

Lewis Henry Morgan, Author of "Ancient Society"

An Account and Appreciation of His Life Work.

(From "Socialist Standard, London.")

THE year 1818, which witnessed the birth of Karl Marx, also saw the birth, on Nov. 21, of Lewis Henry Morgan, a man whose investigations into the nature of primitive human society were as epoch-making as were those of Marx into the structure of modern capitalism. Born at Aurora, Cayuga County, in the State of New York, and of "middle-class" parents, Morgan, after the customary school education, graduated, at the age of 22, at Union College, N. Y. Afterwards he underwent a four years course in law, and in 1844 was admitted to the Bar. In partnership with his old schoolmate, afterwards Judge G. F. Danforth, Morgan practised successfully as a lawyer in Rochester, where he made his home.

Studies of the Indians.

While at college, young Morgan had become deeply interested in the Red Indians of the Iroquois tribes, the remnants of a once powerful and widespread people, in the State of New York. After his graduation he joined with a number of young enthusiasts in Aurora who, like himself, were fond of Indian lore, forming a club or society which was called the Grand Order of the Iroquois. The "Order," which was of the nature of a secret society, also appears to have been known as the "Gordian Knot."

The idea of its founders was to extend the organization over the tribal territory which the Iroquois in times past had occupied. Branches were to be established wherever a settlement of the Iroquois was known to have existed, and "council-fires" held at night for the discussion of matters relating to the Indians.

In order to study more intimately their life and institutions, Morgan actually went into an Iroquois settlement, and there lived as one of themselves for periods which eventually totalled several years. So well did he gain the confidence and affection of the Indians that in 1847, he was permitted to formally enter, by adoption, into the Hawk gens, of the Seneca tribe. They recognized in him a fraternal link between the white men and the red, and gave him the name Ta-ya-da-wah-kugh, meaning "one lying across."

The first results of his investigations, Morgan embodied in a series of papers which were read to the "Grand Order," and also to the New York Historical Society, of which he was a member. Subsequently, they were published as "Letters on the Iroquois," under the pen name of "Shenandoah" in the "American Review" during 1847, and later appeared in other journals.

Among Morgan's closest associates was a pure-blooded Seneca Indian called Ha-sa-no-an-da, who had adopted the English name of Eli S. Parker. He was well educated and a civil engineer by profession. Hasanoanda possessed an exceedingly full knowledge of Iroquois customs and institutions and was himself a Sachem or peace-chief of the Senecas, his

name signifying "Keeper of the Western door of the Long House" (see below.)

With Parkers' assistance, Morgan was able to carry his researches into the past history of the Iroquois and to complete his first great work on primitive society, "The League of the Iroquois," which he published in 1851. This book which Morgan, out of recognition for his services, inscribed to Eli S. Parker, was written, as the author says in the preface, "to encourage a kinder feeling towards the Indian founded upon a truer knowledge of his civil and domestic institutions, and of his capabilities for future elevation," surely, in view of the brutal treatment meted out to the Redman by the Paleface who had robbed him, a noble ideal.

The first scientific account of an Indian people ever written, this book contains a detailed description based on personal observation of the society, religion, ceremonial, games, art, craftsmanship, and language of the Iroquois. A new edition appeared in 1904.

The league of tribes was the highest type of social organization achieved by the American Indians. That of the Iroquois was formed in the fifteenth century and consisted of five, and later of six, tribes, the Mohawks, Cayugas, Senecas, Onondagas, and the Tucaroras. The term "Iroquois" is believed to be of French origin. They called themselves Hode-no-sau-nee, the "People of the Long House," the latter allusion being to the Indian communal house which was chosen as the symbol of the League. At the time when Morgan wrote, however, the League was but a shadow of its former self, having lost, with the coming of the Whites, the position which had made it a social and military power of no mean importance.

In 1855, Morgan was concerned in an engineering scheme to build a railway through the wilderness of North Michigan, and in conjunction therewith performed some practical exploration which was much needed in this, at that time, little known region. When thus engaged he made some original investigations into the social habits and constructive ability of the beaver, an animal which was exceedingly abundant in this area. His results were embodied in "The American Beaver and His Works," published in 1867. One of the most perfect of zoological monographs, this work drew praise from Darwin, although he considered that Morgan had underestimated the power of instinct and thus rated too highly the reasoning powers of the beaver.

In 1856, Morgan made the acquaintance of Prof. Henry, of the Smithsonian Institute, and of Agassiz, the famous American naturalist, both of whom encouraged him to continue his unique Indian studies.

