

HISTORY

OF THE

OTTAWA AND CHIPPEWA INDIANS

OF MICHIGAN;

A GRAMMAR OF THEIR LANGUAGE,

AND PERSONAL AND FAMILY HISTORY OF THE AUTHOR,

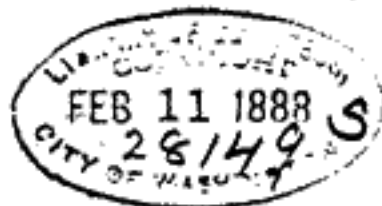
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CHAPTER I.

History of the Ottawas of Michigan—Preliminary Remarks in Regard to Other Histories, Concerning the Massacre of the Old British Fort on the Straits of Mackinac—British Promise to the Ottawas—Ravages of Small Pox—First Recollection of the Country of Arbor-Croche and Its Definition—Uprightness and Former Character of the Indians.

I have seen a number of writings by different men who attempted to give an account of the Indians who formerly occupied the Straits of Mackinac and Mackinac Island, (that historic little island which stands at the entrance of the strait,) also giving an account of the Indians who lived and are yet living in Michigan, scattered through the counties of Emmet, Cheboygan, Charlevoix, Antrim, Grand Traverse, and in the region of Thunder Bay, on the west shore of Lake Huron. But I see no very correct account of the Ottawa and Chippewa tribes of Indians, according to our knowledge of ourselves, past and present. Many points are far from being credible. They are either misstated by persons who were not versed in the traditions of these Indians, or exaggerated. An instance of this is found in the history of the life of Pontiac (pronounced Bwon-diac), the Odjebwe (or Chippewa) chief of St. Clair, the instigator of the massacre of the old fort on the Straits of Mackinac, written by a noted historian. In his account of the massacre, he says there was at this time no known surviving Ottawa Chief living on the south side of the Straits. This point of the history is incorrect, as there were several Ottawa chiefs living on the south side of the Straits at this particular time, who took no part in this massacre, but took by force the few survivors of this great, disastrous catastrophe, and protected them for a while and afterwards took them to Montreal, presenting them to the British Government; at the same time praying that their bro-

ther Odjebwes should not be retaliated upon on account of their rash act against the British people, but that they might be pardoned, as this terrible tragedy was committed through mistake, and through the evil counsel of one of their leaders by the name of Bwondiac (known in history as Pontiac). They told the British Government that their brother Odjebwes were few in number, while the British were in great numbers and daily increasing from an unknown part of the world across the ocean. They said, "Oh, my father, you are like the trees of the forest, and if one of the forest trees should be wounded with a hatchet, in a few years its wound will be entirely healed. Now, my father, compare with this: this is what my brother Odjebwe did to some of your children on the Straits of Mackinac, whose survivors we now bring back and present to your arms. O my father, have mercy upon my brothers and pardon them: for with your long arms and many, but a few strokes of retaliation would cause our brother to be entirely annihilated from the face of the earth!"

According to our understanding in our traditions, that was the time the British Government made such extraordinary promises to the Ottawa tribe of Indians, at the same time thanking them for their humane action upon those British remnants of the massacre. She promised them that her long arms will perpetually extend around them from generation to generation, or so long as there should be rolling sun. They should receive gifts from her sovereign in shape of goods, provisions, firearms, ammunition, and intoxicating liquors! Her sovereign's beneficent arm should be even extended unto the dogs belonging to the Ottawa tribe of Indians. And what place soever she should meet them, she would freely unfasten the faucet which contains her living water—whisky, which she will also cause to run perpetually and freely unto the Ottawas as the fountain of perpetual spring! And furthermore: she said, "I am as many as the stars in the heavens; and when you get up in the morning, look to the east: you will see that the sun, as it will peep through the earth, will be as red as

my coat, to remind you why I am likened unto the sun, and my promises will be as perpetual as the rolling sun!"

Ego-me-nay—Corn-hanger—was the head counselor and speaker of the Ottawa tribe of Indians at that time, and, according to our knowledge, Ego-me-nay was the leading one who went with those survivors of the massacre, and he was the man who made the speech before the august assembly in the British council hall at Montreal at that time. Ne-saw-key—Down-the-hill—the head chief of the Ottawa Nation, did not go with the party, but sent his message, and instructed their counselor in what manner he should appear before the British Government. My father was a little boy at that time, and my grandfather and my great-grandfather were both living then, and both held the first royal rank among the Ottawas. My grandfather was then a sub-chief and my great-grandfather was a war chief, whose name was Pun-gowish. And several other chiefs of the tribe I could mention who existed at that time, but this is ample evidence that the historian was mistaken in asserting that there was no known Ottawa chief existing at the time of the massacre.

However it was a notable fact that by this time the Ottawas were greatly reduced in numbers from what they were in former times, on account of the small-pox which they brought from Montreal during the French war with Great Britain. This small pox was sold to them shut up in a tin box, with the strict injunction not to open the box on their way homeward, but only when they should reach their country; and that this box contained something that would do them great good, and their people! The foolish people believed really there was something in the box supernatural, that would do them great good. Accordingly, after they reached home they opened the box; but behold there was another tin box inside, smaller. They took it out and opened the second box, and behold, still there was another box inside of the second box, smaller yet. So they kept on this way till they came to a very small box, which was not more than an inch long; and