin*

*Trotsky*



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TO  
THE FINLAND  
STATION

*A Study in the Writing and  
Acting of History by*

EDMUND WILSON

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of a new science of history. Among his projects had been a history of "the race considered as an individual," a series of "philosophical studies of the poets" and a work on "the character of peoples as revealed by their vocabularies." He had desired, he wrote, to "mingle history with philosophy" because they "completed each other." By July, he had gotten to Vico, and he read the first volume through without stopping. From the collision of Michelet's mind with Vico's, it is hardly too much to say that a whole new philosophical-artistic world was born: the world of re-created social history. Of this moment in Michelet's life he was afterwards to note: "1824. Vico. Effort, infernal shades, grandeur, the Golden Bough." "From 1824 on," he wrote, "I was seized by a frenzy caught from Vico, an incredible intoxication with his great historical principle."

And even reading Vico today, we can feel some of Michelet's excitement. It is strange and stirring to find in the *Scienza Nuova* the modern sociological and anthropological mind wakening amid the dusts of a provincial school of jurisprudence of the end of the seventeenth century and speaking through the antiquated machinery of a half-scholastic treatise. Here, before the steady rays of Vico's insight—almost as if we were looking out on the landscape of the Mediterranean itself—we see the fogs that obscure the horizons of the remote reaches of time recede, the cloud-shapes of legend lift. In the shadows there are fewer monsters; the heroes and the gods float away. What we see now are men as we know them alone on the earth we know. The myths that have made us wonder are projections of a human imagination like our own and, if we look for the key inside ourselves and learn how to read them correctly, they will supply us with a record, inaccessible up to now, of the adventures of men like ourselves.

And a record of something more than mere adventures. Human history had hitherto always been written as a series of biographies of great men or as a chronicle of remarkable happenings or as a pageant directed by God. But now we can see that the developments of societies have been affected by their sources, their environments; and that like individual human beings they have passed through regular phases of

growth. "The facts of known history," Vico writes, (I quote from the translation by Michelet, which sometimes departs from Vico's text) are to be "referred to their primitive origins, divorced from which they have seemed hitherto to possess neither a common basis, nor continuity nor coherence." And: "The nature of things is nothing other than that they come into being at certain times and in certain ways. Wherever the same circumstances are present, the same phenomena arise and no others." And: "In that dark night which shrouds from our eyes the most remote antiquity, a light appears which cannot lead us astray; I speak of this incontestable truth: *the social world is certainly the work of men*; and it follows that one can and should find its principles in the modifications of the human intelligence itself." And: "Governments must be conformable to the nature of the governed; governments are even a result of that nature."

All of these ideas which Michelet found in Vico were, though Vico had been their first exponent, not of course new to Michelet. The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century had occurred between Vico's time and his. Voltaire, before Michelet was born, had already cleared the gods and the heroes away; Montesquieu had shown how human institutions were related to racial habit and climate. And Michelet, furthermore, was soon afterwards to find in Herder an evolutionary theory of culture and in Hegel an exposition of the chemistry of social change. How was it then that the *Scienza Nuova* could come to a man of 1820 as an intoxicating revelation? Because Vico, by force of an imaginative genius of remarkable power and scope, had enabled him to grasp fully for the first time the organic character of human society and the importance of re-integrating through history the various forces and factors which actually compose human life. "I had no other master but Vico," he wrote. "His principle of living force, of humanity creating itself, made both my book and my teaching." Vico had described his achievement as an explanation of "the formation of human law" and an indication of "the specific phases and the regular process by which the customs which gave rise to law originally came into being: religions, languages, dominations, commerce, orders, empires, laws, arms, judgments, punishments,

Jules Michelet was ten, his father was arrested for debt, and he went along with his mother while she accompanied her husband to jail. Later, Napoleon's police put the seals on the Michelets' press; and the incident caused Jules such anguish that he afterwards made a stipulation in his will that his wife should not be obliged to seal his coffin. The principles of the Revolution were never far below the surface in Michelet, even in those years of his early manhood when they appeared somewhat varnished over by what had come to be the conventional bourgeois opinions.

In the July of 1830, the reaction against Charles X resulted in an uprising of workers and students which held Paris for three days and drove the white flag back into exile. Michelet, still full of Vico, became possessed by a vision of his own, in which the reawakening idealism of the tradition of the great Revolution gave purpose to Vico's cycles. In a burst of emotion, he wrote at top speed an *Introduction to Universal History*. It had been dashed off, he said, "on the burning pavements" of Paris; and it opened with the following declaration: "With the world began a war which will end only with the world: the war of man against nature, of spirit against matter, of liberty against fatality. History is nothing other than the record of this interminable struggle." Christianity has given the world the moral gospel; now France must preach the social gospel. "The solutions to social and intellectual problems are always ineffective in Europe until they have been interpreted, translated, popularized, by France."

But the victory of the workers was premature; the provinces failed to support Paris; and the liberal bourgeoisie, instead of restoring the republic, sold out to the Orléanist party, who set up the constitutional monarch, Louis-Philippe. Michelet went back to the Tuilleries, where he now had a new princess to tutor, Louis-Philippe's daughter. But he got also an appointment more important to him: he was made Conservateur des Archives, head of the Record Office. And with the charters, the statutes and the official correspondence of ancient France at his disposal, he embarked on his *History of the Middle Ages*.

When Michelet went into the Records, with Vico and the echoes of July in his head, a new past, for the first time the real past of France, seemed to revive for the imagination. The first volume or two of Michelet's history, dealing with the early races of Gaul, a period where documents are few and as to which, even in the light of later scholarship, we still remain considerably in the dark, were not particularly successful as "resurrection" of the past, the phrase Michelet applied to his method. It is only with the chapter called *Map of France* and devoted to the description of the country, that the characteristic Michelet appears. But as we get on into the ages where the materials are more plentiful, the miracle begins to take place.

Michelet's letters during this period supply a remarkable picture of his conception of his historian's task and the passion with which he attacked it.

"I believe I have found," he writes, "through concentration and reverberation, a flame sufficiently intense to melt down all the apparent diversities, to restore to them in history the unity they had in life. . . . I have not been able to interpret the least social fact without calling all the departments of human activity to my aid, and coming more and more to realize that our classifications do not hold. . . . To undertake to combine so many elements alien to one another is to harbor within oneself a great disturbing force. To reproduce so many passions is not to calm one's own. A lamp which is hot enough to fuse whole peoples is hot enough to consume its very hearth. . . . I have never yet [he is writing of the Renaissance now] lifted so great a mass, combined in a living unity so many apparently discordant elements. . . . I am trying to twist those threads which have never been woven together in science: law, art, etc., to show how a certain statue, a certain picture, is an event in the history of law, to follow the social movement from the stocky serf who upholds the niches of the feudal saints to the fantasy of the court (Goujon's Diana), even to Béranger. This double thread is twisted of industry and religion. It is easy for the imagination to catch a glimpse of this interaction, but to determine with any certitude the manner,

he came to them out of a different world. When the other boys left school, it was to go home to bourgeois comfort and leisure; when Jules went home, it was to work on the press. He had learned to set type at twelve.

But near the press in that bleak and unhealthy basement, he was building up for himself his own empire. In proportion as he was hungry and cold, so was he forced in for food and heat on his own mind and imagination. After all, he was an only child of whom his parents expected much and for whom they procured such advantages as they could. Later in life, he was to write to his son-in-law on the question of his grandson's schooling: "The most important matter is Etienne. I must *hand on to him what my parents did for me* in providing me by unexampled sacrifices with freedom, freedom to have time for my work. Let us not indulge in false democratic attitudes. The worker is a slave either of the will of others or of fate. I escaped that, thanks to my father and mother." And, after all, although, as we shall see, the damp and chill winters of Paris put their blight on all Michelet's youth, he was a Parisian, and that was to mean to him all his life to have been born to a great intellectual inheritance. He speaks in one of his letters of his eagerness to get back to "our Paris, that great keyboard with its hundred thousand keys that one can play on every day—I mean by that its innumerable intellectual resources."

And finally—what provided Michelet with a special kind of outlook and training—the Michelets were a family of printers, who had their printing press to give them a common interest and a sort of *esprit de corps*. The press was to become for Michelet the great symbol of the advance of modern thought, and printing a veritable religion. There was something in the Michelets still of the spirit of the great Renaissance printers such as the Etiennes and the Alduses, of whom Michelet gives so stirring an account—those extraordinary learned families who, transported by the discovery of antiquity and hardly stopping to sleep at night, managed not merely to set up the classics but to edit and elucidate them, too. So, up to the time of his death, Michelet's father worked with him over his history. And Michelet's interest in the freedom of the press and the progress of human science is that of a man to whom print-

ing is still an adventure and a conquest. It is an essential part of Michelet's strength and charm that he should seem less like a nineteenth-century scholar than like the last great man of letters of the Renaissance. In his early years he mastered Latin and Greek with a thoroughness which was at that time already rare; and he later acquired English, Italian and German and devoured the literature and learning of those languages. With small means, he succeeded in traveling pretty much all over Western Europe, and those regions, such as the Slavic East, to which his actual travels did not penetrate, his insatiable mind invaded. The impression he makes on us is quite different from that of the ordinary modern scholar who has specialized in some narrowly delimited subject and gotten it up in a graduate school: we feel that Michelet has read all the books, been to look at all the monuments and pictures, interviewed personally all the authorities, and explored all the libraries and archives of Europe; and that he has it all under his hat. The Goncourts said that Michelet's attractiveness lay in the fact that his works "seem to be written by hand. They are free from the banality and impersonality which the printed thing has; they are like the autograph of a thought." But what Michelet really goes back to is an earlier stage of printing before either the journalistic or the academic formulas had come between first-hand knowledge and us. He is simply a man going to the sources and trying to get down on record what can be learned from them; and this role, which claims for itself, on the one hand, no academic sanctions, involves, on the other hand, a more direct responsibility to the reader.

Michelet thus learned from the beginning to fortify himself inside an intellectual citadel impregnable to hardship or disaster. The external circumstances of his life continued to be somber and distressing. After the death of Mme. Michelet, Jules's father was given an odd kind of employment presiding over an institution which was half boarding-house, half insane asylum. There Michelet spent some eight years of his youth in the company of cracked and impoverished persons left over from the old regime, and of the doctors and attendants who took care of them. Jules married the young companion of an old and feeble-minded marquise. She had little in common

with enthusiasm by writers as different as Lamartine, Montalembert, Victor Hugo, Heine, Herzen, Proudhon, Béranger, Renan, Taine, the Goncourts and Flaubert. He was an artist as well as a thinker, and so penetrated to parts of the intellectual world widely remote from one another and influenced a variety of writers in a curious variety of ways.

What Michelet regarded as his gospel we may leave for discussion later: his ideas were always expounded on a level more or less distinct from that on which his narrative was developed. Let us consider his history as a work of art and in its philosophical implications.

Two principal problems confronted Michelet in writing history in such a way as to render the organic character of society, of that "humanity creating itself" of which he had caught the conception from Vico. One of these was the nerve-trying task under which we have seen him gasping in his letters: that of fusing disparate materials, of indicating the interrelations between diverse forms of human activity. The other was to recapture, as it were, the peculiar shape and color of history as it must have seemed to the men who lived it—to return into the past as if it were present and see the world without definite foreknowledge of the as yet uncreated future. And in conceiving and carrying out these feats, Michelet seems to me to have proved himself a great intellect and a great artist.

