

# OUR FOREST CHILDREN,

PUBLISHED IN THE INTEREST OF INDIAN EDUCATION AND CIVILIZATION.

VOL. III, No. 5.]

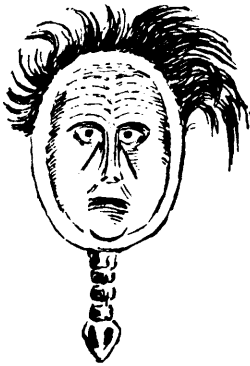
SHINGWAUK HOME, AUGUST, 1889.

[NEW SERIES, No. 3.

## Indian Tribes—Paper No. 3.

### THE MOHAWK INDIANS.

By Rev. E. F. Wilson.



No Indian people has more been written than of the six tribes which form the Iroquois Confederacy, or in other words: the Confederacy of the Six Nation Indians. These six nations were the Mohawks, the Oneidas, the Onondagas, the Cayugas, the Senecas, and the Tuscaroras. Of

these the Mohawks appear to have been the original people, and the Mohawk language that from which the dialects of the other five tribes have sprung. More distantly related to them are the Hurons, the Wyandottes, the Caughnawagas, and the great nation of the Cherokees.

The ancient possessions of the Iroquois Indians were very extensive. An ancient map, made by the British Ordnance Department, about the year 1720, shows their southern boundary as running through the centre of North Carolina, west to the Mississippi; thence along that river and the course of the Illinois, to the southern end of Lake Michigan; thence through the centre of that lake to a point in Canada north of the Great Lakes; thence eastward to the Atlantic. Their neighbors in those days were the "Leni Lenapi," or Delawares. There is a tradition among the Delawares, that they and the Iroquois (or Mengwes,) came from the far West, crossed the Mississippi together, expelled the mound-builders east of it, and so eventually won their ancient seats.

The Mohawks, in common with the other tribes of the Confederacy, were called *Iroquois* by the French. Whence they derived the name of Mohawk is doubtful. Governor Pownall, in his "Treatise on the study of Antiquities," published in 1782, says that "ma" is a common term among many Indian tribes for "here,

on this side," and "aki," or "ak," is likewise a common term for people,—hence 'Mohawk' means 'the people on this side.' Another idea is that it is a corruption of the Ojebway name "Makwa," meaning a bear—the bear being one of their "totems." They do not, however, call themselves Mohawks. Their proper name is "Kanyeageh," or "Kanienga," meaning "the people of the flint."

Mr. Hale, in his pamphlet on "The Iroquois Confederation," gives a most interesting insight into the character and condition of these people, as they were first found by Europeans. Notwithstanding that their implements and weapons were made of flint and bone, their ornaments of shells, and their pottery of rude construction, they nevertheless gave evidence of being, in their own way, he says, "acute reasoners, eloquent speakers, and most skilful and far-seeing politicians. For more than a century, though never mustering more than 5,000 fighting men, they were able to hold the balance of power on this continent between France and England; in a long series of negotiations they proved themselves qualified to cope in council with the best diplomatists whom either of these powers could depute to deal with them. . . Their internal polity was marked by equal wisdom, and had been developed and consolidated into a system of government, embodying many of what are deemed the best principles and methods of political science—representation, federation, self-government through local and general legislatures,—all resulting in personal liberty, combined with strict subordination to public law."

W. C. Bryant says of these people: "Oratory was not alone a natural gift, but an art, among the Iroquois. Their language was flexible and sonorous, the sense largely depending on inflection, copious in vowel sounds, abounding in metaphor, capable of giving expression to various shades of thought—much, we may fancy—as was the tuneful tongue spoken by our first parents, who stood in even closer relations to nature. That great incentive to eloquence, patriotism, was not lacking to those Ciceros of the wilds. They were proud of their history, and their achievements; devotedly attached to their institutions, and enthusiastic at the mention of the long line of chieftains and sages, who,