

Woman and the Socialist Movement

By OLIVE M. JOHNSON

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"In a given society the degree of woman's emancipation is a measure of the general emancipation."—Fournier.

CHAPTER I.

THE ECONOMIC RELATION OF WOMEN IN THE PAST.

EVOLUTION.

Every social scientist to-day accepts the fact that the human race has developed from forms lower in the scale of nature, and that the career of humanity has been a growth from savagery through barbarism into civilization. Modern science also recognizes that this progress has an economic basis; that it is the modes and methods of producing and exchanging the necessities of life that determine the status of progress; that it is the development of the means of production that has forged humanity onward from stage to stage; that the morals, ethics, religions, manners, customs and laws of the human race are but reflexes of their economic status of development.

In order therefore to understand woman's position in society—past and present—it is necessary to investigate what has been and is her economic relation to society, her relation to the means of life, of production and exchange.

EARLY DIVISION OF LABOR

Man is a social animal as well as a tool-using animal. From the very earliest stages the human race collected in herds which later developed into clans and tribes, and, finally, into nations. The first coming together was undoubtedly for mutual protection. Out of that grew love for society.

The first division of labor was between man and woman. It probably commenced as soon as—or possibly even before—man had learned to use sticks and stones as weapons. The male would go forward to fight the enemy while the mother female, who was a necessity to the life of the infant, stayed in the background to nurse and protect it. Hiding and shrinking from danger became therefore the nature of woman. With the invention of weapons and tools on the one hand, and fire and pottery on the other, the division of labor became complete. To fight the enemy and procure the food became the lot of man; to raise and guard the children and prepare food became the duty of the woman.

As soon as mankind commenced to subdivide and spread over the surface of the earth, its battles were no longer confined to the fight with the elements and the wild beasts of the forest. Man has fought man, tribe has fought tribe, and nation has fought nation for the supremacy of the earth. The history of man proves that this eternal struggle has been by far the most severe and destructive. It has also been that which has most rigidly enforced the laws of progress and development. Only those groups of men that were able to invent or adopt inventions were able to withstand the rest or gain new possessions. Others would either perish or be crowded into barren, secluded and undesirable portions of the earth.

Two distinct sets of duties have run through the ages, one for man and another for woman, each necessary for the maintenance and prosperity of the race. Man has been the fighter, the protector of the existing society. Woman has been the rearer of the child, the builder of the future society. Man has been the fisherman, the hunter, the yeoman, and the artisan, the one that procured food, clothing and shelter. Woman has had charge of the preparation of food and clothing and has taken care of the children. Their occupations led each sex into a different mode of life from the very first. This brought, of necessity, different modes of development. Man became adapted to motion and exertion, became strong, brave, rough and enduring. By constantly using tools and weapons and learning their value, he developed to ever higher degree the powers of invention and discovery. This in turn developed the brain so that it finally ran into the channels of art, science and literature. Woman, on the other hand, by constantly staying at home, adopted quieter habits. She has therefore less energy and endurance. By association with the children and the sick and wounded she became kinder and more sympathetic, but her circle was narrow and required little mental or physical energy of the kinds that man developed.

The process of evolution has made different beings of the two sexes. These differences must not and should not be ignored. In the early stages of the human struggle they developed for the good of the entire race. In class society the ruling classes have known how to turn both the advantages and disadvantages of each sex to its own good and the oppression of the enslaved. But, as the economic development points to a future society of peace, leisure and plenty, so does the sexual development point to a future when the good in both sexes may be amalgamated into a greater and nobler humanity.

MATERNAL LAW.

That the economic relations in society are powerful and determining factors in the social relations is well demonstrated by woman's position during primitive communism. At that time man's tools and weapons were as yet crude, and they were his only possession. But woman was the ruler of the house, or rather the women of the gens were the rulers of the community house. They owned the household goods and utensils, and the value at that time of these acquirements for the art of coekery can scarcely be over-estimated, as they greatly increased the value and nutriment of the

food. Moreover, the women were the earliest tillers of the soil, the little plot around the camp. They had charge of the first domestic animals, at least those whose meat and milk was used for food.

