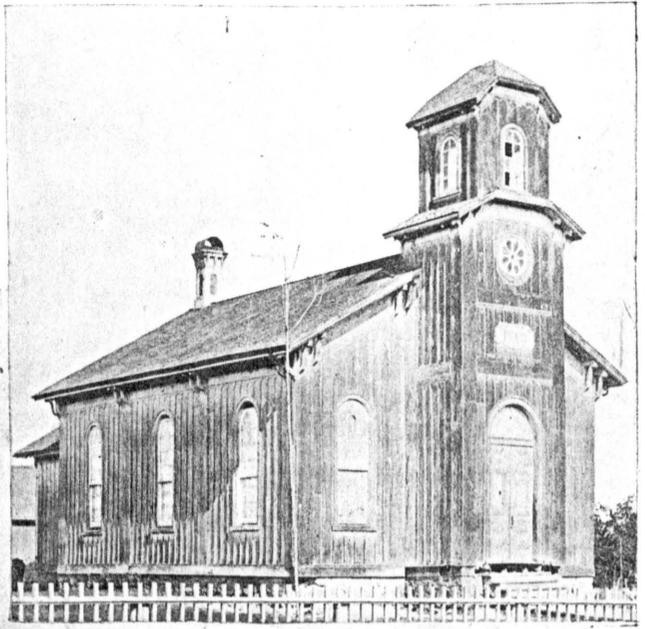


The Six Nations

There are few historical events recorded in America that are more interesting than that touching the consolidation of the "Five Nations" into one vast confederation, under the statesmanship of Hiawatha, nearly four centuries ago.

In following up the history of this people we find them, subsequent to their alliance, engaged in all the early colonial wars. French and English colonists alike feared, yet pandered to, this great war-like nation, who at one time ruled the land from the Atlantic sea-board to the Mississippi, and from North Carolina to the great lakes and river St. Lawrence.

That the remnant of this all-powerful people who once dictated terms to every white and red race on the continent, is, in the present day, a law abiding, peaceful, semi-agricultural nation, occupying a



COUNCIL HOUSE

INDIAN FAIR
OCT. 1895.

THE WAR DANCE.

great portion of our own county, and the adjoining one of Haldimand, is telling evidence of the Nineteenth century march of advancement, and the possibilities of all intelligent races that are given opportunities of absorbing what is best in their sister-nations, whether it be art, habit, or handicraft.

The English and the Iroquois, as we know them in the county of Brant, have made a brotherly exchange of many things, within the last few decades, which happily bodes more good to both nations than those erstwhile interchanges of musket shots

and tomahawks. The Canadians have adopted the Iroquois use of Indian corn as an almost national food. The Iroquois national game of lacrosse has been Canadianized, and although thirty years ago it was absolutely unknown among the whites, it is to-day known the world over as Canada's national sport. Snow shoeing, tobogganing, canoeing, are all adaptations from the red man, who in his turn has adjusted himself to civilized habits and customs, profiting by their excellences and, let us trust, learning as little harm as possible from their imperfections.

It has been a long but astonishingly rapid leap from the wigwam, and the council fire of a century ago, to the neat little, well-ordered, governmental building, known as the "Six Nations Council House," at Ohsweken, yet through all that time with its changes in the Imperial parliament, its strange happenings in Canadian politics, the Iroquois nation have held their system of government intact. It stands to-day, as it stood in the days of Hiawatha, unshaken, unadulterated, unaltered, a living monument to the magnificent statesmanship of the man who conceived it, and carried it, and culminated it before ever the white man had entered the depths of America's forest lands.

The Indian reserve on the Grand river has dwindled from what was the first Imperial grant, that is, the lands that lay for six miles in depth on each side of the river from its source to its mouth, to a tract comprising but fifty-two thousand acres, the greater portion of which is under cultivation, for unlike western tribes the Iroquois have shown a great aptitude for agriculture, as those who have visited their annual industrial exhibition in the spacious agricultural building at the village of Ohsweken will readily testify.

