PRODUCTION AND POLITICS

III

THE OX AND THE PLOUGH

HITHERTO we have traced the rudimentary methods of production from that vague and indefinite period of antiquity in which the ancestors of the commingled peoples who now inhabit these islands devised clay vessels, hardening them with fire; began to make leather from skins and to weave garments of fibres, vegetable or animal; commenced the cultivation of the soil by means of the digging-stick, and from it slowly evolved a more effective, if cumbersome, implement, and, taming certain beasts of the field, tended them for the milk which they afforded for making butter and cheese. Intimately connected with this tedious development of the productive processes we have observed the social organisation of mankind proceeding from the matriarchal groupings of a pre-family relationship to the pairing of man and woman, conscious, when in continuous intercourse, of their sexual inter-dependence, and so becoming, with the segregation of erstwhile hunted cattle into manageable herds, patriarchal groups of descendants from a common father giving cows to his children with which they came to win "their daily bread." The possession of the primitive means of production and their operation, whether digging tool, churn, or oven, did not recommend themselves to the menfolk, who were quite content, as among the Kaffirs, to have the hometied mothers do the work. As long as the tools of agriculture were such as a woman could quite well handle she might use them, but when they required the greater physical strength of a man to direct them, and his greater freedom of movement to push them out across the waste behind the cattle which were his charge and his possession, the productive processes had increasingly to be taken over by the man.

When man had to labour hard and continuously, organisation on a Kin basis began to pass into decline, and the authority of the father to partake of the disciplinary powers of the master.

We have noticed the grazing economy as it showed itself amongst the Cymric Celts in the social organisation of the gwely and the territorial reflex of the tref. In Ireland it resulted in a veritable hierarchy, based first on Kinship and then on possession of cows and of land adequate to their maintenance. Commencing with the freeman or *midboth* without a hearth and the mere fodder-allowance of "milk and stir-about," men rose to *og-aire* with seven cows and a bull, seven sheep, seven pigs and a cow-land for seven cows in payment for which one cow yearly was given to the chief; to a *bo-aire* with twelve cows received from his chief and land adequate for forty-two cows, which surplus of land and beasts he might hire out to the og-aire or to non-tribesmen; to an *aire-desa* with ten tenants and certain other proportionate dependants; to an *aire-ard* with twenty tenants; to an *aire-tinsi* with twenty-seven tenants, and an *aire-forgaill* with forty tenants. The last two took their stock from the *Rituaithe* or King of a *Tuath.*

A bo-aire, or giver of cattle, having twice as much as an aire-desa, could become a *flaith* or chief if he had a green about his house and a fortified place within which he could give protection to the cattle of his tenantry. Chieftain-

ship in Ireland passed from mere Kinship precedence to precedence in wealth of cattle. There were similar qualifying gradations of descent through successive generations for non-freemen in Ireland to what there were in Wales, but, as in Scandinavia and in Scotland, possession of cattle became more and more the test of rank and rights.

Now, besides cows and the bull for breeding, the pastoral groups or grazing tenants had their proportion of *oxen* for purposes of ploughing.

In Wales, as we have seen, each trefgordd had its common plough to which the tribesmen contributed their oxen to make up the team of eight. Mr. Seebohm says that, with the Welsh, their agriculture was secondary, and consisted of the right to plough up portions of the waste yearly for the corn crop. In Ireland, the og-aire had one ox or a fourth-part of a four-ox team, and the bo-aire had two oxen or half of a plough team. In all probability, corn growing was carried on as an auxiliary to grazing, and was intended to contribute to the fodder supply of the animals as much as to the fare of the people. Be that as it might, agriculture at this stage was very crude and amongst both Celts and Germans was of the *open-field* type.

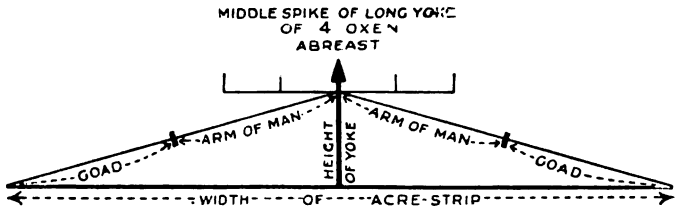
The tribe, whilst still unsettled and wandering from place to place, did not devote itself to the careful working of any patch of ground. Now, however, we must leave the pre-eminently pastoral economy with its tribal system in social organisation, and observe the development of agrarian economy and of the family group as it became so rooted in a particular settlement as to transfer more and more of its rights from itself through the herd to the land.

