MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF THE NEW YORK STATE IROQUOIS

MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF THE NEW YORK STATE IROQUOIS

by

Harriet Maxwell Converse
(Ya-ie-wa-noh)

edited by

Arthur Caswell Parker
(Ga-wa-so-wa-neh)

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PREFATORY NOTE

One may not hope to read a primitive culture from the record of its workmanship alone, although this is often the only avenue remaining by which a lost culture may be approached. The mentality of a primitive people living close to nature mirrors the supreme law of the universe in its simplest and most elemental expressions; it clothes with individuality the manifestation of this law, gives words to its unconscious forces and thoughts to its living agents; it reads, suffused in a wealth of imagery, the spiritual law in the natural world or embellishes some historical event. Such simple and unembarrassed expressions, transmitted not by records of hand but from mouth to mouth through the generations, are priceless to the student who finds in a progressed and complicated civilization the obscuration of natural law by the artificial conditions erected on the rebellious logic of human society.

The labors of Mrs. Harriet Maxwell Converse in recording the legends and nature myths of the New York Iroquois are, for these and other reasons, most worthy of conservation. She was devoted in her love for her adopted people; she shared their spirit and could record their folk tales with perfect sympathy.

Mr. Parker, who has edited the manuscripts of Mrs. Converse and prepared the introductory portion of this work, has been prompted not only by fidelity to the memory of a friend but by the piety and inspiration of inheritance.

John M. Clarke
(Ho-san-na-ga-da)

INTRODUCTION

No people can long exist as an ethnic group without consciously, or otherwise, creating a philosophy of things which becomes the common belief of that body of people—becomes their science and religion. The more permanent the people, the more enduring and greater the influence of their system of belief. Viewed in the light of exact science, as we know it, these primitive philosophies become mythologies. A myth may appear to us puerile and without any basis in logic, it may appear as a worthless fancy or a child's tale and yet a deeper study of the myth reveals within it the beginning of physics, philosophy and theology. Unfamiliar with the real cause of the phenomenon of mind or matter, the primitive mind, being a reasoning mind seeking to satisfy its curiosity and allay its fears, hypothecates the causes of visible effects in the form of myths. The primitive mind, believing all things the result of some intelligence, personifies and deifies the causes of effects, and thus has arisen the multiplicity of gods and guardian spirits.

Once crystallized and diffused, myths become working factors of human action. They become the science and religion of the ethnic group which entertains them. They become the basis of reasoning.

A treatise on a cause, they become a cause. They become so ingrained in the minds of their believers that, when in other generations they are rivaled by more rational systems, they are not easily supplanted, for they bear the approval of the religious leaders and the wise men of the generations past. To the great body of people the old myth was a part of common religion; the new myth which attempted to explain the thunder or the wind's fury was the science of the day and few would have aught to do with it, and here we have a glimpse of the conflict of religion and science. Religion was the conservative element and clung to the sacred beliefs of its fathers; science (so called), which brought the innovation, denied all precedents and struck out afresh to establish new ideas. Years passed by and the religions of the day accepted the new beliefs until the throes of their birth became forgotten in the haze of many years. Then again the critical minds of the time, comparing the experiences of the past and analyzing as best they could, sought to find new explanations that appealed more to their ideas of logic. Then old myths were scoffed at, a new system established, and again the conflict. Nor is it strange that men should be loath to deny that to which they have become accustomed; there is always a feeling of uncertainty about new systems and they are cautiously experimented with at first.

In reviewing myths of the ancients or of modern primitive men we may sometimes wonder how any large body of rational men could hold as sacred truths such fictions as we may regard unworthy of serious consideration. If such is the case it is because we have

forgotten that the human mind has not always been of the same texture as it is today in the modern man of civilization. The minds of men, we should recall, through the varying grades of culture, from lower savagery to civilization, are characterized by wide differences. They are not uniformly susceptible to the same stimuli, for each culture grade gives to the mind of the man which it characterizes a different viewpoint, different capacities and different associations. It is always well to keep in mind the fact that our present enlightened beliefs, our sciences and our civilization are the product of a long period of evolution under favorable circumstances, and that they are not things that men were always able to grasp. It is well, also, to remember that our ancestors were once barbarians and rude savages, scarcely more intelligent than the other animals of the forest. All this might be hard to believe were it not that primitive savages still are to be found, and that all the various culture stages can be illustrated by groups of living peoples. There is little doubt that the man of five centuries hence will find plenty to laugh at, if he feels so disposed, when he reads the annals of our times and gets an insight of our customs and beliefs, some of which he may term myths. While he may appreciate our achievements he will certainly deny our claim to enlightenment and choose to bestow it upon himself. There can be no true enlightenment, and the age of fable will not cease to be, until the laws which govern all phenomena are known to men. Until then men must theorize. Myths were originally theories adduced from the best information

at hand. Surviving in more enlightened ages they were still held even though inconsistent with the known objective experience of the time. Even so they were regarded as sacred truths. A myth must be regarded, therefore, as a primitive theory, as a rude attempt to reach truth, as a tentative hypothesis upon which to fasten one's belief, for one must believe something.