Studies in Kinship and Sex Relations.

While on a visit in 1858 to Marquette on Lake Superior, one of the termini of the proposed railway, Morgan visited a camp of the Ojibwa tribe and there discovered the same peculiar system of recognizing family relationships which he had found

among the Iroquois. According to this system a man referred to the children of his brothers as his own "sons" and "daughters," and all these "cousins" as they would be termed by us, called one another "brother" or "sister." Likewise with the children of several sisters.

The discovery that this system existed among the Ojibwa appears to have been somewhat of a revelation to Morgan, and he now pursued his ethnological researches with redoubled vigor, visiting in the next three or four years different tribes in the extreme West and as far North as Canada. He found, as he had begun to expect, that the same system of kinship was characteristic of practically all the tribes in North America.

After this Morgan, with the assistance of the United States Government, carried his investigations into other lands. Carefully prepared lists of questions were forwarded to officials, explorers and missionaries in different parts of the world. Most of these lists were returned with the desired information, and by this means Morgan was successful in acquiring a vast amount of data bearing on the sex relations and kinship of numerous peoples the world over.

It was a stupendous task to sort out and classify this mass of evidence, but Morgan performed it with great ability and remarkable results. These were set forth in a preliminary essay published in the "Proceedings of the American Academy of Sciences" in 1868.

The complete and tabulated results of these investigations appeared in the "Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family," published in 1871 as Vol. XVII of the "Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge" by the "Institute." This work, containing as it does the kinship systems of one hundred and thirty-nine distinct peoples comprising about four-fifths of the human race, is one of the landmarks of ethnology and denoted the entry of exact scientific method into the study of primitive society.

Frederick Engels in his "Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State," thus summarizes Morgan's conclusions:

(1) The kinship system of the American Indians is also in vogue in Asia, and in a somewhat modified form among numerous tribes of Africa and Australia.

(2) This system finds a complete explanation in a certain form of communal marriage now in process of decline in Hawaii and some Australian islands.

(3) By the side of this marital form, there is in practice on the same islands a system of kinship only explicable by a still more primeval and now extinct form of communal marriage.

Morgan was led by his researches to the belief that unrestricted sexual intercourse had been the habit of primeval mankind. Progressive restriction upon intercourse between near blood relatives then resulted in two successive forms of group or com-

munal marriages in which a group of men were common husbands to a similar group of women. This custom, by rendering actual fatherhood uncertain, necessarily resulted in the tracing of descent through females only, a fact which had already been inferred by Bachofen in his "Mother Right" (1861) from a study of classical mythology.

Further restriction led to a loose "pairing family"—the intercourse and co-habitation of one man with one woman—and then, as Morgan subsequently showed, the rise of private property formed the basis of the historical form of monogamy, with its permanent union and male inheritance.

In treating anomalous kinship-systems as the vestiges of extinct marital and family institutions, and in coming forth as the ethnological champion of the theory of original promiscuity and of group marriage, Morgan encountered the opposition of the "established school" of anthropologists led by McLennan. Just as Owen, Virchow, and other reactionary scientists endeavored to save the "respectability" of mankind by denying, in opposition to the Darwinians, our animal ancestry, so Westmarch, Andrew Lang and others fitted bourgeois morality upon the primitive savage by declaring, against Morgan and even Lubbock, that human sex-intercourse had never been promiscuous and that monogamy was its "natural" and original form.

Morgan's views on this matter have, in the main, been amply vindicated by the more recent painstaking researches of Spencer and Gillen into the communal marriage systems of the Australian aborigines.

The Roots of Cultural Progress.

After the publication of his "Systems of Consanguinity" Morgan pursued the investigation of several series of facts which had attracted his attention whilst accumulating the materials for that important work.

The only literary fruits of his work during the following five or six years were a number of essays on the ancient culture of Central America—a line of enquiry which greatly interested him. Between 1869 and 1876 there appeared in the form of magazine articles "The Seven Cities of Chibola," "Montezuma's Dinner," and "The Houses of the Mound Builders."

Morgan was something of a classical scholar, and it gradually became apparent to him that there was a more intimate affinity between the social institutions of early Greece and Rome and those of existing barbarian peoples than was usually supposed.

He also became aware of the great changes wrought in social and cultural institutions by progressive improvements in man's means of living.

Thus by a variety of channels he arrived at the conception of the essential unity in the course and method of evolution throughout the entire human race. The great antiquity and animal origin of mankind had already been established, but little knowledge had as yet been gained as

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