

Materialist Conception of History

FOR BEGINNERS

LESSON No. VI.

WHEN the Matriarchal institutions prevailed, women's economic status was supreme, and descent was in the female line. Agriculture, which was developed by the women of the tribe cultivating the land surrounding the camps, while the men were hunting or herding, was the basis upon which slavery was built up.

The first signs of a settled life appeared in the agricultural stage. The women left behind, in need of food, learned how to plant roots, and agriculture was at first a female occupation.

As long as tribes wandered about, agriculture was a secondary pursuit. When the tribe got settled in a fertile plain, agriculture became the principal occupation. Up to this time private property consisted of the simple personal belongings, which were buried with the person at death. There was not only of private property but public property did not exist before the agricultural stage. The first landownership was held in common.

As long as women folks remained behind and cultivated the soil, the manufacture of household utensils was exclusively done by the women. Wherever the women materially assisted in the production of the necessities of life, as in the Marian Island, they were well treated and enjoyed a superior position to the women in other parts where women did not contribute to the production of the material necessities of life. Morgan points out that the Indians cultivated maize and potatoes. They dug the earth with a crude stick, or spades and hoes, made of bones and shells attached to a stick. The most of the cultivation was done by the women while the men went hunting, and as the use of a thing constitutes ownership in primitive society, private property was owned by the women, therefore under these conditions women were equal, if not superior in the tribe, with female descent.

We hear much about democracy today, yet a greater form of democracy prevailed in primitive times when women took equal part in the councils of the tribe. The female portion ruled the communal houses. Morgan says: "A man who was too shiftless to do his portion of providing subsistence, no matter how many children or goods he had, might be ordered to pick up and get out."

This condition exists in the Marian Island in the North Pacific, which Germany bought from France in 1894.

A man can kill another man whom he finds with his wife, but dare not do her any ill, while the woman can condemn him to any punishment for a similar offence. She assembles all the women in the neighborhood who, armed with lances get after the culprit. In Formosa Island, which China ceded to Japan in 1897, a daughter is regarded more highly than a son, because when married she brings her husband home, who becomes one of the family and helps to support the family.

The pairing family became the standard of morality because the institution of private property exerted an important influence on the constitution of the family. The complicated system of relationships growing out of the maternal family which gathered so large a number of individuals under a common head, could only prevail previous to private property. As soon as the idea of private property arose, the bond of relationship ceased to be represented by a community of sentiment, and became embodied in the economic relation of hereditary relationship or succession. Thus, when this institution was firmly established, the maternal family with its numerous hosts of relations became intolerable, since it necessitates the division of the heritage among an enormous number of relations. Therefore private property consequently removed the multiple ramifications of relationships growing out of collective property, and replaced them with a simpler system and a more restricted form of the family.

McLellan, who devoted his whole life to the question ("Studies in Ancient Society") did not hesitate to declare: "Every stage in the evolution of the family is determined by considerations of property." Property is an expression of economic conditions. Polygamy was permitted under this pairing family. A man could have several wives but a woman could only have one man. Thus the double standard of morality was established which exists in society today. Previously the sex relation had never been considered vicious, but from this time it became vicious because of the confusion it might cause in the paternity of the offspring.

In the history of American tribal government before this, no death penalty was found to any crime, but after the change of the line of descent from the female to the male, at least one tribe inflicted the death penalty on any woman who contracted a sex relation outside her marriage.

Rev. Samuel Gorman, a missionary among the Pueblo Indians, says: "The lands were held in common and the right of property belongs to the female part of the family and descends to the daughter."

As long as the pastoral stage lasted, women were in an equal position because of their economic activities, cultivating fruits and roots around the the camping grounds, although the movable property of the pastoral stage, being in the hands of men who attended to the domesticated animals, is believed to be the first influence to transfer the economic supremacy of the women to the men.

The scarcity of the game in the hunt in the western hemisphere and the need of cultivation as a means of subsistence for the domesticated animals, in the eastern hemisphere, through the scarcity of nature's growth in dry seasons, force upon the human race a more regular employment on planting, and agriculture became the principal occupation. It was Communism in land first, but with the immense benefits derived from the land the change of obtaining a living by agriculture marked an increase in the density of population, and the introduction of private ownership in land. This ownership of property gave man an influence and power, and the product of his own labor, being not enough to satisfy his ambitions, captives in tribal wars became slaves, being more profitable cultivating the soil than using them as food. Cannibalism became immoral, man even enslaved his own wife and family. Land being the source of wealth by the application of slave labor, we can readily see why land passed from being owned in common, to private ownership of the strongest men of the tribe.

