PRODUCTION AND POLITICS

IN the course of recent studies into the nature and origins of British political institutions, I have found so striking a connection between the social and political forms and phases of any given time and the methods of production then prevailing, that I have decided to bring into relief ~~for the benefit of students and teachers~~ the striking confirmation of the Materialist Conception of History that I find in the history of this country.

It is not only in history, as revealed by customs having the authority of law or in ordinances and statutes bearing the sanction of Crown and Parliament, that this evidence occurs. It is to be found also—and most obviously—in the place names and word forms of the English speech, in the traditions of the people and in their religious beliefs and forms. Everywhere is the impress of the tool scored across the material and spiritual expression of the popular genius.

The Mother and the Spade

Before the coming of men of Aryan stock there appear to have been in the British Isles—in England in pre-Celtic times and in parts of Scotland and Ireland, though subject to cross-breeding with other peoples of more recent settlement, until the present day—a race of Neoliths, perhaps of Basque

affiliation and of the Iberian family, who made their homes upon the high ground and avoided the open and grassy or wooded and swampy lowlands, whether valleys or plains. This people was, probably, responsible for the promontory camps and some of the stone circles and earthworks existing on the West Country Downs, on the Pennine moors, in Scotland and, very frequently, in Ireland and Cornwall.

They, at the time of their appearance in England, were perhaps still in the pre-tribal stage of society and may have been organised not upon the *Kin* relationship, but upon the still older basis of the *totem*.

"Totemism," says Mr. Gomme, "takes no count of fatherhood, and only reckons with the physical fact of motherhood. It is not the actual fatherhood or the actual motherhood which is the fundamental basis of totemism, but the association with animal, plant, or other natural object . . . totemism is, in its origin and principle, a kinless, not a kinship system." (*Folklore as a Historical Science.*) "The search for the origin of totemism must," he says, "be made from the women's side of the social group. Such a search would lead straight to the industrialism of early woman, from which originated the domestication of animals, the cultivation of fruits and cereals, and the appropriation of such trees and shrubs as were necessary to primitive economics." Speaking of beasts and trees, Mr. Gomme remarks:—"As superhuman agencies for pregnancy and birth, they would do what the human father in the society we are contemplating could not be expected to do, for he would be seldom present during the long period of pregnancy; he would have shared with other males the privileges of sexual intercourse, and he would, therefore, not be so closely in companionship with the women of the local groups as the friendly animal, plant, or tree who did so much for the mothers."

In the beginnings of totemism, then, the woman ate of the fruit of the tree, partook of the bird which carried the soul or breath of life—in some parts, a dove—or, encountered some creature of the river, the sea or the forest, and so became a mother.

When mankind became conscious of the consequences of the sex-contact, and I am informed that there are savages in West Africa to this day who are not fully conscious of it, the blood-kinship developed, with the theory that descent was to be traced from some animal, bird, fish, or natural object.

In Scotland the MacLeods, for instance, were held to be descended from a serpent. In Ireland, the hero Cuchulainn (Hound of Culain) might not eat the flesh of the dog, "his namesake's flesh." Another Irish hero, Diarmid, was associated with the pig which, to-day, is still called "Darby" by the common people. In Lancashire and Scotland, the goose was a bird in whose honour feasts were held, but at which the sacred creature was not eaten.

Even when the sex-relationship was recognised, men still continued to believe in some very vague expressions of its functioning. For instance, one Highland saint was thought to be the son of the bone-dust of warriors.

From pure totemism, society came to be organised on the basis of the marriage of the sisters of one totem-Kin to the brothers of another totem-Kin. "Advanced totemic society shows a constant tendency to substitute blood kinship for the association with natural objects: first, blood-kinship with the mother, then with the mother and the father, finally recognised through the father only."

"Blood-kinship is, therefore, the destroyer, not the generator, of totemism."