Legends and traditions. No people of any intellectual life can exist in social bodies without building up out of their experiences and especially out of their imaginations a vast body of oral fiction. Among peoples, widely separated in point of time and space, the same general myths and legends are found. This by no means necessarily implies contact. Rather does it illustrate the fact that illimitable as imagination seems to be in its power to combine and create, in reality it is limited by certain suggesting factors which may be common to all people of a given cultural stage and to all times. We have dwelt upon this feature at some length in a note on the Celestial Bear myth. It is not to be supposed, however, that some myths have not been derived by contact directly or indirectly in times more or less historic. On the other hand it seems quite feasible to believe that certain myths have been transmitted from one stock to another, the elements to be preserved and the details to be recast, in local molds. Some myths are plainly derived from external sources and are easily traced to their originating sources. Others are more difficult to trace.

Certain individuals among tribes in the lower culture stages become the story-tellers of their people and are the tribal libraries of this oral fiction. Legends differ from myths in that they are wonder stories told for the amusement of those who hear them and are recognized as ingenious creations of imagination. There is, however, a class of legends that relate to localities and which explain some local phenomenon, but these are traditions rather than legends. Traditions differ from legends in that they pretend to be and often are the relations of actual occurrences. They are the histories of the peasantry and the tribes that have no system of writing.

Iroquois folklore

The North American Indians possessed a vast oral literature of mythology, legendary lore and tradition. The field of American folklore has scarcely been touched by anthropologists, and even tribes that have been known the longest have received comparatively little attention. True, much has been recorded, but this much is but a small portion of the total. That this should be the case is not due to the lack of energy on the part of students but to the inaccessibility of the greater part of the material.

Much is known of the material culture of the Iroquois and much also of their governmental system and their social laws. That not all is known is conceded, but enough to place them conspicuously before historians and ethnographers as the Indians of

Indians, as the most splendid of barbaric men. It will be found of interest, therefore, to bring before students for correlation the small portion of their literature contained in this volume.

The mythology of the Iroquois differs in form from that of many other of the American races. Iroquois tales were of strength, of great deeds, of nature and the forces of nature, "standing out in striking contrast to the flimsy conceptions of the Algonquins," as someone has remarked. They are the classics of all the unwritten literature of the American aborigines.

The Iroquois were a people who loved to weave language in fine metaphor and delicate allusion and possessed a language singularly adapted for this purpose. They were unconscious poets, and some of their tales seem to have been chanted in blank verse, the rhythm and swing of the meter in their estimation giving an added delight to the story. When the legends are told to white men the delicate word-weave is seldom revealed, and never if the legend is told in English. The translation robs it of much of its intended charm and grace, for the Indian seems to think that the pale invader may laugh at his metaphors or deride him for revealing that such fine emotions exist within a stoic's breast. Thus it is that so many legends appear puerile and without pertinency which in the vernacular are strong and full of meaning.

Story-telling customs of the Iroquois. Each settlement had its official story-teller whose predecessor had carefully taught him all the legends and traditions

of the mysterious past and his listeners who gathered about him never tired of the narrative though repeated again and again.

According to ancient traditions no fable, myth tale, or story of ancient adventures might be told during the months of summer. Such practice was forbidden by "the little people" (jo-gä-oh), the wood fairies. Should their law be violated some jo-gä-oh flying about in the form of a beetle or bird might discover the offender and report him to the jo-gä-oh chief. Upon this a sign would warn the forgetful Indian. Failing to observe the omen, some evil would befall the culprit. Bees might sting his lips or his tongue would swell and fill his mouth. Snakes might crawl in his bed and choke him while he slept, and so on, until he was punished and forced to desist from forbidden talk.