Since the inauguration of private property history became a history of class struggles. The class struggle is not an invention of the Socialist. It is a fact which they discovered by a scientific analysis of human history. The class struggle has been raging in human society thousands of years before the Socialists discovered its historical function and pointed it out. So did the struggle for existence between the various organic creatures before Darwin formulated his definition of it. The first enunciation of the class struggle was no more a gospel of hatred than was the assertion of the struggle for existence by Darwin. It was simply the statement of a scientific fact in plain scientific terms. The first Socialists to point out the class struggle did so, only to show its historical function in human development and declare their aim, as the abolition of the class struggle.

The pastoral stage is believed to have developed as a result of the domestication of the animals. Domestication originated from the hunter killing a female and its young following the hunters to their camp grounds, where they were brought up and domesticated for meat and milk. There were no slaves in the pastoral stage. Slaves would have been detrimental to hunters and herdsmen, therefore, captives being no advantage, they were killed.

The pastoral stage has been traced in different

parts of the globe. The bible shows the pastoral stage of the Jews, where wealth is measured by the head of cattle a man owns. In Genesis, Abram was very rich in cattle. Lot also had flocks and herds. Abram said to Lot: "Let no strife be between thee and me; my herdsmen and thine herdsmen, for we be brethren." When Caesar landed in Britain he found the inhabitants in the pastoral stage, living on milk and meats and dressed in skins. They had wives in common, as many as 10 and 12, including fathers, brothers and sons. Pastoral wealth had the advantage over agricultural wealth that it could be removed when a weak tribe was attacked by a strong tribe. They could fold up their tents and drive the sheep and cattle out of harm's way. When the agricultural stage is reached, property or wealth could not be so disposed, because you could not remove growing crops or stored up grain. Man began building permanent homes under the settled state of agriculture. It became more tempting for neighboring tribes to war with their neighbors and rob them of their agricultural wealth, yet on the other hand it had the tendency of keeping the tribes at home in peaceful occupation. Therefore the growth of property and transference to men's children was the moving power for monogamy in marriage, to limit their numbers to actual progeny of the married pair.

I have pointed out that slaves were detrimental to a pastoral people who killed their captives. A. J. Butler, in 1896, said: "The Masi in East Africa, a shepherd tribe who subsist on herds of a fixed number, kill all their prisoners, but a neighboring tribe (Wakamba) which follow agriculture, being able to find use for slaves, do not kill them." Therefore morals are a reflection of the economic structure of society.

The medium of exchange under pastoral society was cattle, under agriculture it was various grains and tobacco. So that we have another instance of the economic condition reflecting itself in expressing the wealth of society and individuals. The bible shows the agricultural stage in Samuel's time: "And he will appoint them caption of thousands and will set them to ear the ground and reap his harvest, and he will take your fields and give them to his servants."—Samuel viii., 12, 14.

"Thou shalt not remove thy neighbor's landmark."—Deut. xix., 14.

Job numbers among the wickedest of men, he who removes the landmark: "Cursed be he who removes his neighbor's landmark."

The agricultural period was reached in Britain by the time of William of Normandy. In fact it was during the three and a half centuries of Roman rule that England became agricultural. Agriculture and private ownership of land was the beginning, leading up to geographical divisions of people and the carrying on of barter between tribes on neutral land between their boundaries. Therefore the first land ownership was held in common (although capitalist apologists try to dispute it, which I will deal with in our next lesson) developing to private ownership and slavery. I have endeavored to trace human society and its development through the changed methods of procuring a living, showing the status of women on an equal footing in early human development. Here women performed the most important labor in early agriculture and acquired superior power in the councils of the tribe. With the growth of productive labor through higher developed tools, man performed the task alone, and a further extension of man's productivity enabled the conquerors of other tribes to institute slavery.

Woman's position became that of man's inferior, economically depending on the support of man; she lost all say in the councils of the new society. Engels says in "Landmarks of Scientific Socialism": "In spite of all the contradictions and accusations of heresy, the introduction of slavery at that time was a great step forward. Instead of being murdered

(Continued on page 8.)