CHAPTER V.

HABITS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INDIANS.

When the white settlers first came to this region they found many of the intervale lands along the Connecticut river and its branches denuded of trees and showing unmistakable signs of having been cultivated. All the New England tribes of Indians cultivated the land more or less, and in this respect were superior to those in some other parts of the country. They killed the trees on those intervale lands with fire, or by girdling, planted their corn, cultivated and gathered their crop, and sometimes preserved it on the ear in excavations made in dry places in the ground and covered with poles and bark.

Upon the arrival of the Pilgrims on these shores one of their first discoveries was that of corn, or maize, which had been raised by the Indians and preserved in this way; and when they landed they found cornfields, the crop gathered but the stalks still standing.

The Indians raised corn on the meadows of the Connecticut river and its branches, and sometimes sold to the whites.

"The spring of 1637 was so occupied by the English settlers at Windsor, Hartford and Weathersfield in preparing for and carrying on the war with the Pequots, that they failed to plant the requisite amount of corn and wheat. The following winter proving unusually long and severe, their provisions were wholly exhausted. On the first opening of spring (1638), a deputation was sent up to Agawam, where they failed to get supplies, and then up the river to Pocumtuck (Deerfield), where they found plenty of corn, and purchased enough of the Indians to load a fleet of fifty canoes, which were taken down the river by the natives, and the corn delivered at the towns designated." (Temple & Sheldon.)

To the Indians we are also indebted for the squash, which grew luxuriantly on the rich soils of these valleys; and for the Seivia bean and some other vegetables. They

had kettles of soapstone in which they boiled vegetables, and they lived on these and on their corn, berries, nuts and roots; and on fish and game, which they cooked on hot coals, or held in the fire on sticks, and sometimes ate raw. Fish and meat were sometimes preserved by drying and smoking. They parched their corn, and sometimes ground it between stones, and made "samp" and other mixtures with the meal, but "used no salt, spice or bread."

Chestnut groves were carefully preserved from fires, and furnished a valuable addition to their diet. Their supply of food was always precarious. Sometimes they would be without for days; and then, when an abundance was obtained, they would gorge themselves, and imitate voracious animals by sleeping it off. They had no beggars or children unprovided for; and no domestic animals except dogs, and but few of those.

Water was their only drink, and intoxication was unknown to them until the whites sold them liquor and made demons of them with their "fire-water." But they raised tobacco, and were inveterate smokers, using pipes which they made of soapstone, brierwood and other materials with considerable skill.

Their tools were made of sharp, hard stones, fastened with rawhide on wooden handles, and their spears and arrows were pointed in the same way—with flint, quartz or jasper. They cultivated the land with wooden mattocks, and sometimes with sharp bones fastened on sticks, and they were skilled in the manufacture of birch bark canoes, baskets, snowshoes, and many other articles, and in tanning the skins of animals with the hair on, with which they clothed themselves in winter.

For sewing they used the sinews of the deer and other animals, and the fibre of wild hemp, dogbane, and the inner bark of the "basswood" and other kinds of trees, with thorns, fishbones, or sharp sticks in place of needles or awls. They caught fish in nets made of those fibres; and by holding a torch over the water at night, when the curiosity of the larger fish would bring them to the surface to be struck by the Indian's spear.

Their skill in hunting was marvelous, taught by that

most importunate of teachers, necessity. One of their contrivances was to bend a sapling to the ground, and with thongs and deftly laid cords to form a trap for catching deer and other animals. Seth Fields of Northfield had his old mare caught in such a snare, and a friendly Indian came running to tell him that his "squaw horse" was caught in a "yank-up."

Their weapons were bows and arrows, spears and tomahawks—small stone axes. Later, these last were replaced by hatchets bought of the whites.

