

Materialist Conception of History

FOR BEGINNERS

Series Concluded

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WHEN we discussed the subject of Free Will, Buckle was quoted: that we perform certain acts in consequence of some motives as a result of some antecedent causes.

Professor Seligman in his "Economic Interpretation of History" says:

"Although a man is free to steal or not to steal, his acquired characteristics are such that under certain circumstances an honest man will not steal."

"In the case of physical environment the matter is very simple.

While an Eskimo may be perfectly free to go naked, it is no violent stretch of the imagination to assume that no sane Eskimo will do so as long as he remains in the Arctic Region.

When we leave the physical and come to the social environment as we necessarily do in discussing the "Economic Interpretation of History" the essence of the matter is not much changed. The theory of social environment, reduced to its simplest elements, means that even although the individual be morally or intellectually free the range of his choices will be largely influenced by the circumstances, traditions, manners and customs of the society about him.

"I may individually believe in polygamy and may be perfectly free to decide whether to take two wives or one, but if I live outside of Utah the chances are very great, that I shall be so far guided in my decision by law and social customs as to content myself with one wife.

"The common saying that a man's religion is formed for him is another illustration.

"The son of a Mohamedan may become a Christian, but it is safe to predict for the immediate future the vast majority of the Turks will remain Mohamedans. The individual is the unit and may be ideally free. But for individuals living in society the theories that influence progress are social choices."

We saw the downfall of the Roman Empire was economic. "The jealousy of the Capital was aroused by the provinces being drained of money, which was brought to Rome and squandered by the rich. As a result of conspiracies, real or suspected, many yeomen of the middle class were exiled from Italy and their farms went out of cultivation. The exhaustion of the wheat supply drove small farmers into the Capital and the Empire had to depend on importations from Africa. Wealth became monopolized by the few while multitudes were on the verge of starvation. The cruelty of the Emperors caused men to live in a state of apprehension and insecurity; many great families were made destitute by prosecution and confiscation of their property. The unbounded wealth of the rich aroused the envy of the poor and formed dangerous opposition of classes. Official corruption and craze for amusement, indisposed the poor to honest labor and the mighty Empire fell" (from Gorham's Christianity and Civilization.)

Rome was about always engaged in war. When the Roman Army was sending into Italy a continuous stream of slaves, the masters drove them to work naked, and fed them on the cheapest food, housed them in miserable hovels. If the slave became sick he was left to die. It was cheaper to get fresh slaves than to give treatment to the sick.

The Negro slave of America received better treatment because the supply was such that they were of some value, and therefore to lose a slave was a great loss.

At the close of the Roman Republic the slaves formed a nation within a nation. You can form an

idea of their numbers when we learn 10,000 slaves were often sold in one day at the Delic slave market in the second century B.C., and we read of revolts being numerous. The people of the appropriated land were made slaves and, being cheaper than the free labor then existing, they were worked for all they were worth and when exhausted were cast off like dogs to die. The proletarians were thrown upon the streets and highways. Reform laws were attempted to patch things up such as Licinian Law, limiting the number of cattle on the common lands, also the number of free laborers to be proportionate to slave labor employed and alleviation of debtors. This was of no avail as we have Tiberius Gracchus, 100 years later giving a bird's eye view of his country saying:

"The wild beasts of Italy have their caves to retire to, but the brave men who spill their blood in her cause, having nothing left but air and light, without houses, without any settled habitations, they wander from place to place with their wives and children, and the generals do but mock them, when, at the head of their armies, they exhort their men to fight for the sepulchres and domestic gods, for among such numbers, perhaps there is not a Roman who has an altar that belongs to his ancestors or a sepulchre in which their ashes rest." (From De Leon's "Two pages of Roman History.")

The private soldiers fight and die to advance the wealth and luxury of the great and they are called masters of the world while they have not a foot of ground to call their own.

The worker is also exalted one day in the year, (Labor Day) when his master talks about the dignity of labor, but their dignity amounts to escaping it. Lecky says: ("History of European Morals")

"The elder Cato, who may be regarded as a type of the Romans of the earlier period, speaks of slaves simply as instruments for obtaining wealth and he encouraged masters both by precept and his example to sell them as useless when aged and infirm. The marriage of slaves was entirely unrecognised by law and in their case the words adultery and polygamy had no legal meaning. At the close of the Republic the masters had full power to sell their slaves as gladiators."

