

CHIEF GEORGE H. M. JOHNSON.

(ONWANONSYSHON.)

His Life and Work Among the Six Nations.

BY HORATIO MALE.

The chief, now firmly established in his new office, set about the measures which he had long had in view for the benefit of his people. The first and most important of these was to get rid of the gangs of white ruffians who then hung about the Reserve, corrupting and impoverishing the Indians by the illicit sale of liquor, and by combining with the more ignorant among them to rob the Reserve of its valuable store of timber.



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It was an evil of long standing, against which all efforts had hitherto seemed fruitless. It remained to be seen what could be done by an efficient superintendent and a zealous native warden. One prosecution after another, leading usually to fines and imprisonment, was brought against the dealers in illicit whiskey. At length they became thoroughly alarmed. Their active and resolute pursuer must be disposed of. One day in January, 1865, two men encountered the chief walking alone. While one of them drew his attention by some remarks the other suddenly struck him on the head from behind, with the heavy butt of a whip. He fell insensible, and as he lay was beaten in a most brutal manner, resulting in fractured bones and internal injuries. His assailants believed him to be dead, or at least disabled for life. After he was brought home, he lay for five days unconscious. A long illness followed, but his strong constitution finally triumphed. He recovered, but bore till his death the disfigurement and the enfeebling effects of his injuries. Of the criminals one fled and escaped; the other served a term of five years in the penitentiary.

No sooner had the chief regained sufficient strength to enable him to resume his duties than he renewed his crusade against the law-breakers with as much energy as ever. The liquor vendors had been sufficiently alarmed and cowed. The timber plunderers, who belonged to a somewhat higher class, and who acted with the connivance of many Indian confederates, were more difficult to deal with. Against them he waged a troublesome contest of watching, warnings, seizures and prosecutions for several years, and acquired their deadly hostility. In the ordinary intercourse of society the chief was always gentle, courteous and unassuming; but in dealing with

the corrupters and despoilers of his people his manner totally changed. He knew them to be men utterly callous and unscrupulous, and only to be subdued by the strong hand and the terrors of the law. To them he was stern and imperious, as if the spirit and temper of twenty generations of the great chiefs, his ancestors, had been concentrated in his tone and manner. This deportment in "an Indian" filled the measure of their wrath to overflowing. At length their rage had its outbreak. In October, 1873, the chief was encountered on a lonely road, at midnight, by six men, who suddenly set upon him with bludgeons, knocked him down, breaking two of his ribs and a finger, and finally shot him with a revolver, and left him for dead. Recovering, however, he was able to crawl home; and once more, after a long illness, his wonderful vitality triumphed. He regained his strength, but his constitution was irretrievably shattered. He became subject to frequent attacks of neuralgia and erysipelas, which at times incapacitated him for work. But in the intervals of these attacks he continued as alert as ever in the performance of this duties.

These duties, however, no longer included the war with lawless and degraded white men. The last murderous attack upon him had aroused a flame of popular indignation. All classes, whites and Indians alike, shared in the sentiment and in determination to crush the mischief. Before this blaze of public wrath the vile conspiracy



CHIFSWOOD. HOME OF CHIEF GEORGE H. M. JOHNSON.

shrivelled at once, as if smitten by lightning. The malefactors were hunted down, and expiated their crime either in prison or by flight and self-banishment. From that day the Reserve has been as safe and as free from open violations of the law as any part of Canada.

While the chief was waging the war against lawlessness which was thus at last concluded, he had been active in other plans for the benefit and improvement of his people. It was his way to proceed rather by example than by precept. A fortunate venture, into which a merchantile friend had persuaded him, and yielded a good profit and put him in funds. The Indians on the Reserve had for the most part lived on their

scattered farms in the small log cabins which had replaced their earlier bark-built habitations. A few attempts at a better style of residence had been made; but that an Indian should compete with the wealthy whites in this way was not expected. The chief, who had a natural taste and talent for architecture, erected on his farm one of the finest dwellings in the county. A white stuccoed building, of two lofty stories and a spacious and imposing front, rose, elegant and stately, upon a terraced eminence overlooking the Grand River, in the midst of a parklike grove, in which almost every variety of the native woods was represented. The example proved infectious. The traveler crossing the Reserve sees already, here and there, the new and comfortable dwellings of frame or brick, which are gradually replacing the rude log tenements of former days. The house, it may be added, obtained for its possessor the Indian personal name by which (apart from his hereditary designation, in the council) he was best known—that of Onwanonsyshon—"He who has the great mansion."

The Iroquois have always been an agricultural people. Their extensive plantations of maize, beans, and pumpkins excited the admiration of the first explorers. Since their removal to Canada their industry and aptitude as farmers have been notable. The wheat market of Brantford has for many years been largely supplied from the Reserve. To direct this industry into the

best channels, and to furnish it with the latest scientific aids, was a most desirable object. The chief took a zealous part in establishing an agricultural society on the Reserve. An older chief, whose influence would be useful, was made president, while Chief George assumed the humbler but more important duties of secretary. The annual exhibitions of the so-

ciety, beginning on a modest scale, now rival those of the neighboring townships. Of the progress which agriculture has made on the Reserve, of late years, a judgement may be formed from a single fact. A visitor, not long ago, passing through a part of the Reserve, counted in his morning's drive five threshing-machines at work, all owned and managed by Indians.

The chief was a member of the Provincial Horticultural Association, and frequently attended its meetings, where his judicious remarks were always heard with pleasure and respect, by

*The chief was accustomed to annex to his signature a peculiar hieroglyphic, somewhat representing the letter Z enclosing a dot, which he explained as an arm embracing a heart—an ancient Indian symbol of friendship.