CHIEF JOHNSON.

Interesting History of His Life and Achievements.

A LONG LIFE OF USEFULNESS.

Efforts to Ameliorate the Condition of the Indians.

CONTESTS WITH WHITE MARAUDERS

Who Trespassed on the Grand River Reserve.

(From the Magazine of American History.)

The career of this eminent Mohawk chief, who did more perhaps than any other individual of our time for the elevation and advancement of his kindred of the red race, deserves a more permanent record than that of a newspaper obituary. His biography forms the latest and by no means the least interesting chapter in the annals of that famous Iroquois confederacy, which has held an important place in the history of the United States and Canada from the era of Champlain almost to our own day. As he claimed a descent from a companion and fellow-counsellor of the great founder of the league, the brave but peace-loving law-giver Hiawatha, so his character and his acts recall something of the traits and the deeds which authentic tradition ascribes to that no longer mythical hero.

The death of the chief occurred on the 19th of February, 1884, at his residence, Chiefswood, on the Grand River Reserve, in the Province of Ontario, a few miles from the city of Brantford. Though he attained the age of 67, his death must be deemed premature. He belonged to a long-lived race and family. His venerable father,

CHIEF JOHN SMOKE JOHNSON,

for many years Speaker of the Six Nations Council, in which he is known by his truly poetical Indian name of Sakayenkwaraghton, or "Disappearing Mist," is still living, in vigorous health of mind and body, at the age of 92. The causes which enfeebled the stalwart frame of his more noted son, and made his last illness fatal, were undoubtedly the injuries which he received in his endeavors to protect the morals and the property of his people from the white outlaws and desperadoes who formerly infested the Reserve. It is somewhat remarkable that an Iroquois chief should, in our peaceful time and among the quiet and law-respecting people of Canada, die from the effect of wounds received from his enemies of European race, as doubtless many of his predecessors had died in the fiercer days of old. But the conditions were strangely reversed. The conflict was still one of civilization with barbarism; but in this case Indian civilization stood at bay before white savagery, and conquered in the end, though at the expense of a noble life.

CHIEF GEORGE HENRY MARTIN JOHNSON

—as his name is recorded in full—was born on the 7th of October, 1816, at what is now known as Bow Park, then a part of the Grand River Reserve, where his parents resided. Of his father, an eminent war-chief and orator of the Six Nations, who bore a notable part as a military leader in the war of 1812, some mention has already been made. On the mother's side the boy's lineage was, according to Indian notions, still more distinguished. Her family had taken the English name of Martin, and had some strain of European blood, derived from the marriage of an Indian chief, in former days, with a captive white girl, adopted into a Mohawk household. None the less it was known as one of the fifty noble families of the Iroquois confederacy, descended from the fifty great chiefs who, about the middle of the fifteenth century, under the leadership of Hiawatha, framed that confederacy, and thus founded an Indian state which was for a long time the dominant power on our continent north of Mexico. During the American war of Independence, this confederacy, in the clash of stronger forces, was for a time broken up. At the close of that war Brant and his followers, comprising the greater portion of the Iroquois people, left their ancient abodes on the south side of the lakes, and withdrew to Canada. The Government for which they had long fought gave them lands along the Grand River, from its source to its mouth,

AND HERE, JUST A HUNDRED YEARS AGO,

they re-established their league and re-kindled its council fire. The laws and policy framed by Hiawatha and his associates, more than four centuries ago, are still in force among their descendants in this district. The territory has shrunk, by many sales, made at the well-meant instance of the protecting Government, to an extent of little more than 50,000 acres, with a population of some 3,000 souls. But in this small domain the chiefs are still elected, the councils are still conducted, and the civil policy is decided, as nearly as possible, by the rules of their ancient league. Not many persons are aware that there exists in the heart of Canada this relic of the oldest constitutional government of America—a free commonwealth, older even than any in Europe, except those of England and Switzerland and perhaps two small semi-independent republics which lurk in the fastnesses of the Pyrenees and Apennines.

