

THE INDIAN POETESS: A STUDY.

BY HECTOR W. CHARLESWORTH.

The steady progress by which Miss E. Pauline Johnson has risen to the prominent position she now occupies in the literature of this continent, and more particularly in our northern part of it, has made her fame more secure than if her appearance in the literary horizon had been more meteor-like and her writings been as much a source of wonder as of admiration. It is safe to say that in Canada, at least, there are few people who claim in any way to take an intelligent interest in current letters, who have not read and admired her work. Her recitals have created a literary appetite and appreciation in many quarters where it hitherto was not; and a study of her genius is at this time peculiarly appropriate.

Miss Johnson has been a writer of slow development. At an age when most poets have sifted the sands of life and begun to suspect that all is vanity and vexation of spirit, she had not published a line. She is now at the beginning of the very prime of her life. So far her poetic genius has grown in richness; her powers of expression have increased from year to year, and at present it would be futile to hazard what the future has in store for her. A consideration of what she has already given us excites the utmost admiration and delight; her published poems number about half a hundred, and about forty of these, it is to be hoped, we will in the near future see perpetuated in book form.

Emily Pauline Johnson lived the early part of her life among the beautiful landscapes of the Grand River region and there imbibed much of the freedom and beauty which she has since imparted to her poetry. Born in the County of Brant, on the reserve

of her Iroquois ancestors, as a little child many of her amusements were such as they might have been had she been born centuries before, instead of in the latter part of the *blasé* nineteenth century. A few words about her Mohawk descent and the bearing it may have had on her career may be interesting. As is generally known she is the daughter of the late Chief G. H. M. Johnson, of Brantford. He was a polished gentleman of great linguistic acquirements—he could speak seven languages with ease—and was noted in his English speeches for his wonderful eloquence and beauty of expression. Writing in *The Magazine of American History* after his death, Horatio Hale said: "The career of this eminent Mohawk chief who did more, perhaps, than any individual of our time for the elevation and advancement of his kindred of the red race deserves a more permanent record than that of a newspaper obituary." Her grandfather, who died in 1886 at the age of ninety-four, a veteran of the war of 1812, was for forty years Speaker of the Six Nations council. He was noted for his exquisitely flowery and musical language, inasmuch that he was known as "The Mohawk Warbler." Still more interesting is the account of her father's mother. To quote again the great Indianologist, Horatio Hale: "The Iroquois women have always been noted for their high spirit and turn for public affairs;" and this grandmother of Miss Johnson held in the federation of the Six Nations the position of "matron" of the Teyonhehkon—a title which may be termed a peerage, having been handed down from one of the associates of Hiawatha in the fifteenth century, he having borne this title in the first