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An Antiquary's Log-Book

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THE 18th OF BRUMAIRE

A comrade asks me to explain the meaning of Marx's title "The Eighteenth Brumaire." Any decent history of the French Revolution will give the meaning of the phrase. To those not well acquainted with French history the title is somewhat bizarre and undoubtedly puzzling, more especially to those who have merely read extracts from or references to the book in question. It is certainly not a brilliant title for a popular book, however clever the aptness of the phrase to the subject matter might be. Who but a specialist in history would bother to carry in his mind the circumstances of an event that happened on a particular date which none but a student of a particular field of history knows anything about? This special 18th Brumaire was November 9, 1799, when, by means of intrigue and conspiracy, the creatures of Napoleon Bonaparte, alleged representatives of the French people in the "Council of Ancients," succeeded in removing the seat of Government from Paris to St. Cloud and in pitchforking the arch-plotter himself into the post of military dictator. It was the first important political preliminary to his assuming the Emperorship, and the first nail in the coffin of Republican Government. After the fall of Napoleon the Bourbons returned to the throne of France. In 1848, however, a revolution drove Louis Philippe into exile and a somewhat similar set of circumstances as those which operated in 1799 gave the Bonapartists an opportunity of imitating the coup d'etat of Napoleon the First. This was accomplished on December 2, 1851, and in due time Louis Napoleon became second Emperor of the Bonaparte dynasty. Marx gave his masterly analysis of the situation the title of "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon."

As Clear as Mud.

I can imagine some young readers exclaiming, "But what on earth is a Brumaire?"—after the manner of the young lady's query, "What are Keats?" As the repetitions occur in books, historical and romantic, of 18th Brumaire, the Law of Prarial and the Insurrection of 9th Thermidor, etc., etc., it will perhaps be a service to the movement generally if I explain not only these terms but the mystery of the calendar altogether. One is apt to get confused on the question of dates if one isn't aware of the various changes which have been made in our reckoning of time. For example, Charles 1st was beheaded in January, 1649, but at that time the new year didn't begin until March, consequently we read in contemporary accounts of the execution that he was beheaded in the year 1648. Again, the Bolshevik revolution took place on November 7, 1917, but at that time in Russia it was not November 7 but October, 25. Russia, having brought her calendar into line with the western countries, now uses the same date as we do and celebrates the anniversary of the Revolution on November 7. Let us see if we can clear things up a bit.

The Calendars of Antiquity.

Many of the ancient nations, such as the Jews, divided the year into twelve lunar months, adding a thirteenth every now and then in order to accommodate it to the seasons. The Egyptians, who were

celebrated for astronomy, made their year consist of twelve months of thirty days each adding five supplementary days at the year's end. This is interesting, as will be seen later on. Solon the Greek (B.C. 594) altered the month's length to twenty-nine and thirty days alternately, introducing an intercalary month occasionally to restore equilibrium. The Romans had a year of 304 days long, but in the time of Numa two extra months named February and January were inserted every second year. Later on these two months occupied different positions, January coming first. During the period known as the "Decemvirate" (B.C. 452) the arrangement was monkeyed with again, and nobody knew exactly where they were. The time calculations became insufferable. An individual in power could abuse the calendar at will by knocking out days or inserting them to suit his election-arrangements. This led to fearful corruption, whole months being filched from the "calendar" by autocrats to suit their political ends.

Enter Julius Caesar.