The wood sprites enacted and enforced this law for two purposes: first, that no animal should become offended by man's boasting of his triumph over beasts, or at the same time learn too much of human cunning and fly forever the haunts of mankind; and second, that no animal, who listening to tales of wonder, adventure or humor, should become so interested as to forget its place in nature, and pondering over the mysteries of man's words, wander dazed and aimless through the forest. To listen to stories in the summer time made trees and plants as well as animals and men lazy, and therefore scanty crops, lean game and shiftless people resulted. To listen to stories made the birds forget to fly to the south lands when winter came, it made the

animals neglect to store up winter provisions and grow their warm winter coats of fur. All the world stops work when a good story is told and afterwards in marveling forgets its wonted duty. Thus Oñ-gweh′-o-weh-ka′, the Iroquois, loyal to old-time custom, reserves his tales of adventures, myth and mystery for winter when the year's work is over and all nature slumbers.

When the story-teller finds an audience about him or wishes to call one, he announces his intention to recite a folk tale (ga-gä′, or in the plural, ga-gä′-sho-ŏ) by exclaiming "Ha-nio′!" and the eager reply is "Hĕh," which is an ardent request that his "Hanio" take immediate effect, and the relation of a ga-gä′ ensues.

At intervals during the relation of a story the auditors must exclaim "Häh!" This was the sign that they were listening. If there was no frequent response of "Häh," the story-teller would stop and inquire what fault was found with him or his story.

It was not only considered a breach of courtesy for a listener to fall asleep, but also a positive omen of evil to the guilty party. If any one for any reason wished to sleep or to leave the room, he must request the narrator to tie the story, "Si-gä′-hah." Failing to say this, and afterwards desiring to hear the remainder of the tale, the narrator would refuse him, for if he related it at all it must be from the beginning through, unless *tied.* Thus *si-gä′-hah* was the magic word by which a legend might be told as a serial.

Methods of recording folklore

There are several ways in which folk tales may be recorded, as indeed there are several purposes for which they are written. To satisfy strictly scientific requirements, the method employed by the Smithsonian Institution and other progressive ethnological institutions, is undoubtedly the best. The native text is recorded with an exact translation interlined, word beneath word. This method is most satisfactory to the student of languages but from the standpoint of literature it falls short. The resulting English is extremely awkward as it must necessarily be in an attempt to parallel two radically different systems of grammar and word compounding. No idea of the native beauty is preserved in such translations, which are often inelegant and difficult to read and understand. To remedy these defects the whole translation must be rewritten in accord with current methods of expression.

Another method of preserving a myth is to record it exactly as told, in the broken English of its narrator. The most poetic conception is thus sometimes reduced to grotesque caricature, and the value of the record lies not so much in its subject-matter as it does in the estimation which is formed of the narrator's ability of expressing in our tongue the thoughts of his own. The charming Uncle Remus stories are of this character but the result is only a study in brogue or dialect, and fails to convey to our minds the ideas which exist in the mind of the native myth teller. From the standpoint of

literature and psychology it is the impression, its form, its spirit that we wish to apprehend. The same medium may produce different results if employed on different substances. The mind of the modern progressive man of today is of a different texture from that of the savage or the peasant, and the same idea produces different emotions and associations in these classes of intellect.

Many have employed the method of entirely recasting primitive ideas in their own thought molds, eliminating all the original idioms and picturesque eccentricities of expression and presenting the folk tale in all the verbiage of contemporary literature. The plot and motive of the original relation is warped and modified to fit modern requirements, the original elements are lost and the story becomes simply a modern one built upon the shattered skeleton of the old. The use of this method has produced a mass of florid, ocherous, recast and garbled folklore, which nevertheless, is presented as genuine.

There is yet another method which embraces some of the worthy features previously suggested. It may have its drawbacks to be criticized but it is full of merit notwithstanding. By this method the transcriber attempts to assimilate the ideas of the myth tale as he hears it, seeks to become imbued with the spirit of its characters, and, shutting out from his mind all thought of his own culture, and momentarily transforming himself into the culture of the myth teller, records his impressions as he recalls the story. His object is to produce the same emotions in the mind of civilized man which is produced in the primitive mind, which

entertains the myth without destroying the native style or warping the facts of the narrative. If in the vernacular the ideas convey tragic, mysterious, or horrifying impressions, and the style is vigorous, metaphorical or poetic, the transcriber employs every consistent art to reproduce the same elements in his own language. There is virtue in this method if honestly followed but it can only be used by one familiar with all the incidents of the culture which produced the tale, by one who is familiar with the language, life and psychology of the myth maker. A myth tale recorded in this way is neither mechanical, dialect or affected in style, but on the other hand, the same living, sentient story, though dressed in the garments of another speech.