Their fortifications were stockades, in some cases very firm and strong, and covering many acres of ground. On the left bank of the Ashuelot river, just below the south line of Keene, at the "sand bank" near Sawyer's Crossing, there are evidences that there was once an Indian village, or at least a large and somewhat permanent encampment, inclosed with one of these stockades. It covered several acres of ground, and the irregular outlines of a fortification are still to be seen; but they will soon be obliterated by the constantly drifting sand. The quantities of chippings and fragments of flint and quartz that have been found there make it evident that arrow and spear heads and other implements were manufactured there in large numbers from those hard stones, brought from a distance. Among the relics found there by George A. Wheelock, Hiram Blake, F. G. Pratt, and others, which have been preserved by the people of Swanzey, are specimens of Indian pottery; ten arrow heads of flint and quartz; three of another kind of hard stone, fragments of which are scattered about there; a well finished stone-chisel six inches long; a gouge three and one-half inches long; a stone pestle fourteen and one-half inches long of a hard grey stone; and many other specimens of Indian manufacture. Some of these are preserved in the Keene natural history rooms.

Mr. Blake says: "The sand bank, so called, is evidently the site of an Indian village, and bears strong evidence of having been fortified. A dark line of earth mixed with ashes and charcoal extends nearly around an enclosure of several acres. This may have been the line of palisades or

row of stakes stuck in the ground for the purpose of defence. The sand has drifted so much, of late years, that the line is very indistinct or nearly gone. Old residents of the locality state that when they were boys Indian relics were readily picked up on the spot; but few of them were preserved. The large quantity of chippings now found there, as well as occasional pieces of pottery, indicate that these implements of war and domestic economy were made on the spot, and that for a time it was a permanent stopping place for the Indians."

Indian graves have been discovered in that vicinity, the skeletons found, as was almost invariably the case in all parts of the country, in a sitting posture, facing east. It is believed by those who have given the matter some study that there was an Indian burying place of considerable extent on what is known as the "Kate Tyler" farm, a mile and a quarter from the Square, on Court street, between the highway and the river. In excavating for the cellar of the house built there by Henry M. Darling, in 1882, the skeletons of six grown persons and one child were found, in a sitting posture, facing east, and near each other. They were pronounced by well informed persons to be skeletons of Indians. They were in a gravelly knoll or mound, the gravel being of a different kind from the earth around it, and apparently brought there to cover the bodies. No relics or implements of any kind were found buried with the bodies. Four of the skeletons were preserved, though none is perfect, and may be seen in the rooms of the Keene Natural History Society. Other skeletons have also been found in various places. Many stone axes, hatchets, chisels and arrow and spear heads have been found in various places in town. The stone pestle fourteen and one-half inches long mentioned above was found near the Swanzey line, and many years ago a similar one seventeen inches long was found by Capt. Aaron Hall.

In those early days, salmon ran up the Connecticut river and all its larger branches, and the Indians undoubtedly had a "salmon dam" in the Ashuelot near the "sand bank" mentioned above. In 1888, Mr. George A. Wheelock wrote for the New England Observer:

"The low water in the Ashuelot, occasioned by the repairs at the Swanzey mill, has exposed the old traditional Indian dam two miles above. Indians were lazy, and this work of theirs is the more surprising on this account; perhaps there is nothing like it in the state. The river at this point is now almost a rapid and strewn with boulders for thirty rods or so. It is less than a hundred feet wide, but the dam being in the shape of a harrow pointing down stream is more than that distance. By skilful stepping it is possible to pass the point of the harrow, the apex of the dam, and somewhat farther. It is made of stones, such as a man could lift, picked up in the stream above. It varies from six to twelve feet in thickness, according to the depth of the water. It looks like a tumble down wall mixed with gravel, but it must have caused weeks of labor. It is natural to suppose that the dam was made to aid in fishing for salmon with nets and spears. Below the dam is a flat boulder reached by stepping stones. Here stood the young brave and watched the silver-bellied salmon, and struck at him with his flint-pointed spear. Near by the old dam lives Jonas L. Moore. Here lived his father and grandfather before him. For one hundred and thirty years this has been called the Indian dam. Mr. Moore's father, in his boyhood, used to cross the river on the wall. The reason it is now so unknown is because the eel grass in the back water of the pond covers and conceals it. The *Observer's* representative was shown a beautiful spear point of Twin mountain flint. The elder Moore dug up a half peck of arrow and spearheads, all in one pocket. They were carelessly left on a stump and lost years ago. Some twenty Indian fire-places have been ploughed up here. These were simply circles in the middle of the wigwam, paved with stones from the river. The Swanzey Antiquarian Society should have a drawing of this dam showing the two eastern wings and the boulder."

