

SOCIALISM FROM THE ROOT UP.

CHAPTER XII.—THE PARIS COMMUNE OF 1871, AND THE CONTINENTAL MOVEMENT FOLLOWING IT.

In dealing with the great event of the Paris Commune, we must take for granted a knowledge of the facts, which are in a brief form accessible to all since the publication by the Socialist League of its pamphlet on the subject.

As we have stated before, the International was founded in 1864, under the leadership of Beesley, Marx, and Odger. In 1869, at the Congress of Basle, Marx drew it into the compass of Socialism; and though in England it still remained an indefinite labour-body, on the Continent it became at once decidedly Socialistic and revolutionary, and its influence was very considerable.

The progress of Socialism and the spreading feeling of the solidarity of labour was very clearly shown by the noble protest made by the German Socialists¹ against the war with France, in the teeth of a "patriotic" feeling so strong in appearance that it might have been expected to silence any objectors from the first. The result of the war seemed to offer at least a chance for action to the rapidly increasing Socialist party, if they could manage to take advantage of it, to get into their hands the political power; and under the influence of the Internationalists, the French Socialists determined to take action if an immediate opportunity offered. Neither did the opportunity fail. The final defeat of the French army at Sedan brought on the fall of the Empire, when Republican France might perhaps have made terms with the invaders, whom the men of the Empire had challenged. But a resistance was organised by Gambetta, at the head of a stock-jobbing clique, whose interests, both commercial and political, forbade them to let the war die out, lest they should find themselves face to face with a people determined to be fleeced no longer. This resistance, sustained by the success with which this clique played on the sham patriotic or jingo feelings of the general population, was always quite hopeless from a military point of view, and brought the country to the verge of ruin. It also necessarily involved the German siege of Paris, the result of which was to throw a great deal of power into the hands of the city proletariat, since they at least were in earnest in their resistance to the foreign enemy, and the theatrical resistance necessary to the ambition of the political adventurers who posed as their leaders could not have a decent face to put upon it without their enthusiasm. In October, while the siege was still at its height, a rising headed by Blanqui nearly succeeded in overthrowing the bourgeois domination; and after the siege the possession of arms, especially cannon, by the proletariat, in the face of the disarmed and disorganised army under the bourgeois, afforded the opportunity desired by the Socialists. On the failure of Thiers' attempt to disarm Paris—whether he expected it to succeed, or only designed it as a trap to enable him to fall with mere force of arms on Paris—on this failure the insurrection took place, and the Central Committee, largely composed of members of the International, got into their hands the executive power, a great deal of which they retained during the whole of the existence of the Commune. Their position was strengthened by the fact that, apart from their aims towards the economical freedom of the proletariat, in their aspirations towards genuine federalisation they were, in appearance at least, in accord with the Radicals who wished to see an advanced municipalism brought about.

As the movement progressed, it became more and more obvious that if the resistance to Thiers and the attempt to establish municipal independence for Paris was to succeed, it must be through the exercise of Socialist influence on the proletariat: the Radicals, therefore, were forced by the march of events into alliance with the Socialists. The Socialist element therefore came to the front, and enactments of a distinctly Socialistic nature were passed, involving the suspension of contract and abolition of rents; and both in these matters and in the decentralisation which was almost the watchword of the Commune, the advance from the proceedings of the earlier revolutionists is clearly marked. Also, although the opportunity for the establishment of the Commune was given by the struggle against foreigners, the international character of their aspirations was shown by the presence of foreigners in the Council of the Commune and in command of its troops. And though in itself the destruction of the Vendôme Column may seem but a small matter, yet considering the importance attached generally, and in France particularly, to such symbols, the dismantling of that base piece of Napoleonic upholstery was another mark of the determination to hold no parley with the old jingo legends.

It should be noted that the risings which took place in other towns in France were not so much vanquished by the strength of the bourgeoisie, which at first found itself powerless before the people, but rather fell through owing to a want of fuller development of Socialism and a more vigorous proclamation of its principles.

The whole revolt was at last drowned in the blood of the workers of Paris. Certainly the immediate result was to crush Socialism for the time by the destruction of a whole generation of its most determined recruits. Nevertheless the very violence and excess of the bourgeois revenge have, as we can now see, tended to strengthen the progress of Socialism, as they have set the seal of tragedy and heroism on the mixed events of the Commune, and made its memory a rallying point for all future revolutionists.