It is substantially this method which has been employed by Harriet Maxwell Converse in recording the myths and legends contained in this volume, and for this reason her work is eminently worthy of the consideration of students. Her great love for the Indians, her sympathetic nature, her scientific training and her psychic temperament enabled her to get at the heart of the stories her Indian friends told her. With her poetic mind schooled in all the arts of literature she has interpreted the ideas and impressions in a matchless style which enables the reader to feel all that the red man felt when he listened to the ancient stories of his forefathers.

The editor has endeavored to arrange the various myths and legends systematically and add such notes as will illuminate some of the obscure passages and to suggest by other notes the wealth of material which

is opened up by the study of Iroquois folklore and American folklore in general.

As a loving friend and grateful student of Mrs. Converse, the editor has aimed in putting forth this work to rear from her own material a worthy monument, both to the memory of the gifted writer and to the people whom she loved.

Arthur C. Parker

BIOGRAPHY OF HARRIET MAXWELL CONVERSE

To the late Mrs. Harriet Maxwell Converse, the State of New York owes a debt of lasting gratitude. The reason is apparent to even the superficial visitor to the Indian collections in the State Museum where in striking prominence are to be seen hundreds of rare and priceless relics of the aborigines of New York, her gift to the State in memory of her father, Hon. Thomas Maxwell of Elmira. Her unselfish work in preserving the record and relics of the first claimants of New York State has resulted in preserving much of immense value for students of culture, history and ethnography. Her great interest in the Indians and her wonderful influence with them made it possible for her to mingle with them as a trusted and beloved friend. Indeed so greatly did the Indians esteem her that they bestowed upon her every possible honor within the gift of the clan and the council, hailed her as a sister and a mother, called her Ya-ie-wa-noh, She Who Watches Over Us, adopted her as a member of the nation and gave her a seat in their councils. There is a very great difference between merely receiving a complimentary name and an actual national adoption.

The life story of so remarkable a woman can not fail of pertinent interest from any viewpoint. Mrs. Converse was not a woman who was given to saying much concerning herself and although the writer was associated with her more or less from his childhood, the notes which he has relating to her earlier history are few and fragmentary, but from them and from the records which he has at hand, a brief account of her life's history has been prepared.

To get at the ancestral elements which contributed to the construction of her mind and personality, we must go to the Highlands of Scotland where in the romantic days of history, "the Maxwells maintained the splendor of their name in the baronial towers of Caerlaverock." A splendid name was that of Maxwell, and proudly borne by brave Highlanders from days of old.

Alexander Maxwell. Back in the early years of the 18th century, in the Scottish valley of the Nithe was, born Alexander Maxwell. He married Jane McBratney, she too a Highlander, and of the clan McPherson. The charm of America had reached the ears of Alexander Maxwell and in June 1770 he and his good wife set sail, from the port of Partick, for the new world where adventure and fortune, good or ill, awaited every daring pioneer. But summer seas are not always smooth and June breezes sometimes become gales that lash the waves to fury and bring disaster to unwary barks. This the emigrating couple discovered almost at the outset of their voyage. A violent storm came up as they coursed down the North channel which wrecked the ship and

tossed it upon the shores of County Down in Ireland. The unfortunate couple found refuge in a fisherman's cottage on the shore where, about a month later, June 15, 1770, a son was born, whom they named Guy. The Maxwells and their baby son continued in Ireland for months when, in 1772, they embarked again for America. Upon their arrival they settled in Carlisle, Pa., but soon removed to Virginia, where they made their home in Martinsburg, Berkley Co., and where today are many descendants of the Scots, and prominent among them, descendants of the Maxwells.

When young Guy Maxwell was 18 years of age he took up his residence at Tioga Point where he entered into the firm of Colonel Hollenback. His extraordinary acumen is attested by the fact that Governor Mifflin in 1788 appointed him justice of the peace, then an office of greater importance than at the present day. He was less than 19 years of age when he took the appointment which he held for many years. Guy Maxwell occupied many positions of trust during his early years and contemporary history tells us that he was a shrewd business man. He removed from Milton, Pa., in 1794 to the present site of Elmira where he purchased a town lot. He dealt extensively with the Indians especially the Senecas, by whom he was greatly esteemed because of his uniform courtesy and strict honesty. In those days it was a common thing to treat Indians with respect but the quality of honesty was oftentimes a rare one when dealing with them. The Senecas appreciated his integrity and sought to express their regard by bestowing upon him the name, Ta-se-wa-ya-ee, meaning Honest Trader.

His love for the red men of the forest was shared by his son, Thomas, who was born in Athens, Pa.

