

THE SPIRITUAL FATHER OF KARL MARX

By T. A. JACKSON

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ENGELS.



THE appearance for the first time in English—more than a century after the original was written—of a translation of Hegel's *Science of Logic* is on all grounds a notable event.* Hitherto we had had, perforce, to take our views of Hegel at second or third hand—or even more remotely. His *Philosophy of History* has for long been available (in a somewhat eccentric translation) and parts at any rate of his *Encyclopaedia* and *Phenomenology*.

Yet, despite the fact that the former contains an epitomised version of the *Logic*, neither of these works presents the innermost essence of what is by common consent the most stupendous feat of philosophising begotten even by the German Transcendental School.

Hegel and the Hegelians

It is significant that this should be so; that nobody should be able to write at length about philosophy without mentioning Hegel (generally with disparagement varying from mild disapproval to fierce contempt) and yet few, if any, even of those who can read German have really grappled with the

* Hegel's *Science of Logic*. Translated by W. H. Johnston and L. G. Struthers. (Allen and Unwin. 2 vols., 32/- net).

core and essence of his system—the "Bible" of Hegelianism, this present work, the *Science of Logic*.

Did not Hegel himself say (or was Heine up to his larks again when he reported him as saying?) "there is only one man understands me, and he *mis*-understands me?"

George Wilhelm Frederick Hegel was in fact, though successful enough in the narrowly material sense, tragically unlucky. He was born either a century too soon or 22 centuries too late. Among the Greeks in their philosophic prime he would have shone as an acute and comprehensive systematiser, to-day he would be acclaimed as an expositor and an elucidator for whom Einstein would have no terrors and for whom the Freudians would fall into line. As it was, it fell to his lot to carry on the work he found ready to hand. Was it his fault that, reasoning more rigorously and over a far vaster range than his predecessors, he did but the more speedily and completely demonstrate the failure of philosophy?

Engels' Summing-Up

Engels, in a well-known passage, praises the work of Hegel:—

The new German philosophy culminated in the Hegelian system. In this system—and herein is its

great merit—for the first time the whole world—natural, historical, intellectual—is represented as a process, i.e., as in constant motion, change, transformation, development; and the attempt is made to trace out the internal connection that makes a continuous whole of this movement and development. From this point of view the history of mankind no longer appeared as a wild whirl of senseless deeds of violence all equally to be condemned at the judgment seat of mature philosophic reason, and which are best forgotten as soon as possible, but as the process of evolution of man himself. It was now the task of the intellect to follow the gradual march of this process through all its devious ways and to trace out the inner law running through all its apparently accidental phenomena. That the Hegelian system did not solve the problem it propounded is immaterial. Its epoch-making merit was that it propounded the problem.

It needs no argument to show that in Hegel's day (1770-1831) only the tiniest beginning had been made to accumulate the vast body of positively scientific knowledge now available. When therefore he attempted, as he did, to elaborate a detailed world-conception in terms of his leading principle he could not fail to superadd to his own inevitable limitations those of his age. Naturally he thereby laid himself open to castigation and the very grandeur of his repute in his own day ensured that that castigation would be prompt and thorough. Yet for all that, the value of his central principle remained, and it is this that is expounded in the *Science of Logic*.

Hegel's Great Principle

Briefly put, his central point may be expressed as the denial of the "Law of the Excluded Middle." In common text-book (or "formal") logic, a thing either is "so-and-so" or it is not; no interim or "middle" stage is possible. Beginning thus, "formal" logic proceeds to analyse propositions into their component assertions and sort them into identities. Having said that "all men are mortal" and that "Socrates is a man," we triumphantly deduce that we have, virtually, asserted the mortality of Socrates. So far no grievous damage is done. But when we erect this method into a species of revelation and carry it over into the valuation, not of verbal propositions, but of creeds, policies, and concepts its weakness is soon revealed.

Mankind in its history has often seen grandmothers murdered; may we therefore say that all men are liable to murder grand-

mothers? Even if we concede it as a potential possibility, would we be justified in saying that any particular man (John Smith or Stanley Baldwin) was potentially a grandmother-murderer?

Such and such a thing, it is argued, is "either Right or it is Wrong!"—but who is there nowadays that has not experienced the falsity of that proposition? Nowadays, with the old fixed lines of demarcation between Force and Matter, the Living and the non-Living, Christianity and Heathendom, Socialism and non-Socialism, all blurring and fading before our eyes, the truth of Hegel's central proposition (the repudiation of the "Law" of the Excluded Middle) must be apparent without effort.

More than that. To handle as we must categories such as that of the "proletariat," which, however circumspect our verbal definitions, always remain concepts only capable of a progressive, developing, and historical application, we must of necessity employ more or less skilfully the very "dialectical" method which in Hegel was so much the occasion of scandal.

Hegel unfortunately still kept within the limits of the Idealist concept of the Universe. He saw that all things were inter-connected; he saw that "all things glow"; he saw that all distinctions are arbitrary and comparative, so that each positive implied its converse, both were necessary for the act of distinguishing between them. But he was so filled with the sense that a positive mental effort was involved in every act of perception—let alone every process of deduction or comparison—that for him the universe became co-extensive with Mind and the two terms all but interchangeable.

To read this book with even an approximation to understanding will involve an effort—a sustained labour that few nowadays would seem willing to face. Yet one cannot handle it, examine it, or dip into it without feeling that here should be a stimulus from which much may come—to the greater glory of Marx and a better appreciation of the M.C.H. here upon earth.

At the very least one should be the better able to appreciate Dietzgen now that at last one can compare him with the "quarry from which he was hewed."