Chief John S. Johnson was in his way an educated man. He had learned to read and write, but only in the Mohawk language, as it was written by the missionaries. He was determined that his son should have better advantages than he had enjoyed, and accordingly sent him for a time to the school in the then small frontier village of Brantford. Here the lad showed an intelligence and aptitude for learning which fortunately attracted the attention of a newly arrived missionary This was the late Rev. Adam Elliot, a clergyman of the English Church, who for many years devoted himself with untiring zeal to the religious instruction of the Iroquois converts. He found their language—which is a peculiarly complex speech, and is broken up into several dialects—not easy to master. As the Mohawk (or Caniengа) idiom was spoken by the largest number of the people, and was generally understood by the others, it occurred to him that his best course would be to train up an intelligent youth of that nation to interpret his exhortations to his hearers. Young George Johnson was recommended for this office, and thus had the good fortune to find himself

INSTALLED IN MR. ELLIOT'S FAMILY,

as at once his pupil and his assistant. He was still but a lad, and the instruction and practice which he needed to qualify him for his responsible duty occupied several years. To translate readily the recondite reasonings of an English sermon into a language of such a different type as the Iroquois was a task of no small difficulty. That he finally mastered this art, and was able to convey to an Indian audience, promptly and accurately, the meaning of the most complicated passage of an English speech, was admitted by all among his hearers who were acquainted with both languages. In translating rapidly from Iroquois into English he was not always so happy. In his childhood he had spoken and thought only in Mohawk. English always remained to him, in a measure, a foreign speech; and a certain hesitation was sometimes apparent in finding the right word, which, however, usually came at last. But in his own language he was always ready, and could, when his feelings were stirred, rise into the eloquence proper to his race.

In 1840 young Johnson was formally appointed to the office of interpreter for the English Church Mission on the Reserve, an office which brought with it a small salary, and no little toil and exposure. He was the constant companion of the missionary in his rides or drives through the Reserve, over roads which then were bogs in the spring and autumn, and were commonly piled with snowdrifts in the winter. He had often to make long trips by himself, on horseback or on foot, by night as well as by day, to carry announcements, to read the services, and to visit the sick, when the missionary was otherwise engaged. But the work seemed light to him, for he was young and hardy, and his heart was entirely in it. His religious feelings were fervent; his attachment to the English Church was sincere, and his affection for his people amounted to a passion.

MANY OF THEM WERE PAGANS,

as some unfortunately still remain. Young Johnson saw, or thought he saw, no hope for these, either in this world or in the next, except in becoming Christians. On one occasion his zeal for their conversion led him beyond the bounds of prudence, though happily with no ill result. Among the Indians on the Reserve was a small band of Delawares, an intelligent but highly conservative race, who for the most part still adhered to their heathen belief. They had formerly been conquered by the Iroquois, but had lately been elevated by them to the position of members of the confederacy. The Indians of the United States and Canada, as is well known, had in general no idols; but the Delawares had advanced, as some ethnologists would say, to the status of idolaters. They had carved a post into a rude image of the human form, and around it performed their religious dances. When the young Mohawk neophyte heard of these awful rites, he mused until the fire burned in his heart. Seizing an axe, he made his solitary way through the forest to the distant outskirt which had been allotted to the Delawares. Here he suddenly appeared before them, and after haranguing them, to the best of his ability, on the monstrous nature of their religion and its ceremonies, demanded to be allowed to destroy the image. The people listened sullenly, ready at a word to rush upon the intruder and fell him to the earth. But their chief was a well-informed and prudent man, possibly half a convert in his heart. He knew that the youth belonged to an influential family in the dominant Mohawk tribe, and that any injury done to him would meet with condign punishment. He gave a seemingly reluctant consent, and at the word the axe descended, and

THE OBNOXIOUS IMAGE SOON LAY IN FRAGMENTS.

The triumphant iconoclast carried off the head as a trophy, which is still preserved. Not long afterwards the conversion of all the Delawares was announced, and at this day they are among the most steady attendants upon the mission services on the Reserve.