Thomas Maxwell. Thomas Maxwell during his early boyhood became a great friend and favorite of the Indians who made Elmira a trading post and often spent days in the forest with them. His skill with the bow and his speed on the trail excited their admiration. Finally after some deed of heroism and endurance, they acclaimed that he was a red man at heart, though his skin was white, adopted him in the Wolf Clan, told him to call Red Jacket his father and that his name was henceforth, He-je-no and meant Brave Boy. For years Thomas Maxwell was county clerk of Tioga and Chemung counties and he also served in Albany as assemblyman for his district and afterward as congressman in Washington. He was a man of exceptional literary ability and contributed widely to the periodical publications of his day. When in 1812 his country was threatened he enlisted with the American army and fought with all the traditional ardor of a Scottish American. During all his public life he never lost interest in the Indians who had been his boyhood friends but frequently mingled with them until the day of his death in 1864.

Harriet Maxwell Converse. The second wife of Hon. Thomas Maxwell was Marie Purdy, a lady of culture, education and refinement. She was the mother of the seven children of Thomas Maxwell. The youngest was Harriet Maxwell, born in 1836 in Elmira. One of the old family scrapbooks contains a clipping which

relates that Harriet left Elmira, at the age of 9, after the death of her mother, went to Milan, O., "where she was duly put to school." It was at this time she first began to write verse for publication. A gentleman who was her playmate in the days before her departure says he has

Red Jacket

Taken from a steel engraving of the painting by R. W. Wier

a distinct and vivid recollection of her in a white dress and a broad red sash tied in an immense bow. "I can shut my eyes and see her as she appeared then, one of the most graceful little girls I ever saw."

In 1861 Harriet Maxwell Clarke, then the young widow of G. B. Clarke, one of the owners of Congress Spring, Saratoga, married Frank Buchanan Converse, of Westfield, Mass., a friend and playmate of her early childhood. For five years after her marriage she traveled in Europe, Asia and Africa and toured the United States. Her husband, Mr. Converse, was an inventor and musician. He had spent his early days in the west where he experienced all the adventures of the early pioneer. He lived with the Indians and became a great favorite with them. His skill as an athlete, and his dexterity with the rifle and bow won their admiration.

After the return of Mr. and Mrs. Converse to the East they took up their home in Mott Haven, afterward removing to West 46th street. New York City.

Mrs. Converse's interest in Indians may be described as hereditary. It is quite possible, however, that although she might ever have been a loyal friend to them, she might never have known them intimately had it not been for her acquaintance with Gen. Ely S. Parker, himself a Seneca Indian of the Wolf Clan, to which Red Jacket belonged. Oftentimes when environments are foreign we fail to appreciate the circumstances of others, nor are we able to do so, for it is experience which makes one able to appreciate the white man's metropolis and the Indian's reservation are the opposing extremes of

civilization and there is little in the bustling complex city to remind one of the quiet simple reservation. Thus, although Mrs. Converse had within her all the elements which were capable of knowing sympathetically, understanding appreciatively and loving steadfastly the Indians whom her father and grandfather had loved,

Ely S. Parker
Donehogawa
The Wolf

it required an awakening stimulus to arouse her interest in this direction. And once awakened there could be no turning. The moment Mrs. Converse met the Iroquois sachem her life and thought took a new direction. The great mind of the Indian had furnished the impulse.[1]

For years Mrs. Converse had written for the best periodicals in America and Great Britain, and her essays and poems were widely copied. Her poems written in the old Scottish for the Edinburgh journals awakened the fires of Highland patriotism and received an abundance of warm praise. Subsequently she was a regular contributor to the *Ladies Journal* (Edinburgh), the *Scottish American* and the *British Advertiser*. She became a regular contributor to several American magazines and her literary career became assured. Her book of poems. *Sheaves,* passed through several editions and was enthusiastically received by the most rigid critics. Her friend John G. Whittier, read and reread the volume and then wrote her, "It is a sheaf in which there are no tares." The gifted authoress received also a complimentary letter from Tennyson and the volume even inspired Dom Pedro, the Emperor of Brazil, to write a letter of appreciation. The press was universally warm in its praise and even the *New York Independent,* usually so severe in its criticism of poetical aspirants, copied several of her poems and said that at least one of the number was worthy of Keats.

It was this promising literary career which Mrs. Converse relinquished to devote the remainder of her life to the study and defense of the Indians of New York. General Parker took her to his reservation and

to the Tuscarora Reservation where she met his sister, Mrs. Caroline Mountpleasant, wife of Chief John Mountpleasant of the Tuscaroras. In 1881 she visited the Cattaraugus Reservation where she became acquainted with the descendants of Red Jacket.

