

CHIEF GEORGE H. M. JOHNSON.

(ONWANONSYSYHON.)

His Life and Work Among the Six Nations.

BY HORATIO HALE.

The proceedings which has just been related will doubtless elicit a smile from some readers, who may be reminded by it of the wholesale military conversions of the Middle Ages. Chief Johnson himself, in after days, would have cared little for a convert who had been gained otherwise than by reasoning and the influence of religion. By nature he was one of the most reasonable and tolerant of men. In later life he counted among his most valued friends many whose opinions on political and religious questions differed very widely from his own.

His marriage was an event which exercised a strong influence on his character and fortunes. He was married on the 27th of August, 1853, to Miss Emily Susanna Howells, a sister of the wife of his missionary patron and teacher, the Rev. Mr. Elliott. Coming of a good family in the ancient English city of Bristol, Miss Howells had many near relatives in distinguished professional and political positions, both in Canada and the United States, including the late able and eloquent American consul in Toronto, the Hon. Wm. C. Howells, and the eminent author W. D. Howells. As may be readily imagined, the companionship and influence of a refined and accomplished lady, belonging to a family noted for literary tastes and talent, did much to develop the husband's naturally good capacity, and to fit him not only for the work in which he was then employed, but also for the wider field of usefulness which was soon to open to him.

While he was engaged in his duties as church intrepeter, he was called to take part in the civil government of his people. One of the associates of Hiawatha was a Mohawk chief, who bore the designation of Teyonhehkon, or "Double-Life." He was, as has been said, one of the fifty great chiefs who composed the first federal council of the Five Nations. His name descended to his successors, like the title of an English peerage. It had been last borne by George's maternal uncle, whose English name was Henry Martin. On the death of a chief, the duty of nominating a successor—who must be one of his kinsmen on his mother's side—devolves by Iroquois law upon the oldest matron of the family, who is commonly known as their "chief matron." This position in the family of the deceased chief was held by George's mother, who, after due consideration and consultation, named her son for the place. Such a nomination, to be valid, must be approved and confirmed both by the tribe to which the candi-

date belongs and by the Great Council of which he is to be a member. In the present case this confirmation was speedily given, and the young chief took his place as one of the legislators of his people.

By a singular chance, which illustrated alike the Iroquois institutions and the character of the race, he was not long allowed to hold this position undisturbed. His ability as an interpreter, and his character for energy and probity, had attracted the attention of a newly appointed Visiting Superintendent,—as the officer is styled who represents the Canadian Government on the Reserve. Through the nomination of Col. Gilkison—who now for more than twenty years has filled this responsible office to the satisfaction alike of the Government and of his Indian wards—George Johnson was appointed to the post of Government Interpreter for the Six Nations. A modest salary attached to the office formed an acceptable addition to his income; but the post

He became, in fact, and was often styled, the Warden of the Reserve. It was a post highly congenial to his disposition, and he assumed its duties with his usual energy.

