

THAT ERRONEOUS HIAWATHA.

BY ALBERT B. REAGAN.

Hiawatha, hero of Longfellow's poem of the same name, is not recognized as a hero god by the Chippewa Indians. Neither the name nor the person designated occurs in the mythology of these people. Their god is Menibusha, and the only word approaching Hiawatha is Ket'-che-wah'-sah, which means "afar off." Through the kindness of the Indian missionary and court-agency interpreter here, Rev. Frank H. Pequette, who is himself a Chippewa and has lived and preached in various parts of the Chippewa country, I quote his own summing up of this subject:

"When a white man asks an American who is the greatest man of his country he answers, 'George Washington.' But I am here to declare that Hiawatha is not the hero of my race. This personage is unknown to the Chippewa Indian.

"The Indian lad sitting in the forest with his bow and arrow, observing the trees and the sky and the sand and the water of the Great Lakes and the animals and the fishes, asks himself, 'Who made these?' He cannot answer the question himself, so he asks the old medicine man of his tribe. 'Menibusha,' answers the sage. 'Menibusha made the earth, sky, the sun, moon and stars, and the wild things and the fishes, and he made you also, my son.' So says the medicine man of the tribe. Menibusha also made the land, the island-continental surface on which we now live. He is the first brother of all mankind and now lives in the East.

"All the Indians before they became Christians (that is, all Chippewas) supposed that Menibusha was the Supreme, the greatest man and god of his nation. And when the first white man asked the Indian the question who was their greatest personage the Indian replied, 'Menibusha.' 'Where does he live?' of course asked the white man. 'Ket'-che-wah'-sah,' replied the Indian—meaning (that he was) afar off. The white man's ears were not tuned to the Indian sounds used in pronunciation and he caught it Hiawatha, which did not mean god, but 'afar off'; and one great white fellow, Longfellow by name, wrote our legends with this unknown Hiawatha. But this Hiawatha is not known to us Indians."