The proceeding 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. Elliot. 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 in the United States, including the late able and eloquent American Consul in Toronto, the Hon. Wm. C. Howells, and the eminent author, Mr. 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 interpreter, 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 his 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 candidate 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 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—Chief 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 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 at the semi-annual distribution of the annuities which accrued 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. 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 serve 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 councillors 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 high spirit and their turn for public affairs. In this instance the matron, who was

BOTH THE WIFE AND THE 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 councillor 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 to fill his place so long as she should live. This threat

STARTLED THE ASSEMBLAGE.

If it were carried out, the Mohawks, who formed the leading nation of the 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.

The chief, now firmly established in his new office, set about the measures which he had long had in view for the benefit of his people. The first and most important of these was to get rid of the gangs of white ruffians who then hung about the Reserve, corrupting and impoverishing the Indians by the illicit sale of liquor, and by combining with the more ignorant among them to rob the Reserve of its valuable store of timber. It was an evil of long standing, against which all efforts had hitherto seemed fruitless It remained to be seen what could be done by an efficient superintendent and a zealous native warden. One prosecution after another, leading usually to fines and imprisonment, was brought against the dealers in illicit whiskey. At length they became thoroughly alarmed. Their active and resolute pursuer must be disposed of. One day in January, 1865, two men

ENCOUNTERED THE CHIEF WALKING ALONE.

While one of them drew his attention by some remark, the other suddenly struck him on the head from behind, with the heavy butt of a whip. He fell insensible, and as he lay was beaten in a most brutal manner, resulting in fractured bones and internal injuries. His assailants believed him to be dead, or at least disabled for life. After he was brought home, he lay for five days unconscious. A long illness followed, but his strong constitution finally triumphed. He recovered, but bore till his death the disfigurement and the enfeebling effects of his injuries. Of the criminals one fled and escaped, the other served a term of five years in the penitentiary.

No sooner had the chief regained sufficient strength to enable him to resume his duties than he renewed his crusade against the law-breakers with as much energy as ever. The liquor vendors had been sufficiently alarmed and cowed. The timber plunderers, who belonged to a somewhat higher class, and who acted with the connivance of many Indian confederates, were more difficult to deal with. Against them he waged a troublesome contest of watching, warnings, seizures and prosecutions for several years, and acquired their deadly hostility. In the ordinary intercourse of society the chief was always gentle, courteous and unassuming; but in dealing with the corrupters and despoilers of his people his manner totally changed. He knew them to be men utterly callous and unscrupulous, and only to be subdued by the strong hand and the terrors of the law. To them he was stern and imperious, as if the spirit and temper of twenty generations of the great chiefs, his ancestors, had been concentrated in his tone and manner. This deportment in "an Indian" filled the measure of their wrath to overflowing. At length their rage had its outbreak. In October, 1873, the chief was encountered on a lonely road at midnight by six men, who

SUDDENLY SET UPON HIM WITH BLUDGEONS,

knocked him down, breaking two of his ribs and a finger, and finally shot him with a revolver and left him for dead. Recovering, however, he was able to crawl home; and once more, after a long illness, his wonderful vitality triumphed. He regained his strength, but his constitution was irretrievably shattered. He became subject to frequent attacks of neuralgia and erysipelas, which at times incapacitated him for work. But in the intervals of these attacks he continued as alert and resolute as ever in the performance of his duties.

These duties, however, no longer included the war with lawless and degraded white men. The last murderous attack upon him had aroused a flame of popular indignation. All classes, whites and Indians alike, shared in the sentiment and in the determination to crush the mischief. Before this blaze of public wrath the vile conspiracy shrivelled at once, as if smitten by lightning. The malefactors were hunted down, and expiated their crime either in prison or by flight and self-banishment. From that day the Reserve has been as safe and as free from open violations of the law as any part of Canada.