The Indian was too proud and too lazy to labor with his hands or perform any menial service unless it was in building fortifications or wigwams, or preparing for war or the chase, or otherwise procuring food, as in building the salmon dam, mentioned above. But he willingly submitted to the necessity of carrying heavy burdens in war. The equipment of Raimbault's party of eight savages that went with him to Northfield in 1748, after he had been exchanged, as given by the Canadian authorities who provided them, was: "80 muskets; 80 breechclouts; 80 pairs mittens; 100 deerskins; 8 lbs. vermillion; 80 woodcutters'

knives; 80 lbs. powder; 80 lbs. ball; 80 lbs. lead shot; 80 collars for carrying; 80 awls; 80 tomahawks; 400 flints; 80 powder horns; 100 needles; 3 lbs. thread; 80 war clubs; 8 axes; 4 pairs scissors; 80 lbs. tobacco; 8 iron cooking pots; 8 canoes, and 13 days' provisions. This force made directly for the Connecticut valley; and took position on the highlands to the eastward of Fort Dummer." This was the party that had the fight with Sergt. Taylor on the 14th of July near Fort Dummer.

The squaws planted, gathered and preserved the crops, prepared the food, and with the above exceptions, bore the burdens and performed all the drudgery of life. But the rights of women were recognized in many ways. They could hold property by descent, and lands in the Connecticut valley were sold to the whites, and deeds given, by women who owned those lands by inheritance. In some cases their sachems were females, and in such cases their bands were led by their most powerful warriors. One of the tribes in eastern Massachusetts had a squaw for chief, the widow of Nanepashemet who lived near Lake Mystic in Medford. In some tribes squaws of recognized position were admitted to their councils. Awashauks, the powerful squaw of Sogkonate, and the unfortunate Queen Weetamoo, have already been mentioned. The latter was a sister-in-law and confederate of King Philip, and attended his court here in the Connecticut valley; was "squaw sachem of Pocasset and was counted as potent a prince as any round about her." She married Wamsutta, and at his death, Quinnapin, a powerful chief of the royal blood of the Narragansetts. She had two maids, one of whom was Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, the captive wife of the minister of Lancaster. She was proud and severe and spent as much time each day in dressing as any of the gentry, powdered her hair, painted her face, and wore ear-rings, necklaces, bracelets, girdles, red stockings and white shoes.

The Indians of these valleys not only accorded rights to women, but often treated them with a rude gallantry, especially white women, and in the early days "a white woman in captivity was never known to be insulted by an Indian."

When they captured the Johnson family at No. 4, in August, 1754—taking Mr. Johnson, his wife, three children, Miss Merriam Willard and two men—the surprise was complete, but no one was harmed. The next day Mrs. Johnson was delivered of a daughter, who, from the circumstances of her birth, was named Captive. The Indians halted one day on the mother's account, and the next day resumed their march, carrying her on a litter, which they made for the purpose, and afterward put her on horseback. "On their march they were distressed for provisions; and killed the horse for food; the infant was nourished, by sucking pieces of its flesh."[1] There was a similar case of birth the second day out, and of carrying mother and child on a litter, at the capture of Fort Massachusetts in 1746, when Sergt. John Hawks of Upper Ashuelot was in command.

The ferocity of the Indians towards the whites was caused chiefly, without doubt, by the barbarous and perfidious manner in which they were treated from the first by the English. The Dutch settlers along the Hudson, and the French in Canada, treated them with kindness and lived with them in peace; and the Indians generally were friendly until they had learned to distrust the whites. The great chiefs Massasoit in Massachusetts and Passaconaway in New Hampshire were strong and faithful friends of the whites.