I could give scores of illustrations of belief held in various parts of the British Isles that point backwards to primitive totem ideas in this country. The folk-lore of Scotland and Ireland, as of the North of England, abounds with instances of them. Such notions must have originated in a condition of society in which the pairing family was unusual and in which the contacts of the sexes were occasional and promiscuous. That the life union of man and wife is of no immemorial antiquity in Scotland is evidenced by the survival of the Gretna wedding, the informal marriage achieved by simple statements made and implicitly acknowledged by silence if not by spoken assent on the woman's part, and binding for seven years. This Scottish form of union is a survival of the early pairing system, transitional from promiscuity to marriage for life. In the early stages of tribal society, when man and woman did not pair, the man visited the woman in *her* family homestead and the children knew with certainty only their mother, her brothers, her sisters and those of the matriarchal kith and kin. This state of affairs prevailed at a time when the technique of production was so slender that neither from the chase, nor from the keeping of herds—then in its inception—nor from the art of tillage was any appreciable surplus to be accumulated which might constitute property.

The men went out to the hunt with the crudest of wooden and stone implements and brought back carcases that would not be stored and which, beyond the food immediately consumed, yielded only pelts and skins to be scraped and sewn into garments or for use as hut coverings. The catching and taming of food-giving animals was just beginning, and all other economic activities were in the hands of the women, who, apart from simple weaving of fibres and making of clay-vessels, contrived and used the *digging stick*, with which they tilled small patches of ground outside the hill-village and within easy reach of home and its protecting rampart of earth. This primitive agriculture was that which gave us the mysterious "terraces" running in parallel ridges along the hill-sides in various parts of the West of England, Yorkshire and in Scotland, and which are now, fairly generally, conceded to be the relics of this original method of cultivating corn by means of an implement like a hoe or a *mattock* and evolving gradually into a *spade* and from that into what we may call a *hand-power plough.*

This digging-stick is still in use amongst the hill-tribes of India and was, as the "Highland spade," the prevailing means of land-cultivation employed in Dumbarton and in the Orkneys within the last century and a quarter. Developing from the "Highland spade" was the "caschrom," which, says Mr. G. L. Gomme, "is a crooked piece of wood, the lower end of which is about 2½ feet in length, somewhat thick, pretty straight, and armed at the end with iron, made thin and square to cut the earth. The upper end of this instrument is called the shaft, and the lower is termed the head." The method of using it was for the labourer to stand on his left foot, hold the "caschrom" firmly by the shaft, rest his right foot on a peg, just below the angle, drive the head deep into the ground and, turning it over towards the left, throw the clod on that side and proceed to deal with the next clod in the same way. It was said to enable a man to do the work of four using common spades.

The members of a village group used to engage co-operatively in what we may call "digging gangs." This method employed by the Basutos and the

Fijians alike was used also by the Scotch. Quoting Ure's work, *Agriculture in Dumbarton*, Mr. Gomme writes, in his *Village Community* of the use of the "Highland spade":—

> It is the common practice for eight or ten men and women to assemble with their spades for the purpose of digging a piece of ground, and form themselves into a row at a convenient distance from one another; they cut with their spades a line in the ground, 9 or 10 inches deep, and then, with one united effort, throw over at once a furrow or piece of ground about 18 or 20 feet in length, and 8 or 10 inches in breadth.—(p. 282.)

That description, probably, would suffice for the digging of the terraces or ridges around and below the hill-villages of the ancient tribal groups of Britain.

With so primitive a tool it is easy to understand that the crops grown on stony ground, in little trenches, formed of leaf-mould and handfuls of soil, would not yield sufficient store of ears of grain to feed the settlement, to leave over a supply of seed and, at the same time, to constitute a stock of corn to maintain a large herd of animals during winter.

The toil would be heavy and the result not adequate enough to attract the adventurous and inconsequential, because unencumbered, male either to take up the burden of labour or to appropriate the spoils as property.

Hence, with this system of cultivation and this tool the *Kin* remained undivided and *mother-right* prevailed.

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(*To be continued.*)