The little village of Ohsweken is of much interest to the visitor, being as it is the seat of the Six Nations' government, where the local "parliament" is held, and the affairs of the nation discussed and disposed of by the lineal descendants of Hiawatha's "Fifty-two Noble families," who comprised the first great council of the confederation.

The present council house was erected in 1863 and since that time has been in constant usage. Prior to that year various buildings were used in various localities. At one time the council house was at the now village of Middleport, and in yet earlier times some assert it was one of the ancient, and now-desolated buildings on Tutela Heights. In addition to the Ohsweken council house, there are two others devoted to the exclusive use of the Pagan Indians, one for the Cayugas, the other for the Onondagas. These latter buildings are called "Long Houses," and are in reality the places of worship of these two conservative old tribes, where they hold their various religious dances and festivals throughout the year, worshipping in the exquisite beauty of "Pagan" faith, and simple belief in the "Great Spirit," that wondrous, peaceful, large-hearted God of the unchristianized Indian, that God that they believe no sin can really estrange them from, whose love and favor is theirs, it matters not how unworthy they may be, that God that is pleased with the simple dances and feasts of his red children, who harbors no ill-thought or feeling towards them, and who has for souls and bodies after death, whether they be bad or good, limitless reaches of Happy Hunting grounds, and through all eternity the happy atmosphere known only where an everlasting "Peace-Pipe" is in daily use between God and man.

But in early times the dances of the domesticated Iroquois were not always the outcome of religious zeal and good-fellowship with the Great Spirit; for America knew no greater terror than when a band of eight or ten thousand Iroquois warriors chose to don their war paint, and set forth conquering and to conquer; their fierce visages, and half-naked bodies, decorated with the ominous streaks of black and red, meaning "Blood and Death," always the war colors of the Mohawks. For miles across the country could their terrible war cries be heard, and the hated Huron crouched fearfully in his wigwam beside the Georgian bay, and the faithful Jesuit father crossed himself to no purpose, when the Iroquois roused with a just ire, impassioned by a taunt, marched northward, and in one fell battle exterminated Jesuit and Huron, leaving the little christian hamlet a desolation, and dancing a triumphant war dance on the hills that overlook Penetanguishene. No, it is not a fiction. The ancestors of those calm-eyed Indian men, of those low-voiced, gentle-faced women, who on market days through our busy little streets, were some of the bravest, most intrepid and valiant warriors known to the history of the world; men who defended their country and the "ashes of their fathers," against the inroads of a great all-conquering race; men who fought, and bled, and died to hold the western continent against an incoming eastern power, as England's sons would battle and fall to-day, were their own mother country threatened with a power that would eventually annihilate, subject—then alas! absorb their blood, their traditions, their nation, until naught promises to remain save a memory. The Iroquois got a bad name for ferocity and blood thirstiness in the early days of American history, but I can tell you, reader, that those Indian warriors were savage with a righteous patriotism, and that they won the respect of the whole world by the way they contended and wrestled to retain their forest homes, their game, their gods. The whole civilized world would have hissed them had they not loved the land and fought fiercely for the soil where their ancestors were born, and lived and died, and perhaps the ancestor of this quiet-mannered Indian, who any day you might see in our streets, was once an indomitable war-stained brave, standing ankle deep in the blood of French and English invaders, fighting with the desperate savagery, born only of the pre-moition of a lost cause, a lost land, a lost continent, never to be regained; of a scattered people never again to be a nation, and then, with the noblest of that military valor, in after years linking his fate with his own conquerors. And then perhaps the strangest of all things has happened, that to this very Iroquois who fought and killed your own ancestors, then afterwards fought side by side with their sons against the colonists, perhaps to this very man who fought so fiercely for his own country, then with such ardor and valor for the British flag, you owe the possession of your peaceful home in Canada to-day.

E. PAULINE JOHNSTON.