

Lake Erie, and including the Senecas, Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneidas and Mohawks, a fierce, intelligent, unscrupulous confederacy or league of tribes, estimated afterwards by La Hontan at 70,000 in number, warring with neighbours and extending their boundaries in every direction, their very name a terror over half the northern part of the American continent. Allied to these by blood and language, although at the dawn of history at bitter enmity with them, were the Hurons, estimated at 30,000 to 40,000 in number, inhabiting the eastern border of the great lake which now bears their name. The Neutral Nation also inhabiting the peninsula of Upper Canada, and of the Iroquois stock, were, with the Eries, destroyed by the confederated Iroquois almost before their contact with the whites, and scarcely figure in history.

Following the more fertile country of the valley of the St. Lawrence, there appears to have been an outlying member of the great Iroquois-Huron family, holding the banks of the River and present sites of Montreal and Quebec, while the Algonkians, as we have already seen, peopled all the neighbouring regions.

Such were the main features in the distribution of the Indian nations of the north-east portion of the Continent at the time when they were about to be brought into contact with a stronger external power. In regard to their internal condition and progress in the arts, notwithstanding the gloss with which time may to some extent cover these aborigines, we cannot disguise from ourselves that they were for the most part the veriest savages. The northern Algonkians were found rarely, if ever, cultivating the soil, even on the most limited scale; hunters, fishermen adding to their dietary such wild roots and berries as the country happened to afford; living from hand to mouth, with little providence even for the annually recurring season of cold; probably then, as now among the more remote tribes, not infrequently forced even to cannibalism during seasons of scarcity; wanderers, not as some of them afterwards became in the service of the great fur companies, over immense areas of the Continent, but each little tribe migrating, with the seasons, in its accustomed district, from the lake abounding in trout or white fish, to the region frequented by deer, or the rocky hills and islands where berries ripened most abundantly; battling, with scanty means, against the heat of summer and the winter's cold, and not usually living with any sense either of security in life or in