For many years her knowledge of the Iroquois had been gleaned solely from the manuscripts left by her father and from the *League of the Iroquois,* the joint work of Lewis H. Morgan and General E. S. Parker. With the insight of Indian character which these works had given her, her actual experiences among the Indians themselves fanned her interest into a passion. She admired their laws and customs, she marveled at their wondrous national vitality, their endurance, and she loved them. And they, finding her a friend, loved her.

Mrs. Converse's untiring activity in behalf of her red friends won their esteem and confidence. Her labors both at Washington and Albany, before the federal and state legislative bodies, at once placed her conspicuously before the public as a friend of the Indians and those who planned adverse legislation feared the forces she was able to muster in opposition. The best men in private and in public life were her friends and anxious to fight as she directed.

The Indians were grateful and thus expressed themselves, but were unable for a time to find a suitable way for expressing it by other means than words. Then they began to shower their ancient heirlooms upon her, articles of embroidered buckskin, chieftains' belts, ceremonial regalia, strange musical instruments, beadwork and wondrously wrought silver brooches.

This was not enough, however. Bearing in mind the record of two generations past, of Honest Trader, her grandfather, and Brave Boy, her father, and with the evidence of her loyalty fresh in their minds, they planned to make her a sister and a clanswoman. This could be done only by a family adoption and naming. The matter impressed Tho-na-so-wah, one of the national Seneca sachems, whose English name was William Jones, who with his wife, Jo-on-do-oh, planned to adopt Mrs. Converse as a sister. The adoption ceremony took place on the Cattaraugus Reservation on June 15, 1885; Mrs. Converse was received into the Snipe Clan and given the name Ga-ya-nes-ha-oh. Bearer of the Law. This was one of the ancient hereditary names of the Snipe Clan honondiont, *faith keepers,* and was once borne by Ruth Stevens, Red Jacket's stepdaughter.

Mrs. Converse at the time of her adoption

The naming ceremony was elaborate and impressive. All the modern innovations which the Senecas had acquired were added to the ancient usages to increase the interest of the occasion. In accordance

with the ancient custom the council was held out of doors in a council square, made by bounding a grassy spot with huge logs and benches, which served as seats for the throng. The council fire crackled within the square and the chiefs and matrons moved about within the space. This square was arranged in the Jones orchard and may be seen even today. Only once again was it used for council purposes. At this ceremony two others were "named" and one "confirmed." Hon. George S. Conover of Geneva, a student of Indian lore, received the name, Hy-we-saus, Seeker of History; Maj. Fred H. Furniss of Waterloo was named To-an-do-ah, Inventor; and Hon. Charles H. Hutchinson, ex-mayor of Utica, who had received an honorary name from an individual Indian, received the confirmation of his honorary title.

It is well to note here that the conferring of a name or even a family adoption carries no national rights with it. National adoption and honorary naming are honors widely different. Yet those who have received names often believe themselves adopted tribesmen. Naming, does not necessarily imply adoption, nor does family or clan adoption imply national adoption. Considered in the true light, few have ever been adopted into an Indian tribe, although many have claimed to be. There are even grades of names, so that to have an Indian name does not necessarily mean that one bears an ancient Indian title. Persistent name seekers often have been danced around by a grinning Indian with a rattle, who demanded $5 in return for a name which no Indian would translate, but which the donor assures

the recipient means Great Big Eagle Chief, or some like fiction. The white man or woman who has persisted in his quest for an Indian name is satisfied and ever after boasts himself an adopted Indian. The Indians, however, only laugh and think of the greenback which somebody received and of the ludicrous name that no one will translate. A true Indian name is not easily obtained by a white man or woman nor is it often given to those who ask for it. It is, however, given those who have shown themselves worthy of the honor and who know how to bear it. Such were the names given by the sachems, chiefs, and warriors, the faith keepers and women of the Senecas at the Tho-na-so-wah ceremony.

Mrs. Converse's reception in the Snipe Clan and into the family of William Jones, placed her in a position to secure extensive information regarding the customs and institutions of the Iroquois. The more she studied, the greater her enthusiasm became. She contributed generously to all their festivals and attended the various ceremonies on all the reservations in New York and Canada, each time the guest of the chiefs. Her home in New York became the stopping place of Indians visiting that city and the writer has met at her home Indians not only of the Iroquois nations of New York, but Indians from all over North America, from Hudson bay to Yucatan, from Dakota to Arizona and from Maine to British Columbia.