Our sympathies are naturally aroused for the brave pioneers and their families who suffered so much in their frightful experiences, and feelings of horror are excited at the barbarous treatment they received from the Indians. But we must not forget that that treatment was chiefly in retaliation for the cruel and perfidious manner in which some of the whites had treated those untaught, wild men of the forest. In his uncorrupted state the Indian knew nothing of duplicity, except his natural, animal instinct of wiliness in war. He was taught that by the whites. "The very words that signify lying, treachery, dissimulation, avarice, detraction and pardon were never heard of." (Buchanan's North American Indians.) Those are the terms

[1] Belknap's History of New Hampshire, vol. 2, pages 288-9.

and vices of civilization. With all their naturally warlike disposition, their cunning in strategy, and even their revengful proclivities, the Indians in their natural state were governed largely by instinctive feelings of honor and justice.

"Over the track of the Concord and Northern railroad are daily seen running (1853) three Powerful engines, named Passaconaway, Wonalanset and Tohanto—names of three noble chiefs of the Pennacooks—tried friends of the English in prosperity and in adversity—one of them a bold advocate of temperance, against lawless traffickers in Rum." (Bouton's History of Concord.)

In the old French war: "A single instance of moderation deserves remembrance. An Indian had surprised a man at Ashuelot; the man asked for quarter, and it was granted; whilst the Indian was preparing to bind him, he seized the Indian's gun, and shot him in one arm. The Indian, however, secured him; but took no other revenge than, with a kick, to say, 'You dog, how could you treat me so.' The gentleman from whom this information came, has frequently heard the story both from the captive and the captor." (Belknap's History of New Hampshire, vol. 2, page 255.)

The same author tells us that "the universal testimony of the captives in that war who survived and returned was in favor of the humanity of their captors. When feeble, they assisted them in traveling; and in cases of distress from want of provisions, they shared with them an equal proportion."

"The Indian never makes a show of civility except when prompted by genuine feeling. It is not the custom of any uncorrupted Indian to repeat a request, or an offer of civility or courtesy. If declined, they believe it is done in perfect sincerity and good faith, and that it would be rudeness to ask them to change their determination. They are seldom guilty of duplicity. They never interrupt those who are conversing with them, but wait till they have finished." (Buchanan's North American Indians, page 14.)

We must remember also that the Indians had the prior right to this country by occupancy, and in that sense were the owners of the land; and that the whites were intruders who persistently forced them back and away from their familiar haunts—"the hunting grounds of their fathers"—those hills and valleys and streams for which they had the natural feeling of love for one's home and country. In most cases in New England the whites did

not buy the lands of them, or if they did, it was at such ridiculously low prices that the red man soon discovered that he had been cheated and was naturally exasperated. Five thousand acres of that fine intervale land at West Springfield, Mass., was bought of the Indians by a tailor who sold the same tract to a carpenter for a wheelbarrow.

The motive for the attack on No. 4, in August, 1754, was, as stated by the Indians to their captive, James Johnson, "because the English had settled down upon lands there which they had not purchased; and that they intended next spring to drive the English on Connecticut river so far as Deerfield." (Johnson's Declaration, Provincial Papers, vol. 6, page 330.)

The Indians had an indefinite belief in a future existence, and buried with their dead the arms and implements of war or of the chase, and such provisions as they supposed would be needed on the journey to the "happy hunting grounds." Sometimes the bodies were placed on scaffolds of the branches of trees, but were more usually buried, and the grave was often surrounded with a light stockade; and for six months the women would go there three times a day to weep. "If a mother lost her babe, she would cover it with bark, and envelop it anxiously in the softest beaver-skins; at the burial place, she would put by its side its cradle, its beads, and its rattles; and as a last service of maternal love, would draw milk from her bosom in a cup of bark, and burn it in the fire, that her infant might still find nourishment on its solitary journey to the land of shades." (Bancroft's History of The United States, vol. 2, page 442.)