SOCIALISM FROM THE ROOT UP.

CHAPTER I.—ANCIENT SOCIETY.

In beginning this series on Socialism, we think it necessary to preclude the matter which may appear to interest more immediately us now living, but which is the subject of future historical research.

Our adversaries are sometimes forward to remind us that the present system of society with which we are so discontented, has been made by the growth of ages, and that our wills are impotent to change it; they do not see that in stating this fact they are condemning their own position. Our business is to recognize the coming change, to clear away obstacles to it, to accept it, and to be ready to organize it in detail. Our opponents, on the contrary, are trying conscientiously to stay that very evolution at the point which it has reached to-day; they are attempting to turn the transient into the eternal; therefore, for them history has no existence, and one important test of their social management and its worth is whether we cannot afford to disregard. The hopes for the industrialism of the future are involved in its struggles in the past; which, indeed, since they have built up the present system, and placed us amidst its struggle towards change, have actually forced us whether we will it not, to help forward that change.

The modern civilized State has been developed by the antagonism between the two classes of society which has transformed primitive Society into Civilization. The conditions of mere savage life recognised nothing but the satisfaction of the immediate needs of the individual; this condition of complete want of co-operation yielded to primitive Communism as the powers of man grew, and he began to perceive that he could do more than satisfy his daily needs for food and shelter. By this time he had found that he could aid nature in forcing the earth to produce livelihood for him; the hill and forest became something more to him than the place where berries and roots grew, and wild creatures roamed, the habitats of the palette, pasturage ground to him, and at last some races ground for tillage.

But the wealth of man still grew, and change came again with its growth; the land was common in the sense that it was not the property of individuals, but all the members of the class; primitive society was formed, and man was no longer a mass of individuals, but the groups of the primitive society were narrow and exclusive; the primitive community, the Gens of the Romans, the tribes of the Britons, were among themselves, but which group was hostile to all other groups; within the Gens wealth was common to all its members, without it wealth was price of war.

This condition of war necessarily developed leadership amongst men; successful warriors gained predominance over the other members of the Gens, and since the increasing powers of production afforded more wealth for the conquerors, political leaders began to seek to gain personal wealth at the expense of their fellow-warriors; the warrior leaders began to get to themselves larger shares of the wealth than others, and so the primitive communism of wealth began to be transformed into individual ownership.

Thus the tribe now passed the place of the Gens; this was a larger and more artificial group, in which blood relationship was conventionally assumed. In it, however, there was no means more individual ownership, although, as said above, Communism had been broken into; the tribe at large disposed of the use of the land according to certain arbitrary arrangements, but did not admit ownership in it to individuals. Under the tribal system also slavery was developed, so that slavery in the form as we know it had begun.

The tribe in its turn melted into a larger and still more artificial body, the people—a congeries of many tribes, the ancient Gothic-Tuscan name for which—theod—still is preserved in such nations. This development, the last great form of slavery, was there more change in the conditions of wealth under it from those obtained among the tribe, although it held in it something more than the more sordid forms of the other.

Finally, ancient Barbarism was transformed into ancient Civilization, which, as the name implies, took the form of the life of the city. With these cities political life began, together with the systematization of the old beliefs into a regular worship. The religion of Barbarism was the worship of the ancestors of the tribe, mingled with fetishism, which was the first universal religion, and may best be described as a state of mind in which the universe was conceived of as a system of animated beings to be feared and propitiated by man. This was transformed into what may be called city patriotism, which summed up the whole religion of the city, and which was the real religion of the Greeks and Romans in their progressive period, and of all the then progressive races of mankind, including the Hebrew. In these cities slavery speedily developed until it embraced nearly the whole of industrialism, the main business of the free citizens being the aggravation of their city by war. For the cities were as long to each other as the tribes had been.

The course of events towards further transformation was that in the Early Ages the cities were federations which gradually fell under the dominion of bureaucratic and absolute monarchies, of which China still remains as an example. The Greek and Latin cities carried on the progress of human intelligence, but did not escape corruption and transmutation.

Amongst the Greeks the individual struggle for pre-eminence gradually broke down the city patriotism, and led the way towards the domination of military and political absolutism; whilst the independence of Greece was finally trampled upon the power of Rome, now corrupted also. For during this time in Rome the struggle of the plebeian order—or inferior tribes of which the city was composed—with the consuls took the place of that is, the three most ancient and consequently leading tribes—had developed a middle-class living on the profits derived from slave labour, which broke up the old city republic and led to the formation of a commercial and tax-gathering monarchy, founded on slavery, whose subjects were devoid of all political rights, and in which the triumph of individualism was complete. Indeed, this same struggle had taken place in one way or another in the Greek cities. Thus was a political struggle which had been developed from commercialism gradually ate up the Wealth of the empire; even slave labour became unproductive. The landlords were ruined; the taxes were not paid, and meanwhile the money which was religiously devoted to his city, became a bribed hireling; till at last no bribe was high enough to induce a civilised man to fight, and the Roman legions were manned by the very barbarians whose kinsmen were attacking the empire. Thus, was ancient civilization delivered over to the Barbarians, fresh from their tribal communism, and once more the antagonism of individual and communal interests was the order of the day; the Barbarian and Roman ideas, from the union of which was formed the society of the next great epoch—the Middle Ages.

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