

Feudal Institutions

IN my last article to the "Clarion" dealing with the events occurring during man's early career we saw that the chief agents responsible for the overthrow of primitive communism were the discovery of agriculture, the domestication of animals and the inauguration of human slavery. The settling down to town life organized on a political basis brought into play other forces necessary to control the antagonisms created by the free development of private property. The State as a power of coercion had to be installed to keep the lower orders in their proper place. When the old order of things had disappeared and the new machinery of law set in motion, Greek and Roman institutions grew and developed, raising the people to still greater efforts and higher achievements. The flocks and herds of domesticated animals were brought in close proximity to the town, to be fed on tame grasses and raised to a higher standard of perfection. The demand of the people to meet their increased desires accelerated the movements of the slave owners. The principal means of production at this period being that of Chattel slavery, the burden of maintaining the city populace fell principally upon the slave. The products of slave labor were produced in large quantities, enriching the property owners beyond the power of their imagination. The leisure time provided by the institution of Chattel slavery presented the opportunity for the study of art, science and philosophy, and the rather inquisitive nature of the Greek led him to indulge in the effort to solve the riddle of the universe. Greece was the cradle of crude philosophy and science, but the products of the Greek mind only lasted so long as outside interference of military prowess kept without her Athenian walls. The Roman Patrician is more in harmony with the desire for power and the accumulation of riches. The leisure time of the ruling class of Rome was given more to the building up of a large army and a military State. The perfection of a military machine, with the desire for the seizure of more territory, moved the Roman rulers with their armies towards Greece when they succeeded in annexing the classical home of the ancient world. The conquerors carried back to Rome the products of Greek art and many of the Greek philosophers.

The success of Roman arms enriched the empire, quickening the pace for greater ambitions for wider fields to establish a market for the huge mass of products produced by slaves. The Roman provinces, flooded with Chattel slaves captured in war were highly productive, producing large volumes of luxuries that swelled the Patrician purse, thus creating a band of drunken Epicures indulging in every possible vice to satisfy their strange desires. Princes of note, armed with knives and daggers are recorded to have visited the fields of slave owners, murdering slaves for the mere pleasure of killing. In the event of injury a freeman or slave had no redress, but the offenders being of the higher orders escaped with impunity. Roman judges gave no quarter to those of inferior rank when brought before the court for disobedience. Roman law, not unlike modern capitalist law, was a conspiracy of the rich against the poor. Violent eruptions developed within, owing to the degradation of the rich and the oppression of slaves; this with other inequalities among the civil population, plunged the Roman world into a period of retrogression. So unbearable were the conditions forced upon the slaves, that open revolt threatened to engulf rich and poor alike.

During the Roman conquest peoples from many quarters of the globe were brought under Roman subjection, and following the success of Roman arms, commerce and industry were developed, bettering the condition of the conquered peoples in many cases, but the flourishing period of Roman arms reached its zenith when her producing class were reduced to poverty. The wealth necessary to maintain a huge army taxed the farming class, bleeding them almost to death, driving them in desperation

to abandon the land and flock into the cities, thus creating the necessity for the state to plunder the granaries of the conquered estates to feed her starving citizens. The great highways of commerce and industrial progress now show signs of decay. Markets for slave products begin to flounder, shaking the slave institutions to their very foundation. The owners of large estates were in many instances compelled to free their slaves. The release of the downtrodden, despised and rejected human automatons revived the idea of the lost communities. A revival of the virtues of communism gripped the brains of men that now begin to strive for the destruction of the advanced stage of human progress, to return to the old period of barbarism. We have instances of men in this modern age preaching the destruction of the machine to return to the old system of petty competition and handicraft production. Conflict raged between the forces of progress and the forces of reaction which ended in the extermination of millions of blind and reactionary communists. The reigns of Claudius, Caligula, and Nero were blotted with the blood of the victims of a bunch of fakir disciples, leading the people along the pathway of retrogression. Pliny, after the wholesale murder of ancient working people, looked with compassion upon the motherless and fatherless children running hither and thither, naked and bleeding, homeless and starving. A strong feeling of remorse crept over the guilty conscience, and Pliny, in order to save the children, erected the first charitable institution in human history, an institution that has been a curse to human society ever since its inauguration.

From now on the Roman Empire withered and crumpled. The endless struggle internally, and the continuous movement of arms to combat the invasion of the barbarians of the North, brought the Empire to ruin.

