

not make their residence here until after Sullivan destroyed their towns on the Genesee during the American Revolution. These hatchets would be convenient articles to trade for furs, and were doubtless used for that purpose. It is extremely improbable that any Indians would have thrown away such valuable instruments in the numbers which have since been found, except from compulsion, and the disaster which befell the Kahquahs at the hands of the Iroquois readily accounts for the abandonment of these weapons.

Some copper instruments have also been found, doubtless of similar origin.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE IROQUOIS.

Their System of Clans — Its Importance — Its Probable Origin — The Grand Council — Sachems and War-chiefs — Method of Descent — Choice of Sachems — Religion — Natural Attributes — Family Relations.

FROM the destruction of the unfortunate Kahquahs down to the last great sale of land by the Iroquois to the Holland Land Company, those confederates were the actual possessors of the territory of Erie county, and a few years before making that sale the largest nation of the confederacy made their principal residence within the county. Within its borders, too, are still to be seen the largest united body of their descendants.

For all these two hundred and thirty years the Iroquois have been closely identified with the history of Erie county, and the beginning of this community of record forms a proper point at which to introduce an account of the interior structure of that remarkable confederacy, at which we have before taken but an outside glance.

It should be said here that the name "Iroquois" was never applied by the confederates to themselves. It was first used by the French, and its meaning is veiled in obscurity.\* The men of the Five Nations (afterwards the Six Nations) called themselves "Hedonosaunee," which means literally, "They form a cabin;" describing in this expressive manner the close union existing among them. The Indian name just quoted is more liberally and more commonly rendered "The People of the Long House;"

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\*The writer has seen an old map which showed a tribe of Indians called "Couis," living near the site of Kingston, in the province of Ontario, while another ancient map designated the territory then occupied by the Iroquois as belonging to the "Hiro Couis." This is very plainly the derivation of "Iroquois," but what is the meaning of "Hiro" or "Couis," the writer saith not.

which is more fully descriptive of the confederacy, though not quite so accurate a translation.

The central and unique characteristic of the Iroquois league was not the mere fact of five separate tribes being confederate together ; for such unions have been frequent among civilized and half-civilized peoples, though little known among the savages of America. The feature that distinguished the people of the Long House from all other confederacies, and which at the same time bound together all these ferocious warriors as with a living chain, was the system of *clans* extending through all the different tribes.

Although this clan-system has been treated of in many works, there are doubtless, thousands of readers who have often heard of the warlike success and outward greatness of the Iroquois confederacy, but are unacquainted with the inner league which was its distinguishing characteristic, and without which it would in all probability have met, at an early day, with the fate of numerous similar alliances.

The word "clan" has been adopted as the most convenient one to designate the peculiar artificial families about to be described, but the Iroquois clan was widely different from the Scottish one, all the members of which owed undivided allegiance to a single chief, for whom they were ready to fight against all the world. Yet "clan" is a much better word than "tribe," which is sometimes used, since that is the designation ordinarily applied to a separate Indian nation.

The people of the Iroquois confederacy were divided into eight clans, the names of which were as follows: Wolf, Bear, Beaver, Turtle, Deer Snipe, Heron and Hawk. Accounts differ, some declaring that every clan extended through all the tribes, and others that only the Wolf, Bear and Turtle clans did so, the rest being restricted to a lesser number of tribes. It is certain, however, that each tribe, Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas or Senecas, contained parts of the three clans named and of several of the others.

Each clan formed a large artificial family, modeled on the natural family. All the members of the clan, no matter how widely separated among the tribes, were considered as brothers and sisters to each other, and were forbidden to intermarry. This prohibition, too, was strictly enforced by public opinion.

All the clan being thus taught from earliest infancy that they belonged to the same family, a bond of the strongest kind was created throughout the confederacy. The Oneida of the Wolf clan had no sooner appeared among the Cayugas, than those of the same clan claimed him as their special guest, and admitted him to the most confidential intimacy. The Senecas of the Turtle clan might wander to the country of the Mohawks, at the farthest extremity of the Long House, and he had a claim upon his brother Turtle which they would not dream of repudiating.

Thus the whole confederacy was linked together. If at any time there appeared a tendency toward conflict between the different tribes, it was instantly checked by the thought that, if persisted in, the hand of the Heron must be lifted against his brother Heron; the hatchet of the Bear might be buried in the brain of his kinsman Bear. And so potent was the feeling that for at least two hundred years, and until the power of the league was broken by overwhelming outside force, there was no serious dissension between the tribes of the Iroquois.

