

THE LAST OF THE MIAMIS.

From The Indianapolis Journal, January 7, 1900.

Some five miles east of Peru, within rifle-shot of the Wabash, stands the home of Gabriel Godfroy, the most notable and interesting Indian in Indiana to-day. Godfroy, though not a full Indian as to blood, is fully an Indian in character, and is of genuine Miami lineage, his father, Francis Godfroy, being the last war-chief of that once powerful tribe, that not only made their home in the Wabash valley, but claimed sovereignty over all of Indiana.

Gabriel Godfroy, picturesque in appearance, is a powerfully built man, in his sixties, with a massive, strong face, made leonine by a heavy growth of yellowish-white hair which falls to the shoulders or is worn in a knot behind. His nature is utterly transparent, and one who converses with him and takes note shrewdly may get a key to the Indian question and guess why the fates have dealt hardly with him and his people in their intercourse with the whites. After his more than three-score years spent cheek by jowl with the invaders of his heritage, the modification is but superficial; their ways are not his ways, and his conformity to them is, at best, but awkward and unnatural. For example, the Indian's natural domicile is a wigwam, or something akin, and Godfroy and his family are strikingly out of place in the great, barren, many-roomed house where they find shelter. The rules of living, the orderly arrangement, the convenience and ornamentation which make a house a home in any sense of the word, are here missing entirely. The place is simply a refuge from outdoors, when outdoors proves unpleasant.

Again, the Indian's natural activity is to tread the wild places with moccasined foot, the preying instinct hot in his blood; and the spectacle of him in cowhide brogans caring in his slipshod way for plow, horses and cattle is so palpably forced and incongruous as to be grotesque. We read encouraging reports here and there of the civilized Indian taking to husbandry, and Godfroy himself has been cited as a thrifty, prosperous citizen. The statements are not purposely false, but they are a decided per-

version of the real fact. Thrift, providence, anything like industrial application and business sagacity is utterly foreign to the Indian's character, and the fact that he may be seemingly well-to-do at any given time signifies little. A better illustration of this could not be found than the case of Godfroy. When, more than a half-century ago, the Miamis sold to the United States government the last great tract of land which they held as a tribe, there were reserved to Francis Godfroy many hundreds of acres of the finest Wabash bottom. To part of this domain the son Gabriel succeeded, and at one time owned more than 300 acres of that rich tongue of land formed by the confluence of the Wabash and the Mississinewa. Here he lived in the open-handed style of a manorial lord, his house the stopping place of all his fellow-Indians, who looked to him as their friend and superior, and for whose debts he was surety. All that is over now. Godfroy has left of his father's ample reserves but forty-eight acres, part of them hilly and sterile. As one inquires further among the Indians of this locality he finds the same story repeated, and there is revealed the pathetic spectacle of these one-time lords of the soil now in a class with our poorest, least successful white farmers, floundering along in a helpless, inefficient sort of way, and pushed to the wall by the conditions of civilized life. One of the most notable cases is that of William Peconga, whose former home stood on the Me-shin-go-me-sia reserve, in the southern part of Wabash county. Peconga is the grandson of old Chief Me-shin-go-me-sia, to whom and his band was reserved ten sections or ten square miles of land. In an evil hour they had this common property divided and apportioned among the several members of the band. Few of them now have anything left, and Peconga, the chief heir, recently left his last strip of land, and is living with a friend.

The explanation is two-fold. In the first place the Indian, along with his lack of foresight, has but little sense of values; what he wants he will have at any cost, if it lies within his means, and he will give his promise to pay or a mortgage with very little thought as to result. Hence, assailed by a multiplicity of wants that he never knew in his savage condition, and without the check of prudence, his possessions must, in the nature of things, slip away from him.

Again, the Indian is utterly unqualified to take care of himself in the midst of our civilization, with its unscrupulous measuring of wits. There is no gainsaying that a very dominant trait with the white man is avarice; there is very little mercy for the unsophisticated, and this avarice preying off the Indian makes an ancient tale of wrong, the half of which has never been told. From the early days of the traders they have paid exorbitantly for every commodity they bought, and have been encouraged to revel in credit wherever their lands or annuities would secure their debts. To the present day the whites sustain this attitude toward them, and sharks operating from the shady side of the law have left them all but penniless. Litigation of one sort or another has been pending for years in the courts at Marion, and one does not have to inquire far to hear of lawyers who have grown richer as the Indians have grown poorer. Among the latter exists the feeling generally that they have been over-reached in every way; that they have no chance against the white man. Even history, they say, is but the white man's perversion of truth, and the legends preserved among them, as I got them from Godfroy, breathe bitterly of wrongs done them in the early wars—wrongs that have never been chronicled.

Along the beautiful Mississinewa, from its union with the Wabash to the Misissinewa battle-ground, linger the sorry remnants of a tribe that once ranked among the noblest of the North American savages. As one makes his way up this romantic stream, so long beloved of the red men, he finds them here and there, often with a skin more or less Caucasian, but always with the unmistakable, fine, dark Indian eye, which has in it something of the eagle. One notable thing is the persistence of the Indian instincts, despite this liberal admixture of white man's blood. Gabriel Godfroy's boys are as aboriginal in their proclivities as the Miami striplings of a century ago. They are skilled in the use of the bow, and, perched in some tree-top overhanging the river, kill many a fish with their deadly arrows. The mellifluous Miami language is not allowed to die out, nor the Indian custom of naming children for some natural object or quality, and not the least interesting of my recollection of my

visit to Godfroy's is that of him and sundry of his youngsters going through their weird, curious dances for my delectation.

One with the disposition, time and patience might make an interesting study in this region of the Indian as he is after long contact with the civilized life, and pick up much lore cherished by them which reveals the nature of these people. No stream in our State is pleasanter to loiter along than this one where such student would go to seek his material. No stream more stimulates the imagination with romantic associations, for it was a favorite abiding place with the Miami, and up and down its beautiful, winding, narrow valley stood his picturesque wigwam. Here slumbers forgotten the dust of many a chief and warrior once famous among his people. Here lived and now rests Frances Slocum, who, stolen from her Pennsylvania home when a child, spent a long life among her captors, so content with their customs that, when discovered and identified in her old age by her own people, she could not be prevailed upon to go to them.

Here, also, everlooking a beautiful bend and stretch of the river, about a mile from the little town of Jalapa, Pleasant township, Grant county, is one of the most famous Indiana battle-grounds in the State, known as the Mississinewa. It is now a stretch of tilled fields, unmarked in any way, and only known vaguely to the surrounding countryside as the spot where some sort of a battle once took place. It merits more explicit celebrity, for here, in the early dawn of December 18, 1812, occurred a fierce and bloody conflict, akin to that of Tippecanoe, between about six hundred whites under Lieutenant-Colonel John B. Campbell, and an uncertain number of Miami and Munsee Indians. About all the records that exist of the fight are based on Colonel Campbell's official report, which gives the victory to the whites, but the Miami tradition, as told by Godfroy, varies from the received account, and glows with indignation at the violence previously committed on a Munsee village, which led the Miamis to side with the Munsees and make the early morning attack.

G. S. C.

NOTE.—Godfroy still lives at his old home but is, we are told, no longer a land-owner. For an interesting tradition related by him see Vol. I, No. 1, p. 19, of this magazine.—*Editor.*