Naturally, simple minded Indians in a great city were wont to get into complications. Sometimes they would not hesitate to strike down an inquisitive inhabitant of the Bowery who ventured a disparaging

remark. The Bowery inhabitant went to Bellevue and the Indian to the police station. Fortunately for the Indian the next morning found Mrs. Converse in court to plead for his release, and while Mrs. Converse lived the cases against Indians almost without exception were dismissed. Most of the cases are extremely humorous and an examination of the court documents will reveal that when an Indian in New York spoiled a white man's face the white man was usually fined and the Indian discharged, though sometimes with a mild reprimand.

Mrs. Converse not only was the Indians' defender in the courts, but was constantly busy relieving unfortunate Indians who had been robbed, swindled or injured. She always managed to find a ticket home for Indians who were destitute and disgusted with the big town. Sometimes they returned with a new pocket-book well lined and clean new outfits.

Those who were stricken with diseases or injured in accidents found her quick to discover their plight and to furnish relief. Mrs. Converse kept track with all the solicitude of a mother of the 50 or 100 Indians who lived in New York and those who came temporarily. The writer has four or five large scrapbooks full of clippings telling of the humorous, tragic and pathetic experiences of Indians in New York City, most of them from the pen of Mrs. Converse herself.

Her activities, however, were not confined to the Indians who dwelt in the city. She constantly watched bills before legislative bodies and was always on hand with a good fight when an adverse bill came up. The

forces which she marshaled were formidable and the framers of the bills were obliged to capitulate every time.

Soon after her naming Mrs. Converse was initiated into the Pleasant Valley Lodge of the "Guards of the Little Waters," popularly known as the Secret Medicine Society. She also became a member of the Ye-ih-dos, the Society of Mystic Animals, one of the Little Water fraternities. The writer is a member of the first named order and of the lodge which she subsequently joined, Ga-nun′-da-sē.

CHIEF JOHN SANDY

One of the Canadian chiefs who welcomed Mrs. Converse to the Six Nations Reservation in Ontario

With the Indians the term "medicine" means a mystic potence, or to use Hewitt's word, it means *orenda*. There is no English equivalent of the word which the Indians term "orenda," though it is erroneously and ambiguously interpreted *medicine*. The "Medicine" Society, therefore, does not necessarily imply an organization devoted to the compounding of drugs or the mixing of nostrums. Mrs. Converse was probably the first white woman ever to have become a member of this fraternity and to have actually held the great Ni-ga-ni-ga′-ah in her possession.

The love which all the Iroquois nations of New York had for her amounted to a passion. She was their one strong arm in every trial. They could do nothing to express their appreciation, but to plan more to honor her. Her first naming had only been a complimentary honor and at the time considered the highest ever given a white woman by the Iroquois. Now they planned to give her a national adoption and to ratify and seal it with the consent of the council and the seal of the nation.

In April 1890, the Name Holders of the Snipe Clan held a council and decided to change Mrs. Converse's name. Thus on the following June there was another ceremony. Mr. Converse was present with Mrs. Converse and was given a clan adoption. He was named Ha-ie-no-nis, Music Maker, in allusion to his ability to wring melody from any musical instrument which he chose to touch. Mr. James Kelly of New York City, an American sculptor of note, at this ceremony was named Ga-nius-kwa, Stone Giant, a name consistent with the

sculptor's profession. Mrs. Converse was received with great ceremony and named Ya-ie-wa-noh. The next spring the Indians planned to advance her still further in the honors of the nation.

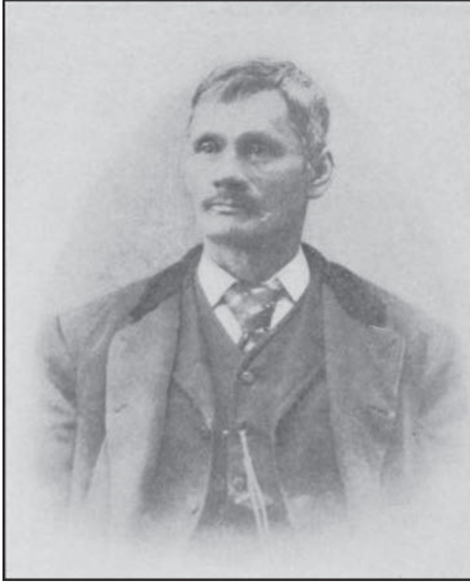
She had just succeeded in bringing about defeat to a particularly objectionable bill. The *New York World*, April 8, 1891, in an article entitled "Named Ya-ie-wah-noh," describes the action which was taken as follows: "After the bill was killed, when the Seneca Council, now in session at Carrollton, Cattaraugus Co., New York,

An Ostowa-gowa officer who presides over adoption and naming ceremonies

in the Allegany Reservation was called, an application was laid before that body to the effect that 'by love and affection' it was the desire of the Indians that Mrs. Converse should be received into their nation as a legal member of it. Upon this appeal a vote was taken and it was unanimously resolved that she should at once be invited to appear before the council and receive her Indian name. To this summons Mrs. Converse immediately responded and on her arrival at Carrollton was met by a delegation of the Indians and escorted to the Council House where she was received by the Marshal of the nation and presented by him to the President and Board of Councilors.