Other Indian tribes had similar clans, but these were confined each to its own nation, and had therefore very little political value. The Scotch, as has been said, had their clans, but though all the members of each clan were supposed to be more or less related, yet, instead of marriage being forbidden within their own limits, they rarely married outside of them. All the loyalty of the clansmen was concentrated on their chief, and, instead of being a bond of union, so far as the nation at large was concerned, the clans were nurseries of faction.

The Romans had their *gens*, which were supposed to have been originally natural families though largely increased by adoption, but these like the Scottish clans, instead of binding together dis severed sections, served under the control of aspiring leaders as seed-plots of dissension and even of civil war. If one can imagine the Roman *gens* extending through all the nations of the Grecian confederacy, he will have an idea of the Iroquois system, and had such been the fact it is more than probable that the confederacy would have long survived the era of its actual downfall.\*

Iroquois tradition ascribes the founding of the league to an Onondaga chieftain named Tadodahoh. Such traditions, however, are of very little value. A person of that name may or may not have founded the confederacy. It is extremely probable that the league began with the union of two or three tribes, being subsequently increased by the addition of others. That such additions might be made may be seen by the case of the Tuscaroras, whose union with the confederacy long after the advent of the Europeans changed the Five Nations into the Six Nations.

Whether the Hedonosaunee were originally superior in valor and eloquence to their neighbors cannot now be ascertained. Probably not. But their talent for practical statesmanship gave them the advantage in war, and success made them self-confident and fearless. The business of the league was necessarily transacted in a congress of sachems, and this fostered oratorical powers, until at length the Iroquois were famous among a hundred rival nations for wisdom, courage and eloquence, and were justly denominated by Volney, "The Romans of the New World."

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\* At the time of writing the foregoing remarks concerning the Iroquois clan-system, the author had not seen the valuable work of L. H. Morgan, entitled "The League of the Iroquois," but on examining it is pleased to find his own opinion regarding the effect and importance of that system confirmed by the previously expressed views of that careful investigator and sagacious writer.

Aside from the clan-system just described, which was entirely unique, the Iroquois league had some resemblance to the great American Union which succeeded and overwhelmed it. The central authority was supreme on questions of peace and war, and on all others relating to the general welfare of the confederacy, while the tribes, like the States, reserved to themselves the management of their ordinary affairs.

In peace all power was confided to "sachems;" in war, to "chiefs." The sachems of each tribe acted as its rulers in the few matters which required the exercise of civil authority. The same rulers also met in congress to direct the affairs of the confederacy. There were fifty in all, of whom the Mohawks had nine, the Oneidas nine, the Onondagas fourteen, the Cayugas ten, and the Senecas eight. These numbers, however, did not give proportionate power in the congress of the league, for all the nations were equal there.

There was in each tribe the same number of war-chiefs as sachems, and these had absolute authority in time of war. When a council assembled, each sachem had a war-chief standing behind him to execute his orders. But in a war party the war-chief commanded and the sachem took his place in the ranks. This was the system in its simplicity.

Some time after the arrival of the Europeans they seem to have fallen into the habit of electing chiefs—not war-chiefs—as counselors to the sachems, who in time acquired equality of power with them, and were considered as their equals by the whites in the making of treaties.

It is difficult to learn the truth regarding a political and social system which was not preserved by any written record. As near, however, as can be ascertained, the Onondagas had a certain pre-eminence in the councils of the league, at least to the extent of always furnishing a grand-sachem, whose authority, however, was of a very shadowy description. It is not certain that he even presided in the congress of sachems. That congress, however, always met at the council-fire of the Onondagas. This was the natural result of their central position, the Mohawks and Oneidas being to the east of them, the Cayugas and Senecas to the west.

The Senecas were unquestionably the most powerful of all the tribes, and as they were located at the western extremity of the confederacy, they had to bear the brunt of war when it was assailed by its most formidable foes who dwelt in that quarter. It would naturally follow that the principal war-chief of the league should be of the Seneca Nation, and such is said to have been the case, though over this too, hangs a shade of doubt.

