

THE INDIAN POPULATION OF CANADA—ITS HISTORY AND PRESENT CONDITION.

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The subject of the Indians of Canada presents an endless variety of topics. I shall confine myself chiefly to a brief review of their history from the time of the white man's first arrival among them, as being the best means of judging of their original character and capabilities; stating as briefly as may be the nature and consequences of the relations formed with them by the English and French in the past, as bearing upon their present condition, and also as being some guide to the proper treatment of those Indians lately come under our control in the North-West.

The first white visitors to Canada were received by the Indians with generous kindness, as was the case everywhere on this continent. All those early writers who had the best means of judging the Indian character fully support their claim to the lofty title assumed by the Iroquois—Onkwe honwe, or *real men*. "They are possessed of sound judgment, lively imagination, ready conception, and wonderful memory. All the tribes retain at least some trace of an ancient religion, handed down to them from their ancestors, and a form of government. They reflect justly upon the affairs, and better than the mass of the people among ourselves. They prosecute their ends by sure means; they evince a degree of coolness and composure which would exceed our patience; they never permit themselves to indulge in passion, but always, from a sense of honour and greatness of soul, appear masters of themselves. They are high-minded and proud, possess a courage equal to every trial, an intrepid valour, the most heroic constancy under torments, and an equanimity which neither misfortunes nor reverses can shake. Towards each other they behave with a natural politeness and attention." . . . "Towards strangers and the unfortunate they exercise a degree of hospitality and charity which might put the inhabitants of Europe to the blush."—(*Père Lefitau*.)

Other early Jesuit and Recollet missionaries who passed their lives among the Indians while uncorrupted, bear equally strong testimony to their good qualities and intelligence. And I have met many men of culture who, for scientific and other purposes, have resided a number of years among the western tribes in our own day, and who all speak highly of their good faith, hospitality and courtesy. This is more than could have been expected after the centuries of debasing influences they have been subjected to.

Although the tribes of Canada are known by many names, they may all (excepting those in the North West and British Colonies) be classed by the standard of language as belonging to the great families of the Iroquois and Algonquins. These differ so essentially from each other in character, and in the parts they have played in the history of the growth of this country, that it may perhaps be best to give a separate sketch of the history of each.

THE IROQUOIS.—Jacques Cartier found the Iroquois dwelling on both sides of the St. Lawrence, in large fortified villages (afterwards called "castles" by the English) surrounded by vast fields of maize and other produce; the fields being cleared free from stumps, and carefully tilled and manured. In Hackluyt's account of the first visit to Hochelaga* (1535) we read: "The Indians brought us great store of fish, and of bread made of millet, casting them into our boats so thick that you would have thought it to fall from Heaven." "They make also sundry sorts of pottage with the said corne, and also of pease and of beans, whereof they have great store, as also with other fruits, as musk millions and very greate cowcumbers."

We also read concerning the agriculture of the Indians of New England: "The Indians, at the first settlement of the English, performed many acts of kindness towards them; they instructed them in the manner of planting and dressing the Indian corn"—and "by selling them corn when pinched with famine, they relieved their distresses, and prevented them from perishing in a strange land and uncultivated wilderness" (Turbin's Connecticut.)

Although possessing settlements on both sides of the St. Lawrence, the great seat of the Iroquois Confederacy was in western New York, their central council-fire being at Onondaga. Here they lived long and peacefully until their great war with the Algonquins and Hurons; trading their surplus produce for the furs and skins of those tribes, the former of whom they called *Adirondacs*, meaning savages, from their living by the chase.

The Iroquois, or Five Nations, formed a federal republic composed of the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas and Senecas. Their government is thus described by the Honorable Cadwallader Colden, Surveyor General of New York, who wrote his excellent "History of the Five Nations" early in the last century, when the power of the Iroquois was at its height.

"Each of these nations is an absolute republic by itself, and every castle in each nation makes an independent republic, and is governed in all public affairs by its own sachems or old men. The authority of these rulers is gained by, and consists wholly in the opinion the rest of the nation have of their wisdom and integrity. They never execute their resolutions by force upon any of their people. Honour and esteem are their principal rewards, as shame and being despised their punishments. They have certain customs which they observe in their public transactions with other nations and in their private affairs among themselves, which it is scandalous for anyone among them not to observe and these always draw after them either public or private resentment when they are broke.

"Their leaders and captains in like manner obtain their authority by the general opinion of their courage and conduct, and lose it by a failure in those virtues.

"Their great men, both sachems and captains, are generally poorer than the common people; for they affect to give away and to distribute all the presents or plunder they get in their treaties or in war, so as to leave nothing to themselves. There is not a man in the

* Hochelaga Oseruki, or beaver dam) was probably so called from the strength of its triple palisade.