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EDITORIAL

ANOTHER CURIOSITY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

“**H**ERE goes another curiosity,” writes a correspondent from this city, and sends us a copy of *Marxism versus Socialism* by Vladimir G. Simkhovitch, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Economic History at Columbia University.

Led by our knowledge that a Columbia Professor wouldn't, even if he could, do justice to either Marxism or Socialism, lest he be pulled up with a sharp turn for endangering the good will of Bishop McFaul towards the University, we were on the point of throwing the book aside. The blunderbussing, habitual to the general run of our University Professors, is of use only to help illustrate Marxism anent concrete happenings of the day. To criticize their “demolitions of Marxism” is like fetching coals to Newcastle. Fortunately, however, the kinkishness of the title—*Marxism versus Socialism*—induced us to glance over the tome. The effort was amply repaid.

True, of Socialism there was found no attempt at definition;—only allusions here and there, and more or less shallowly confused.

True, of Marxism, or, rather, against Marxism, there was found nothing new—the same old, stale, and repeatedly triturated denials of the concentration of productive powers in private hands, together with the consequent broader spreading and deepening of mass-dependence and misery; the same stale, old and repeatedly confuted peddling of the myth concerning Marx having recanted his law of value; etc.; etc.; etc.

All this notwithstanding, the effort of reading was repaid. In the mass of that rubbish was found, out of that veritable garbage barrel of alleged science an ingot was pulled up. Lest the Marxists of the land remain in ignorance of our find, hence, deprived of the pleasure that the find must give them, we hasten to exhibit the

same to them. The find is this: Aware of the flimsiness of the “scientific” bulwarks against the spread of Marxism, hence, Socialism, that the official economists of Capitalism have been and are throwing our Columbia University Professor up, opens a new path. What path may that be?

On page 185 of *Marxism versus Socialism* a citation is made in the original German of one of the remarks of Goethe’s great character Mephisto:

“Was ihr den Geist der Zeiten heisst, Dass ist im Grund der Herren eigner
Geist,
In dem die Zeiten sich bespiegeln.”

The remark is one of Mephisto’s master strokes; it is, on the field of sociology, what his bull’s-eye are on medicine, law, theology, etc.;—

“What the Spirit of the Times you name,
That, at bottom, is the Spirit of the Master Class,
In which the Times reflect themselves.”

What on earth can be the purpose of quoting the sense of such an up-to-the-handle Marxian generalization, quoting it, moreover, in the introduction of a chapter that is intended to ridicule the to the capitalist class so hateful Marxian philosophic principle of the Class-Struggle? The answer is found in the supposed English translation furnished on the same page: “What you call the spirit of the times is in reality the spirit of the hosts who mirror themselves in the times”—“Herren,” the German word for the Lords, the Masters, the Master Class, a German word that never conveys the meaning of the many, but of the few, the ruling few, that word is turned in the English rendition into “the hosts,” the many, the multitude.

A translator is not a slavish renderer of one language into another. He is an interpreter; he has the right, he often has the duty to disregard literal equivalents; and, with an eye to the context, and controlled by the exigencies of language, save the sense at the expense of word-exactness. The instance of Schlegel, who rendered the English word “philosophy,” put by Shakespeare into Hamlet’s mouth, with the German “Buchgelehrtheit” (book-learning) is classical. On the contrary, to render the German word “Herren” with the English “the hosts,” and to do so in Goethe’s maxim,—that is not to translate, that is not to interpret, that is to falsify.

The new path opened by our Columbia University Professor consists in enlisting classic literature in the effort to refute Marxism; and—seeing that the classics are too eminent to give any but cold comfort to Nonsense—in giving the classics English renditions that fly in the face of the original.

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