

OUR IROQUOIS COMPATRIOTS.

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It is a pretty corner in Ontario, where for a few miles the Grand River slips between gentle shores. For leagues and leagues its waters have laughed in rapids—until here it slumbers like a child after the pleasures of a play hour. Here, where the counties of Brant and Haldimand touch, lies the Six Nations Indians' reserve, truly a deplorably insignificant remnant of land compared with the original grant made by the Imperial Government to the Iroquois, when they left New York State to ally their forces and their destinies with those of the British when Canada was young and its future a matter of conjecture.

At that time the tract consisted of the lands lying within six miles on both sides of the Grand River from its source to its mouth, at the present day the reserve comprises but 53,000 acres, a comparatively small portion of which fronts the beautiful stream that will forever be associated with Indian traditions, and whose legend-thronged shores girdle with a peculiar loneliness some of the purest, sweetest water in Ontario.

And this has been the home of the Six Nations for upwards of a hundred years, and in that time it has developed from absolute forest into an infinitely better agricultural country that can be found occupied by any class of settlers, enjoying a corresponding degree of educational, religious and civil advantages. In the early part of the century much of the land specified in the Imperial grant slipped out of the Iroquois' possession much like the sands in an hour glass. "Value received" was not always recorded, but after a time when the country was being settled, and the demand for river lands in southern Upper Canada far exceeded the supply, the Six Nations surrendered and sold piece after piece, until now, in lieu of their old-time real estate, they have deposited with the government upwards of eight hundred thousand dollars—the interest on which they draw bi-annually, individually, the amount varying in accordance with the expenditure they make on public works within their own reserve.

The Departmental census returns of 1890 show the entire Indian population of Canada to be 122,585. The Six Nations of the Grand River are but a seeming drop in the ocean, numbering as they do 35,000. In the accompanying sketches from life Mr. Heming has portrayed most accurately men who may be regarded as perfect types of their respective tribes, yet men who are brothers all, bound by the invisible but powerful ties which have existed since the formation of the great Iroquois confederacy, more than four hundred years ago—that mighty alliance which historians and scholars alike declare to be one of the most faultless and impregnable governmental constitutions known in the world's history. In a measure, these people are to-day self-governing. At their councils, swayed by Chiefs who are still elected in accordance with ancient rule, they debate and decide the policy that is really scarcely subject to the sanction of the Dominion Government; and, to their credit be it known, the wise old chiefs so understand the requirements of the people that rarely indeed does the Government feel that her Grand River subjects require her guiding hand. Law-abiding, diligent, and intelligent, the Six Nations are advancing every year both civilly and intellectually,—with regret the term "religiously" must be omitted. To be sure there are missionaries—Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Plymouth, aye—even the ever zealous Salvation Army has reached the reserve, and yet there still remain 500 Pagans, living exemplary lives in a way, moral, upright, industrious, believing in the all-caring, all-good one, "The Great Spirit"—worshipping and loving a far-off God—understanding all things beautiful except the story of the Cross.

The bells ring out from the towers of the Brantford sanctuaries scarcely a dozen miles distant from the Pagan settlements, where the devotions of the Onondagas ascend heavenward through the medium of dances, chants and burnt offerings—but few indeed there are in that thriving little city who

seem to heed the cry—not from far off Macedonia, but from the voices at their own doorstep calling out year after year "Come over and help us." These Pagans still offer annually the sacrifice of the "White Dog," with burning incense and beautiful faith in the efficacy of its power to transmit aloft on its curling blue wings all their prayers and their desires until it reaches the lodge of the "Great Spirit" and lays at his feet the burden of these beautifully ignorant, exquisitely simple hearts.

One feels almost driven to demand "What are the missionaries about? And why has so little progress been made towards Christianizing this tribe and their co-religionists among the Senecas and Cayugas. These people are civilized, and being educated, surely the demands made upon the missionaries by the flock within the church's fold cannot be so extortionate that they find no moments to spare wherein they may graft the bud of Christianity into this tree so well prepared to receive and nourish it. And yet one can scarcely deplore their lives lived in such absolute fidelity to their God whom they honour and adore as did the ancient Jews. Still do the Onondagas join in the dances of praise and supplication, when at corn planting time they ask for the blessings of an abundant harvest, still do they gather together at berry-picking season to give thanks by strange wild chants and stranger dances for the gift of all good fruits, still do they congregate in the autumn for a general thanksgiving to the Great Spirit for all His mercies in supplying their needs, and giving them this day their daily bread.

The Anglican church has the vantage ground on the Grand River reserve, backed as she is by the New England Company that for two hundred and forty years has worked actively among the North American Indians.

One of their churches, beautiful St. Paul's, built near the celebrated Sour Springs, in the very heart of the reserve, would be a credit to any of our Canadian cities; its wide, deep chancel, its crimson and gold draped altar, perfect in all its appointments, its pretty little organ, its long row of pews and carpeted aisles, its lofty gothic roof and richly stained glass windows through which the sunlight blazes in quaint and gorgeous coloring over the dark, bowed heads of the native worshippers, is a bit of beauty that, once seen, is never forgotten.