While the chief was waging the war against lawlessness which was thus at last concluded, he had been active in other plans for the benefit and improvement of his people. It was his way to proceed rather by example than by precept. A fortunate venture, into which a mercantile friend had persuaded him, had yielded a good profit and put him in funds. The Indians on the Reserve had for the most part lived on their scattered farms in the small log cabins which had replaced their earlier bark-built habitations. A few attempts at a better style of residence had been made; but that an Indian should compete with the wealthy whites in this way was not expected. The chief, who had a natural taste and talent for architecture, erected on his farm

ONE OF THE FINEST DWELLINGS IN THE COUNTY.

A white stuccoed building, of two lofty stories and a spacious and imposing front, rose, elegant and stately, upon a terraced eminence overlooking the Grand River, in the midst of a parklike grove, in which almost every variety of the native woods was represented. The example proved infectious. The traveller crossing the Reserve sees already, here and there, the new and comfortable dwellings of frame or brick, which are gradually replacing the rude log tenements of former days. The house, it may be added, obtained for its possessor the Indian personal name by which (apart from his hereditary designation in the council) he was best known—that of Onwanonsyshon—"He who has the great mansion."

The Iroquois have always been an agricultural people. Their extensive plantations of maize, beans and pumpkins excited the admiration of the first explorers. Since their removal to Canada their industry and aptitude as farmers have been notable. The wheat market of Brantford has for many years been largely supplied from the Reserve. To direct this industry into the best channels, and to furnish it with the latest scientific aids, was a most desirable object. The chief took a zealous part in establishing an agricultural society on the Reserve. An older chief, whose influence would be useful, was made president, while Chief George assumed the humbler but more important duties of secretary. The annual exhibitions of the society, beginning on a modest scale, now rival those of the neighboring townships. Of the

PROGRESS WHICH AGRICULTURE HAS MADE

on the Reserve, of late years, a judgment may be formed from a single fact. A visitor, not long ago, passing through a part of the Reserve, counted in his morning's drive five threshing machines at work, all owned and managed by Indians.

The chief was a member of the Provincial Horticultural Association, and frequently attended its meetings, where his judicious remarks were always heard with pleasure and respect by his associates. His own grounds showed a choice selection of fruit trees and the best variety of the grape. In this respect, also, his example has proved inspiring and useful.

The care of the Mission Society and the Government has provided the Reserve with schools, including one of a superior stamp, the Mohawk Institute in Brantford. As was to be expected, the Indians were for a long time slow to perceive the advantages of these schools. The teaching, which was now conducted entirely in English, seemed to them anything but attractive. Such an education might suit the children of white people, but not theirs. The chief took the best possible method of dispelling these ideas. He secured for his own children—two boys and two girls—the best education which the schools and colleges of Brantford and London could give. This prescient care has speedily been repaid. His sons have already, at an unusually early age, gained positions of much trust and responsibility, the eldest,

MR. HENRY BEVERLEY JOHNSON,

being cashier of the New York Life Insurance Company for the Dominion of Canada, and the youngest, Mr. Allen W. Johnson, holding a good mercantile situation in Hamilton. They are not alone in manifesting to their people the advantages of such a training. Several other educated members of the Iroquois tribes, in various positions, professional and commercial, in Canada and the United States, are displaying the acumen and energy of their remarkably intellectual race.

The chief was often sent by his people as a delegate to bring their needs, and occasionally their remonstrances, to the attention of the Government. If not in all cases successful in such missions, his appearance and address always secured him attention and respect. Governors and statesmen received him with courtesy and interest. At Government House and everywhere in society he was a welcome visitor. At public entertainments

HIS FINE NAPOLEONIC FIGURE AND FACE,

set off by the Indian costume, which on such occasions he frequently assumed, made him a centre of attraction, which his quiet dignity of manner and a happy style of conversation, combining good sense with humor, and made more piquant by a half foreign accent, was well calculated to enhance. At home he was the most genial and kindly of men. The attractions of the place and of the household brought many visitors, who all came away delighted with a reception in which Indian hospitality had combined with English courtesy and refinement to make the guests feel themselves pleasantly at home. American tourists who visited Brantford eagerly sought an invitation to Chiefswood, and sometimes gave to the public, through the journals of the Southern and Eastern cities, an account of their agreeable experiences—the elegant and tasteful Indian home in

THE TREE-EMBOWERED MANSION,

overlooking the wide and winding river, the cordial and dignified chief, the gentle English matron, and the graceful and accomplished young "Indian princesses"—all making a picture as charming as it was novel and unexpected.