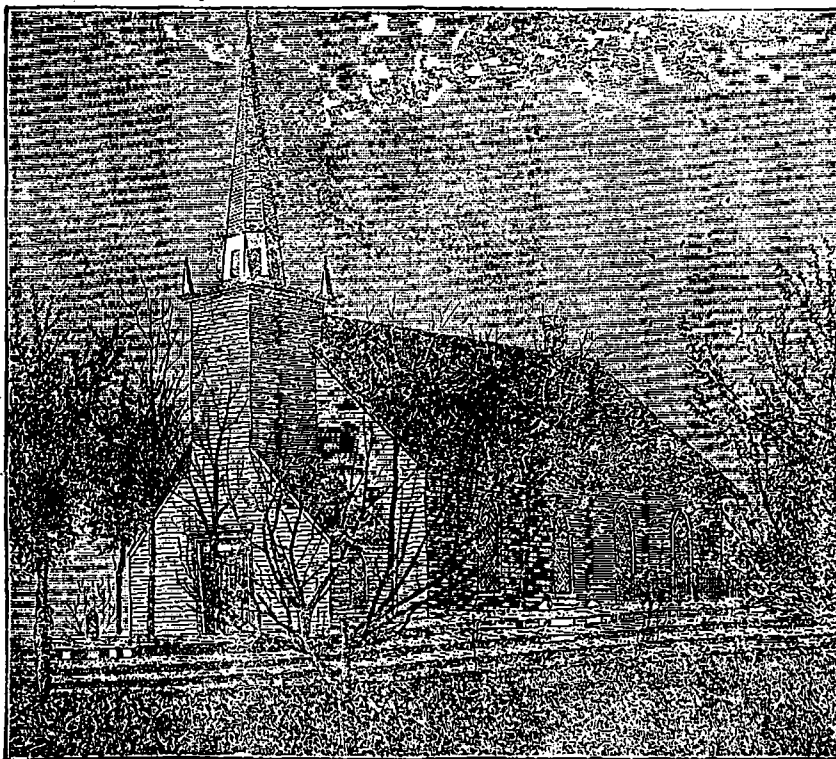
But he had hardly entered upon them when an unexpected difficulty arose. Was it consistent with the principles of the Iroquois constitution that a salaried official of the colonial government should be a member of the Legislative Council? The question was warmly discussed. The case was new, and there was no precedent to use for a guide. The general opinion was unfavorable; and at length it was understood that at the next meeting of the council the new Teyonhehkon would on this ground be displaced from his chieftainship. But the councilors had reckoned without their hostess. The chief matron, when she learned of the indignity, as she deemed it, which was about to be inflicted on her son and the chief of her choice, was greatly moved. The Iroquois women have always been noted for their spirit

and their turn for public affairs. In this instance the matron, who was both the wife and sister of a chief, understood—or believed she understood—the principles of their government better than the councillors themselves. There was no doubt of the right of the great council to eject one of its members; but this, it was well known, must be done for a good cause. It had never before been done except for some delinquency of the ejected person himself. To deprive a councilor of his office, not for anything he had done, but for something which they feared he might do, was, she acutely reasoned, not only unprecedented, but unjust. Using her privilege as a peeress, she presented herself before the council at their next meeting, and there delivered her mind. After soundly rating the members for their unconstitutional and arbitrary purpose, she ended by declaring that if they deprived her son of his chieftainship for no misconduct of his

own, she would never nominate a candidate so long as she should live. This threat startled the assemblage. If it were carried out, the Mohawks who formed the leading confederacy, would lose one of their nine representatives in the council. The matter was reconsidered, and a conclusion was finally reached which satisfied all scruples. Chief George was to retain his title and his seat in the council, but so long as he remained a salaried official, a resolution of the council (which usually required a unanimous vote) should be valid without his assent. Thus jealously did these freeborn sons of the forest guard the independence of their parliament.

(To be Continued.)

If the Indian female be compared to a shadow it is a shadow which reflects the softer outlines of the substance. There is grace and modesty in the rudest female of the forest.



THE OLD MOHAWK CHURCH, ERECTED IN 1784, SHOWING BRANT'S TOMB.

was chiefly prized by him for the large opportunities which it offered him of benefiting his people. The humble title of the office gave no idea of the duties and powers attached to it, or rather, it should be said, which quickly annexed themselves to it when held by the new incumbent. In strictness, perhaps, he had only to interpret between the superintendent and council, and also in courts of justice, when Indian witnesses were called, and to attend when the semi-annual distribution of the annuities which occurred to the Indians from the sale of their lands. But as the interpreter was necessarily the chief assistant of the superintendent, and as powers and responsibilities naturally flow to the capable and the willing, it was not long before he found himself the chief executive officer on the Reserve, charged with the duty of carrying into execution both the laws enacted by the council and the regulations framed by the protecting government.