Little St. John's at the opposite side of the reserve boasts a Mohawk pastor, the Rev. Isaac Bearfoot, who took Orders at Huron College, London, and who has translated into the Mohawk language a collection of hymns, that are used in the churches throughout the entire reserve.

Touching the educational facilities, there are eleven district schools, whereat the pupils receive instruction preparatory to attending the Mohawk Institute—which is generally admitted to be the most complete and desirable boarding school for children in Canada. The total average attendance at the day schools is 173 daily, and during the year 1890, fifteen boys and seventeen girls entered the institution, the applicants for admission far exceeding the accommodation of the school. The Rev. R. Ashton is the present superintendent, and represents conscientiously the interests of the New England Company, but the school had its birth upwards of twenty-five years ago, when the late Venerable Archdeacon Nelles, who was near the close of his long and faithful labours as a missionary, could watch over and guard this school as a mother guards an only child, and the kindly love of that gentle old heart is here perpetuated annually, by the awarding of the "Nelles Medal" for general proficiency.

The scholars who graduate from these class rooms have the opportunity of attending the Collegiate Institute in Brantford, the distance being only a mile. There are here at present two more than ordinarily interesting pupils. They are both Blackfoot boys, and last autumn they came alone, without the knowledge of a word of English, all the way from the Blackfoot Reserve in the North West Territory. Little "Fire Ears" is the son of

Chief North Axe, who in company with five other prominent Chiefs visited Ontario the year following the late North-West rebellion. Mr. Heming has sketched the boys just as they arrived in Brantford, and I understand the little fellows evince much intelligence and inclination towards advancement, although they have discouraging odds to fight against in conquering English without the aid of an interpreter.

The Six Nations are a self-supporting people; thrift, industry and ambition are yearly asserting themselves, their presence endorsed by the well cleared farms and natty cottages of the successful wooers of Fortune. Bordering the Grand River there are some lovely little estates, with well-built brick houses, smoothly rolled lawns, dainty flower-beds, fields of yellow corn and grain, stacks of corn crouching closely to ample barns, fine horses and sleek cattle. I regret that Mr. Heming is able to give but one sketch of an Indian home—that of "Chiefswood," the residence of the late Chief G. H. M. Johnson. It is one of the loveliest spots in Brant county, the estate consisting of 200 acres of rich arable land, and is wooded about the homestead with splendid walnuts, oaks and elms. So famous had become the magnificent walnuts of "Chiefswood," that when the Marquis of Lorne was Canada's Governor-General he requested of the late chief some seed nuts to send to his Scottish home. I have not heard for some years how the wee Indian-nurtured seedlings are doing in the soil that lies about Bonnie Inverary Castle. Do the little leaves, I wonder, long to breathe their far-off native air, or to look down the southward slopes, where the old Grand River tosses and ripples at the feet of their parent trees?

But in many Indian homes prosperity forgets to smile—homes that consist of but one room constructed of logs, of comfortless emptiness, of barren larders, of extreme poverty. Oftentimes the cause is not difficult to discover, it lies at the door of the nearest tavern, and has been transmitted by the white man's hand. Not that there are no improvident or lazy Indians,—these individuals throng in every nation—but take the general household, where the father is one who never drinks, and the son not a frequenter of the miserable little villages fringing the skirts of the reserve, and one will generally find a well-built log or frame house, a goodly supply of corn, and, in an average season, of root crops also. In many homes there are sewing machines, in some few, organs, and in almost every yard a pig or two; but where the poison of bad liquor is, (and no one ever dreams that the "poison" lies more in the inferior quality of the whiskey that is so often considered "good enough for Indians" than in the quantity they take), there is sure to follow misery and degradation, to the people who knew not what vice, ill-living or disease meant before "the white man's footprints" were seen, and the sooner that the world sees the folly of attempting to civilize Indians by bringing the Bible in one hand and the bottle in the other, just so soon will it realize the fact that Indian brain and Indian bone can help in the upbuilding of the grand young country that Iroquois hearts and arms have loved and served so loyally.

Obsweken, the central village of the reserve, has clustered itself about the Agricultural Hall, where in the entire Six Nations hold their annual industrial exhibition—which, by the way, is really a marvel in its representation of farm, dairy, culinary and artistic enterprise—and about the old white frame Council house, that has heard so many stormy debates, so many eloquent speeches, so much of law-making, while its picture-covered walls stare down at the venerable chieftans and braves going through the same ceremonial rites that their ancestors practised four hundred years ago, and most honoured of all the pictures there are three steel engravings, framed in gold. One is the face of a noble, handsome man, the Prince Consort; its companion, that of the earnest, soldierly boy Prince, donor of the three portraits, Arthur, Duke of Connaught and Chief of the Six Nations Indians. Above them both, its frame draped with a Union Jack, the face of a woman, young, kindly, queenly; beneath it the single word,

"VICTORIA."