Therefore while these our ancestresses were hard workers they were also well nigh economic masters, and, says a writer on the subject: "Woe to the luckless husband or lover who was too indolent or too clumsy to contribute his share to the common stock." We might well imagine what a life the women of the community would lead him, particularly as all the women were related, belonged to the same gens and the man at marriage went into his wife's household. Sometimes indeed, he was bodily ousted from the house and had to go home to his folks again or hunt for another wife to take him in. Inheritance was then traced in the female line and the children belonged to the mother.

PATERNAL LAW AND CLASS RULE.

The next division of labor was that between the slave and the freeman. As man learned to any great extent to till the soil and domesticate the animals, he invented a new means of production—the slave. Instead of killing and eating, or otherwise disposing of the conquered enemy he was set to work to produce the necessities of life for the conqueror. The conqueror became the master; the slave, a mere tool and instrument of production, an animal of drudgery at best.

With the growth of slavery the tribes became powerful, they developed into nations and became attached to the land. These existed now a division in society between the slave and the freeman. There also soon arose another, the difference between the rich and the poor freeman. Some were able to get more slaves, more land, more animals, more precious metals, etc., than the others, and therefore acquired greater economic power. These new forms of wealth were man's wealth. They developed within man's specific domain of acquiring food. With them, therefore, man gained economic affluence and power.

The possessions of woman on the other hand sank into insignificance. The implements for her work remained simple, her possessions remained few and comparatively valueless. Man's "house" became the powerful one and begat the attractive power. Gradually woman had to leave her family at marriage and go to the home of her husband. She became absorbed by his family and assumed its name.

As man accumulated private property and assumed economic power, he naturally desired to perpetuate both in his own family instead of leaving it as formerly to be partitioned among his wife's kindred. Thus arose inheritance in the male line. Later on primogeniture was inaugurated to further assure the concentration of wealth and power within man's "house" and the predominance of the male line.

Man's rule had been established in society. Woman's possessions had no economic value. The division between the sexes had become complete. Property was man's, and women were even excluded from the inheritance thereof unless no male children existed.

In the ancient nations, the circle of the wife was narrow and miserable. The freemen owned the wealth and the slaves and held mastery over land and sea. The slaves did the work on land and sea and also in the household. The "free" woman's economic pedestal was knocked from under her by the slave and therefore she was often less considered. She was tolerated only as the breeder of the race of freemen. In the more warlike nations, such as Sparta and Rome, where many free citizens of strength and courage were highly valued for martial operations, women held a higher position as mother and wife than in the purely agricultural and trading nations such as Athens and Phoenicia.

With the establishment of class rule in society, woman lost her prestige. The women of the ruling class were probably the part of humanity that first became wholly and totally parasitic. Theirs, therefore, was the lot, and to them clung the stigma, of the parasite. They were tolerated only as necessary evils, were below consideration, treated as objects of scorn and often subjected to actual degradation.

MEDIEVAL SOCIETY.

As the concern of this pamphlet is to find in the course of woman's evolution those women who are or should be directly interested in the Socialist movement, we have little or nothing to do with the women of the upper class. It is the working women that concern us.

With the reorganization of society after the downfall of the Roman Empire, chattel slavery disappeared in the progressive part of the world as a general and worldwide institution. The exploited class were serfs, attached to the land and sold with it. The freemen consisted of two classes—the feudal class, the owners of the land and the serfs, and the artisan and trading class of the free towns.

With the dissolution of chattel slavery, woman regained an economic foundation in the homes of the burghers and serfs. The home became the unit of production and a number of occupations developed within its walls that fall entirely to the lot of women. Spinning, weaving, carding, brewing, baking, sewing, and for relaxation fancy work of various kinds by which home and clothing were made ornamental, kept the housewife busy from early morning until late. To teach these various occupations was the duty mothers owed to their daughters, and a bride's chief value was her efficiency in them. Medieval society was a combination of the various family units and much of the prosperity of a nation depended upon the skill and industry of its women.

To judge by song and poetry and romance, one should think that these homes were ideal ones. But economics is not poetry. These women were household drudges, coarse

*Arthur Wright, for many years a missionary among the Seneca, Iroquois, quoted by Engels.

and ignorant from the very nature of things. The serfs of the middle ages were not slaves in the historic sense of the word, but they were working drudges over whom the master possessed the right of life and death. The women were not slaves in the historic sense of the word but they also were mere working drudges. They were drudges at home and serfs under the master, and the indignities to which they could be submitted seem, to us, at least, worse than death. Even the wives of the free burghers are scarcely to be envied. While they were exposed to fewer indignities and less deprivation, their horizon was narrow and their views petty, bounded as they were by the daily routine of work and the small gossip among the neighbors.