When the Roman slave-masters were relieved from the obligation of caring for their slaves, the responsibility of maintaining the freemen rested with the individual receiving his or her liberty. In many cases the liberated slave remained on the estate of his old master, paying so much for the use of the land, thus fertilizing the nucleus of the Feudal social system that must follow the system of Chattel slavery.

The invasion of Italy began in the year 406 by the Goths, and by the year 476, the Northern barbarian tribes in great numbers rushed down upon Rome and completely overcame the tottering Empire, when General Odoacer was proclaimed King of the old capital.

The chiefs of the Germanic tribes were made Land Barons; then again the land was subdivided by the new lords among other successful warriors, but the rank and file of the people were freemen, serfs, and slaves performing duties similar to those in use during Chattel slavery.

From the village communities of Britain evolved the Feudal system, but by a different process from that of Central Europe. Those early communities had their chiefs, but like the other members they were under the dictatorship of the village council of deacons. As those ancient communities were subject to invasion from other neighboring tribes, the need arose for the erection of a castle with a high tower built on the most conspicuous spot near the village. This castle was enclosed in a huge enclosure protected by water and a draw bridge. The chief and his family were placed in the castle to be on the watch from the tower and warn the villagers of an approaching danger. The new residence demanded additional duties which necessitated a change in the old custom of selecting the chief annually, consequently from this point the chief held his position for life. The leisure time acquired was given to study by the chief when all the cunning of priestcraft and trickery of every description was applied for self aggrandizement. After the Roman invasion the village chiefs and Roman officials cunningly devised schemes that deceived the commoners in making the chief's position hereditary. At a later date, with his hereditary position, the chief seized the castle with its enclosures and all its fortifications in perpetuity.

The chiefs being clothed in the role of Feudal Lords appointed their king when titles of ownership were granted to the successful manipulators, when again the land would be divided and subdivided among the bravest of warriors.

Feudalism now begins its career with a complete set of institutions, religious and political, differing in degree from those adapted to the system of Chattel slavery.

GEO. PATON

"Progress"

"PROGRESS—the advancement of the world, moral, mental and material as exhibited in history." (Encyc. Americana)

There is no question in anyone's mind that society has progressed greatly during the past few thousand years. This rapid progress, in the last analysis is largely due to a certain section of society possessing leisure. Of course this does not necessarily mean that "leisure" alone is the main factor. There are other factors which we have to take into consideration. Before the days of slavery, the human race progressed very slowly comparatively speaking. There are certain individuals who claim that there was no progress during the days of primitive communism. The invention of the bow and arrow, the discovery of fire, the invention of the canoe and other epoch-making inventions should be sufficient to convince those sceptics. But it must be remembered that according to most authorities, the human race existed under primitive communism for over 100,000 years. Comparing that with the few thousand years of slavery, we notice a huge difference.

That difference is due as stated before, to the presence of a leisure class. When man is compelled to devote his entire time towards satisfying his wants, he has very little time to devote to the liberal arts, to analyzing effects, and searching for causes. "Time is the room of human development." (Marx)

With the advent of slavery, a certain section of society was able to live without working and thus had a considerable amount of leisure. Some members of the ruling class devoted their time to sport, others to debauchery, while a few busied themselves with Art, Music, Science, etc.

Prof. Odin, of Sofia, in a rather comprehensive work published many years ago proved beyond a shadow of doubt that 95 per cent. of the geniuses of the past few hundred years were possessed by the ruling class. The remaining 5 per cent. were either proteges of the wealthy class, or those whose biographies were unknown. He also showed that practically all men of genius possessed a thorough education. How many workers ever see the inside of a university?

After proving that practically all the scientists of the ages were recruited from the ruling class, Prof. Odin asks the following question, which he is unable to answer:

"What is the cause of this extraordinary superiority, the more remarkable because rich young men having absolutely no need to think of the morrow, are only too much inclined to idleness or to kinds of activity directly opposed to labors of the mind?"

The answer to his question can be found in Veblen's "Theory of the Leisure Class." Unfortunately Veblen hails from Boston, and to the average worker his books are more or less masses of meaningless words. Either Veblen must realize that he will have to use simple language if he desires his books to be read by the working class, or the working class will only by a comprehensive study of the English language, be able to understand his books. The future alone will tell. Here is the passage that made Veblen famous.

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