

## The BOOK TRAIL

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When I first contemplated in my mind's eye the vacant space on page 20, or thereabouts, in *The Freeman*, my intention was to fill it, partially at least, with reflections on the virtues of a little book entitled "Great Leaders in Human Progress" (By E. H. Griggs. The Bobbs-Merrill Co. \$1.50.) I am a hero-worshiper in a way. Few things please me more than contemplation of the accomplishments of a great man, though I have found in times gone by that, as with the case of Apollo, who was "a beautiful god to behold, a bitter god to follow," it is never wise to take great men for granted. Nevertheless, I still approach biography with prelibation and expectancy.

Such an attitude perhaps puts too much of a burden upon biographers; however, in the present case I am confident no critical standards are being strained beyond reason—Mr. Griggs' "Great Leaders in Human Progress" really is a thin work which falls far short of its subject matter. The thumb-nail "inspirational" biography had its prototype in the "Little Journeys" of Elbert Hubbard; but these were in vogue a long time ago, and no one since has been able to recapture their mellifluous flavor. Come to think of it, why should anyone try?

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Mr. Griggs' book brought to mind that ancient question: do the times make the man, or does the man make the times? Did Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Savonarola, Spinoza, Voltaire and other "Great Leaders" make the world in which we live? Or were they themselves the products of world movements which used them as mere pawns to work out a larger destiny?

This is no idle question to be bracketed with the proverbial conundrum "which came first, the chicken or the egg?", for in its answer lies a motivating force of great political and social significance. The Marxists would have us believe that a force far more powerful than either the demoniacal or aspirational capacities of man is leading us inexorably to a Communist State; and that at the appropriate times great men are brought forth to work out the will of this foreordainment. Generally speaking, teleological doctrines of this sort do not find much scientific acceptance.

Be that as it may (and therein lies a long, long story), the Marxian doctrine is opposed *ab ovo usque ad mala* by our old friend, the quondam dyspeptic and sometimes wondrous-wise Carlyle. Perhaps you will recall these lines from "On Heroes and Hero-Worship": ". . . the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the history of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are the practical realization and embodiment, of thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these."

Strong words! Yet not too strong for Carlyle. Here was a man who relished his conclusions and who, apparently, could not resist the temptation to revel in his power over the written word.

But if we take Carlyle with a grain of salt, it is only fitting at the same time to seek for the soul of truth in Marx. That is, it were wise not to allow Carlyle's engaging self-assurance to prove too seductive, nor Marx's cocksureness to become too forbidding.

The happy medium, and possibly the simple truth is that the world is, in its inscrutable nature, attempting to work toward a natural goal: which goal seems to be supreme abundance and extreme heterogeneity; and that in the course of events great men appear to fulfill special roles in this natural process. However, the same as there are blights in nature which often at a single blow, destroy years of careful construction, so in the world of men there are Hitlers, Stalins and Mussolinis who destroy, distort and hinder.

Fortunately there are also Georgists—not many of them, of course, but enough to shed light and spread inspiration, to the end that one may reasonably hope for a happy outcome of the present world imbroglio.

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Socrates believed that virtue consisted of knowledge—that is, knowledge of what is right. The evil that men do is attributable, according to his doctrine, to their lack of understanding of what is right and their consequent failure to distinguish between good and its opposite.

Perhaps you have noticed that Henry George, too, expressed a great faith in the power of knowledge. "Until there be correct thought," he said, "there cannot be right action; and when there is correct thought, right action will follow." His optimism is shared by a good many present day Georgists—and also by a number of schismatic Marxist groups, as well as by innumerable bodies of "idealists." The colloquial phrase, "Believe me!" is a serious imperative in every social appeal, for each reformer believes,

in the spirit of Max Stirner, that "my truth is the truth!"

You will find no yardstick in the U. S. Bureau of Standards by which to measure and establish the acceptability of ideas or "correct thoughts," and so, until such a yardstick is forthcoming, social movements will have to stake their final success on more aggressive efforts than the development of slow educational processes.

Which leads me, quite deviously, to a little book entitled "Hunger and Work" (by Jurgen Kuczynski, International Publishers, \$1.50), for in this volume the author adduces statistics which prove, statistically, that millions of members of the "working class" in Great Britain are undernourished (the fact did not have to be proved realistically) and deduces, not too connectedly, that the years to come may bring "progress"—"under pressure of mass action in a Popular Front."

Of course anyone with half an eye open will recognize in such phraseology the trade mark of the Communist "line," and since the Communist movement has become predominantly political (as opposed to philosophic), it is doing but simple justice to make exceptional allowances for the language of the hustings. But once we have done that, it is only sensible to attempt a penetration into deeper principles. What is the meaning of this undernourishment of Englishmen? How does Mr. Kuczynski, who is introduced to his readers as "a noted Marxian economist," explain this contradiction: an increased productivity, which he is careful to point out, and a decreased relative reward to labor?

Karl Marx would turn in his grave could he but read the author's answer! Indeed, the patriarch of "scientific" socialism would take on the appearance of a whirling dervish were he able to note the innumerable conflicting interpretations bespoken in his name.

I quote Mr. Kuczynski: "Unemployment was low as long as society was ruled by progressive forces. (Sic!) These progressive forces were represented during the greater part of the nineteenth century by pure capitalist bourgeois society. To-day the progressive forces are represented by labor and still a considerable part of the bourgeoisie, chiefly the petty and middle bourgeoisie. There is no doubt that a Government corresponding in its composition and its backing, let us say to the first Blum Government, i.e. to the first Popular Front Government in France, backed by wage workers, the blackcoat workers, the small farmers, tradesmen, craftsmen, a considerable part of the intelligentsia, and a fair sprinkling of the middle bourgeoisie, could reduce unemployment to as low a level as prevailed usually in the nineteenth century."

Books like "Hunger and Work" prove graphically how common it is to interpret significant facts insignificantly.