

## PROPHET OF REVOLUTION

NO MAN of modern times has been more feared, more hated and more loved than the revolutionist Michel Bakunin. No man, except perhaps his enemy Karl Marx, had a stronger influence on modern political thought. It is Bakunin who is the personification of the fearless Siegfried in Wagner's famous music drama and he is also the mysterious heroic figure in Zola's labor novel, *Germinal*.

Bakunin was a personal friend of the young revolutionary Wagner but he was also the friend of George Sand, Elisée Réclus, Malatesta, Louise Michel, Herzen and all who fell under his magic spell. He was the soul and beating pulse of the Socialist circles of Paris and the labor movements just then being launched in Spain, young Germany, Italy and Sweden.

When Alexander II ascended the throne of Russia he half-pardoned many of the political prisoners, but not Bakunin. This was the man the Czar feared. The aristocratic mother of the revolutionist petitioned the Emperor but his reply was: "As long as your son lives, Madame, he will never be free." But the Czar could not

hold him. He escaped, at the age of forty-seven, from Siberia and via Japan arrived in San Francisco in the year 1861. A year later he was in London again to set Europe aflame and prove the chief thorn in the side of Karl Marx, who hated Bakunin with a passion no less than that of Czar Nicholas, though for other reasons.

Bakunin was born in 1814 and went to the Artillery School at St. Petersburg. He served only one year as an officer and left Russia in the year 1840. Secret revolutionary activities took him to various parts of Europe. The revolution in Germany in 1849, which turned Wagner to music and Nietzsche to philosophy, brought young Bakunin before the first bar of justice that he was to face.

The prisoner was calm and fearless. So great was the impression he made that twenty-seven years later one of the officers who brought him to court still remembered almost each word of his replies. "In politics," said the prisoner, "the issue alone can decide what is a great action and what a crime."

He was kept in prison from Au-

gust to May and then condemned to die. Later, instead of being executed, he was sent in chains to Austria, where he was wanted to expose the secrets of the Slavonian labor movement. His silence brought him another death sentence but this was later commuted to life imprisonment. However, his prison was changed several times, for the government was in constant terror that a mob attempt would be made to liberate him. In one prison he passed six months chained to a wall.

Bakunin believed in the spirit of Nihilism and claimed that to destroy is to create. In 1869 at the Peace Congress at Berne he delivered a caustic indictment of modern civilization as having been "founded from time immemorial on the forced labor of the enormous majority, condemned to lead the lives of brutes and slaves in order that a few might be enabled to live as human creatures."

Everywhere in Europe was Bakunin's influence felt. Prince Kropotkin, writing in a London labor journal about Bakunin's influence, recorded: "As a rule, Bakunin sat down to write a letter dealing with some question of the moment. But the letter quickly grew to the size

of a pamphlet, and the pamphlet to a book. For the author wrote so fluently, had so thorough a conception of the philosophy of history, such a vast store of knowledge relating to the events of the time, that the pages soon filled themselves . . . I must not forget to emphasize the fact that every pamphlet of Bakunin's signifies a crisis in the history of revolutionary thought in Europe."

It was Bakunin who declared that the radicalism of 1848 was dead and the dawn of socialism and labor was close at hand. It was he who brought forward the question of economic independence and prophesied that this would be a dominating factor in modern Europe. In another pamphlet he announced the end of conspiracies directed at national independence and the coming of the social revolution. He saw the end of Christian socialism and the coming of a realistic and atheistic Communism in which he did not wholeheartedly believe.

In a pamphlet entitled *The Bears of Berne* he proclaimed the death of the Philistine Swiss Federation and in another pamphlet, *Letters to a Frenchman*, written during the Franco-Prussian War

of 1870, he hailed the approach of a new epoch which found its expression in the Commune. This former student of artillery prophesied that the people would, and rightly should, take up arms for the defense of their own territory and thus inaugurate the social revolution within their own walls. This was Bakunin's reply to German invasion.

After the surrender of Paris, Bakunin foresaw in Bismarck's military triumph a reaction that would hold Europe in its grip and endure "from forty to fifty-three years." These words were recorded in 1871. If you add forty-three to 1871 the year would be 1914!

No wonder Karl Marx hated this prophet of revolution. Marx had theories of his own, and besides Bakunin seriously threatened Marx's power and control. He once declared openly that Bakunin was a paid spy of the Czar and an *agent provocateur*. This of course was not true and friends of Bakunin brought pressure to bear, resulting in an apology by Marx. Later, however, Marx succeeded in having Bakunin expelled from the Socialist Party.

Bakunin, the fearless revolution-

ist, stood out against Communism—and in no uncertain terms. "Communism I abhor, because it is the negation of liberty, and without liberty I cannot imagine anything truly human. I abhor it because it concentrates all the strength of society in the state, and squanders that strength in its service."

The great revolutionary prophet and most feared figure in Europe, the man who three times, by three different governments, was condemned to die, who plotted the destruction of kings and societies, who was feared by the Czar and also by Karl Marx, who believed that you must destroy in order to create, died in bed in Switzerland in the year 1878.

Before he died he told friends of his that he had six stages of happiness, and he named them in the following order: 1. The highest stage is to die fighting liberty. 2. Love and friendship. 3. Literature and art. 4. Smoking. 5. Eating. 6. Sleeping.

Bakunin has a still further distinction to his credit. He was the very first man to be expelled from the Communist International Party,—*Manuel Komroff in Coronet*.