The health of the chief, never very good since he received his injuries, began latterly to fail perceptibly. His final illness, however, was brief. An attack of erysipelas, following a long drive in a drenching rain, seemed at first so slight as to cause no apprehension. After a few days, however, the malady took an unfavorable turn. Pyæmia, or "blood-poisoning," set in, and the patient gradually sank, losing consciousness partially toward the last, but retaining always his kindly and cheerful manner so long as he was capable of speaking.

HE DIED WITHOUT PAIN.

The family and friends who surrounded his bed were not for a time aware that he had ceased to live. There were other anxious watchers outside, for the news of his precarious condition had spread through the Reserve and caused much uneasiness. Suddenly a loud, wailing cry rose, in a single note, high, prolonged and quavering, from the river bank below the house. It was repeated on the opposite shore. The well-known signal passed, in the still winter night, from lip to lip, from lonely cabin to cabin, from farm to farm, in every direction, until within an hour all the tribes of the Six Nations on the Reserve knew that a great chief of their council had passed away.

In the churchyard of the ancient Mohawk Church near Brantford, built by Brant and his fellow-converts a century ago, the remains of this noble Mohawk chief and Christian gentleman rest beside the graves of his forefathers. His memory will long be cherished by multitudes of both the races to which he belonged, and for whose common welfare he labored and may be said to have died. Few have done more than he accomplished in his humble sphere, in breaking down the absurd and wicked prejudices of race, and proving the essential unity and brotherhood of the human family.

HORATIO HALE.

Drawing Drafts on the Future.

A man in China endowed with much forethought can make some provision for his own future comfort. The priests have considerately organized a bank for the spirit world. To this the provident may remit large sums during their lifetime, and can draw on the bank as soon as they reach the dark country. The priests periodically announce their intention of remitting money on a certain day, and invite all who have any to deposit to bring it. All who feel doubtful of the generosity of their next heirs accordingly come and buy from the priests as much as they can afford of the tinfoil paper money which is current among the spirits. It is an excellent investment, as for a handful brass cash, altogether worth about one penny, they will receive sycee, *i.e.*, the boat-shaped blocks of silvery-looking tinfoil, bearing a spiritual value of $30. Paper houses, furniture and clothes may in like manner be purchased and stored beforehand in the happy security that neither moth nor rust shall corrupt them, neither shall thieves break through and steal. When the depositor (probably a poor coolly or an aged beggar) has invested his little savings in this precious rubbish in the ecclesiastical bazaar he delivers it to the priest, together with a sum of real money as commission. For this the priest gives a written receipt. All this din is thrown into a large boat. It is a framework of reeds with bamboo mast, and its sails and planking are of paper. When all the depositors have made their payments, the priests walk several times around the boat, chanting some incantation, then simultaneously set fire to both ends, and the paper fabric vanishes in a flash of flame. The priests bid the depositors keep their certificates with all care, and give them to some trustworthy person to burn after their decease, whereupon the said certificates will reach them safely.

A Water-Snake's Fishing.

Just one mile from where I write, says a note from J. S. Warner, of Jonesboro, Tenn., a bold spring issues from under a rock and sends out so considerable a stream that it affords power for an old-fashioned saw-mill three-fourths of a mile from the spring. Just a few rods from where I am writing fish eight to ten inches in length are caught as they come up stream. Last year I saw a water-snake leaving the creek with a fish about five inches in length, just as described by Mr. Nye in "Fish Commission Bulletin, 1883," page 196. I killed the snake, rescued the fish and returned it to the water, but it seemed to be too badly wounded to recover. The snake was making way for a place of safety where it might devour its prey.

The permanent population of Washington is estimated at 212,000, and the transient in town at 10,000.