One of the primary aspects of the fusing process was the relation of the individual to the mass; and Michelet's handling of this has probably never been surpassed, even in fiction. "Another thing," he wrote in the *History of the Revolution*, "which this History will clearly establish and which holds true in every connection, is that the people were usually more important than the leaders. The deeper I have excavated, the more surely I have satisfied myself that the best was underneath, in the obscure depths. And I have realized that it is quite wrong to take these brilliant and powerful talkers, who expressed the thought of the masses, for the sole actors in the drama. They were given the impulse by others much more than they gave it themselves. The principal actor is the people. To find the people again and put it back in its proper role, I

have been obliged to reduce to their proportions the ambitious marionettes whose strings it manipulated and in whom hitherto we have looked for and thought to see the secret play of history." And in regard to remarkable persons in general, Michelet always shows them in their relation to the social group which has molded them and whose feelings they are finding expression for, whose needs they are attempting to satisfy. Yet even the personalities of the revolutionary leaders are made vivid and idiosyncratic; they are at intervals brought so close to us that we can note a change in their health or morale, their manner or their way of dressing; we follow their private relationships, enter into their love affairs. Michelet is equally successful in dealing with individuals and communities. The special personality of a city or a locality—Lyon, Avignon, the Vendée—is rendered with the same masterly sense of character; and the various social elements which compose it are shown in their interaction like the elements in a single human character. And then there are the persons of secondary importance, like Ravaillac, the assassin of Henri IV, or Madame Guyon, the eighteenth-century mystic, or the totally obscure persons like Grainville, the unfortunate schoolmaster of Amiens, who seemed to concentrate in his destiny all the disillusion and despair of the aftermath of the Revolution—those minor figures of whom Michelet will give us a portrait in a chapter, making us see clearly in the single cell some function or some malady of the body.

Michelet's skill at shifting back and forth between the close-up of the individual, the movement of the local group and the analytic survey of the whole, is one of the features of a technical virtuosity which becomes more and more amazing.

Michelet first begins really to master his method toward the middle of the *History of the Revolution*, where he has to range over an immense keyboard in relating the developments in the provinces to political events in Paris. I cannot allow Lytton Strachey's opinion that the centuries leading up to the Revolution are the most successful section of Michelet (the volumes on the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were written after the volumes on the Revolution). The

plains that he did not give his references in a genuinely scholarly fashion; but even the methodical Taine and the envious Sainte-Beuve were forced to confess that, though Michelet's way was as alien as possible from their ways, his work remained valid none the less.

X //

Then, Michelet, reentering the past, successful though he is at making us see things as they must have looked to the people of the past, has nevertheless, inescapably, the wisdom of the later time and cannot restrain himself from trying to intervene. He is always warning, advising, scolding his actors, whom, however, he cannot hope to influence. And in the meantime, contemporary events were continually soliciting his attention. He wrote pamphlets against the Jesuits; in vindication of the revolutionary tradition; in defense of France after 1870. According to the devoted but disquieted Monod, he turned his lectures into public speeches. He insisted that what he wanted was to get out of history "a principle of action," to produce "something more than intelligences—souls and wills." He was never, he complained, at one with himself; all his life, he was hurrying and straining to accomplish prodigious tasks which seemed to loom insurmountable before him. "Having strayed from the paths of harmony forever," he writes in one of his letters, "I have resumed the life I led so long: that of a cannon ball." Yet his history found its vein and its proportions; and he did not desert it for action. Even in 1848, when his excitement over public affairs was at its height and his friend and ally Quinet was running for political office, Michelet declined to take part in politics. His early years had conditioned him, as the behaviorists say, for self-dependence, literature, research—as his hair had turned white at twenty-five. He had made a second marriage late in life with a woman much younger than himself, who gave him sympathy and admiration; but the impression we get from his work is that of a man who has subsided into early-acquired habits of solitude. He worked at night, and made the centuries of the dead keep him company and lend him their strength and their faith that he might wake strength and faith in the living.

his attempts to reaffirm, to keep always in the foreground of his activity, the original revolutionary principles, was turning out to be one of the chief ornaments of this highly developed literature. With his novelist's sympathetic insight into different kinds of human beings, his sense of social and moral complexity and his artistic virtuosity, he was to live to be read with delight by people who did not share his opinions.

Nevertheless, he was to pass out of fashion. The writer of an article called *Why Michelet Is No Longer Read* predicted in 1898, on the occasion of the Michelet centenary, that the celebration would not do Michelet justice. Michelet is no longer read, he says, because people no longer understand him. Though he was followed in his day by the whole generation of 1850, he commits for the skeptical young men of the end of the century the supreme sin of being an apostle, a man of passionate feeling and conviction. Michelet created the religion of the Revolution, and the Revolution is not popular today, when the Academicians put it in its place, when persons who would have been nothing without it veil their faces at the thought of the Jacobin terror, when even those who have nothing against it manage to patronize it. Besides, Michelet attacked the priesthood, and the Church is now treated with respect.

Let us take a last look at him, in Couture's drawing, before passing on to his successors: the Michelet of 1842, with his mask of determined will, which seems always to have been straining, never relaxed—the long plebeian jaw, the self-assertive chin, the set mouth, the fine trenchant nose with its distended and mettlesome nostrils, the eyes deep and sharp, sheltering a sensitiveness taxed by interior struggle, beneath eyebrows as heavy as wings, which make the creases of perpetual effort.

Now look at Renan and Taine. With Michelet, the man has created the mask. But here it is the profession that has made it: Renan, with his great belly, his pudgy hands, his round and puffy face, his heavily-drooping porcine eyelids—the most intelligent and honest of all the French abbés, but still fundamentally a French abbé; Taine (in Bonnat's portrait), with his spectacles and his myopic-looking eyes, his bald

dome, his wilting imperial, his high conversational eyebrows—the most brilliant of all the French professors, but still from tip to toe a French professor. Michelet, the man of an unsettled and a passionate generation, has forged his own personality, created his own trade and established his own place. Renan and Taine, on the other hand, are the members of learned castes. Both, like Michelet, set the search for truth above personal considerations: Renan, who had studied for the priesthood, left the seminary and stripped off his robe as soon as he knew that it was impossible for him to accept the Church's version of history, and the scandal of the *Life of Jesus* cost him his chair at the Collège de France; and the materialistic principles of Taine proved such a stumbling-block to his superiors throughout his academic career that he was finally obliged to give up the idea of teaching. But, though rejected by their professional colleagues, they came before long to be accepted as among the official wise men of their society, a society now temporarily stabilized. Both ended as members of the Academy ("When one is *someone*, why should one want to be *something*?" Gustave Flaubert wondered about Renan)—whereas it is only a few years ago that Michelet and Quinet were finally given burial in the Panthéon.

Both Renan and Taine, of the generation twenty or thirty years younger than Michelet, had felt his influence, and combining, as Michelet had done, immense learning with artistic gifts, were to continue his re-creation of the past. Renan tells us with what excitement he read Michelet's history at school: "The century reached me through the cracks in a broken cement. . . . With amazement I discovered that there were laymen who were serious and learned; I saw that there existed something outside of antiquity and the Church . . . the death of Louis XIV was no longer the end of the world for me. Ideas and feelings appeared that had never had any expression either in antiquity or in the seventeenth century."

Three years after Renan left the seminary, the Revolution of 1848 occurred, and "the problems of socialism," as he says, "seemed, as it were, to rise out of the earth and terrify the world." Renan attempted to deal with these problems in a book

is in my opinion regrettable. For besides depriving the public service of those who are best fitted to fill it, it implies that everything that is done and everything that happens ought to be taken seriously. . . . In my own case, nothing has yet been asked of me; I confess that I don't consider myself sufficiently important to make an exception among my colleagues, who are no more partisans of the present regime than I am. It is clear that for a very long time we must stand aside from politics. Let us not keep the burdens, if we do not want the advantages."

Yet there is here still an ideal of public service. Renan ran for the Chamber of Deputies in 1869 on a platform of, "No revolution; no war; a war will be as disastrous as a revolution." And even when the war was in progress and the Prussians were besieging Paris, he took an unpopular line in advocating peace negotiations.

The French bourgeois intellectual after 1870 found himself in the singular position of belonging at the same time to a dominant class and a defeated nation, of at the same time enjoying advantages and submitting to humiliation; and this paradox produced curious attitudes. Edmond de Goncourt, in his journal, gives an illuminating picture of Renan during the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune—we see him praising the Germans, to whom in his field he owed so much, in the face of the loud protests of his companions; waving his short arms and quoting Scripture against the prophets of French revenge; maintaining that for the "idealist," the emotion of patriotism had been rendered obsolete by Catholicism, that "the fatherland of the idealists is the country where they are allowed to think." One day when he had been standing at the window watching a regiment pass by amidst the shouts of the crowd, he contemptuously turned away: "There's not a man among them all," he cried, "who is capable of an act of virtue!"

But what did Renan mean by virtue? On what did he base his code? Renan's work, for all his smiling indulgence, has a certain austerity behind it. In what school had this virtue been

in the air of the Convention; the French language of the eighteenth century traveling around the world like light.

So much for the surface of Taine. It is significant of the difference between Michelet, on the one hand, and both Renan and Taine, on the other, that we should think of the latter as presenting surfaces. When we look back on Michelet, what we are aware of is not a surface, but the thing he is presenting, the living complex of the social being. Michelet's primary concern is to stick close to the men and events; he succeeds in dominating history, like Odysseus wrestling with Proteus, by seizing it and holding on to it through all its variety of metamorphoses; and in the course of this rough-and-tumble struggle, he works out an original kind of literary form. He has no preconceived ideas which hamper him; his ideas are in the nature of speculations, and they are merely set afloat in the upper air while his prime business is with what is actually happening. But both Renan and Taine practise systematizations which, in ordering the confusion of human life, seem always to keep it at a distance. Renan must never get so close to violent happenings or emotions that they can break up his sweet and even flow. Taine feeds history into a machine which automatically sorts out the phenomena, so that all the examples of one kind of thing turn up in one section or chapter and all the examples of another kind in another, and the things which do not easily lend themselves to Taine's large and simple generalizations do not turn up at all. The thesis is the prime consideration, and he will allow only a moderate variety in the phenomena that go to fill it in. Yet Taine, with his remarkable machine, did manufacture an article of value.

The generation of French artists and thinkers who came to manhood about 1850 had pretty well abandoned political interests. The *coup d'état* of Louis Bonaparte in 1851 depressed them and left them feeling helpless. Taine, like Renan, had declined to make an issue of the oath of allegiance to Napoleon III. He took the position that the voters, though imbeciles, had the right to confer power on whom they chose; that for a dissident like himself to refuse to submit to their choice would constitute an act of insurrection—the implication being that such an act would be wholly improper in itself, amounting to

turned into the situation of love rendered hopeless by neurotic obsession and inhibition. Michelet, too, had been an only child; Michelet, too, had suffered from social maladjustment; but he had derived from the Revolution just behind him a sense of solidarity with others engaged in a great human undertaking, and through his history he had succeeded in making himself a part of a human world of which he believed in the importance and the destiny. With France, the abysses of doubt and despair are always yawning under the tightropes and trapezes of the highly developed intelligence, and to perform on them becomes more and more ticklish.

In the meantime, during the period of the Dreyfus case, France sends back his Legion of Honor ribbon when the Legion strikes Zola off its rolls. He stays away from the séances of the Academy; but goes back to it, on entreaty, in old age. He makes speeches before working-class audiences at the time of the 1905 revolution in Russia. He supports the war of 1914, offers himself at seventy for military service; then, hearing of the rejection by the Allies of the peace proposals of the Central Powers, declines to lend his support to any more patriotic causes. "Yes," he told Marcel LeGoff, "I've written and talked like my concierge. I'm ashamed of it, but it had to be done." He would not protest, however, even in the War's later stages. He was frightened: his old friend Caillaux had been sent to jail by Clemenceau, his old ally of the Dreyfus case, and Clemenceau had threatened, it is said, to do the same thing to France if he opened his mouth to criticize the government. Surrounded by parasites and female admirers and a veritable museum of *objets d'art*, he would receive and talk with radicals, whom he called "Comrade." Brousson records that, on one occasion, when asked why he was "drawn toward socialism," France had answered: "Better be drawn than driven." To another caller, we are told by LeGoff, he said in answer to a question about the future: "The future? But, my poor friend, there is no future—there is nothing. Everything will begin the same again—people will build things and tear them down and so on forever. So long as men can't get outside themselves or free themselves from their passions, nothing will ever change. There will be some periods which

### 3 Origins of Socialism: The Communities of Fourier and Owen

The parties of the workers predicted by Saint-Simon were actually to be organized very soon—though they were not to proceed straight, as he had imagined, to the realization of the new Christian society. But in the meantime, there appeared other prophets, who were to try to create by themselves small seminal new worlds inside the old.

Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, ten years younger than Saint-Simon and Babeuf, are closely similar figures who follow almost parallel careers, as they represent tendencies which were specially characteristic of the first part of the nineteenth century. Fourier was a draper's son from Besançon, who had gone on the road as a traveling salesman; Owen was a Welsh saddle-maker's son, who had worked as a draper's clerk. Both had lost faith, as Saint-Simon had done, in the liberal politics of the period and both stood outside its conventional culture. Fourier was never tired of denouncing the tradition of European philosophy, in the light of whose guidance humanity had "bathed itself in blood for twenty-three scientific centuries," and he believed that it was the purpose of God to discredit the professional philosophers, to confute all "those libraries of politics and morals," by selecting him, Charles Fourier, "a shop clerk, almost an illiterate," as the expositor of His secrets to mankind. The mistake of the statesmen for a thousand years had been, according to Fourier, to occupy themselves only with abuses of a religious and administrative character. "The divine code should legislate first of all on

## 5 Karl Marx: Prometheus and Lucifer

In the August of 1835, a young German-Jewish boy, a student at the Friedrich-Wilhelm Gymnasium at Trier on the Moselle, composed a theme for his final examination. It was called *Reflections of a Young Man on Choosing a Profession*, and it was radiant with those lofty ideals which are in order on such occasions and which in the present case have attracted attention only for the reason that the aspiring young man managed to live up to his aspirations. In choosing a profession, said Karl Marx at seventeen, one must be sure that one will not put oneself in the position of acting merely as a servile tool of others: in one's own sphere one must obtain independence; and one must make sure that one has a field to serve humanity—for though one may otherwise become famous as a scholar or a poet, one can never be a really great man. We shall never be able to fulfill ourselves truly unless we are working for the welfare of our fellows: then only shall our burdens not break us, then only shall our satisfactions not be confined to poor egoistic joys. And so we must be on guard against allowing ourselves to fall victims to that most dangerous of all temptations: the fascination of abstract thought.

One reflection—which the examiner has specially noted—comes to limit the flood of aspiration. “But we cannot always follow the profession to which we feel ourselves to have been called; our relationships in society have already to some extent been formed before we are in a position to determine them. Already our physical nature threateningly bars the way, and her claims may be mocked by none.”

So for the mind of the young Marx the bondage of social relationships already appeared as an impediment to individual self-realization. Was it the conception, now so prevalent since Herder, of the molding of human cultures by physical and geographical conditions? Was it the consciousness of the disabilities which still obstructed the development of the Jews: the terrible special taxes, the special restrictions on movement, the prohibitions against holding public office, against engaging in agriculture or crafts?

Both, no doubt. There had been concentrated in Karl Marx the blood of several lines of Jewish rabbis. There had been rabbis in his mother's family for at least a century back; and the families of both his father's parents had produced unbroken successions of rabbis, some of them distinguished teachers of the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. Karl Marx's paternal grandfather had been a rabbi in Trier; one of his uncles was a rabbi there. Hirschel Marx, Karl's father, was evidently the first man of brains in his family decisively to abandon the rabbinate and to make himself a place in the larger community.

The German Jews of the eighteenth century were breaking away from the world of the Ghetto, with its social isolation and its closed system of religious culture. It was an incident of the liquidation of medieval institutions and ideas. Moses Mendelssohn, the Jewish philosopher, through his translation of the Bible into German, had brought his people into contact with the culture of the outside German world, and they were already by Karl Marx's generation beginning to play a role of importance in the literature and thought of the day. But Mendelssohn, who had been the original of Lessing's Nathan the Wise, produced a result far beyond what he had intended: instead of guiding the Jews as he had hoped to a revivified and purified Judaism, he opened to them the doors of the Enlightenment. For the young Jews, the traditional body of their culture seemed at once to collapse in dust like a corpse in an unsealed tomb. Mendelssohn's daughters already belonged to a group of sophisticated Jewish women with salons and "philosopher" lovers, who were having them-

the warm and quiet towns; will put to sea, and let his ship's sail swell, keep his course by the changeless stars, contend with the waves and the wind, feel the joy of all his forces at full strain, blood pounding in his breast at the danger—he will defy and he will conquer the sea, which is picking the bones of his brother. In another ballad, a second skipper, assaulted by the songs of the sirens—very different from the sailors of Heine, whose bones have whitened the rocks—declares to their faces that their charms are specious, that for them in their cold abysses there burns no eternal God; but that in *his* breast the gods preside in their might, all the gods, and under their governance no deviation is possible. The sirens, discouraged, sink. In another, a Promethean hero curses a god who has stripped him of his all; but he swears that he will have his revenge, though his strength be but a patch-work of weaknesses: out of his pain and horror he will fashion a fortress, iron and cold, which will strike the beholder livid and against which the thunderbolts will rebound. Prometheus is to be Marx's favorite myth: he is to prefix to his doctor's dissertation the speech of Aeschylus' Prometheus to Zeus, "Know well I would never be willing to exchange my misfortune for that bondage of yours. For better do I deem it to be bound to this rock than to spend my life as Father Zeus's faithful messenger"; and a contemporary cartoon on the suppression of the paper he is later to edit is to show him chained to his press with the Prussian eagle preying on his vitals.

In yet another of Karl Marx's poems, he proclaims that the grandeurs and splendors of the pygmy-giants of earth are doomed to fall to ruins. They do not count beside the soul's aspiration; even vanquished, shall the soul remain defiant, shall still build itself a throne of giant scorn: "Jenny! if we can but weld our souls together, then with contempt shall I fling my glove in the world's face, then shall I stride through the wreckage a creator!"

Old Heinrich, who said that his parents had given him nothing but his existence and his mother's love, hoped that Karl, with more advantages than he had had himself, would take

feudal reaction. From that point on, the necessity for political action became continually more urgent for Germans. In the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, they had no parliament, no trial by jury, no rights of free speech or assembly; and the new king, with his royal romanticism that idealized the Middle Ages, made it quite plain that he would give them none of these things. In the meantime the doctrines of the utopian socialists had come to trouble German philosophy and politics. They leaked over first from their sources in France into the Rhineland, already partly Gallicized, where they found for other reasons, also, a particularly favorable field. The wine-growing peasants of the Moselle were being impoverished, since Prussia's customs union with Hesse, by the competition of the wine industry outside; and they had still some remnants from the Middle Ages of the communal ownership of land. Saint-Simonism spread so rapidly along the Moselle that the archbishop had to denounce it as a heresy; and in 1835 a German named Ludwig Gall published in Trier a socialist pamphlet in which he declared that the propertied class and the laboring class had directly conflicting interests. Heinrich Marx had in 1834 taken a leading part in political banquets at which the demand for a real parliament had been pressed and at which the *Marseillaise* had been sung, but of which the Trier papers had been forbidden to publish any report and which had been rebuked by the Crown Prince himself—with the result that the club in which they had been held had been put under the supervision of the police.

Karl Marx in the first months of 1842 wrote an article on the new Prussian censorship, in which we see him for the first time at his best: here the implacable logic and crushing wit are trained full on Marx's lifelong enemies: the deniers to human beings of human rights. The censor himself, it is true, blocked the publication of the article in Germany, and it was only printed a year later in Switzerland. But the new note has already been sounded which, though it is long to be muffled or ignored, will yet gradually pierce with its tough metallic timbre through all the tissues of ideas of the West.

Marx now begins to write for the *Rheinische Zeitung*, a liberal newspaper published in Cologne, the center of the in-

dustrialized Rhineland, and supported by the wealthy manufacturers and merchants who had found their ideas and their railroads obstructed by the old Catholic society. It was written by the young intelligentsia; and Karl Marx became editor-in-chief in October, 1842.

Marx's work for the *Rheinische Zeitung* brought him up for the first time against problems for which, as he said, no solution had been provided for him by Hegel. In commenting on the proceedings of the Rhenish Diet which Friedrich Wilhelm IV had convened, he had had to deal with the debate on a bill for punishing the picking-up of wood in forests, and it had been plain to him that the new government was attempting to deprive the peasants of even those communal privileges which had remained with them from the Middle Ages. By a first stroke of that irony of "fetishes" which was afterwards to play so important a part in his work, he pointed out that the trees had been given rights to which the rights of the people were being sacrificed; and through arguments of a semi-scholastic subtlety he proved that an administration that made no distinction between wood-gathering and common theft as offenses against private property were inviting the persons they prosecuted so unfairly to disregard the distinction between the offense against property involved in common theft and the offense against property involved in owning a great deal of property and preventing other people from having any. The subject leads for Marx at twenty-four to a passage of exhilarating eloquence, in which he declares that the code of the feudal world has no relation to general human justice but has perpetuated itself from a time when men were essentially animals, and simply guarantees their right to eat one another up—with the exception that among the bees, at least it was the workers that killed the drones and not the drones that killed the workers. Later, people began writing to the paper about the misery of the wine-growers on the Moselle. Marx investigated, found out that conditions were really extremely bad, and got into a controversy with the governor of the Rhine Province. In the meantime the *Rheinische Zeitung* had become involved in polemics with a conservative paper rival, which had accused it of communist tendencies. Karl

not in the end to seek happiness in the same way, by the same means? And still they crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another, and as if their only agreement were the tacit one that each shall keep to his own side of the pavement, in order not to delay the opposing streams of the crowd, while it never occurs to anyone to honor his fellow with so much as a glance. The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are herded together within a limited space."

This conception of the individual in modern society as helpless, sterile and selfish was one of the main themes of nineteenth-century thought, and in our own time it has been felt, if possible, even more intensely. We have seen how the historian Michelet, writing at the same moment as Engels, was tending increasingly to interpret the world in terms of an anti-social egoism opposed to an ideal of solidarity, how he succeeded by a return to the past in escaping from that sinister solitude by identifying himself with the French nation, and how he later tried to find reassurance against the antagonisms that he felt in society through a mystical belief in "the People." We have seen how one of the first ideas of the young Marx was that there was a danger in egoistic interests if preferred to the service of humanity. With Saint-Simon, the disintegration of Catholicism and the feudal system with which his heredity connected him, had caused him, in the years of disorder that followed the Revolution, to elaborate a new system of hierarchies which should win unity and order for the future. The utopian socialists like Fourier, who found competitive society intolerable, were protecting themselves in a similar fashion against the feeling of isolation from their fellows by imagining a new kind of coöperation.

The further advance of industrial civilization created more murderous conflicts; and an intimate contact with it sharpened the conviction of the need for a new reconciliation. To Engels, in his early twenties, it seemed that a society so divided must be headed straight for civil war and for the consequent abolition of the system of competition and exploitation. The mid-

it was not merely unfortunate accidents and disagreeable personal relations which had rendered the American communist movement futile but its ignorance of the mechanics of the class struggle.

Of this class struggle Marx had learned first from his reading of the French historians after he had come to Paris. Augustin Thierry in his *History of the Conquest of England*, published in 1825, had presented the Norman Conquest in terms of a class struggle between the conquerors and the Saxons. Guizot, in his *History of the English Revolution*, had shown, from the bourgeois point of view, the struggle between the middle class and the monarchy.

