

PRODUCTION AND POLITICS

II.

THE COW AND THE CHURN

WHILST the producers of the matriarchal communities were slowly and laboriously developing the infinitely crude technique of pottery-making, weaving, leather-curing, and digging with the wooden spade, there was evolving likewise from the chase and from attempts at taming or at corralling on the part of the men, the herd of cattle. These were being collected together, bred in captivity and fed on corn and on dried grasses, so that, tentatively, the

Kindred became a pastoral or grazing folk. This seems to have been, particularly, the economic foundation of early Aryan society in Europe and pre-eminently the occupation of the Celts.

This great people and those who followed them across Europe came, *organised by tribes*, wandering over the Continent, eventually making their way, Gadhelic and Cymric Celts, into these islands. Needless to say, they did not acquire an enduring link with any locality. They, and even more so the Teutons, had their gods domiciled now on one mountain top and again upon another. Their social ties were personal. Their whole system depended upon the Kin, upon the blood-tie. Mr. Gomme, in his *Folklore as a Historical Science*, says of the Aryans that "they conquered in tribes, and it was because of the strength of the tribal organisation during the period, first of migration and wandering, and then of conquest, that the settlement after conquest was possible and was so strong." He stresses the enormous importance of this blood-tie, remarking of the tribal organisation that it was "the great institutional force from which spring all later institutions. Its roots go back into the remotest past of Indo-European history; its active force caused the Indo-European people to become the mightiest in human history; its lasting results have scarcely yet ceased to shake the aspirations of political society and to affect the destinies of nations. The whole life of the early period was governed by tribal conditions—the political, social, legal and even religious conceptions were tribal in form and expression."

The tribal organisation rested upon the cow, upon the economy of grazing, and, latterly, of the use made of oxen in the cultivation of the land upon which the pastoral people eventually settled and made their enduring home. Cows constituted the first embodiment of the concept of property, and with this concept the father, keeper of cattle, became conscious of his power.

Realisation of his sexual indispensability; a gradual but continuously developing unbelief in the woman's mystic communion with life-giving powers and of the magical qualities with which they endowed her, combined with an ever more confident estimate of his own importance, as herdsman and husbandman, caused the father of the family (*paterfamilias*) to assert his authority over the woman. At the same time, the introduction of the primitive system of property replaced a horizontal association of men by a vertical hierarchy of loyalties and obediences to elders. Social rights and duties of the most sacred and binding character now made their influence felt upon the relations of mankind. The tie was one of blood, and, ultimately, of fire—curiously enough, the sign and symbol of the Christian religion in its crudest modern expressions.

The Kindred can, so far as these islands are concerned, be observed best in Wales, in Ireland and in the Highlands of Scotland. In the first two until the English conquests, and in the last until the middle of the eighteenth century, not only the grazing economy but also the super-imposed social organisation continued. In Wales the unit, first, of society and, eventually, of landholding was the *gwely*, or group of families in three generations from a great-grandfather, who, as chieftain, gave to each of his descendants as they came of age the *da* or allotment of cattle, in return for which the descendant paid a food-rent. When the great-grandfather died, the rights he held were apportioned among his children, and when they had all died a new division was made amongst their children, and so on until the great-grandchildren constituted new family groups, new *gwelys*. In the *gwely* the daughters as well as the sons went shares,

but when they died their portions went back to their own *gwely* and did not pass on to their children unless the line of male descendants failed, when succession passed to the female line.

The *gwely* consisted of three generations from a common ancestor. The Kindred was composed of from seven to nine generations similarly descended. Marriage was, probably, taboo within the *gwely* and beyond the Kindred.

The rights began with the *gwely*, and the *gwely* occupied a group of huts or a hamlet known as a *tref*. This *tref* gave its name to the village-group or *trevgordd*, viz., group having a churn. The laws of Wales state that:—

This is the complement of a lawful *trevgordd*: nine houses and one plough and one oven (*odyn*) and one churn (*gordd*) and one cat and one cock and one bull and one herdsman.

But of all these things, be it noted, it is the *churn* into which the milk of the territorial unit of society in the grazing period. It was the prevailing *tool*, and that tool was not yet the plough drawn by oxen, but the churn in which milk was manufactured into the finished product of a pastoral society. As Mr. Seeböhm remarks:—

The *trevgordd* was a working unit of co-operative dairy farming . . . Just as in the Domesday Survey the number of ploughs affords such a unit (of tribute or taxation), so in a tribal community a district might easily be fiscally estimated at so many beds, or so many churns or so many ploughs. All these would mean so many *trevgordds*.

Already we see the plough and the oven—both held in common. The former is coming into use, drawn by oxen contributed by the inhabitants—the Kinsmen living in the *tyddyns* or homesteads of the *trev*. Both the plough and the oven—a survival, probably, from the single homestead of an earlier time—we shall find again in the manor. As yet there is no common mill. There is nothing more complex than the hand-quern—which the Norse said had been stolen from behind the door of hell!

Since the hearth-stones of the *tyddyns* could be and were taken up and removed as the *gwely* moved from one grazing ground to another, we may say that every means of production, every form of property was still moveable. The chief item of property was the cow, the chief means of production the churn.

For the time being the social unit moved from place to place, but the tribal chieftain came to estimate his tribute and to exact it from the occupants of the *tref* or of the *maenol* or group of *trevs*. Rent and taxes were estimated in land and not in cattle or in Kinsmen. Finally, of course, land was measured in the cattle necessary to support and capable of being managed efficiently by a *gwely*. Slowly, as the system of production changed, the social unit modified. Grazing was the primary occupation, though steadily cultivation of the waste by the eight ox plough was taking up a more and more important place.

In Wales, as in Ireland and in Italy, in the pastoral period value was estimated in terms of cattle and money based on cows. Rents were paid in the yield of the cow, and, if not held as sacred here in the West, the mighty prestige which it has earned, if not enjoyed, for its part played in the economy, polity and ideology of Europe may have given to the animal that air of superiority and of contemptuous unconcern with which, as it chews its cud, it regards the mere man whom it has unwittingly but enormously enriched.

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