

## CHAPTER IV.

Niagara a tribal name—Other names given to the tribe—The Niagaras a superior race—The true pronunciation of Indian words.

THE name Niagara has been so thoroughly identified with the river and the Falls that the question whether it was also the name of an Indian nation or tribe has been quite neglected. It is proposed now to give the question some consideration, assuming, at once, its affirmative to be true. This, it is believed, we shall be justified in doing by every principle of analogy. We know that it was a general practice of the Indians who occupied this region of country, so abounding in lakes and rivers, to give the name of the nation or tribe to, or to name them after, the most prominent bodies and courses of water found in their territory. Such was the fact with the Senecas, Cayugas, Oneidas, Onondagas, and Hurons, the tribal name of each being perpetuated both in a lake and a river. The Mohawks, the warrior tribe of the Six Nations, having no noted lake within their boundaries, left a perpetual memorial of themselves in the name of a beautiful river. The unwarlike Erics, too, though finally exterminated by their more powerful and aggressive neighbors, the Iroquois, are still remembered in the lake which bears their name.

With the Niagaras the river and the cataract were the most notable and impressive features of their territory. Their principal village bore the same name; and when we recall the proverbial vanity of the race, we can hardly doubt that this must also have been their tribal name. That it should have been perpetuated in reference to the village, the river, and the falls, and that the use of it, in reference to the tribe, should have lapsed, can be readily understood when we recollect that they had two substitutes for the tribal name. One of these substitutes is explained at page 70 of the "Relations" of 1641, in a passage which we translate as follows: "Our Hurons call the Neuter Nation *Attouanderonks*, as though they would say a people of a little different language: for as to those nations that speak a language of which they understand nothing, they call them *Attouankes*, whatever nation they may be, or as though they spoke of strangers. They of the Neuter Nation in turn, and for the same reason, call our Hurons *Attouanderonks*."

Thus it would seem that this was a mere title of convenience used to indicate a certain fact, namely, a difference of language. The other substitute by which the nation was best known among their white brethren will be understood by an extract from a letter contained in the same "Relations," and written from St. Mary's Mission on the river Severn, by Father Lalement. In it he gives an account of a journey made by the Fathers Jean de Brebeuf and Joseph Marie Chaumont to the country of the *Neuter Nation*, as the Niagaras were called by the

Hurons on the north and the Iroquois on the south of them, learning it, as they did, from the French. The letter says: "Our French, who first discovered this people, named them the *Neuter Nation*, and not without reason, for their country being the ordinary passage by land, between some of the Iroquois nations and the Hurons, who are sworn enemies, they remained at peace with both; so that in times past the Hurons and the Iroquois, meeting in the same wigwam or village of that nation, were both in safety while they remained. There are some things in which they differ from our Hurons. They are larger, stronger, and better formed. They also entertain a great affection for the dead. \* \* \* The Sonontonheronons [Senecas], one of the Iroquois nations the nearest to and most dreaded by the Hurons, are not more than a day's journey distant from the easternmost village of the Neuter Nation, named Onguiaahra [Niagara], of the same name as the river."

It would seem, then, that this name, Neuter Nation, as applied to this tribe, was an appellation used merely to indicate a peculiarity of its location, or of the relation in which it stood to the hostile tribes living to the north and south of it. The Indians, it is needless to say, were not philologists, and seem not to have objected to the names applied to them, nor to have criticised the erroneous pronunciation of words of their own dialects.

In the extract given above, the name of our river first appears in type. Its orthography will be noted as peculiar. It is one of forty different ways of spelling the

name, thirty-nine of which are given in the index volume of the Colonial History of New York, and the fortieth, the most pertinent to our present purpose, in Drake's "Book of the Indians," seventh edition. Prefixed to "Book First" is a "Table of the Principal Tribes," in which we find the following:

"Nicariagas, once about Michilimakinak; joined the Iroquois in 1723."

M. Charlevoix, apparently using the facts stated in one of Lalement's letters and quoting also a portion of its language, says: "A people larger, stronger, and better formed than any other savages, and who lived south of the Huron country, were visited by the Jesuits, who preached to them the Kingdom of God. They were called the Neuter Nation, because they took no part in the wars which desolated the country. But in the end they could not themselves escape entire destruction. To avoid the fury of the Iroquois, they finally joined them against the Hurons, but gained nothing by the union." Later, he says they were destroyed about the year 1643. But we have before observed that Father Raugeneau states that their destruction occurred in 1651. The tribe mentioned by Drake was probably a remnant that escaped in the final overthrow of their nation in this last-named year, and sought refuge at Mackinaw, among the Hurons, who had previously retreated to this almost inaccessible locality, in order, also, to escape from the all-conquering Iroquois. After the lapse of nearly three-quarters of a century, when the hostility of the latter had subsided, and they had themselves been weakened and



Opposite page 22.

The Youngest Inhabitant.

subdued by the whites, the wretched remnant of the Niagaras, with that strong love of home so characteristic of the Indian, returned to their native hunting-grounds, where they remained for a few years, and then joined their conquerors in that mournful procession of their race toward the setting sun. If there were a Nemesis for nations as well as for individuals, it would be fearful to contemplate the time when the Anglo-Saxon should be called on to pay the "long arrears" of the Indians' "bloody debt."

Returning to the orthography of our name, we find on Sanson's map of Canada, published in Paris in 1657, that it is shortened into "Oniagra," and on Coronelli's map of the same region, published in Paris in 1688, it crystallizes into *Niagara*. There is also on this map a village located on or near the site of Buffalo, designated as follows: "*Kah-kou-a-go-gah, a destroyed nation.*" This name bears a closer resemblance to the true one than several of the forty to which we have just referred, and if it be reduced to Kahkwa it would still be only a corrupt abbreviation of Niagara.

More than fifty years ago, while leisurely traveling through western New York, the writer well remembers how his youthful ears were charmed with the flowing cadences of the better class of Indians, as they intoned rather than spoke the beautiful names which their ancestors had given to different localities. Every vowel was fully sounded.

O-N-E-I-D-A was then Oh-ne-i-dah; C-A-Y-U-G-A was Kah-yu-gah; G-E-N-E-S-E-E was Gen-e-se-c;

C - A - N - A - N - D - A - I - G - U - A was Kan-nan-dar-quah,  
and N - I - A - G - A - R - A was Ni-ah-gah-rah.

In regard to the name, the pronunciation nearest to the original which it may be possible to perpetuate is Ni-ag-a-rah; the accent on the second syllable, the vowel in the first pronounced as in the word *nigh*; the *a* in the third and fourth syllables but slightly abbreviated from the long *a* in *far*, and that in the second syllable but slightly aspirated.