Julius Caesar, "the foremost adulterer of Rome," reformed the Roman calendar. He probably had as much to do with it as Lord Carnarvon had with the discovery of Tutankhamen. Sosogenes was the real time-merchant. He made a scientific discovery, to wit, by taking a definite point on the path of the sun it will take the sun 365 days, 5 hours, and nearly 49 minutes to return to that point. Therefore that is the sun's true year. The thing to do was to try and get the "civil" year to keep in step, "as the sayin' is," and to keep on keeping in step. All years cannot possible contain the same number of days if the point at which the year commences remains fixed, so Caesar decreed that every fourth year should be a "leap year" containing 366 days while every other year should contain 365. In Numa's time the vernal equinox occurred in March, but in the years of confusion it happened any time. Caesar next restored the vernal equinox to its correct position by adding another two months to the calendar. Thus was born "July" (Julius) and "August" (Augustus) and "the last year of confusion" saw the beginning of the Julian calendar. The Julian year began on January 1, B. C. 46. The first, third, fifth, seventh, ninth and eleventh months all contained thirty-one days. The others contained thirty each except February, which only had twenty-nine. Every leap year one day was added to February, which made it thirty days long like the rest. This was a sensible kind of arrangement, but it didn't last. When Augustus (adopted son of Julius) began to reign he objected to the month named after him being one day shorter than the month named after Julius. His despicable egotism was the cause of the present idiotic arrangement. To make August thirty-one days long he annexed a day from February and stuck it on to August. February became twenty-eight days long and has remained so ever since. Caesar's attempt to reform the calendar was splendidly scientific, but it had one drawback. The civil year still remained faster than the solar year by eleven minutes and fourteen seconds. This amounted to one day in 128 years, so in the course of a few centuries—centuries filled with the bitter-

ness of Christian sectarian bigots disputing the correctness of certain dates for the celebration of religious festivals—the calendar again became a laughing stock. In the 16th century the vernal equinox was occurring perilously near the beginning of the year and fresh calculations were rendered necessary, in consequence Pope Gregory XIII. ordered them to be made.

Gregory's Mixture.

A man, called Christopher Schlüssel, better known as "Clavius," was the brains of the new reformation. He was a German and a Jesuit, and the "Gregorian Calendar," now in use, was the result of his investigations and computations.

In the year 1582 ten days were omitted from the month of July. In other words, 15th July was made to become 5th July, and a marvellous new rule was ordered to be observed—"Every year of which the number is divisible by four without a remainder is to be a leap year. When the year is a centurial year, and it occurs four years after a leap year, it is not to be a leap year itself unless its two left hand numbers are divisible by four." Thus the years 1600, 1892, 1896, 2000 are all leap years. The years 1700, 1800, 1900 (centurial years) are not leap years. That is why there was not a leap year between 1896 and 1904—the two left hand figures of 1900 did not "divide by four." This is a wonderful arrangement. An idea of its perfection will be gathered from the result of a little calculation. So exactly are the civil and solar years made to correspond that 4000 years from now the civil 1st of January will be almost exactly the same distance from the vernal equinox in point of time as it is today, for the year is only twenty-six seconds faster than the sun, which equals a solar loss of one day in 3323 years. The reason for the confusion regarding old dates is due to the fact that the "Gregorian Calendar" was not adopted by Germany until 1700; Britain, 1752 (Scotland, 1600); and Russia, 1902-1918. Most Catholic countries adopted it in the year of its birth (1582).

The Revolutionary Calendar.

During the French Revolution, Fabre d'Églantine was authorized to "revolutionise" the Calendar. The effort resulted in the picturesque "Revolutionary Calendar," of which 18th Brumaire is a date, Fabre began his "year" on the 22nd of September, and ended the first month on the 21st October. This first month was called "Vendémiaire" (vintage month). On the 22nd October began the second month, called "Brumaire" (foggy month). The third month began on 22nd November, and was called "Frimaire" (frosty month). In due succession, as above, followed the other nine months in this order: Nivose, Pluviose, Ventose, (snowy, rainy and windy months), Germinal, Florial, Prarial (budding, flowery, and pasture months), Messidor, Thermidor, and Fructidor (harvest, hot, and fruit months). Each of these months began on the 22nd of the old month, which was called the "1st Vendémiaire" or 1st Brumaire," as the case might be. Each month has 30 days, and at the year's end five days were added which belonged to no month. This was identical with the system of the ancient Egyptians. The months were divided not into weeks, but

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