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THE STORY OF THE
EARLIEST SCRIPTURES IN
THE MOHAWK TONGUE

UPPER CANADA BIBLE SOCIETY

14 COLLEGE STREET, TORONTO



The Story of the Earliest Scriptures in the Mohawk Tongue

THE story stretches over nearly nine decades—1715 to 1804. Its episodes belong to times before and after the revolutionary war of 1776. Not a little of its interest is derived from the picturesque personalities concerned; not a little also from its linking together beginnings of movements which profoundly influenced the



DR. STUART.

evolution of events. The chief interest lies in the greatness of the issues flowing from a part of Scripture being given the wings of a new destiny.

The Mohawk Indians occupy the centre of the story. Their migration under the pressure of revolutionary persecution from the

State of New York to Upper Canada is its governing incident, their dispersion bringing together in friendship and co-operation partners so unlikely as a refugee minister of the Christian Church and a chief of the war-spent Indians. Pioneers, both of them, in their distinctive ways, and partners whole-hearted in the same self-sacrificing toil, these two are figures conspicuous in the dawn of Ontario history.

A third figure enters the story before the end, not any less interesting, but shadowy because less fully known, though playing a part decisive in the issue of it all.



(Romney.)

CHIEF JOSEPH BRANT.

One incidental feature of the story to be remarked is the degree to which this Indian tribe excited the interest of the British monarchy and government of that time. This alone might excite the curiosity of the reader: what occasioned such interest in a people as obscure as they were remote?

That a Missionary Society (the S.P.G.) should have discovered the Mohawks, and should have endeavored to serve them and win them to the Christian faith occasions no surprise. At the instance of the S.P.G., as early as 1715, morning and evening prayer, together with some passages from the Old and New Testaments, were trans-

lated and published for their use. The little volume was re-published twice. It was a meagre meal for hungry men; but we may suppose it afforded sustenance until a larger gift was possible.

Scattered from their original home, they settled, some by way of Lachine in the Bay of Quinte, and the greater number by way of Niagara, on the Grand River near Brantford. There they were sought out by a man of apostolic soul, nicknamed paradoxically "the little gentleman," he was "of a choice shape, tall of stature, and of a most persuasive behaviour." John Stuart had been the missionary and friend of the Indians in the Mohawk Valley, had suffered



THE MOHAWK CHURCH, BRANTFORD.

at the hands of the revolutionists, and eventually made his escape to Montreal. Thence he came to Kingston (Catarqui) in 1784, and began a ministry, which was as eager for the Mohawk red men as for the scattered white men. He had discerned the Christian character of Joseph Brant, the Indian chief; Brant had recognized the disinterested devotion of Dr. Stuart; and they were fast friends. Now, fellow-sufferers for their loyalty and faith, with larger and intenser purpose Dr. Stuart and Chief Brant worked together for the common good.

The Missionary Society encouraged their joint labors, and they produced the Gospel of St. Mark and the Book of Common Prayer.

Their translation was carried to London by Indian hands, and it was published for them at the expense of the British Government. The book was printed in very good type and contained some fine engravings.

Meanwhile, near Brantford, the Mohawks were raising the first Protestant Church in Upper Canada. The Bible for the pulpit and the communion plate (bearing the Royal Arms) had been the gift to them in their old home on the Mohawk of Queen Anne, and the British Government of a later date presented them with a fine bell for the church tower.



THE STUART FAMILY VAULT (ST. PAUL'S, KINGSTON).

In Kingston, under Dr. Stuart's inspiration, was built what was probably the first church for Loyalists in the Province (old St. George's), around which came to cluster associations civil as well as ecclesiastical. Thus, in this building, the commissions were read and the oaths administered when Upper Canada became a separate province, July 8th, 1792. In this city, also, Dr. Stuart laid the foundation of the Upper Canada educational system, when he opened schools for the children alike of the Indians and of the whites.

The two cities, Kingston and Brantford, thus enjoy the heritage, among other memories, bequeathed them by these large-hearted and devoted men. . . . "Let us not forget to pay a tribute to the Loyalists of the (eighteenth) century who left their homes for the

sake of 'King and Country,' and laid the foundations of prosperous and loyal English communities by the . . . Great Lakes; . . . (and) to the unknown body of pioneers, some of whose names perhaps linger on a headland or river or on a neglected gravestone, who let in the sunlight year by year to the dense forests of these countries, and built up by their industry the large and thriving provinces of this Dominion." (Bourinot's *Life of Lord Elgin*, pp. 235, 236.)

From a partnership like that great issues were sure to flow. When they passed away their works followed them. Another took

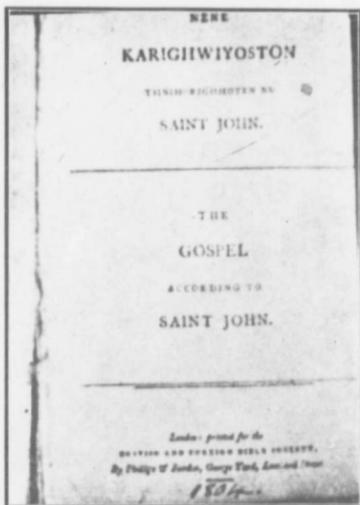


THE BRANT MEMORIAL.

up the task of giving the people yet another part of the word of God. This was John Norton. By birth a Cherokee Indian, from his infancy he had lived among the Mohawks; he became the Chief of the Six Nations; and to him in 1804 his people were indebted for the Gospel of St. John in their own tongue.

The British and Foreign Bible Society was then just being established, and the first Scripture the young Society published was this Gospel of St. John in Mohawk and English for the red men of Canada. A copy of this original is preserved in the C.B.S. museum in Toronto.

It should not be overlooked that Norton had prepared a preface to his translation, very spirited in expression, recommending the Gospel to his people; but the issue of this in the publication was at variance with the ideal of the Society, viz., to publish the Scriptures without commentary or interpretation of any kind. The preface was accordingly published separately; and it was in these circumstances that the Society formulated its foundation principle: "The Word of God without note or comment."



FLY LEAF OF ST. JOHN, MOHAWK AND ENGLISH.

Canada, the first of the beneficiaries of the Bible Society, has nobly recognized for the hundred years and more since then the magnanimity of its service for even the least among the peoples all over the earth. Mohawk was the modest beginning. The amazing sequence shows hundred after hundred of new languages made the channels which have conveyed the water of life to "the barren and parched soils of the remotest regions."