But it remained to root the class struggle in economics. We have seen how Friedrich Engels had come to appreciate the importance of economics as the result of his experience in Manchester. Karl Marx owed more to his reading. The idea of the fundamental importance of economic interests was not new in the eighteen-forties. A French lawyer named Antoine Barnave, who had been president of the revolutionary Assembly of 1790, had asserted that the difference between classes was the result of economic inequalities, that the class which was in power at any epoch not only made laws for the whole of society in order to guarantee its own hold on its property but also "directed its habits and created its prejudices," that society was constantly changing under the pressure of economic necessities, and that the rising and triumphant bourgeoisie which had displaced the feudal nobility would in turn produce a new aristocracy. Barnave, who was a moderate in politics and compromised himself with the royal family, was guillotined in 1793. A collected edition of his writings was published in 1843; but Marx never seems to have mentioned him, and it is not known whether he had ever read him. In any case, the thought of the period was converging during the first years of the forties toward the Marxist point of view. Friedrich List, the patriotic German economist, had published in 1841 his work on *The National System of Political Economy*, in which he had described the development of society in terms of its industrial phases; and in 1842 a French communist named Dézamy, a former associate of

Cabet, published his *Code de la Communauté*. Karl Marx had read Dézamy at Cologne. This writer had criticized Cabet for believing that anything could be done for labor by invoking the aid of the bourgeoisie, and, accepting the brute fact of the class struggle, had projected a somewhat new kind of community, based on materialism, atheism and science. Though Dézamy had not as yet arrived at any ideas about proletarian tactics, he was sure that the proletariat, among whom he included the peasants, must unite and liberate itself. And it may be noted that the importance of the bottom class had already been emphasized by Babeuf when he had declared in the course of his defense that "the mass of the expropriated, of the proletarians" was generally "agreed to be frightful," that it constituted now "the majority of a nation totally rotten."

In the December of 1843, Marx had written for the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* a *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Law*, in which he had postulated the proletariat as the class which was to play the new Hegelian role in effecting the emancipation of Germany: "A class in *radical chains*, one of the classes of bourgeois society which does not belong to bourgeois society, an order which brings the break-up of all orders, a sphere which has a universal character by virtue of its universal suffering and lays claim to no *particular right*, because no *particular wrong*, but complete wrong, is being perpetrated against it, which can no longer invoke an *historical* title but only a *human* title, which stands not in a one-sided antagonism to the consequences of the German state but in an absolute antagonism to its assumptions, a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without freeing itself from all the other spheres of society and thereby freeing all these other spheres themselves, which in a word, as it represents the *complete forfeiting* of humanity itself, can only redeem itself through the *redemption of the whole of humanity*. The *proletariat* represents the dissolution of society as a special order."

Yet even though Marx has got so far, the proletariat remains for him still something in the nature of a philosophical abstraction. The primary emotional motivation in the role which he assigns to the proletariat seems to have been bor-

more weight and more will. Engels wrote with lucidity and ease; he had sensibility and measure and humor. He is so much more like a French writer of the Enlightenment—something between a Condorcet and a Diderot—than a philosopher of the German school that one is inclined to accept the tradition that his family had French Protestant blood. This young man without academic training was an immensely accomplished fellow: he had already learned to write English so well that he was able to contribute to Robert Owen's paper; and his French was as good as his English. He had a facility in acquiring information and a journalist's sense of how things were going; his collaborator Marx used to say that Engels was always ahead of him. But Engels had not Marx's drive; it is what we miss in his writing. From the beginning Marx is able to find such quarrel in matters like the wood-theft debates that he can shake us with indignation against all violators of human relations; while Engels, with his larger experience of the cruelties and degradations of industrial life, does not—even in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*—rouse us to protest or to fight but tends rather to resolve the conflict in an optimistic feeling about the outcome. "Marx was a genius," wrote Engels later. "The rest of us were talented at best."

It is perhaps not indulging too far the current tendency toward this kind of speculation to suggest that Marx took over for Engels something of the prestige of paternal authority which the younger man had rejected in his own father. There was always something boyish about Engels: he writes Marx in the September of 1847, when he is twenty-seven, that he does not want to accept the vice-presidency of one of their communist committees, because he looks "so frightfully youthful." Young Friedrich had been rebelling since his teens against old Caspar Engels' combination of the serious crassness of business with the intolerance of religion; but old Engels' decisions for his son had hitherto determined his practical career. And, in spite of Friedrich's final enfranchisement from theology, some of the fervor of his father's faith had nevertheless been communicated to him. He had grown up in Barmen-Elberfeld under the pulpit of the great Calvinist preacher, Friedrich

Marx had made the acquaintance of Proudhon in the summer of 1844. P.-J. Proudhon was a barrelmaker's son, who had risen to be a printer and who had educated himself in a remarkable way, teaching himself to read Greek, Latin and Hebrew. In 1840, he had published a book of which the title had asked the question, "What Is Property?" and in which he had given an answer: "Property is theft," that had made its impression on the age. Marx had felt considerable respect for Proudhon and during long nocturnal sessions in Paris, had expounded to him the doctrine of Hegel.

Two years later Marx wrote Proudhon from Brussels inviting him to contribute to an organized correspondence, designed to keep the Communists in different countries in touch with one another, which he and Engels were getting up. He took the occasion to warn Proudhon in a postscript against a journalist named Karl Grün, one of the "True Socialists," against whom he makes charges rather indefinite but stinging in tone and sinister in implication.

Proudhon replies that he will be glad to participate, but that other business "combined with natural laziness" will prevent his really doing much about it; and he goes on to "take the liberty of making certain reservations, which are suggested by various passages of your letter." "Let us by all means collaborate," says Proudhon, "in trying to discover the laws of society, the way in which these laws work out, the best method to go about investigating them; but for God's sake, after we have demolished all the dogmatisms *a priori*, let us not of all things attempt in our turn to instil another kind of doctrine into the people; let us not fall into the contradiction of your compatriot Martin Luther, who, after overthrowing the Catholic theology, immediately addressed himself to the task, with a great armory of excommunications and anathemas, of establishing a Protestant theology. Germany for three centuries now has been obliged to occupy herself exclusively with the problem of getting rid of M. Luther's job of reconstruction; let us not, by contriving any more such restorations, leave any more such tasks for the human race. I applaud with all my heart your idea of bringing to light all the varieties of opinion; let us have good and sincere polemics; let us show the world

sities of the established order"; and out of the Hegelian theory of development, which Marx had been attempting to explain to him, he had produced a new kind of utopian socialism, which did not require for its realization a genuine Hegelian emergence of the working class as the new force that was to overthrow the old, but which was an affair merely of succoring the poor under the existing system of property relations.

Marx himself now went back to Hegel to get away from the Abstract Man, whom Feuerbach had assumed as well as Proudhon, and to restore the Historical Man, whose principles together with his subsistence were always bound up with the special conditions of the period in which he lived. New conditions could not be inculcated; they had to be developed out of the old conditions through the conflict of class with class.

X And here we encounter what Karl Marx himself claimed to be one of his only original contributions to the system that afterwards came to be known as Marxism. Engels says that when he, Engels, arrived in Brussels in the spring of 1845, Marx put before him the fully developed theory that all history was a succession of struggles between an exploiting and an exploited class. These struggles were thus the results of the methods of production which prevailed during the various periods—that is, of the methods by which people succeeded in providing themselves with food and clothing and the other requirements of life. Such apparently inspired and independent phenomena as politics, philosophy and religion arose in reality from the social phenomena. The current struggle between the exploiters and the exploited had reached a point at which the exploited, the proletariat, had been robbed of all its human rights and had so come to stand for the primary rights of humanity, and at which the class that owned and controlled the industrial machine was becoming increasingly unable to distribute its products—so that the victory of the workers over the owners, the taking-over by the former of the machine, would mean the end of class society altogether and the liberation of the spirit of man.

Marx and Engels—who had assimilated with remarkable rapidity the social and historical thinking of their time—thus

emerged with a complete and coherent theory, which cleared up more mysteries of the past, simplified more complications of the present and opened up into the future a more practicable-appearing path, than any such theory which had been hitherto proposed. And they had done more: they had introduced a "dynamic principle" (a phrase of Marx's in his doctor's dissertation)—we shall have more to say of it later—which got the whole system going, motivated convincingly a progression in history, as none of the other historical generalizations had done, and which not only compelled one's interest in a great drama but forced one to recognize that one was part of it and aroused one to play a noble role.

Of this theory they had given the first full account in the opening section of *The German Ideology*, begun that autumn in Brussels; but, as this book was never published, it was not till the *Communist Manifesto*, written for the international Communist League at the turn of the year, 1847–48, that their ideas really reached the world.

Here their glass has been turned quite away from the large and vague abstract shapes that have inhabited the German heavens—they are not concerned any longer even to mock at them—and directed upon the anatomy of actual society. The *Communist Manifesto* combines the terseness and trenchancy of Marx, his logic which anchors the present in the past, with the candor and humanity of Engels, his sense of the trend of the age. But nowhere can we see demonstrated more strikingly what Engels owed to Marx than at this point where we can compare the first draught by Engels with the material after it had been worked over by Marx. The *Principles of Communism* by Engels—written, it is true, in haste—is a lucid and authoritative account of the contemporary industrial situation, which generates little emotion and leads up to no compelling climax. The *Communist Manifesto* is dense with the packed power of high explosives. It compresses with terrific vigor into forty or fifty pages a general theory of history, an analysis of European society and a program for revolutionary action.

This program was "the forcible overthrow of the whole extant social order," and the putting in force of the following measures: 1. Expropriation of landed property, and the use

categories of men whom he did not care to recognize as brothers; and they provided the new slogan which was to stand at the end: "Let the ruling classes tremble at the prospect of a communist revolution. Proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. PROLETARIANS OF ALL LANDS, UNITE!" The idea of righteous war, and with it the idea of righteous hatred, has been substituted for the socialism of Saint-Simon, which had presented itself as a new kind of Christianity. All men are no longer brothers; there is no longer any merely *human* solidarity. The "truly human" is that which is to be realized when we shall have arrived at the society without classes. In the meantime, those elements of society which alone can bring about such a future—the disfranchised proletariat and the revolutionary bourgeois thinkers—in proportion as they feel group solidarity among themselves, must cease to feel human solidarity with their antagonists. Their antagonists—who have "left between man and man no bond except self-interest and callous 'cash-payment'"—have irreparably destroyed that solidarity.

We have hitherto described Marx and Engels in terms of their national and personal origins. The *Communist Manifesto* may be taken to mark the point at which they attain their full moral stature, at which they assume, with full consciousness of what they are doing, the responsibilities of a new and heroic role. They were the first great social thinkers of their century to try to make themselves, by deliberate discipline, both classless and international. They were able to look out on Western Europe and to penetrate, through patriotic sentiments, political catchwords, philosophical theorizings and the practical demands of labor, to the general social processes which were everywhere at work in the background; and it seemed clear to them that all the movements of opposition were converging toward the same great end.

The *Communist Manifesto* was little read when it was first printed—in London—in February, 1848. Copies were sent to the few hundred members of the Communist League; but it was never at that time put on sale. It probably had no serious influence on the events of 1848; and afterwards it passed into

XII

Marx and Engels themselves returned to Germany, arrived on April 10 in Cologne, where a branch of the Communist League had set in motion throughout the Rhineland a movement of petitions for reform and where a repercussion to February 23 had just occurred when soldiers had shot into a demonstration led by the Communist League. The head of the League was a man named Gottschalk, the son of a Jewish butcher, who had studied medicine and practised among the poor in the working-class quarters of Cologne. He was a passionate partisan of these people and had organized a Workers' Union. When the Prussians, under pressure of agitation, granted a national assembly, Gottschalk advocated a boycott by the workers. Karl Marx was opposed to this: he believed that it was useless for the working class to strike for their own demands until the bourgeois revolution had been won. He got control of a newspaper, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*; put into it all that was left of his patrimony as well as such money as Jenny possessed; liquidated the Communist League, in the teeth of the protests of its other leaders, on the ground that, since he now had an organ through which to exercise his guidance, the organization was no longer necessary; and carried on a campaign for "democracy," in which working-class interests as well as communism were carefully kept out of sight. He also got control of the Workers' Union, while Gottschalk was in prison.

These months of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* were certainly Marx's most formidable period as a publicist. Engels, who handled the foreign policy, declared afterwards that every one of their articles had struck like a shell and burst; and Lenin said in 1914 that the paper was still the "unsurpassed" model of what an "organ of the revolutionary proletariat" ought to be. Day after day and month after month, Marx's goad dug the shanks of the Assembly, inciting it to bolder action; the breath of his freezing criticism blasted the backs of their necks. But the deputies, unused to political power, debated philosophical principles and could not agree as to what kind of central executive to set up at a time when authority was vital. The result was that the Prussian Friedrich Wilhelm concluded a truce in the war with Denmark without

morselessly rubs it in that a certain newspaper editor in London has taken to spelling his name "Levy" instead of "Levi" and made a practice of publishing attacks on Disraeli, in order to be accepted as an Englishman, and elaborates with more stridency than taste on the salience of Levy's nose and its uses in sniffing the sewers of gossip. The point is that this man—who has libeled Marx—is a toady and a purveyor of scandal. And Marx's charge against another Jew, who has been profiteering out of the Second Empire, is that he has "augmented the nine Greek muses with a tenth Hebraic muse, the 'Muse of the Age,' which is what he calls the Stock Exchange." If Marx is contemptuous of his race, it is primarily perhaps with the anger of Moses at finding the Children of Israel dancing before the Golden Calf.

