

AN INDIAN GRAVE IN WESTERN NEW YORK.

BY A. L. BENEDICT, M.D.

SOUTH of Lake Ontario, between the Genesee River on the west and Canandaigua Lake and its outlet on the east, lies a fertile country, studded with knolls and hills from twenty to two-hundred-and-fifty feet in height. West of the Genesee River, as far as Buffalo and Lake Erie, the land is level, with only occasional elevations to relieve the monotony. East of Canandaigua Lake the hills enlarge into miniature mountain ranges, five to fifteen miles long, four or five miles from valley to valley, and five or six hundred feet in height.

Nearly the whole of this region west of Seneca Lake was inhabited by the Seneca nation of the Iroquois, but only in the middle portion was there much communication between the Europeans and the Indians until late in the eighteenth century, when the usurpation of the land by the white settlers was accomplished in a comparatively short time. Hence, as a rule, the Indian village sites and burial places of the western and eastern portions of the Seneca territory yield relics of genuine aboriginal workmanship, whereas in the central portion, in which the Indian population held its own against foreign encroachment for more than a century, European influence is indicated by an abundance of iron axes and knives, glass beads, copper ornaments, brass kettles, and a variety of other articles found in connection with flint arrowheads, stone tomahawks, wampum, and unglazed pottery.

One of the largest and best-known sites of Indian occupancy in this region is on a large hill near the thriving village of Victor. Some idea of the importance of this Indian village may be derived from the following considerations: The hill is one of the most commanding localities in the whole middle territory, descending so abruptly on the west and north as to make it a vantage-point in case of war, sloping more gradually in other directions. At least ten acres of the hill-top were so densely populated that even at this late day, after half a century of cultivation and the visits of

two generations of relic-hunters, it still yields ample recompense in the form of beads, pipe-stems, pottery, and other implements to any one who will take the pains to search for them. On and near this village site so many iron tomahawks were found by the early settlers that they were of commercial value as old iron, and were by no means an insignificant source from which the blacksmiths derived the material for horseshoes and other articles of farm use.

The writer had made several visits to this place, and had gathered from the surface a considerable number of relics. In the spring of 1885 a young man of the locality exhumed a skeleton with which were buried two or three silver rings, and in September following the writer opened a grave almost adjoining the first one, with such rich results that he has thought it worthy of a descriptive article.

The graves were situated at the extreme western edge of the hill, four or five rods beyond the field in which the relics were so plenty, and a few feet before the slope, already begun, became so steep that ascent was difficult.

The writer, availing himself of the work of excavation which had been done in the spring, dug into the side of the grave, reaching, after a short time, a woodchuck hole, which fortunately led him to another skeleton. This skeleton, whose immature bones and teeth showed that it had belonged to a person between sixteen and twenty years old, was in the crouching attitude, with elbows at the sides and knees drawn up to meet them, characteristic of Indian burial. Strange to say, however, the skeleton was turned head downwards, a circumstance which has never been duplicated in the writer's experience.

One of the first objects exhumed was a bone head-comb, evidently either of European manufacture, or an imitation by the Indians of some similar ornament which they had seen the white women use. Several of the teeth of the comb had become broken, but otherwise it was well preserved. At the top of the comb there is a rudely cut figure of a man standing and resting his hand on the shoulder of another person who is on horseback. Beside the skeleton was a partially overturned brass kettle, con-

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taining a hard discoid stone, presumably used to heat water, for only a few years previous to the time when this village was destroyed the Indians used clay kettles, which could not stand the heat of a fire, and they therefore heated water in them by throwing in hot stones. In and just outside the kettle was a quantity of large, red glass beads, of smaller glass beads, white, blue, green, and yellow, some spherical, some cylindrical in shape, and which, when strung, measured thirty feet. There was also a flat, white shell ornament in the shape of an isosceles triangle, with a hole near the apex. At the bottom of the kettle was a mass of decayed organic matter, which showed faint traces of interlacing fibres, and which was probably the remains of a basket or mat. The bail of the kettle was of iron, much corroded, for that metal is not nearly so enduring as copper or brass. The spongy fragments of a wooden handle were also found.

Seven slender bone or shell tubes were also found, some almost perfect, some worn and decayed so as to require the most careful handling. The longest of these measured four-and-one-eighth inches, the shortest unbroken one three-and-three-eighths inches. Nearer yet to the skeleton was genuine Indian wampum, both white and purple, showing in places, as it rolled out of the earth, the original arrangement into parallel rows of five or six beads. This when strung measured sixty feet, and when stitched on to cloth, in imitation of its arrangement at the time of burial, it would reach from one shoulder to the opposite hip, or several times around the waist of a small person.

Part of the upper rounded shell and most of the jointed under shell of a good-sized turtle were also exhumed. This turtle skeleton may have been part of a rattle, or it may have been a pet of the Indian girl, or, again, it may have been the symbol of the clan to which she belonged, for running through the six nations of the Iroquois were clans or brotherhoods taking their names from animals, and one of these clans was named from the turtle.

This grave was one of a number opened in the vicinity, and all, while differing in detail, agreed in presenting evidences of European civilization in conjunction with aboriginal customs.

Buffalo, N. Y.