

NOTES ON HISTORY.

NOTE THE FIFTH.

THE INDIANS OF NEW ENGLAND.

BY CLARENCE ORMOND.

As the object of this Note is to elucidate such points of history as are doubtful or little known to the mass, it is our purpose in this Note, and several that may succeed it at intervals, to give some account of the original inhabitants of this vast continent. We shall take but a portion of country for each Note, assuming for our first the history of the New England tribes.

The Indians who inhabited the vast territory called New England, containing about six hundred thousand square miles, seem never to have been known by any common appellation, as were their brethren, the *Tartars*, in Asia, but always to have been called by names derived from incidental circumstances, such as the names of rivers, or mountains. The oldest tribes, and those which have been called the most eminent in council, resided at one time in Berkshire county, Massachusetts, and in the neighbouring region of New York, and of late years at Stockbridge, Massachusetts. They were called, by the late Dr. Edwards, President of Union College at Schenectady, who spoke their language familiarly, Mahicanews, and by one of their own educated writers, *Muhheenkunnuk*, or more commonly, *Mohicans*, or *Mohegans*. The other tribes of note which were settled in New England, were the *Pequods*, in Connecticut, the *Narragansetts* in Rhode Island, the *Wampanoags*, Massachusetts. *Nipnicks*, or *Nipnucks*, *Nashuas*, and *Stockbridge Indians* in Massachusetts; the *Pig-wacket* and *Coos Indians* in New Hampshire, and the *Tarratees*, or *Abenaquais*, in the District of Maine.

Of all these tribes, the most powerful was the *Pequods*, whose chief seat was near New London, Connecticut. Although this tribe could muster but a thousand warriors, they always maintained a superiority over neighbouring tribes that could muster four or five thousand warriors. This nation was so powerful that the Anglo-Saxon settlers were forced, for their own safety, to crush it in 1637, a few years after the settlement of New England, and consequently little is known of it. As the *Pequods* would hold no communication with the whites, no portion of their traditional history could be recovered, and there were only two chiefs known to the settlers, *Pekoath* and *Sassacus*. In 1631, a sachem of a tribe tributary to the *Pequods*, came to Boston, and having given a glowing description of Connecticut to the governor, and tried to induce him to settle there, he also gave them an account of

Pekoath, the chief of the *Pequods*, and their conquests over the surrounding tribes. His story was not believed; but he met with better success at Plymouth. When the party who were sent to explore Connecticut arrived there, *Pekoath* was dead, and *Sassacus*, the last chief, ruled over the tribe. Connecticut was soon settled, and the *Pequods* were involved in a quarrel which was the cause of their ultimate destruction.*

The *Narragansetts*, which was the only other tribe of any importance, had their stronghold in Rhode Island. They remained apparently friendly to the English for many years. But their strength was impaired by the ferocious wars which they waged with the *Pequods* and the *Pokanokets*, a nation whose territory bounded on that of the *Narragansetts*. Although these wars were ended soon after the arrival of the English, yet the evils which the Europeans introduced into their country, proved equally destructive.

At length, in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, (1676,) the celebrated Indian chief, Philip of *Pokanoket*, induced most of the leading tribes of New England to join him in his war of extermination against the whites. His schemes having proved abortive, and himself at length slain, Philip's confederates were punished for their perfidy. After his death, the English were determined to extirpate all those tribes who had taken part with him, and accordingly turned their eyes to the *Narragansetts*, as being the most powerful and the nearest to the English settlements. By the greatest care and skill they reached the country of the *Narragansetts*, attacked and carried their fort, slew nearly all their warriors, and destroyed their stores of provisions, so that the scanty remnant of the tribe had nothing to rely on for their sustenance. The colonists next turned their attention to the northern Indians; and having slain great numbers, drove the rest into the trackless wilderness of the northern part of their territory and Canada. Most of the inferior tribes of Indians shared the fate of their brethren, and in a few years there remained in New England but a few *Mohicans*, a tribe which had always been friendly to the English.

The tribes of New England differed in some respects from the Indians of other states. Their customs and method of government were different, and hardly so well calculated for the patriarchal government, as those of some more powerful tribes, living to the westward of them. Those who desire a full historical account of the Indians—their great men, and their customs, will find it in "Drake's Book of the Indians"—"Thatcher's Indian Biography," and "Church's History of King Philip's war."