

THE INDIAN.

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Where are our Chiefs of old? Where our Heroes of mighty name?
The fields of their battles are silent—scarce their mossy tombs remain!—OSSIAN.

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AHOENDOE;

THE LAST REFUGE OF THE HURONS.

By A. F. Hunter.

In the southeast corner of Georgian Bay, there is a group of large islands, now reserved by the government for the use of the Indians—the Christian Islands: When the Chippewas first arrived there, in their migration of the early part of last century from the Lake Superior district, they found on the largest of the group a few French christianized Indians, speaking a language altogether different from their own. This circumstance at once gave the islands a name, and they continued to be known by the early voyagers as the "Îles des Chrétiens." The few Indians thus found have long ago perished or become merged into the great Chippewa nation, but the name is still retained, being applied to the largest island. In olden times it played an important part in Canadian history; it was known among the Huron Indians as Ahoendoe. The old tradition, which tells how these came to be called the Christian Islands, does not give the name of the tribe to which the christian Indians belonged; but it is not improbable that they were a remnant of the ancient Hurons, gathered around the ruins of the last stronghold of their tribe.

The record of the Hurons is familiar to all readers of early Canadian history. The first important notice of them that we possess is given by Champlain. In 1615, he visited their native district. This coincided, at the time of his visit, with the North riding of the present County of Simcoe; but in recent years their remains have been discovered all over a large portion of central Ontario. Champlain found this small area peopled about thirty thousand—a number fully as great as the rural population of the same district at the present day. He learned also that they had been at war with the Iroquois of New York state for many years, and accompanied a large war party on an expedition against their enemies. Thirty-five years later, this long standing feud ended in the complete triumph of the Iroquois.

Champlain has left an account of the Huron's country and their manners of living; but the fullest is given by the Jesuit missionaries whom he introduced among them, and who toiled earnestly for several years. Systematic mission work may be said to have begun in 1634, although Father Brebeuf had previously spent three years with them. From 1634 until the extirpation of the tribe by the Iroquois in 1650, these missionaries labored continuously in their country. In

1639 a fortified mission was built on the river Wye, not far from the present town of Penetanguishine, and called Sainte Marie. This served as headquarters for the missionaries, who had by this time established over a score of mission stations in the country around.

The attacks of the Iroquois upon the Hurons became more frequent and severe; village after village fell before them. In this protracted war no less than five of the Jesuits were massacred. As most of our readers are aware, a handsome cathedral is now in course of erection at Penetanguishine, as a memorial of these martyrs who perished in this bitter war.

The condition of affairs at the chief mission of Sainte Marie on the Wye became so serious that the priests decided to abandon the scene of their labors, and take refuge on the island of Ahoendoe, whither most of the surviving Hurons had fled. They embarked on a raft on June 14, 1649, and reached their destination a few days later. They spent the remainder of that Summer in building their new fort on Ahoendoe. The site selected was on the shore of the little bay which makes a deep indentation in the south side of the island, and distant perhaps two or three miles from the nearest point of the mainland. Like the abandoned mission on the Wye, it was called Sainte Marie.

With remarkable fortitude the Indians set to work under the direction of the Jesuits, and aided in the erection of the new fort. It was built about ten rods from the shore, and was rectangular in shape, with bastions on all four corners. The walls which enclosed about half an acre, were of solid masonry, built of stones mostly flat, and of a size convenient to carry. Along the shore the wall was above twelve feet high, and the whole construction was surrounded by a ditch. Its ruins, although nearly two centuries and a half old, are still to be seen. Except in a few places, the walls have crumbled down. The lighthouse keeper, a man who has spent most of his life on the island, once informed me that thirty years ago they were as high again as they are to-day; but farm stock from the present Indian village have trampled over them.

Springs of running water have burst out here and there within the enclosed area. These, running down the bay, have produced a dense swamp over the ruins, as well as the intervening space between them and the shore. Small trees are growing so thickly together as to be impassable in some places; and owing to the marshy nature of the ground, the whole scene is uninviting to visitors.

There is a remarkable semi-enclosure of high masonry near the centre. It is shaped like a

horse shoe, its greatest breadth being about six feet, and its greatest length about twelve. A spring bubbles up within it, and the water flows through the open side. As there was a well in the fort at the time of its occupation, very probably it was used for that purpose.

The formation underlying Ahoendoe is Trenton; viewed from the water, it consists of ranges of low hills, thickly wooded from the shore to their summits with pine, beech, and maple. This dense forest afforded a shelter to the Hurons from the attacks of Iroquois scalping parties.

In the autumn of 1649, about eight thousand Hurons gathered around the fort for protection; of priests and their French attendants there were about fifty. Before winter set in, quantities of Indian corn, smoked fish, and acorns were collected for the support of the Hurons during the approaching winter. But this was not sufficient; and before spring, over half of the inhabitants died of starvation and disease. The Jesuits were forced to leave Ahoendoe, and on June 10th, 1850, with a remnant of about three hundred Hurons, they made their departure for Quebec. The abandonment of this place brought to a close one of the bitterest Indian wars on record. The wooden buildings within the fort were burned, in order that they might not harbor the victorious Iroquois. Seven or eight years ago, the melted remains of the chapel bell were found in a corner of the ruins.

The place has yielded a large quantity of relics. Besides a number of brass utensils bearing French inscriptions, a great number of French coins of the period have been found, and sometimes human bones. A steel mill, used for making sacramental wafers, was found there in 1848, in a remarkably good state of preservation. It is now in the British Museum.

There are many interesting remains on the island. The writer picked up a number of pottery fragments, etc., on the lighthouse plot, at a short distance from the lighthouse—a large white stone tower that guards the gap between the island and the neighboring peninsula of Tiny. At the place where these fragments were found, traces of several large Huron lodges are visible. Their pots were made of baked clay, skilfully ornamented, and often quite large. Their method of cooking in them was very primitive. Having placed the raw food (fish, game, corn, &c.) in one of these earthen pots filled with water, they threw in hot stones until it was cooked. As a rule, the interior surface of their pottery wears a black, sooty appearance from having been used in this way. All the remains on the island bear witness of the literal truth of the records that give the history of this remarkable Indian nation.