Humanity to-day bears the traces of its inheritance from savagery and barbarism. The working class bears the traces of past slavery and servitude. Woman has the additional disfavor of narrow association and cramped views, and the stigma that past slavery and serfdom throws upon her as peculiarly hers. This is the inheritance that the past ages give the woman of to-day. This it what she must face frankly, battle against, and overcome.

CHAPTER II.

MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY.

PRIMITIVE FORMS OF THE FAMILY.

Marriage and family life have not always been what they are to-day. In fact monogamy is a rather modern institution, and as far as its ideal attainment is concerned, humanity has even now a long way to travel.

When man lived in wild herds sexual intercourse was promiscuous. In the course of development, a form of group marriage and blood relationship was instituted under which all men of one group were the husbands of all the women of another group and vice versa. This system of marriage was one of humanity's great inventions, as by it interbreeding was prevented. This was a most important step in the progress of the race. It improved the health and strength of the tribe and when once established there sprung from it moral concepts, high for that status of development. In these stages of the family, it was a matter of course that descent was traced in the female line.

During primitive communism, a form of pairing family developed. One man and one woman only were husband and wife. Polygamy was of course neither abolished nor forbidden, much less did they have our moral concept about it. However, it was seldom practiced. Food was hard to procure and it was man's bounden duty to provide for the woman with whom he lived, and as man went into the family of his wife, or wives, it was the women who saw to it that he fulfilled this duty. If he utterly failed, he was bluntly ousted from the house. That was the barbaric, plain and unsophisticated method of divorce. The man was then free to pair with another woman and the woman could choose another mate. The children remained in the mother's family and the mother's brother was a nearer relative and owed greater duty to the child than the father himself.

Between the pairing family and the monogamiam intervenes the patriarchal family. This was monogamous in nature and concept, but when the patriarch was rich enough it became polygamous because slavery had arisen and he had the right over his female slaves.

MONOGAMY.

Monogamy arose with the development of private property. It is far from meaning the sole association of one man with one woman, as the word would imply. It simply means the legal recognition of the marriage of one man and one woman. This in turn, means that the children of such a marriage are the only legitimate heirs of the persons involved. Side by side with it grew the two nasty heirlooms of modern civilization—prostitution and adultery. Neither the ancient masters nor the feudal lords recognized the first iota of the moral concept of monogamy. The ancients had a house full of pretty female slaves and their intellectual female associate was not the wife but the hetæra. The knights of the middle ages had the right over their female serfs and their romantic love, so beautiful in song and poetry, steered headlong for prostitution and adultery. Nor does monogamy fare better, from a moral point of view, to-day, with its crop of divorces and its host of scandals. Many of our leading pillars of society have several living wives and many of our prominent society ladies have ditto husbands. The "affinity" is becoming as well recognized as the Greek hetæra. For the rest, man buys his sexual pleasures from the women whom poverty forces to sell. There is small difference between that and the ancient institutions under which he took the same privilege as his divinely ordained right. The modern way only is more hypocritical, as it is considered shameful and the shame and blame fall upon the woman only.

Historic monogamy is a strictly economic institution. It means nothing more or less than the seclusion of the wife of the economic master, be he slave-owner, feudal lord or modern capitalist. This seclusion has for its purpose the bringing up of legitimate heirs through which to perpetuate the economic mastery. It brought about the first degradation of woman, as it made her a parasite, and marriage a speculation. Among the ruling classes, it has remained so throughout. Marriage has been a contract seldom made by the contracting parties themselves. Parents, guardians and marriage brokers have attended to that business. The determining factor has been property. Where choice has been allowed at all it has been only within the given class of the chooser. Often the contract has been made without the parties seeing each other, generally without the least reference to their likes or dislikes. Children have been betrothed in the cradle or while too young to be concerned at all. Land, goods and chattels have been the world's most irresistible Cupid! It is a serious mistake to think that the "age of romance" was an age of marrying for love. On the other hand the romance as a rule headed for

the very opposite of matrimony. The heroes were often already married, the heroines as often so.