In any case, there is no question at all that Marx's antipathy to writing for money was bound up with an almost maniacal idealism. "The writer," he had insisted in his youth in the article already quoted, "must earn money in order to be able to live and write, but he must by no means live and write for the purpose of making money. . . . The writer in no wise considers his works a means. They are *ends in themselves*; so little are they a means either for himself or for others that, if necessary, he sacrifices *his own* existence to *their* existence and, in his own way, like the preacher of religion, takes for his principle, 'Obey God rather than man,' in relation to those human beings among whom he himself is confined by his human desires and needs." This was written, of course, before Marx had developed his Dialectical Materialism; but he was to act on this principle all his life. "I must follow my goal through thick and thin," he writes in a letter of 1859, "and I shall not allow bourgeois society to turn me into a money-making machine." Note Marx's curious language: the writer is "confined" ("eingeschlossen") among men. Instinctively Marx thinks of himself as a being set above their world.

Yet he is confined in this world by his "human needs and desires"; and if he will not allow himself to be turned into a money-making machine, somebody else will have to turn himself into one in order to make money for him.

Engels had written in *The Peasant War in Germany* of the

were regarded by Marx and Engels as infinitely varied and complex. If they were mystical about the goal, they were realistic about the means of getting there. Certain assumptions—we shall examine them later—they had carried over from the more idealistic era of the *Communist Manifesto*; but these never blocked their realization that their hypothesis must fit actual facts. There are many respects in which Marx and Engels may be contrasted with the crude pedants and fanatics who have pretended to speak for the movement which Marx and Engels started; but none is more obvious than the honesty of these innovators in recognizing and respecting events and their willingness to learn from experience.

With this went an omnivorous interest in all kinds of intellectual activity and an appreciation of the work of others. This last may not seem easily reconcilable with the tendency we have noticed in Marx to split off from and to shut out other thinkers or with his habitual tone of scornful superiority and the earnest imitation of it by Engels. There are many passages in the Marx-Engels correspondence in which these two masters, who, like Dante (much quoted for such utterances by Marx), have decided to make a party by themselves, seem perversely, even insanely, determined to grant no merit to the ideas of anyone else. Yet it is as if this relentless exclusion of others were an indispensable condition for preserving their own sharply-angled point of view. It is as if they had developed their special cutting comic tone, their detached and implacable attitude, their personal polyglot language ("Apropos! Einige Portwein und Claret wird mir sehr wohl tun under present circumstances"; "Die verfluchte vestry hat mich bon gré mal gré zum 'constable of the vestry of St. Pancras' erwählt") in proportion as they have come to realize that they can take in more and more of the world, that they can comprehend it better and better, while other men, vulgarly addicted to the conviviality of political rhetoric, have never caught the sense of history at all, have no idea what is happening about them. Inside that reciprocal relationship, limited to the interchange of two men, all is clarity, coolness, intellectual exhilaration, self-confidence. The secret conspiracy and the practical joke conceal a watch-tower and a laboratory.

when every day foolish gossips bring her the stinking exhalations of the poisonous democratic sewer."

The crowning affront of this phase of Marx's life was an attack by a man named Karl Vogt, a German professor of Zoölogy, who had sat on the Left of the Frankfort Assembly and who had afterwards lived in exile in Switzerland. In the course of one of those wars of exiles, whose complications it would be unprofitable to trace, Vogt published in January, 1860, a brochure in which he accused Marx of blackmailing former revolutionists who were trying to go along with the regime in Germany, of fabricating counterfeit money in Switzerland, and of exploiting the workers for gain. This provoked Marx to write and publish in the November of the same year a long counter-attack on Vogt. His friends had done their best to dissuade him, telling him that he was wasting his time and his money (since he was printing the book at his own expense); but Marx insists that, filthy though the whole affair is, he owes it to his wife and children to make a defense of his character and career.

*Herr Vogt* did certainly vindicate Marx; and it made out a convincing case against Vogt on the basis of the charge which had been printed in a paper sponsored by Marx and which had started the polemics between him and Vogt: that the latter was a paid propagandist in the service of Napoleon III. Yet the reader is likely to agree with Marx's friends that Marx might better, as the Marxists say, have left his denouncer to History. For when the republican French government, after Sedan, published the archives of the Second Empire, it was found that Karl Vogt had indeed received forty thousand francs from the Emperor. And in the meantime Marx's book about him—in spite of a chapter of acute analysis of international events and a characteristically macabre caricature of one of those sordid police agents who were the plague of the exile's life—proved certainly one of the dreariest, most tedious and most exasperating productions of which a man of genius has ever been proud. Here Marx, by very force of his compulsion to go into every subject exhaustively, to fix each point with the last degree of exactitude, exposes a few ignoble lies and frauds with a machinery whose disproportion to its func-

monarchy in itself, if it represented this "moral" state; Bismarck told the Reichstag after his death that Lassalle had "by no means" been a republican. At that time Lassalle and Bismarck had in common, though the levers with which they were working and their ultimate intentions were different, the desire to unseat the bourgeois liberals. (It ought also to be noted that Lassalle differed from Marx as well as from Bismarck in attempting to bring back into socialism the idea of brotherly love, which Marx had banished from it: "He who invokes the Idea of the workers' estate as the governing principle of society, . . . utters a cry that is not calculated to split and separate the social classes; he utters a cry of reconciliation, which embraces the whole of society, . . . a cry of *love*, which from the very first moment when it rises from the heart of the people, will *remain forever the true cry of the people* and continue by reason of its content to be essentially a *cry of love* even when it rings out as a battle-cry.")

Lassalle on his side treats Bismarck as if he were the head of one great power advising the head of another great power what to do for his own good. When the General Union was founded, he sent Bismarck a copy of its rules, with the message: "Herewith I send your Excellency the constitution of my realm, for which you will perhaps envy me." When Bismarck begins suppressing newspapers and prohibiting political discussion, Lassalle warns him that he is inviting revolution. He tours the Rhineland in triumph. At Solingen, a liberal burgomaster has the police break up one of his meetings, and Lassalle telegraphs to Bismarck, demanding "the promptest legal satisfaction." He runs into more serious trouble in Berlin; the liberals have won in the October elections, and his speeches give rise to riots. He is finally arrested for high treason at the behest of the Public Prosecutor, who, as Lassalle says, has never forgiven him for throwing in his teeth the ideas of his distinguished father; and he actually succeeds in inducing Bismarck to transfer Schelling to another town.

But by January, 1864, the war with Denmark was looming. Lassalle did his best to scare Bismarck into establishing universal suffrage before he committed Germany—declaring that a prolonged war would bring on riot and insurrection at home,

metaphysical progression from Pure Existence to the divine Idea. At twenty-six—in 1840—Bakúnin decided to visit Berlin in order to drink Hegelianism at the fount and in order to rejoin a sister whom he had alienated from her husband and whom he had induced to take her child to Germany.

Bakúnin during his early years in Russia had remained a loyal subject of the Tsar—his only insubordination had been against his father. But in Berlin, under the influence of the Young Hegelians, he gravitated toward the Left. The critical turn of his conversion to the revolutionary interpretation of Hegel seems to have come at the moment when he definitely lost his hold over his maturing brothers and sisters. His married sister became reconciled with her husband and went back to Russia to live; a brother who had joined Michael in Germany, also returned and became an official; the sister whom he had loved most passionately and who was to have joined him in Germany, too, fell in love with his friend Turgénev and never left home at all. But Michael himself did not mature: he had no normal emotional development. Carried along by the current of the time, he now declared himself a political revolutionist—a revolutionist of the pure will and act, for whom upheaval was an historical necessity but who had no use for the strategy of Marx. For Bakúnin, the sincerity and the intensity of the gesture guaranteed its value, its effectiveness; and the gesture was primarily destructive. Discussing his character in his later years, he “attributed his passion for destruction to the influence of his mother, whose despotic character inspired him with an insensate hatred of every restriction on liberty.” But it was evidently also an outlet for a frustrated sexual impulse. “The desire to destroy,” he had already written in his early years in Germany, “is also a creative desire.” He had visions of ecstatic conflagration: “the whole of Europe, with St. Petersburg, Paris and London, transformed into an enormous rubbish-heap.” Herzen tells how, on one occasion, when Bakúnin was traveling from Paris to Prague, he had happened upon a revolt of German peasants, who were “making an uproar around the castle, not knowing what to do. Bakúnin got out of his conveyance, and, without wasting any time to find out what the dispute was about, formed the

hood. The purely emotional character of his rebellion against society is indicated in one of the last things he said. He had left the hospital one evening to call on a friend, who played Beethoven for him on the piano. "Everything will pass," said Bakúnin, "and the world will perish, but the Ninth Symphony will remain."

But the real climax of all this period of working-class organization and agitation was the Paris Commune of 1871.

The Commune was a pivotal event in European political thought. We have seen how the news of the civil war laid Michelet out with a stroke; how two months of a socialist government in Paris so filled Taine with terror that he devoted the rest of his life to trying to discredit the French Revolution; how Anatole France in his twenties shuddered at the sight of the Communards. Inversely, for that later movement which looked for historical progress to the victory of the working class, the Commune broke through into the real stream of history as the first great justification of their theory. And just as the bourgeois historians shied away from it, so these other philosophers of history took heart from it, celebrated it, studied it. "The struggle of the working class against the capitalist class and its State," Marx wrote Kugelmann in April, before the fall of the Commune, "has entered upon a new phase with the struggle in Paris. Whatever the immediate results may be, a new point of departure of world-historic importance has been gained." Three years later, the anarchist Kropotkin, shut up in a St. Petersburg prison, had a solace which Bakúnin had not had: he spent a week rapping out on the wall of his cell for the benefit of a young man next door the story of what had happened in Paris.

Napoleon III, through his own weakness and through the corruption of his racketeering government, had by the latter part of the sixties forfeited the confidence of all those groups save the peasants among which he had formerly kept the balance. The shell of the Second Empire collapsed with his defeat at Sedan; and now the classes quickly came to blows, as Marx had predicted they would. A provisional republican government was set up by the liberal wing of the Chamber, and

ment, with no hesitation, itself laid siege to Paris. During a single week in May, when the Commune was defeated (May 25), between twenty and forty thousand Communards were cut down by the Versailles troops. The Communards themselves shot hostages, burned buildings. It is a proof of the divergence of the tendencies of the socialist and the bourgeois pictures of history—and from now on there will be two distinct historical cultures running side by side without ever really fusing—that people who have been brought up on the conventional version of history and know all about the Robespierrist Terror during the Great French Revolution, should find it an unfamiliar fact that the Terror of the government of Thiers executed, imprisoned or exiled more people—the number has been estimated at a hundred thousand—in that one week of the suppression of the Commune than the revolutionary Terror of Robespierre had done in three years.

The Workers' International, officially, had had nothing to do with the Commune; but some of its members had played important roles. Marx and Engels had watched from England, greedily clipping the papers, with the most intense excitement. Engels had tried to give them the benefit of his studies in military strategy by advising them, without effect, to fortify the north slopes of Montmartre. And two days after the final defeat, Marx had read to the General Council his address on *The Civil War in France*, which had aroused British indignation. "I have the honor to be at this moment," he wrote to his friend Dr. Kugelmann, "the best calumniated and the most menaced man in London. This really does me good after a tedious twenty-years' idyl in my study."