As among many other savage tribes, the right of heirship was in the female line. A man's heirs were his brother (that is to say, his mother's son) and his sister's son: never his own son, nor his brother's son. The few articles which constituted an Indian's personal property, even his bow and tomahawk, never descended to the son of him who had wielded

them. Titles, so far as they were hereditary at all, followed the same law of descent. The child also followed the clan and tribe of the mother. The object was evidently to secure greater certainty that the heir would be of the blood of his deceased kinsman.

The result of the application of this rule to the Iroquois system of clans was that if a particular sachemship or chieftaincy was once established in a certain clan of a certain tribe, in that clan and tribe it was expected to remain forever. Exactly how it was filled when it became vacant is a matter of some doubt, but as near as can be learned the new official was elected by the warriors of the clan, and was then "raised up"—i. e. inaugurated by the congress of sachems.

If, for instance, a sachemship belonging to the Wolf clan of the Seneca tribe became vacant, it could only be filled by some one of the Wolf clan of the Seneca tribe. A clan-council was called, and as a general rule the heir of the deceased was chosen to his place; to wit, one of his brothers, reckoning only on the mother's side, or one of his sister's sons, or even some more distant male relative in the female line. But there was no positive law, and the warriors might discard all these and elect some one entirely unconnected with the deceased. A grand council of the confederacy was then called, at which the new sachem was formally "raised up," or as we should say "inaugurated," in his office.

While there was no unchangeable custom compelling the clan-council to select one of the heirs of the deceased as his successor, yet the tendency was so strong in that direction that an infant was frequently chosen, a guardian being appointed to perform the functions of the office till the youth should reach the proper age to do so. All offices were held for life unless the incumbent was solemnly deposed by a council, an event which very seldom occurred.

Notwithstanding the modified system of hereditary power in vogue, the constitution of every tribe was essentially republican. Warriors, old men, and even women, attended the various councils and made their influence felt. Neither in the government of the confederacy nor of the tribes was there any such thing as tyranny over the people, though there was a great deal of tyranny by the league over conquered nations.

In fact there was very little government of any kind, and very little need of any. There were substantially no property interests to guard, all land being in common, and each man's personal property being limited to a bow, a tomahawk and a few deer skins. Liquor had not yet lent its disturbing influence, and few quarrels were to be traced to the influence of woman, for the American Indian is singularly free from the warmer passions. His principal vice is an easily-aroused and unlimited hatred, but the tribes were so small and enemies so convenient, that there was no difficulty in gratifying this feeling outside his own nation. The consequence was that although the war-parties of the Iroquois were con-

tinually shedding the blood of their foes, there was very little quarreling at home.

They do not appear to have had any class especially set apart for religious services, and their religious creed was limited to a somewhat vague belief in the existence of a "Great Spirit," and several inferior but very potent evil spirits. They had a few simple ceremonies, consisting largely of dances, one called the "green corn dance," performed at the time indicated by its name, and others at other seasons of the year. From a very early date their most important religious ceremony has been the "burning of the white dog," when an unfortunate canine of the requisite color is sacrificed by one of the chiefs. To this day the pagans among them still perform this rite.

In common with their fellow-savages on this continent the Iroquois have been termed "fast friends and bitter enemies." They were a great deal stronger enemies than friends. Revenge was the ruling passion of their nature, and cruelty was their abiding characteristic. Revenge and cruelty are the worst attributes of human nature, and it is idle to talk of the goodness of men who roasted their captives at the stake. All Indians were faithful to their own tribes, and the Iroquois were faithful to their confederacy, but outside these limits their friendship could not be counted on, and treachery was always to be apprehended in dealing with them.

In their family relations they were not harsh to their children, and not wantonly so to their wives, but the men were invariably indolent, and all labor was contemptuously abandoned to the weaker sex. They were not an amorous race, but could hardly be called a moral one. They were in that respect merely apathetic. Their passions rarely led them into adultery, and mercenary prostitution was entirely unknown, but they were not sensitive on the question of purity, and readily permitted their maidens to form the most fleeting alliances with distinguished visitors. Polygamy, too, was practiced, though in what might be called moderation. Chiefs and eminent warriors usually had two or three wives; rarely more. They could be divorced at will by their lords, but the latter seldom availed themselves of their privilege.

These latter characteristics the Iroquois had in common with the other Indians of North America, but their wonderful politico-social league and their extraordinary success in war were the especial attributes of the people of the Long House, for a hundred and thirty years the masters, and for more than two centuries the occupants of the county of Erie.