The council was in session but immediately adjourned to welcome her and after a prayer had been offered to the Great Spirit, thanking him for her safe journeying through the dangerous trail of the white man (a railroad accident detained her), she was offered a seat by the side of the President and the hour of the adoption ceremony was appointed.

A runner was immediately sent out to notify the people and 300 of them had gathered at the Council House when Mrs. Converse was nominated by the Indian matrons to sit with them. Taking her place between two of the 'mothers' at the head of the Council House, the ceremony proceeded, conducted by the head chief of the Snipe Clan of which Mrs. Converse had been made a family member in 1884. The resolution of the council was then read in the Seneca language and interpreted to her as follows:



Chauncey Abrams, Sachem of the Tonawanda Snipe Clan

Whereas, Harriet Maxwell Converse has through her kindness and tender feeling to our Nation exerted herself to the uttermost in behalf of the protection and welfare of our Nation, and is always ready to stand at the helm of the canoe to avoid the crash of extinction of the Indians; it is

Resolved, On account of our appreciation and love thereof, she shall be honorable admitted as a member of the Seneca Nation of New York Indians.

The new name and title which was given was Ya-ie-wa-noh meaning She Watches Over Us. This name had once been borne by the wife of the celebrated Chief Cornplanter."

The next year, 1892, the Onondaga chiefs, the

legislative body of the Six Nations, determined to share in the honors which were due Mrs. Converse.

The plan was inaugurated at the Condolence Council held at the Tonawanda Reservation in September 1891. There Mrs. Converse had joined in the national condolence for the lost chief of the nation. After the ceremony of official mourning, the Onondaga chiefs nominated and elected Mrs. Converse for the office formerly held by the dead chief of the Tonawanda Senecas, but as the ceremonies were conducted entirely in Indian languages, Mrs. Converse did not learn of the action until the following spring when she was

Daniel La Forte, President of the Six Nations in 1892

summoned to the Six Nations Council at Onondaga Castle.

A personal invitation was sent by Chief Daniel La Forte. At the council she was unanimously confirmed a chief of the Six Nations, an honor never before conferred upon a white woman. The certificate which was afterward handed the newly elected chief read as follows:

Onondaga Castle, Mar. 25, 1892

This is to certify that Harriet Maxwell Converse has been duely elected & Installed to the Chieftain Ship of the Six Nations of the New York Indians on the 18th day of September, in the year 1891, at the Condolence held on the Tonawanda Indian Reservation. And she is therefore recognized as one of their Chiefs — to look after the interest of the Six Nations & also is recognized as Ya-ie-wa-noh.

Witness

Rev. ALBERT CUSICK

Vice President
Six Nations

Principal Chiefs

his

MR. ABRAM (x) HILL

mark

THOMAS WILLIAMS

THOMAS WEBSTER

his

BAPTIST (x) THOMAS

mark

President of Six Nations, DANIEL LA FORTE

The chiefs of the Six Nations of Canada then invited her to honor them with a visit and once again she was received with an ovation.

After this culmination of honors her Seneca friend, Do-ne-ha-ga-wah (Gen. Ely S. Parker) wrote:

> I am extremely delighted to receive your brief note telling how bountifully honors have been showered upon you by the remnants of the Iroquois, both in New York and Canada. You deserve these honors empty and shadowy though they be and a great deal more, for the service you have rendered them. Accept, please, my hearty congratulations on your triumphal tour among these simple but honest hearted children of our ancient forests.

Onondaga Castle Mar 25th 1892.

This is to certify that Harriet Maxwell Converse
has been Duely elected + Installed to
The Chieftian Ship. of the six nations
of the New York Indians on the 18th
day of September the Year of 1891. at
The condolance held on the Towanda
Indian Reservation. And she is there
fore recognized as one of their Chiefs.
to look after the Intrest of the six
Nations. & also is recognized as

Ya-ie-wa-noh
Indian name

Principle Chiefs -

Witness
Rev. Albert Cusick. — Mr. Abram his x mark Hill
Vice President six nations — Thomas Williams.
Vice President six nation — Thomas Webster
Baptist his x mark Thomas
President six nation — Daniel La Fort

Mrs. H. M. Converse's national adoption and chieftainship certificate