However, the fall of the Commune involved that of the International. The immediate failure of its action was obvious, and blinded

¹ They also protested, at the end of the war, against the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine.

people to its indestructible principles. Besides, a period of great commercial prosperity visited the countries of Europe at this time. The French milliards which Germany had won as the prize of war were being turned over and over by the German bourgeois in their merry game of "beggar-my-neighbour." England was at the height of its period of "leaps and bounds"—a period now called by the German middle classes themselves the "swindle period." Even France, in spite of her being the plundered country, recovered from the condition into which the war had thrown her with a speed which made the plunderer envy her. In short, it was one of those periods which prove to the bourgeois exploiter that he is positively right, in which the bettermost workman grows quite unconscious of the chain which binds him, and is contemptuously regardless of that which lies heavy on the labourer below him, to whom the prosperity or adversity of the rest of the world make little or no difference.

Internal dissensions, also, were at work within the International, and at the Congress of the Hague in 1872 it was broken up; and though it still existed as a name for the next year or two, the remaining fragments of it did nothing worth speaking of.

In Vienna, in 1871, the movement in sympathy with the Commune became threatening, but was repressed by the authorities, and several of the prominent members of the party were imprisoned for the part they had taken in a Socialist demonstration—amongst others, Johann Most and Andreas Scheu.

For a while after the fall of the Commune the interest in the active side of the movement turns to Russia and Germany. In 1878 Nobiling and Hödel shot at the Emperor William; which event gave the occasion for the attack by Bismark on the rapidly increasing Socialist party in October 1878, when the repressive laws were enacted which have been in force ever since. The result of these laws, which suppressed meetings, papers, and other literature, has been to drive the movement into a purely parliamentary course. In spite of the repression, the party has not only succeeded in holding itself together, but has grown to large dimensions, numbering, according to official statements, 650,000.

In Russia the Socialist movement was, on the face of it, mixed up with nationalist and political agitation, which was natural in a country in the bonds of the crudest form of absolutism. Nevertheless the ultimate aim of the party is unmistakable, and the propaganda has been carried on with a revolutionary fervour and purity of devotion which have never been surpassed, if they have ever been equalled. The slaying of the Czar on March 13, 1881, with the tragic scenes that followed it, has been the most dramatic event which the Russian movement has given to the world; and it must be said of it that it has marked and initiated a new revolutionary period. Since that time the elements of Revolution have gathered force and cohesion; a sense of insecurity has come over the authority of "law and order"; the sympathies of all people of honesty and good feeling have been attracted to the side of those suffering under mere open monstrous oppression; and men's minds generally have been opened to new ideas on the more insidious oppression under which labour groans in constitutionally governed countries.

The last stage of the great revolution inaugurated in France at the end of the eighteenth century seems destined to be reached at the end of the nineteenth—if, indeed, that thing of rags and patches called "Constitutional Government" can keep itself alive so long.

E. BELFORT BAX AND WILLIAM MORRIS.

SAMUEL MORLEY.

ACCORDING to the newspapers one would imagine that a great benefactor of the human race had been removed from us in the shape of Samuel Morley. It never seems to occur to these worshippers of Mammon that our Morleys, Wrights, Goschens, Oetzmanns, and Chamberlains are not benefactors at all, but are instead makers of most part of the poverty of the employed, and are also creators of the unemployed, and almost all the misery that surrounds us. Out of one million workers two-thirds are women, and women are employed because they work for lower wages; for the same reason children are employed; this means that men are thereby thrown out of work; and where men are employed one man has to do the work of three or four; the great increase in the productive power of machinery also assists to enlarge the number of unemployed. Of course this sort of thing in business circles is considered perfectly honest.

From the papers we gather that councils, clubs, and associations have all lost their heads over his so-called "unbounded generosity and large-hearted Christian charity." Would that these councils on the dwellings of the poor, the different operative associations, temperance societies, and young men's Christian associations, as well as our working-men's clubs, would see that this sort of charity only makes a show in subscription lists, but does not interfere with the causes of misery, and that it would be better even if they only brought their organising power to bear upon the wisdom of preventing this misery from arising by increased wages, and greater facilities for sustaining health. Large charities would then be unnecessary, for the need of them wholly arises from the conditions under which large masses of our working people are forced to live. When we look at the picture in this light, what utter twaddle the following appears in the *Daily News*—

"Samuel Morley was a barn merchant, with the instincts of commerce working strongly in him; and being also a Puritan by conviction and