Yet the Commune had not really followed the course that Marx and Engels had previously laid down for the progress of the revolutionary movement. In so far as it had succeeded, it had justified rather the direct force idea of their opponents Blanqui and Bakúnin. And now Marx, who had always insisted that the State of the bourgeoisie would have to be taken over by the proletarian dictatorship and could be abolished only gradually, allowed himself some inconsistency in praising the bold action of the Communards in simply decreeing the old institutions out of existence.

## 15 Karl Marx: Poet of Commodities and Dictator of the Proletariat

Karl Marx's great book *Das Kapital* is a unique and complex work, which demands a different kind of analysis from that which it usually gets. At the time when Marx was working on the first volume, he wrote Engels (July 31, 1865) that whatever the shortcomings of his writings might be, they had "the merit of making an artistic whole"; and in his next letter to Engels (August 5) he speaks of the book as a "work of art," and mentions "artistic considerations" in connection with his delay in getting it finished. Certainly there went into the creation of *Das Kapital* as much of art as of science. The book is a welding-together of several quite diverse points of view, of several quite distinct techniques of thought. It contains a treatise on economics, a history of industrial development and an inspired tract for the times; and the morality, which is part of the time suspended in the interests of scientific objectivity, is no more self-consistent than the economics is consistently scientific or the history undistracted by the exaltation of apocalyptic vision. And outside the whole immense structure, dark and strong like the old Trier basilica, built by the Romans with brick walls and granite columns, swim the mists and the septentrional lights of German metaphysics and mysticism, always ready to leak in through the crevices.

But it is after all the poet in Marx who makes of all these things a whole—that same poet who had already shown his strength in the verses he had written as a student but whose equipment had not been appropriate to the art of romantic verse. Marx's subject is now human history; and that bleak

What Karl Marx, then, had really based his prophecies on—as Reinhold Niebuhr has recently pointed out—was the assumption that, though the employer had always shown himself to be grasping, the socialist worker of the future—having made what Engels describes in *Anti-Dühring* as the “leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom”—would always act for the good of humanity. The dominant class of the capitalist era had never willingly done anything but rob the poor in the interests of the well-being of their own group; but the dominant class of the proletarian dictatorship would never dream of abusing its position.

It ought also to be noted at this point that Marx and Engels had come to believe that there had been an epoch in the prehistoric past when a different standard of morality had prevailed. Since writing the *Communist Manifesto*, they had had occasion to revise their opinion then expressed, that “the history of all human society, past and present, has been the history of class struggles.” In the later editions, Engels added a note in which he explained that in 1847 little had been known about the communism of primitive societies. In the meantime, he and Marx had read the books of certain recent anthropologists who had convinced them that a communistic *gens* had been the true primitive form of social organization. Especially had they been impressed by the work of Lewis H. Morgan, the American ethnologist and socialist, who had lived among the Iroquois Indians. As a result, Marx and Engels now looked back—and thereby nourished their faith in the future—to something in the nature of a Golden Age of communist ownership and brotherly relations.

Marx himself had intended to write on this subject, but he had never got to the point of doing so—so that Engels, after Marx’s death, published an essay on the German mark (a free rural commune), based on the researches of G. L. von Maurer, and a little book called *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Here he attempted to demonstrate from Morgan that the “simple moral grandeur” of the “old gentile society without classes” had been “undermined and brought to its ruin by the most contemptible means: theft, violence, cunning, treason,” and that, in consequence, the “new

means something like "weigh like an incubus," to which Marx was very much addicted. We find it on the first page of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, where he says that, "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like an incubus on the brain of the living." We have seen it in the letter already quoted, in which he tells Engels that the injury to his friend's career for which he feels himself responsible has weighed like an incubus on his conscience; and he had written to the Countess Hatzfeldt after Lassalle's death that this event—in a similar phrase—had weighed upon him "like a hideous and evil dream." In writing about *Das Kapital* to Engels, he says that the task weighs upon him like an incubus; and he complains that the Workers' International "and everything that it involves . . . weighs like an incubus on me, and I'd be glad to be able to shake it off." It is always the same oppression, whether Marx has objectified it and generalized it as the oppression of the living by the dead or felt it personally as his own oppression under the conviction of his own guilt or under the greatest of his own achievements. It is always the same wound, as to which it is never quite clear—as in the case of the Dialectic, which is now a fundamental truth of nature, now an action performed by human agents, as in the case of the development of the capitalist economy, which is now an inevitable and non-moral process, now the blackest of human crimes—whether the gods have inflicted it on man or man has inflicted it on himself. It is always the same burial alive, whether it is the past trying to stifle the present or the future putting away the past. The French constitution of 1848, which, according to Marx in one of the passages just quoted, has been guarded in the womb by bayonets, is brought out of the womb by bayonets only to be bayoneted to death.

"You see," he had once written Engels, "that I'm the object of plagues just like Job, though I'm not so godfearing as he was." No: he is not so godfearing. He sees himself also as "Old Nick," the Goethean spirit that denies. Yet Old Nick is not the right symbol either: this Devil has been twisted and racked. Though he is capable of satanic mockery of the publisher who had sent Kriege on their necks and then fallen and broken his own, the mocker cannot jeer at such a doom

able, impossible, for society to function at all unless the money and the great centralized plants were taken away from the people who claimed to own them and who were incapable of conceiving them as a means to any more beneficent end than that of making themselves rich out of the profits, and were run for the public good. The working class would be able to accomplish this, because it would have increased to enormous proportions and have grown conscious of its interests as a class as incompatible with the interests of its employers; and it would now find itself so hard-pressed by privation that no alternative would be possible for it. All its scruples would be overcome by the realization that this privation coincided with an era when the production of what they needed had become possible with an ease and on a scale which had never been imagined in history.

Now we may reject the Hegelian-Marxist Dialectic as a genuine law of nature, but we cannot deny that Marx has here made effective use of it to exhibit the impossibilities of capitalism and to demonstrate the necessity for socialism. Nothing else had so brought home the paradoxes of destitution imposed by abundance, of great public utilities rendered useless by the property rights of those who controlled them. Nor was it necessary to accept the metaphysics of the Labor Theory of Value and to argue from it *a priori*, as Mr. Strachey does, in order to be convinced by Marx that this process must land capitalism in an *impasse*. The great thing was that Marx had been able, as the bourgeois economists had not, to see the capitalist economy in the perspective of the centuries as something which, like other economies, had had a beginning and must have an end. Mathematician, historian and prophet, he had grasped the laws of its precipitate progress and foreseen the disasters of its slumps as nobody else had done.

Marx was not able to foresee with the same accuracy the social phenomena which would result from these collapses. There were several fallacies involved in the picture he had made of the future.

In the first place, the identification by the Jew of the Jew with the proletariat gives rise to a miscalculation. In Marx's

to Europe—Mr. Lundberg to the contrary, notwithstanding—relatively little of the kind of class solidarity which is based on group intermarriage and the keeping of businesses in the hands of the same families. And it is also true that the democratic aims which the Republic announced to the new country, put forward though of course they were by a government of property-holders, have still preserved for us enough of their prestige so that it is still usually a serious matter in politics—something which is rarely the case in Europe—to bring charges of undemocratic conduct.

There has been plenty of industrial violence in America, a great deal more than is usual in Europe; but we do not work up to cumulative crises as they do in the more feudal European countries: we have the class quarrel out as we go along. And this is possible because in the United States, even where class interests divide us, we have come closer to social equality: our government does not guarantee a hierarchy to the extent that the European systems do. We are more lawless, but we are more homogeneous; and our homogeneity consists of common tendencies which Marx would have regarded as bourgeois, but which are actually only partly explicable as the results of capitalist competition. The common man, set free from feudal society, seems to do everywhere much the same sort of thing—which is not what Marx had expected him to do because it was not what Marx liked to do himself. The ordinary modern man wants a home with machine-made comforts (where Marx had never cared enough about a home to secure for his wife and his daughters even moderately decent living conditions); he wants amusement parks, movies, sports (Marx claimed that he had once studied horsemanship, but Engels, who had had him on a horse once in Manchester, said that he could never have got beyond the third lesson); he wants an opportunity to travel in his country: cheap excursions such as they have in Nazi Germany, proletarian boat-trips down the Volga, American road-camps and trailers; he wants Boy Scout Clubs and Y.M.C.A.'s, German walking clubs and youth organizations, Komsomol "Physkultur." He wants social services—hospitals, libraries, roads—whether he gets them through taxation by

the State or by the State's taking business over or, as has occurred on such a large scale in America, by the philanthropy of private persons. All these things that the peoples of the Soviet Republics as well as the fascist peoples want, the Americans have more or less managed to get during those periods when their capitalist economy was booming; and they have managed to get other things too, which other peoples will learn to want and will get: free movement and a fair amount of free speech.

It looks today as if some such conditions as these were the prerequisites for any socialist revolution which is to perpetuate as well as set up a new form of group domination. Socialism by itself can create neither a political discipline nor a culture. Even where a group of socialists come to the helm, they are powerless by themselves either to instil their ideals or to establish their proposed institutions. Only the organic processes of society can make it possible to arrive at either. And it seems today as if only the man who has already enjoyed a good standard of living and become accustomed to a certain security will really fight for security and comfort. But then, it appears, on the other hand, that from the moment he has acquired these things, he is transformed into something quite other than Karl Marx's idea of a proletarian.

Marx could recognize as worthy of survival only those who had been unjustly degraded and those who rose naturally superior through intellect and moral authority. He had no key for appreciating the realities of a society in which men are really to some degree at liberty to make friends with one another indiscriminately or indiscriminately to bawl one another out—in other words, in which there is any actual approximation to that ideal of a classless society which it was the whole aim of his life to preach. And we must remember—unless we are willing to accept it as a simple act of faith in Scripture, as the people of the year 1000 expected the world to come to an end—that Karl Marx's catastrophic prophecy of the upshot of capitalist development, the big short circuit between the classes, is based primarily on psychological assumptions, which may or may not turn out to have been justified: the assumption that there can be no possible limit to the ex-

tent to which the people who live on profits will continue to remain unaware of or indifferent to the privations of the people who provide them. The Armageddon that Karl Marx tended to expect presupposed a situation in which the employer and the employee were unable to make any contact whatever. The former would not only be unable to sit down at the same table with the latter on the occasion of an industrial dispute; he would be inhibited from socking him in the jaw until the class lines had been definitely drawn and the proletarian army fully regimented.

In other words, Marx was incapable of imagining democracy at all. He had been bred in an authoritarian country; and he had had some disappointing experiences with what were supposed to be popular institutions. His expectations of what was possible for democratic parliaments and tribunals had evidently been qualified by his memory of the ineptitudes of the Frankfort Assembly, which had dispersed like a dandelion top when Friedrich Wilhelm had puffed it away, and by his failure to obtain redress against Vogt. Furthermore, he was himself, with his sharp consciousness of superiority, instinctively undemocratic in his actual relations with his fellows: he was embittered by the miscarriage of many projects undertaken with the various groups of his associates and his working-class constituents. Finally—what is doubtless fundamental—it is exceedingly difficult for one whose deepest internal existence is all a wounding and being wounded, a crushing and being crushed, to conceive, however much he may long for, a world ruled by peace and fraternity, external relations between men based on friendliness, confidence and reason. So that Marx was unable either to believe very much in the possibilities of such democratic machinery as existed in the contemporary world or to envisage the real problems which, failing this, would be created by the coming to power of an untrained proletariat in the future. He was sometimes willing to admit in his later years—see his conversations with H. M. Hyndman and his speech at a workers' meeting in Amsterdam, September 8, 1872—that in democratic countries like England, Holland and the United States there was a chance that the Revolution might be accomplished by peace-

long labors were also the consequence of the scope of his inquiries and interests and of the immensity of his undertaking: interests which were always to remain insatiable, an undertaking which could never be completed. Marx had expected, when he was seeing the first volume through the press in the spring of 1867, to have the second finished the following winter. He speaks then, in writing to Engels, of the "much new material" which has come in on the subject of landed property; and he seems to have decided at some point after this to make Russia his great example of the development of ground-rent in the second part, as he had used England for that of industry in the first. He learned Russian at the end of the sixties, read up Russian literature and history, and had documents sent him from Russia. It was probably an anxiety, however exaggerated, to deal authoritatively with the Russian economy rather than trepidation as to the fate of the Labor Theory of Value, which was the obstacle to his progressing with his work. He accumulated stacks of statistics to the volume of two cubic meters; and at the time when *Das Kapital* in its second volume had rolled back on the Marxist household like an infernal Sisyphean stone that had to be propelled up the mountain again, Engels once remarked to Lafargue that he would like to burn all this material up. One of the last of Marx's unfinished writings was, as we shall presently see, an attempt to formulate some ideas on the revolutionary future of Russia and the possibilities of its presenting an exception to the capitalist laws he had demonstrated.

