PRODUCTION AND POLITICS

This article is the fourth of a series written by Walton Newbold for the PLEBS, *the earlier instalments of which appeared in the June, July and September issues. Its object is to show "the striking confirmation of the Materialistic Conception of History," which the author found in the course of studying "the nature and origins of British political institutions." Everywhere he discovered "the impress of the tool scored across the material and spiritual expression" of the people; and the various instances he gives constitute a series of illustrative footnotes to Industrial History, which should be of the utmost value to tutors and students.*

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MANOR AND PARISH

IN the last article we traced the development of the essential means of primitive production up to the stage when the pasture lands were supplemented by arable lands furrowed by the wooden plough, drawn not by man, but by oxen. Now, instead of living on the milk and milk products of their cattle and the meagre crops grown on little hand-and spade-tilled plots, the members of the community had an augmented fare of meal, cakes,

and bread to consume, along with the richer milk foods their cows now yielded when stall-fed in winter with the crops of the arable land. Living conditions were steadily improved by the newer social economy. Gradually and laboriously arable cultivation was added to pasturage, until in time it became in the better lands of England and Lowland and Eastern Scotland the more important element in agriculture.

It is with this plough-land that we have to do all through the Middle Ages in England and in Scotland south of the Highland line. It is this plough-land which constituted the foundation ground plan on which was erected the whole structure of manorial economy and feudal polity. Where the cow pastures predominated the Clan and the Kin system survived. Where the ox and the plough prevailed the Kin relationship fell into disregard and political society emerged and flourished.

From this point, therefore, we can begin to observe and to explain the rise and progress of the political and ecclesiastical superstructures whose institutions and functionaries selected and codified such of the tribal customs as seemed to them in harmony with the interests of that class of Thane-worthy men who were, by the eighth and ninth centuries, transforming the free village communities into manors with more or less servile tenants.

At the time of their coming to these shores, and subsequently, the Angles and Saxons were organised in and designated as *tribes*. These tribes comprised an irregular and unknown number of families, who occupied steadings which came to be known as *tuns*. Blackstone, in his *Commentaries*, would have it that the *township* or *tithing* comprised ten free families or households. This township is considered to be considerably older than the manor, something destroyed in essence by English feudalism. Stubbs, in his *Constitutional History*, says:—"The unit of the constitutional machinery, the simplest form of social organisation, is the township, the *villata* or *vicus*." (Vol. I, v. 39.)

Clamped down upon this popular basis, this geographical area inhabited by a Kinship group, was the *manor*, wherein the headman shed his patriarchal responsibilities to his folk and assumed those of a lord over his people and a henchman responsible to his sovereign-lord, the King. In a later article we shall trace the rise of the territorial state, compounded of manors and of the ecclesiastical system based upon parishes. At this juncture we are concerned with the units of feudal polity, secular and ecclesiastical.

Everywhere, locally as well as nationally, with the development of territorial lordship marched the usurper of more or less arbitrary labour dues, the collector of tribute, the assessor of taxes. Until the spread of arable culture, the contribution to the headman or chief consisted of food-rents. Regular settlement had to precede the levying of a tax on land, as also of a whole calendar of labour-services. What strikes one in going through any detailed record of manorial customs is the endless and varied exactions which the lord demanded. The whole manorial system reveals itself as a method of levying tribute in one form or another. The heavy father of patriarchal society has become the grasping master.

The gradations of social status and of local prestige are decided by the conditions accompanying land tenure and the manner of the tillage. The lord of the manor has villeins and cottars to do his ploughing for him. The sok-man

ploughs for himself. The villein ploughs for others, but has a plough-land of his own. The cottar ploughs for others and has no plough-land of his own.

The court-roll of the manor and the accounts of the reeve have all to do with the tenures of plough-lands, their fractions and their multiples; with sowings, harrowings, weedings, reapings, leadings, threshings; with hedging, ditching, turf-cutting; with payments of pigs and sheep, hens and eggs, butter and cheese; with all the diverse and tangible applications of labour and its concrete embodiments. The lord is concerned to annex to his own use and enjoyment every emolument of the acres which the uncertainties of war, the innovations of royal power, the dooms of anti-popular witenagemots (or councils of the magnates of the realm) and the sanctions of an alien church have enabled him to claim as his in trust for God and the welfare of his people.

One of the most unscrupulous myths that pass muster for truth in the history books is that which represents the introduction and spread of Christianity in Britain as being favourable to and favoured by the common people. The Christian propaganda, especially that of the Roman Bishopric, was assuredly "revolutionary," but it was anti-popular in origin and purpose. It was used to destroy the sanctions of common right and Kinship duties. It was directed to weakening the claims of human birth-right and blood-relationship. It was aimed at the rites, beliefs and institutions of real fraternity, and elevated in their place a mystical and meaningless gospel of "brotherhood," of salvation by "blood," of a hierarchy of "fathers," of a reward beyond the grave, of a heaven "in the sky, by and by." The dignitaries of the Church were almost all drawn from royal or noble families. The abbeys and priories were alternative lordships and estates for the brothers, sisters and cousins of the ruling aristocracy.

