

ANCIENT ORIGIN OF "LOTS"

In the November Freeman is an item from Lancaster M. Greene entitled "Drawing Lots—Free." According to that, Sir William A. Craigie calls "lots" of land an Americanism originating from the Pilgrim fathers drawing lots for their parcels of the soil.

It may be of interest to know how much further back the word and practice originated. In Laveleye's "Primitive Property," (Macmillan 1878, Marriott's English translation) at page 111, I find the following footnote:

"M. Fustel de Coulanges recently wrote in the Revue des Mondes of May 15, 1872: 'The word sors was applied to all land that passed by descent. The idea of casting lots was not implied in it.' Undoubtedly, at a more recent period, the word sors, or sortes, implied neither casting of lots, nor periodical partition, any more than does the phrase lot of land in the present day; but the terms obviously originated in the drawing of lots, customary in early times. All the land of Gaul was not confiscated and distributed by lot; here M. Fustel is certainly correct. But there is no doubt that after the conquest it was by means of lots that the land taken from the vanquished was apportioned. See Von Maurer, Einlei-

tung, p. 82 M. Fustel de Coulanges, in an excellent article in the Revue des deux Mondes, 15 May 1873, himself quotes several facts which prove that in ancient times the apportionment of the soil was effected by means of lots. Sors patrimonium significa, says Festus the grammarian. Compare Livy i, 34. This sense of the word sors was a very ancient one in the Latin language; it was the same with the Greeks. . . . Decision by lot was an old custom, which the population of Greece and Italy had always made use of in the apportionment of the soil, without which it does not appear how private property could have been established.

"...Originally the portion to be occupied for temporary enjoyment was assigned by periodical drawing. Subsequently, portions so obtained were transmitted by descent; private property sprang up in fact from the last apportionment by lot."

Laveleye says in the text: "In the first place, the parcels were in German called **Loosgut**, for which the Latin translation is sors. . . . From

this practice of drawing lots our word lot is derived. . . . Of this there seems to be no doubt, that periodical partition by lot remained in practice, from the most remote ages down to our own time, in certain villages of Germany, and in some localities in Scotland."

That should settle Sir William Craige.

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