

The constant tradition of the Iroquois represents their ancestors as emigrants from the region north of the great lakes, where they dwelt in early times with their Huron brethren. This tradition is recorded, with much particularity, by Cadwalader Colden, Surveyor General of New York, who in the early part of the last century composed his well-known "History of the Five Nations." It is told in a somewhat different form by David Cusick, the Tuscarora historian, in his "Sketches of Ancient History of the Six Nations;" and it is repeated by Mr. L. H. Morgan in his now classical work, "The League of the Iroquois," for which he procured his information chiefly among the Senecas. Finally, as we learn from the narrative of the Wyandot Indian, Peter Clarke, in his book entitled "Origin and Traditional History of the Wyandotts," the belief of the Hurons accords in this respect with that of the Iroquois. Both point alike to the country immediately north of the St. Lawrence, and especially to that portion of it lying east of Lake Ontario, as the early home of the Huron-Iroquois nations.

How far does the evidence of language, which is the final test, agree with that of tradition? To answer this question we have to inquire which language, the Huron or the Iroquois, bears marks of being oldest in form, and nearest to the mother language,—or, in other words, to the original Huron-Iroquois speech. Though we know nothing directly of this speech, yet, when we have several sister-tongues of any stock, we can always reconstruct, with more or less completeness, the original language from which they were derived; and we know, as a general rule, that among these sister-tongues, the one which is most complete in its form and in its phonology is likely to be nearest in structure, as well as in the residence of those who speak it, to this mother speech. Thus, if history told us nothing on the subject, we should still infer that, among what are termed the Latin nations of Europe, the Italians were nearest to the mother people,—and, in like manner, that the original home of the Aryans was not among the Teutons or the Celts, but somewhere between the speakers of the Sanscrit and of the Greek languages.

Our materials for a comparison of the Huron and the Iroquois are not as full as could be desired. They are, however,

letter to the author: "To my mind, the structure of such a language as the Mohawk is quite sufficient evidence that those who worked out such a work of art were powerful reasoners and accurate classifiers." Not less emphatic is the judgment expressed by Professor Whitney, in his admirable work on the "Life and Growth of Language." Speaking generally of the structure of American languages, but in terms specially applicable to those of the Huron-Cherokee stock, he observes: "Of course there are infinite possibilities of expressiveness in such a structure; and it would only need that some native-American Greek race should arise, to fill it full of thought and fancy, and put it to the uses of a noble literature, and it would be rightly admired as rich and flexible, perhaps beyond anything else that the world knew." See also the excellent works of the distinguished missionary author, the Rev. J. A. Cuoq, of Montreal, on the Iroquois and Algonquin languages, in which abundant examples are given of the richness and power of those tongues.