It is true, as Edward Bernstein says, that, though "where Marx has to do with details or subordinate subjects he mostly notices the important changes which actual evolution had brought about since the time of his first socialist writings, and thus himself states how far their presuppositions have been corrected by the facts," he, nevertheless, "when he comes to general conclusions, adheres in the main to the original propositions based upon the old uncorrected presuppositions [of 1848]." But the point is that he *was* aware of the changes: his mind was always reaching out to know more, straining to understand better. It was colossal to have summed up as Marx

had done the copious literature of his predecessors; but since his subject extended into the present and stretched away into the future, he was confronted with what was really the more difficult task of seizing the trend of contemporary events. If he devoted hours and weeks to reconstructing from documents in Old Slavonic the history of the land system in Russia, he also found it necessary to learn Rumanian in order to follow what was happening in the Balkans.

X | So *Das Kapital* was not only unfinished: it is, in a sense, endless—and this not merely in the sense that, after Marx's death, Engels continued to work on the manuscript over a period of twelve years and that, even after the death of Engels, Karl Kautsky brought out further volumes (Marx's critical summing-up of his predecessors) from 1904 to 1910—not merely that there still half-loom even beyond all this the unwritten or unfinished supplements: the philosophical book on Dialectical Materialism which was to hitch the Revolution up with the Universe, the anthropological work which was to justify the communism of the future from the communism of primitive times, the literary book in which Balzac was to be examined as the anatomist of bourgeois society, the studies in higher mathematics which were to illustrate the laws of the Dialectic by "putting the differential calculus on a new basis." Not only must *Das Kapital*, like Michelet's history, eventually break down as a *Kunstwerk*, because events will not accommodate themselves to its symmetry—since Marx himself became diverted while he was writing it into pursuing new researches into phenomena which were not allowed for by his original plan; but it leads inevitably to further thought and further writing—beginning with Engels' addenda to the later volumes, to the whole growth of Marxist thought since Marx's time—failing which, one may actually say, as one can say of few other books, that the original work would not continue to be valid. And its primary impulse deserts literature altogether when it animates such activities as those of Marx himself in connection with the Workers' International which interrupted the writing of his book and that later participation by Engels in the organizing of the Social Democrats which delayed him in patching up the unfinished work (if it is diffi-

indicted for high treason and condemned to two years of prison. Schweitzer, the leader of the Lassalleans, had also been arrested; and after the War the common fight against Bismarck brought the two parties together. Liebknecht arranged a merger which took place at the town of Gotha on May 22, 1874.

A program had already been drafted by a committee of seven Lassalleans and seven Eisenachers, and it had been sent for Marx's approval. He might well have been pleased that German labor should finally have been united, but he took the occasion to make himself unpleasant at the expense of the false doctrine of the Lassalleans. Liebknecht was not seriously concerned about these criticisms. A few minor changes were made in the program, and the merger took place and prospered; and the whole incident might be ignored as one of the instances of Marx's misdirected virulence if he had not been stimulated by the occasion to develop, in the long letter which has come to be known as the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, some general ideas on a very important question to which he had hitherto devoted no attention.

Marx began by raising an outcry—he may perhaps have been nervous on the subject—over an attempt on the part of the framers of the program to ground it on the Marxist Theory of Value. They had asserted that "labor is the source of all wealth." No! Nature was also a source of use-value. You not only had to work: you had to have something to work on and with.

And he went on to another matter, which the charges brought against him by Bakúnin may have induced him to discuss more fully. Bakúnin had promised a society set free from the burdens and the restraints of the State, and had declared that Marx, as a German, wanted to impose authoritarianism and regimentation. It was true that Marx had insisted a good deal, in discussing the future of Germany, on the importance of working for a strong centralized State rather than for a federal republic; and he now tried to make it plain that he was opposed to the State in itself, that he also aimed at ultimate freedom, at the accomplishment of the tasks of humanity through voluntary association.

## 16 Karl Marx Dies at His Desk

Yet Karl Marx was far, as we have already seen, from backing cordially that one of his followers who had learned to wield this weapon most effectively. Marx had pursued the Lassallean movement with a peculiar intensity of intolerance. He had resented the glorification of Lassalle which had taken place after his death and the piety with which the German workers sang songs about him and put his picture up in their houses. He credited a story of the Countess Hatzfeldt's that Lassalle had made a deal with Bismarck to support the annexation of Schleswig-Holstein in return for certain concessions to the workers, and he unjustly accused Lassalle's party, for whom Mehring says it was vital to profit by such concessions as Bismarck might make to labor, of playing Bismarck's game. The party, he wrote Engels, needed "cleansing from the lingering stink of Lassalle."

Liebknecht and Bebel had in the meantime succeeded in 1867 in getting themselves elected to the North German Reichstag, and they founded the following year at a trade union congress at Eisenach a new Social Democratic Labor Party. ("A hell of a name!" Engels had written Marx when the term "Social Democrat" had been invented.) At the time of the Franco-Prussian War, the Lassalleans voted for war credits in the July of 1870 when Liebknecht and Bebel refrained from voting at all; but in December, after the victory was won, both parties refused to vote further credits. Liebknecht and Bebel protested against the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine and applauded the Paris Commune, and were

bourgeois run cold. Conscientiously, almost morbidly, reluctant to put himself on record about anything which he had not completely excogitated, Marx had never far pursued the inquiries which would have led him down to dialectical first principles. It is significant that in the preface to *Das Kapital* he should, instead of expounding himself the materialistic view of history, be content to quote with approval a rather inadequate attempt to state it, but a version which made it seem extremely grim, volunteered by a Russian admirer. Engels with his readier fluency and his relative superficiality now tried to explain everything plausibly; and as he did so the old German idealism which he had drunk in with his first Rhine wine began to flow back into the Dialectic. We have already discussed the varying emphasis which Marx and Engels gave to their doctrines at different moments of history and different periods of their own careers; but it ought to be added here that the widely diverging interpretations which have been put upon Dialectical Materialism have also been partly due to certain fundamental divergences between the temperaments of the two different men.

And now Engels had on his hands the Labor Theory of Value, against which a great outcry went up. He died (August 5, 1875) earnestly trying to defend it, leaving the last of his polemics unfinished. He was suffering from cancer of the oesophagus and was no longer able to speak, but could write. He carried on conversations with his friends by chalking his remarks on a slate, and they could see from them that he was bearing his pain "with stoicism and even with humor." 19

He left legacies to both the Marx daughters and to the niece of Mary and Lizzy Burns (who nevertheless made trouble about the will in an effort to get more than he had left her), and twenty thousand marks to the Party. He wrote Bebel to "take care above everything that . . . it doesn't fall into the hands of the Prussians. And when you feel sure on that score, then drink a bottle of good wine on it. Do this in memory of me." He left directions for the disposal of his body, which were carried out by his friends. They had him cremated, and on a windy autumn day threw his ashes out to sea off Beachy Head.

Nor has he even as an historical critic the same interest as Marx and Engels. Even *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* differs from Marx in its limited scope and through the emphasis of its special local bearing as a polemic against the Russian Populists. And even in this political field, the concentration of Lenin is more limiting. There is a letter of Engels to Marx, to which I have already referred, in which he speaks, after the defeat of '48, of the conditions of an actual revolution as having a demoralizing effect on such critical thinkers as Marx and himself, and tells his friend that, when the moment comes, they must try to avoid, "at least for a time, becoming involved in that whirlpool." To Lenin this point of view would have been utterly inconceivable; he could not have imagined that it would be possible to lose anything worth having by becoming involved in action. Even in a similar situation—the reaction that followed the defeat of the revolution of 1905—he did not withdraw, as Marx and Engels had been glad enough to do, in order to look at things more closely and to elaborate their ideas more completely. The roots of Lenin's activity were instinctive, unquestioning, irresistible; his explicit convictions are derived from whatever will serve his purpose in Marx. His whole object is still to build a party; and his critical activity is confined to what he regards as indispensable for whipping his party into shape.

It would be tedious to trace in detail the stages by which Lenin steered his followers through the rocks and shoals of revolutionary politics. As we follow his windings in those interminable polemics that make dreary enough reading today, we may be tempted to imagine with certain of his opponents that he is the victim of a theological obsession with doctrine, or to be struck, as Boris Souvarine is, by the apparent inconsistencies of his course. But to approach Lenin thus through his writings, even in these utterances to his party, is not to understand him at all. If his controversial writings are usually dull to read, it is because the issues involved are not really being fought out by Lenin in terms of ideas at all. These issues are not—though Lenin thinks they are—really questions of Marxist theory. They are invariably questions of practical

policy; and his real aim is not to justify theoretically the policy that he feels is the right one, but simply to make people pursue it. The theoretical side of Lenin is, in a sense, not serious; it is the instinct for dealing with the reality of the definite political situation which attains in him the point of genius. He sees and he adopts his tactic with no regard for the theoretical positions of others or of his own theoretical position in the past; then he supports it with Marxist texts. If he is mistaken, he declares his error, and adopts a new tactic, with new texts. Yet in all this ready shifting of tactics, he had always in his mind a single purpose related to theory in a larger sense: the making in Russia of a revolution which should be not merely Russian but Marxist.

He had thus a double problem: to implement Marxism itself and to guide the Russian movement along the Marxist rails.

In connection with the first of these, he had really to reload the weapons that had been hung up by Marx and Engels after the campaign of 1848, to bring back into Marxism the "dynamic principle" of Marx's college dissertation, the will to change the world of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, the human force that made Marxism "not a dogma," as Lenin was fond of quoting from Engels, but indefinitely "a guide to action." And Lenin's character was totally free from that personal ambition and vanity which had betrayed Ferdinand Lassalle when he had tried to take Marxism into action.

In Western Europe the doctrine of Marx had been falling into what the Marxists called "reformism" and "opportunism." When Lenin, in 1895, had gone to see Paul Lafargue in Paris, Marx's son-in-law had told him it was impossible that the Russians should understand Marx, since nobody understood him any longer in Western Europe. The very parliamentary successes of the Social Democratic Party in Germany had had the effect of cooling the ardor of the revolutionary purpose of German Marxists and of impelling them to question the Marxist credo. Edward Bernstein began in 1898 to advocate a revision of Marxist theory. The Social Democrats, he pointed out, were no longer a revolutionary party in the sense that, say, the Communist League had been: they were simply reformers

of his impulse to pontificate and humiliate, he was in his political procedure almost as undemocratic. He was fond of his associates, he appreciated their qualities, but it never occurred to him to doubt for a moment that he could tell them what they ought to do; and he could never relinquish the final responsibility for what was said or done by the group any more than the headmaster with even the ablest faculty, the most promising crop of boys, can submit to a vote of the school. Sukhánov says that, skilful though Lenin was at preparing and presenting his ideas, he avoided the direct give-and-take of debate.

This, of course, was not merely a matter of Lenin's peculiar personality or of his conditioning by his early life. If he gravitated into the role of dictator, it was because the social physics of Russia made it inevitable that he should do so. In his drive toward personal domination there was nothing either of the egoism of genius or of the craving for honor of the statesman. Lenin was one of the most selfless of great men. He did not care about seeing his name in print, he did not want people to pay him homage; he did not care about how he looked, he had no pose of not caring about it. He regarded his political opponents not as competitors who had to be crushed, but as colleagues he had regrettably lost or collaborators he had failed to recruit. Unlike certain of the other great revolutionists, Marx or Bakúnin, for example, he is imaginable as a statesman of the West, developing in a different tradition.