The word *hide* which, in Anglo-Saxon custom and law, was the term applied to the land pertaining to a free family and as much as it could bring under cultivation in a single year with an eight ox plough, may, in the opinion of Mr. Seebohm, have had reference at one time to an area devoted to grazing rather than to arable culture. The word was derived from *hiw*(=family), and so takes us right back to the same kind of social organisation as we saw in the Welsh gwely. The *ceorlisc man*, or husbandman, having an enclosure or hedge about the homestead of his family, rendered no week-work, and was, until the manorial system was well developed, by no means a servile tenant. He paid a *gafol* or something akin to a food rent to his superior, but paid no labour-service or week-work, and his status was higher than that of the *gebur* or tenant of the *yardland* or virgate, the land supporting two plough oxen who rendered not only gafol, but also a servile rent. The gebur would seem to be the successor of a non-tribesman who received crops and stock from the chieftain on whose land he had settled, and who gave for it not only the food-rent of a kinsman, but the unfree labour of a man without rights. Above the ordinary ceorl or *twyhyndman* were, at first, the *six-hyndman* and the *twelf-hyndman*. These became, as holders of five hides and of ten, noble not so much in blood as in possession of wealth in landed property. Beginning with rank in the Kin, nobility came to require reinforcement by territorial estate. The six-hyndman became a *thane*, and the twelf-hyndman, holding the fiscal unit of a King's food rent and attending on the monarch as his companion with coat of mail and helm and gilded sword, attained *gesithcund* status as a *royal thane*. A man with the full complement of twelve Kinsmen, with ten legal areas of plough-land and with Kingly recognition, the gesithcundman bridged the narrowing gulf between non-political and political society.

War, with its inroads upon the manhood of the Kindred and its insecurity

for the ordinary freeman, made more and more insecure the freedom of the lower grades of tribal society. In the laws of Ine in the beginning of the eighth century, the freedmen had ceased to rise and in the tenth century the six-hyndman had disappeared and the twy-hyndman or ceorl was being depressed to servile status. The men of the Kindred became divided into classes—the owners of land and the toilers upon the land. The owners of land, in gaining freedom from the responsibilities of Kinsmen lost also the strength of independence which their pledges gave them, and had to depend much more upon the King. On the other hand, the authority which they so derived from a law outside the Kindred enabled them to modify the tribal custom so as to readjust their relations with their dependants, and to change into something approaching villeinage or even serfdom the tenures of their geburs or husbandmen. The gesithcund man was transforming his King's fiscal unit into a *manor* to enable him—so he would have argued—more successfully to pay his dues to his superior. Professor Maitland defined the manor as the fiscal unit from which gafol was paid direct to the King, whilst the lord received payments and services from his tenants. It was an institution clamped down from above, a *quid pro quo* of royal sanction, a legal recognition of a usurped lordship. Besides the King, it had the endorsement of the Church. "The influence of the Church," says Mr. Seebohm, "also told in favour of the artificial and anti-tribal division of the people into great men and small men," and again, in discussing the development of the Anglo-Saxon laws, he urges "it must not be forgotten how much of the modification of custom found in the laws was due to the influence of Romanised ecclesiastical power." This new order of society, establishing its responsibilities, its rights and duties on the tenure of land and estimating their value not in cows, as heretofore, but in ox-lands as fractional plough-lands, had, so to speak, dug itself into the soil. It had its *botl*, its *burh* and its *flet* firmly planted upon its *hid* or its *yardland*. Unlike the Welsh gwely, the Anglo-Saxon *mægdh*, or Kindred, did not take up its hearth-flags and move from ground to ground. It stayed to win from the land the sustenance of its families, and this could only be obtained by strenuous exercise of human labour-power. Even before their settlement in England and lowland Scotland, it is probable that the Anglo-Saxons were substituting agriculture for grazing, and on their arrival here continued and developed their economy.

The *hid*, we have seen, was a plough-land, the area of land to be cultivated in a year by means of a plough and a team of eight oxen. It was divided into either four or six *yardlands*, and they again into two *oxgangs* apiece. The latter was the amount of land which an ox could plough in a year. The *acre* was the amount of land which an eight-ox plough-team could furrow in a day. The *furlong*, as its name implies, was the length of a furrow in the open-fields, and the breadth of the acre-strip was obtained—at any rate in Wales—by means which this diagram, taken from Mr. Seebohm's *Customary Acres*, will serve to make clearer than it might otherwise be.



This represents the teamster who, with one hand on the middle spike of the long yoke of eight oxen, stretches out his other arm to its full extent and, holding in that hand a goad as long as the long yoke, just touches the ground and so marks the edge of the acre strip now on one side and now on the other. Between these two edges is the breadth of the "small end" of the customary Welsh acre. Now the length of the goad or rod was equal to the "long yoke," and that was sixteen feet, which was also the length of the English "rod, pole or perch." Thus the linear and square measurements used to this day and evolved in the *hidage* of the village community of the *gwely* or of the Anglo-Saxon group of *hiws* are seen to have been multiples of the plough-yoke and of the plough-furrow. The smallest measurements were reckoned in lengths of wheat seed, whose weight, again, was taken to estimate the grains of silver and of gold to be equated with cows in the pastoral and with plough-land yields in the agricultural period. Lengths and areas, weights and values—all the means of calculating things tangible; titles and nobility; the chief constellation in the northern sky and the whole firmament of heaven revolving round the Pole of the Plough—these are some of the evidences that the prevailing means of production do influence predominantly the thoughts and institutions of mankind.

It is the areas determined by the habitations of the kinship fractions, or by the agricultural economy underlying territorial adjustments, which to this day bind society within the limitations of an archaic and outworn production and haunt our conservative minds with the ghosts of vanished social systems.

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(To be continued)

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