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Kropotkin the revolutionist

Hippolyte Havel

1912

Of the thousands of congratulations and good wishes conveyed to-day to Peter Kropotkin by his admirers, friends and sympathizers, none will, I am sure, find in his heart such a responsive echo as those expressed—most of them in silence—by the simple workers in the Anarchist movement, the men who are neither writers nor speakers, whose names are unknown to the great public, the quiet, self-sacrificing comrades with out whom there would be no movement. Those of US who have shared their bed and their last bit of bread know their feeling for the beloved teacher, their love for the man who gave up his position among the favored ones and stepped down to the lowly to share their daily struggle, their sorrows, their aspirations; the man who became their guide in the sacred cause of the Social Revolution.

Many will speak of Kropotkin as the great natural scientist, the historian, the philologue, the littérateur; he is all this, but he is at the same time far more—he is an active revolutionist! He is not satisfied, like so many scientists, merely to investigate natural phenomena and make deductions which ought to be of value to mankind; he knows that such discoveries cannot be applied as long as the system of exploitation exists, and he

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therefore works with all his power for the Social Revolution which shall abolish exploitation.

Were it not for men like Kropotkin, the pseudo-scientific Socialists would long since have succeeded in extinguishing the revolutionary flame in the hearts of the workers. It is to his lasting credit that he has used all his great knowledge to fight the demoralizing activities of these reformers, who use the name of Revolutionist to hide their mental corruption. It is this—the uncompromising attitude, his direct participation in social revolt, his firm belief in the proletariat—which distinguishes Peter Kropotkin from many other leaders of modern thought. He is the most widely read revolutionary author; the Bible and the “Communist Manifesto” are the only works which have been translated into 50 many tongues as “The Words of a Rebel,” “The Appeal to the Young,” and other writings of Kropotkin. It would be impossible to state in how many editions and translations each of his pamphlets has appeared. Some times I wonder whether he would recognize his own children: the pamphlets go through so many transformations in their journeyings from one language to another!

Peter Kropotkin is the most beloved comrade in the Anarchist movement; his name is a household word in the revolutionary family in all parts of the world. Our ill-fated Japanese comrades were proud of being called Kropotkinists. This was no idolatry on their part, but simply the expression of deep appreciation of his work. Those who have had the opportunity of meeting Kropotkin in his home or in public know that simplicity and modesty are his chief characteristics. As he never fails to emphasize that our place is among the workers in the factories and in the fields, not among the so-called intellectuals, so is he never happier than when he sits with his comrades and fellow-workers. I remember his indignation several years ago in Chicago when he accepted an invitation to a social gathering, expecting to meet his comrades, and found himself instead among vulgar bourgeois women who pestered him for his auto-

graph. The irony of it! The man who gave up gladly his position at the Russian court to go to the people being entertained by the porkocracy of Chicago!

One of the bitterest disappointments of his life, as he himself told me, was that he could not participate actively in the great Russian Revolution. His friends and comrades decided that he could render the revolution far greater aid if he remained in London as one of the organizers of the gigantic struggle. But what arguments they had to use to convince him!

Peter Kropotkin’s life and activities demolish the shallow arguments of our utilitarians, who judge all spiritual and intellectual life from their own narrow point of view. His work disproves the belief that ours is an age of specialists only. Like every great thinker, Kropotkin is many-sided in his intellectual activity; life and science as well as art find in him a great interpreter.

Looking back over the seventy years of his life, he must needs feel gratified with his work. The Anarchist brotherhood, to which he belongs, rejoices with him today.