But in Russia the difference in culture between the people and the educated classes was so extreme that a leader of the people had inescapably to direct them from above. Tolstoy had spent the latter part of his life alternating between his actual role of a great landowner with a troublesome conscience and the intensive impersonation of a muzhik, whose humility always became a fraud. Lenin knew how to talk to the people, he could readily put himself in their shoes, he believed that they had the stuff to contribute members to his trained corps of professional revolutionists. But with his hard sense of social realities, he is quite clear about the intellectual inequalities between the intelligentsia and the

masses. He quotes in *What Is to Be Done?* as "profoundly true and important" a statement by Karl Kautsky to the effect that the proletariat, left to itself, can never arrive at socialism; socialism must be brought them from above: "the vehicles of science are not the proletariat, but the *bourgeoisie* intelligentsia." And "our very first and most pressing duty," he writes in the same book, "is to help turn out worker-revolutionists on the same level *in regard to party activity* as intellectual revolutionists (we italicize the words 'in regard to party activity,' because in other connections the attainment of such a level by the workers, although that, too, is needful, is neither so easy nor so pressing). Our attention then must chiefly be directed to raising the workers to the level of revolutionists, not at all necessarily to degrading ourselves to the level of the labor masses,' as the Economists want to do, or to the level of the 'medium workers,' as *Svoboda* wants to do." These masses are mostly illiterate, and when they exchange their submission for insurrection, they fall as readily into a filial attitude toward the man who takes the helm in their rebellion as toward the man who had kept them in bondage.

On the other hand, the Russian intellectuals with whom Lenin had to collaborate had been demoralized by the same paternalism: hunted, thwarted, with no experience of power, they were irresolute, irresponsible, unready. At a time when the Social Democrats were bitterly complaining against the domination of Lenin, an old friend of Lenin's, Krzhizhanóvsky, lost patience and demanded of Fyodr Dan how it was possible, as they said, for one man to ruin an entire party while everybody looked on helpless. "Because," said Dan, "there is nobody who is occupied with the Revolution twenty-four hours a day, who has no thoughts except the thought of the Revolution, and who even when he goes to sleep, dreams only of the Revolution. See what you can do with a man like that!" In *What Is to Be Done?*, Lenin characterizes Russia as "a politically enslaved state, in which nine hundred and ninety-nine of the inhabitants have been corrupted to the marrow of their bones by political subservience and by a complete incomprehension of party honor and party ties."

Lenin's rigor was thus intensified by the slackness of the

little offensive for a Marxist revolutionist in exile, and with none of Lenin's human charm. Where Lenin, says Lunachásky, never "glanced in the mirror of history, never even thought what posterity would say of him—simply did his work," Trotsky "looked often at himself."

Nor could he specialize himself so narrowly as Lenin. He always liked to read French novels, and in Paris he met a young comrade who even induced him to visit the Louvre. This was Natália Ivánovna Sedóva, who had begun her revolutionary career by persuading her whole class at boarding-school to go in for reading radical literature and refuse to attend prayers, who at the time of Trotsky's advent from Russia was the head of the welcoming committee for Social Democrats arriving in Paris, and who has lived with him ever since and is the mother of his two sons. She took him around Paris. At first, he says, he fought against art, but later came to understand it and even wrote about it a little; and he has followed the tradition of Lassalle and Engels rather than that of Marx and Lenin: the tradition of the socialist as man of the world and all-around personality.

XII  
Yet an unquestioning, almost an involuntary, recognition of Lenin's superiority comes out in such comments on Lenin as that which I have quoted above. Marxist though Trotsky is and uncompromising fighter though he is, when he writes about Lenin it is always as one who is approaching something noteworthy and rare, of a breed almost above the human; and he has found in presenting Lenin an art of traits carefully picked and quietly placed, a portraiture affectionate and delicate, made sober by the deepest respect, quite outside the vein of Marxist vehemence and recalling in an unmistakable way the picture of Socrates by Plato.

It was not time yet for Trotsky to follow Lenin's lead. In the early part of 1903 Lenin proposed taking him on *Iskra* in a letter to his colleagues in which he described the young writer as "a man of rare abilities, he has conviction and energy, and he will go much farther." He deprecated the floridity of Trotsky's style, but predicted that he would outgrow it. Plekhánov, evidently antagonized by the appearance of

tittle-tattle.\* They can be ruthless, but not treacherous. For outward glamor, titles or rank they have nothing but a cool contempt. What philistines and vulgarians considered aristocratic in them was really only their revolutionary superiority. Its most important characteristic is a complete and ingrained independence of official public opinion at all times and under all conditions."

But even here we can see that it is the attitude itself, rather than what is to be accomplished through the attitude, that appeals to the imagination of Trotsky: he sees himself as the aristocrat of revolution. Lunachársky tells of Trotsky's exclaiming of the Social Revolutionary leader Chernóv, who had accepted a place in the coalition government before the October revolution: "What contemptible ambitiousness!—to abandon his historic position for a portfolio." But the position of honor is only removed to the end of a longer perspective. "Trotsky," Lunachársky adds, "treasures his historic role, and would undoubtedly be willing to make any personal sacrifice, not by any means excluding that of his life, in order to remain in the memory of mankind with the halo of a genuine revolutionary leader." Bruce Lockhart wrote in his diary in February, 1918, after his first interview with Trotsky: "He strikes me as a man who would willingly die fighting for Russia provided there was a big enough audience to see him do it." And there is somehow the impression created that the cause of human progress stands or falls with Trotsky: Truth's quarrel is Trotsky's quarrel. He tells in his autobiography of his judgment on the boys at his school when he went back after having been suspended over the demonstration against the French teacher. He divided them into three distinct groups: those who had "betrayed" him, those who had "defended" him, and those who had "remained neutral." The first

\* This was written before Trotsky had been able to read the complete text of the correspondence, published by the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow. It did not begin coming out till 1929, the year that *My Life* was finished. But of course the very expurgation to which Bebel and Bernstein subjected the letters is evidence of the ideal of self-discipline that the Marxists had come to set themselves.

serves. Thus it is a criminal act to shoot a man "with the aim of violation or murder," but an act of virtue to shoot a mad dog which is about to attack a child. "The Jesuits represented a militant organization, strictly centralized, aggressive, and dangerous not only to their enemies, but to their allies as well." They were superior to the other Catholic priests of their day because they were "more consistent, bolder and more perspicacious." It was only in so far as they became less Jesuits, less "warriors of the Church," that is, in so far as they were perverted into "bureaucrats," that their order degenerated.

Thus such means as lying and killing are morally indifferent in themselves. Both are necessary in time of war, and it depends on which side we want to win whether we approve them or reprobate them. Trotsky illustrates this phenomenon strikingly, and evidently without being aware of it, in the very essay under discussion, by bitterly complaining of the "hypocrisy" and the "official cult of mendacity" of the Kremlin and denouncing one of his calumniators of the GPU as a "bourgeois without honor or conscience." When the Bolsheviks calumniated the Mensheviks, then, the reader is moved to inquire, this did not imply anything derogatory to their conscience or their honor? One finds the answer in another passage: "The question does not even lie in which of the warring camps caused or itself suffered the greatest number of victims. History has different yardsticks for the cruelty of the Northerners and the cruelty of the Southerners in the [American] Civil War. A slave-owner who through cunning and violence shackles a slave in chains, and a slave who through cunning and violence breaks the chains—let not the contemptible eunuchs tell us that they are equals before a court of morality!" There is, then, a court of morality above the warring classes, and this court is presided over by, precisely again, the Goddess History. For anyone but a Marxist it would appear as if history in the ordinary sense of the description or study of past events might well approach without moral animus the casualties of both North and South in the American Civil War. Should the historian, even in assuming that one side in a given conflict represents a progressive force and the other a retrograde

as the general road to salvation, nor have I ever known of any man anywhere, who hated, despised and loathed all unhappiness, grief, and suffering so deeply and strongly as Lenin did. . . . He was particularly great, in my opinion, precisely because . . . of his burning faith that suffering was not an essential and unavoidable part of life, but an abomination that people ought to and could sweep away."

It was this that now made him harsh, and that later, under the stress of the civil war, led him to accept the rigors of the new machine that had to govern Russia. Trotsky tells of Lenin's misgivings in the first days of the Revolution over a military order that looters should be executed on the spot, the first infliction of the death penalty by the Bolsheviks; but afterwards, when some emissary from the West asked questions about political executions, Lenin retorted: "Who wants to know?—the statesmen who have just sent sixteen million men to their deaths?" He said to Gorky one day in the country, when they had been talking to some Soviet children: "These children will have happier lives than we had. A good deal that we have had to go through they will never know. There will not be so much cruelty in their lives."

He lost himself now in events, seems to have been conscious of himself solely as the agent of an historical force. Those who knew him have noted with surprise his complete lack of self-importance. Angélica Balabánova says that she cannot remember when she first met him in exile, that "externally he seemed the most colorless of all the revolutionary leaders." Nor did the shift from the Zürich library to the dictatorship of the Kremlin release a love of power for its own sake or an impulse to play the great man. Bruce Lockhart, when he saw Lenin after the October Revolution, thought "at the first glance" that he "looked more like a provincial grocer than a leader of men. Yet in those steely eyes there was something that arrested my attention, something in that quizzing, half-contemptuous, half-smiling look which spoke of boundless self-confidence and conscious superiority." And Clara Zetkin tells a story of his receiving a delegation of German Communists: accustomed to the Marxists of the Reichstag, with their frock-coats and their official inflation, these Germans had expected something

apropos of whether the immediate measures he contemplated for feeding the Russian people should be regarded as constituting a "dictatorship of the proletariat" or a "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the poorest peasantry." . . . "It would be indeed a grave error if we tried now to fit the complex, urgent, rapidly-unfolding practical tasks of the revolution into the Procrustean bed of a narrowly conceived 'theory,' instead of regarding theory first of all and above all as a *guide to action*."

We have watched the attempts of Michelet to relive the recorded events of the past as a coherent artistic creation, and we have seen how the material of history always broke out of the pattern of art. Lenin is now to attempt to impose on the events of the present a pattern of actual direction which will determine the history of the future. We must not wonder if later events are not always amenable to this pattern. The point is that western man at this moment can be seen to have made some definite progress in mastering the greeds and the fears, the bewilderments, in which he has lived.

The terminal where the trains get in from Finland is today a little shabby stucco station, rubber-gray and tarnished pink, with a long trainshed held up by slim columns that branch where they meet the roof. On one side the trains come in; on the other are the doors to the waiting-rooms, the buffet and the baggage-room. It is a building of a size and design which in any more modern country of Europe would be considered appropriate to a provincial town rather than to the splendors of a capital; but, with its benches rubbed dull with waiting, its ticketed cakes and rolls in glass cases, it is the typical small station of Europe, the same with that sameness of all the useful institutions that have spread everywhere with middle-class enterprise. Today the peasant women with bundles and baskets and big handkerchiefs around their heads sit quietly on the benches.

But at the time of which I am writing there was a rest-room reserved for the Tsar, and there the comrades who met him took Lenin, when the train got in very late the night of April 16. On the platform he had been confronted by men come back

Breyeroff Labor - Commissar  
Wilson — Fabrikator + Isolator  
Tocqueville — Author — together = power  
In Soviet Russia Thought + Solider = book

A DOUBLEDAY



ANCHOR

BOOK

## TO THE FINLAND STATION

takes its title from the scene of Lenin's return to Russia in April 1917, during the early stages of the Russian Revolution. This event, whose consequences have dominated the modern world, brought to a climax the many political and intellectual movements which are the subject of this book.

It is with the background to this event that Mr. Wilson concerns himself in the present book, the history of Vico's idea that "the social world is the work of man." He traces the influence of this revolutionary view of society through Michelet, Taine, Renan and Anatole France; through the early socialists, Saint-Simon, Babeuf, Fourier, Owen and the American socialists; and through the further development of their ideas in Marx and Engels. The final chapters deal with Lenin and Trotsky and the origins of the Russian Revolution itself, while in a new appendix Mr. Wilson evaluates the most recent manifestations of the socialist idea.

The author has no wish  
to be disturbed