The grand old institution of marriage has had very little to do with love, faith and truth!

THE PROLETARIAN FAMILY.

We saw that polygamy was seldom practiced among our barbarian ancestors because food was too difficult to procure to allow the man that luxury. Even so throughout the ages have the poor been too poor to follow in the footsteps of the rich in creating the expensive corollaries of the monogamian family.

Among the poorer classes monogamy has been comparatively strict from the force of economic necessity. And as economic necessity is the world's greatest teacher, so among the propertyless monogamy has become the greatest moral virtue. It is therefore among the proletarians that the purest of all human feelings, modern sex-love with a view to marriage and life partnership, has sprung into life.

Even animals exercise choice at mating and often show strong likes and dislikes. Man has no doubt always had preferences. But sex-love, true, pure and lasting, is a very modern virtue and could spring only from generations of the strictest monogamy. While the ancients secluded their legitimate wives, and themselves remained perfectly unrestricted, the poor herdsman composed songs to his beloved one and his suit once won he was usually too poor to look for further adventure. While the feudal knight romanced for another man's wife or betrothed, the poor serf toiled and saved to get together that with which to purchase the "right of the first night" from the lord for the woman of his choice. Crude and simple and coarse and ignorant as these herdsmen and serfs might be, a life companionship purchased by a multitude of sacrifices, before and after marriage, could not fail to breed devotion, and devotion from generation to generation might well be expected to bear a child as pure as the modern sex-love.

While the modern heiresses look for titles with which to adorn their names, and titled degenerates look for fortunes with which to revive their faded glory; while middle class matrons dicker for position, money and support for their marriageable daughters; while immorality, scandal and divorce stalk rampant in the land, that part of the industrial proletariat that is separated from the scourges of both wealth and extreme poverty are remaining as nearly as possible pure from the taint that pollutes the upper and lower slums alike. With the proletariat property can play no part either as a matchmaker or an agent of oppression. The workers own nothing but their labor power, and that they all own alike. The "man with a good job" may appear as a desirable match from a proletarian point of view, but as a job is in itself a most unstable thing only the most superficial can allow it to influence their choice.

The average proletarian home is far from ideal. There are thousands of rocky reefs in the worker's matrimonial sea. The inherited narrowness still clings to the woman, the inherited brutality still clings to the man. Then there are the troubles bred by economic conditions, by lack of work and small pay, and high cost of living and large families to be fed and clothed. "When poverty comes in through the door, love flies out through the window," is a proverb that holds good forever.

But the workers are too poor to indulge in the vices of the rich. Their troubles are of a different character. It takes at all times all a worker can make, to support home, wife and children. His wages do not allow him to support an "affinity." Such extravagance would too soon be detected, and a working woman of to-day sooner seeks the factory for employment than to sit neglected at home. No property brought her to the man, no property holds her there, and the legal and official trappings instituted for the control of property in matrimonial relations are meaningless to the working class. A new morality, a union based on mutual love and faith is growing in spite of all influences to the contrary. Out of this will spring the morals of the future, a monogamian family in the full sense of the word.

CHAPTER III.

WOMAN UNDER CAPITALISM.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MACHINE.

During the past three centuries there has been such development of social-economic forces as to cause complete revolutions in every relation of human life. It began with the great development in navigation, which resulted in the discovery of vast continents and the opening of world-wide markets for the manufacturing and trading classes. It blossomed out in the development of the great science of chemistry and the manifold discoveries and inventions consequent thereupon. It finally culminated in the discovery of steam and electricity as motive powers. The development of all these branches has forced on and in turn been forced on by the wonderful inventions and improvements in the means of production. A machine is an appliance by which the actual performance of the working process is taken out of the hands of man and is accomplished by the mechanism. In the handicraft period the operative process was limited to the use of a tool in man's own hand and the duration of the workday was subjected to man's physical capacity within the twenty-four hours. Stretch this as they might, man had to eat and sleep even be he denied all further recreation.

But the machine is a different "animal." There is no limit to the number of "hands" with which it may perform the working process. There is no limit to its hours of activity. Twenty-four hours are as good as eight. It needs neither rest nor sleep nor recreation. It indulges in no vices that unfit it for work. It gets no "lazy feelings" nor "cranky notions." Modern machinery is well nigh ideal perfection as far as the performance of the labor process is concerned.

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