The would-be lord of one or many manors welcomed the missionary of Rome with his new and infallible faith, his intolerance of old ways, his stern advocacy of authority and his advice to men to be humble in anticipation of a beatific hereafter. He gave him the use of barn or hall, he accepted baptism and thrust it upon his Kinsmen, putting himself and his into the hands of Holy Church. Oft-times he set up a chapel in his homestead or transformed his "burh" into a church, levying tithe, acting as priest, and paying a subordinate to read the services and to officiate at mass. In this useful capacity he became the father of his people, holding open or barring to them the doors of heaven and hell. Despite the statutes of the Church and the encyclicals of Popes, this state of affairs continued until the 13th century. The lord remained the tithe-receiving *rector* and employed a *vicar* to do the work.

In the Welsh *trefgordd*, we found that in addition to a common churn, the social group had a common *oven*. With the development of plough cultivation, the accessories of village industry came to include a common *bakehouse*, a common *brew-house*, a common *ale-house* and a common *mill*. Even as the common fire and altar of the family homestead evolved into the lamp and candles and high altar of the parish church, remaining under the control of the lord of the manor, who collected his tithes at the church door himself or by deputy, so the common oven, the oven of the patriarchal homestead, became with the increase and variation of the corn crop a more important institution, and as an accessory of the manor house or the parish church formed a valuable source of revenue for whichever local officer controlled it. "In England," says Mr. Addy, in his *Church and Manor*, "the sale of bread was a monopoly in the

hands of the lord or in that of the local community. Not only were the tenants of a manor fined if they did not grind their corn at the lord's mill, but also if they sold bread which they had not baked in the lord's oven."

Another institution was the manorial or parish brew-house, where the grain was mashed and made into beer or ale. The times of sowing and of reaping were in pagan days great occasions of drinking. Later, these drinking bouts coincided with Easter, and celebrated the "Lord's Supper" along with the "Master's Feast" on Maundy Thursday, or on Our Lady's Day—which became the customary rent-day. The tenants drank deep of scot-ale or penny ale, but paid a sum greater in value than the liquor that fuddled their brains. The autumnal feastings coincided later with Michaelmas, the time of winter servant hirings. From the lord's or the parish scot-ale-house evolved the village inn, leased out to some tenant with the proviso that it should be available for the customary drinking occasions.

Finally, we come to that later but all important adjunct of a plough-using and corn-growing economy, the corn-*mill*. For many ages the grinding of corn had been the laborious work of the woman in the home using the quern to pound and bruise the ears of barley, oats and other grains. The original quern, said the Northmen, had been stolen from behind the back-door of Hell. This wearying method of making meal survived in the Orkneys and Hebrides within living memory, and I have myself seen the primitive meal-mills by the stream-side, three or four to a clachan, owned in common by the villagers though standing on the landlord's ground.

The manorial mill belonged to the lord, and all his tenants had to bring their corn to be ground there. What they thought of this custom and of the miller is evident in the ribald tales and folk-songs of the peoples of every land as well as in the records of such townships as Manchester and such burghs as Glasgow.

The township meeting or assembly of the fathers of free families was wont to be held at some open place, on a slight elevation in or near the village, at the "cross," the parish-pump or in the church-yard. Immemorial custom required that it should be held in the open-air, in an open space where neither evil spirits nor concealed weapons could work ill. With the rise of the manor this assembly, or *moot*, fell into desuetude (though there is reason to believe that its successor was the vestry, composed as this was of the free-men or land-owners of the parish).

The parish church, again, *cf.* Mr. Addy's extraordinarily painstaking and thought-provoking study, *The Church and the Manor*, was an intensely interesting feature of the manorial society. Mr. Addy points out that the two parts of the church in the manorial parish, the chancel and the nave, belonged respectively to the lord and to the community. He shows how the early churches conform in design to the early abodes of the chieftains. He brings out clearly the well-recognised fact that the parish church was the common assembly hall, the granary and the chaffering place of the township.

When we come to the title to pews recognised in law, we discover it to be appurtenant to a *messuage—i.e.*, the plot of land or tenement on which the house originally stood and which was the source of the owner's rights in the community, including his lands. It was these free-holders of messuages who had been *mote-men*, who sat in the manorial court or Court Baron of manorial free-holders and composed what came to be known as the *Vestry*. They had to do with the rights of common and other matters affecting the township.

The chairman of this body appears to have been the *reeve*, chosen frequently by the community of tenants and approved by the lord of the manor. He was at once the representative of the tenants and the agent of the lord. He was responsible for the care of the church, and in the 15th century came to be known by the name of *church-warden*. He had to take charge of the brew-house and keep an eye on the bake-house. He was assisted in his duties by other elected or nominated officers, the beadles, the ale-tasters, etc.

In the pre-Reformation and manorial period, the secular and the spiritual were but aspects of a single system. Rights in the community began with free tenements in the village street and went on to free acres in the open fields, pasturage in the common and the waste, pews and rights in the church-nave, attendance at town meeting, manor-court or vestry, eligibility for the office of reeve or church-warden. On the one hand was the manor—on the other the parish. Both were institutions rooted in the land settlement that went with plough cultivation.

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(*To be continued*)