Slavery lasted in Europe about 800 years after Constantine, but the barbarian conquest of the Roman Empire modified labor conditions. The cessation of barbarian captives, the impoverishment of great families, the need for agriculture to keep up the food supply led to legislation to attach slaves permanently to the land. In course of time the free peasantry as well as the slaves sunk into the qualified slavery of serfdom. Towards the end of the 8th century the sale of slaves beyond their native provinces was in most countries prohibited. In the 12th Century, slaves in Europe were very scarce and were almost unknown in the 14th Century. Many peasants put themselves under the Monks because they were the best masters. Slavery was distinctly and formally recognised by Christianity and no religion ever labored more to encourage a habit of docility, and passive obedience. On Constantine's orders a woman was executed and the slave burned if they had any improper intercourse as their marriage was forbidden. Pope Urban II. gave license to the nobles, to reduce to slavery the wives whom priests had obstinately refused to abandon after the introduction of celibacy. Traffic in the sale of children was prohibited by Diocletian, 284 to 285 A.D. The Council of Rouen in the 9th Century invited women who had secretly borne children to place them at the door of the church. It is probable that they were brought up as slaves or serfs attached to the ecclesiastical properties, for a decree of the Council of Arles in the 5th Century and afterwards a law of Charlemagne had echoed the enactment of Constantine de-

claring that exposed children should be the slaves of their protectors.

The system of settling great numbers of the Barbarian captives upon Italian soil, compelling them to work as slaves, was eventually the cause of the downfall of Rome and the need of food supply brought in the condition of serfdom into which slavery faded.

In Rome's best days the army was recruited from the upper class and the service which lasted only during war was gratuitous. With the decade, military pay was introduced and property qualification for recruits was abolished.

Serfdom, we noticed previously, was introduced into England by William the Conqueror 1066. There we saw how the Manor system with its democracy was broken up by the militarism of feudalism. Then with the growth of trade, the extension of the market from the local to country, then to the national and finally to the world's market was a result of the development of the means of production. Marx was the first to draw our attention to this development. Professor Seligman says in his "Economic Interpretation of History"

"After ascribing how the Guild System of industry gave way to the modern industrial system based on the world's market and on the revolution in industrial production, Marx points out the bourgeoisie, in revolutionizing the methods of production, alters with them the whole character of society, and displaces feudalism with modern conditions. At the present day this is a truism; but at the time the manifesto appeared it was a novel and striking conception."

P. 45: "But it was not until the publication of volume III of 'Capital' 11 years after his death that continental writers realized the significance of the theory . . . since neither his earlier works of 1847 or 1859 nor any of the volumes of 'Capital' had been translated into English the English speaking people had only a slight opportunity of grasping the real significance of Marx's theory or its corollaries."

We saw how true this development was by the growth of towns with the factory system of dividing up the work of crafts into simple detail operations, known as divisional labor. Not until the laborer performed one simple task could the machine be introduced to displace him, and as the machines became bigger and greater the power used to move them was transferred from the animal power, the water wheel and windmills to the steam engine. The invention of one machine led to the necessity of another as we saw the powerloom's demand for increased production of yarn brought about the invention of the spinning jenny, so that every branch of industry was compelled to improve its means of production in order to keep step with the need of raw material or the consumption of raw material, for instance, the improved spinning of yarn led to better and faster looms, the steam engine led to better method of digging coal and so on all through the various industries. The weaver with his loom at home and his cottage with its large garden was forced to abandon them and go to the factory. His women folks who spun the yarn and made the clothes had now also to leave home. The skill was eliminated and they now became factory hands or machine tenders, therefore, ushered in was the great factory system with the competition of the worker keen because of women and child labor. The history of the factory system of England is a history of the industrial slavery of women and children, with the earnings of the whole family giving a subsistence instead of the father being the breadwinner.

We have seen the free trade and tariff question a struggle between sections of the master class for an advantage over their competitors. We have seen how their ideas have changed according to their ec-