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A Pequot-Mohegan Witchcraft Tale

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## A PEQUOT-MOHEGAN WITCHCRAFT TALE.

It is not generally known that a small colony of about fifty Indians of mixed blood who call themselves Mohegans still exists at Mohegan near Norwich, Conn. These people have practically lost their language, but they still retain a wealth of folk-lore tales. It was my good fortune about two years ago to establish friendly relations with these Indians and to collect from them some of their stories, as well as such linguistic material as I could gather. Their ancient and obsolescent speech is still known to two old women, from one of whom, Mrs. Fidelia Fielding, I obtained the following extraordinary tale. Professor J. Dyneley Prince, who coöperated with me in a technical article on the subject<sup>1</sup> of the present dialect of Mrs. Fielding, has, I think, definitely shown that her idiom is a last echo of the Pequot tongue, and not a variant of the Lenâpe Mohegan language which was still spoken at Stockbridge, Mass., in the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The name Mohegan, which is the only one which our Connecticut Indians know for their clan, probably arose from an early confusion of terms. The present Pequot-Mohegans have a tradition that they originally came from the Lenâpe Mohegan country in the Hudson Valley, an idea which is in harmony with the ancient Pequot legends regarding their primitive habitat. I have suggested in the above mentioned article that the name Mohegan may have been first applied as a distinctive appellation to the rebellious band of Uncas which separated in the seventeenth century from the main body of the Pequots. The name Mohegan may have been adopted because of the Indians' belief in their Lenâpe Mohegan origin. There can be no doubt, however, that the Pequot language was a very different Algic dialect from the idiom of the Lenâpe Mohegans.

## THE TALE OF CHAHNAMEED.

Long ago there lived a man upon an island<sup>2</sup> some distance from the mainland. His name was Chahnameed, the great eater, the glutton. On the island he had a house, and in a cove near by he kept two canoes. One day, as he stood on the beach looking toward the mainland, he saw something moving, but he could not make out

<sup>1</sup> See "The Modern Pequots and their Language," by J. Dyneley Prince and F. G. Speck in the *American Anthropologist*, April, 1903.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Fielding asserts that some of the old Mohegans considered this island to be in one of the coves near Massapeag, Conn. I agree with her, however, in thinking it more probable that it was in the region of the Great Lakes or of the upper Hudson River, which was the traditional seat of this people.

what it was. He looked for some time, and then saw that it was a beautiful young girl walking along the beach. He said to himself: "She is looking for shells to put on her dress;" for her garment was of buckskin covered with colored beads, shells, and fringe. She was very beautiful, and Chahnameed thought so. So he put his hands about his mouth, and called to her. When she looked up, he called to her, and asked her to come over and live with him. The girl hesitated, but Chahnameed urged her, and at last she consented. Then he got into one of the canoes, and paddled to the mainland. When he got there, the girl said: "I will come back, but first I must go and get my mortar and pestle." So she went away to her village, and Chahnameed waited for her. When she came back, she had a mortar, a pestle, and some eggs. Then he took her in the canoe, and paddled to the island, and after that they lived together for a long time.

Now Chahnameed was accustomed to stay away from home for long periods, during which his wife did not know what he did, or where he went. She did not like this, but said nothing to him about it. After a while, however, she made up her mind that she would leave him, for she did not like to be left alone so long. Quietly she set about making some dolls. She made a great many,<sup>1</sup> decorating them with paint and shells, but one doll was made larger than the rest. These she put away, so that her husband should not find them. Waiting until he had departed as usual one day, she took her mortar and pestle and some eggs down to the canoe. This canoe Chahnameed had left at home. Then she went back to the house, and got the dolls, which she put against the walls in different places, all facing the centre. The large one she put in the bed, and covered it up with robes. Before she left, she put a little dried dung about each doll, and then crawled into the bed, and voided her excrement where the large doll lay. She then left her handiwork, went down to the canoe, and paddled away towards the mainland. In the canoe were the mortar, pestle, and eggs.

By and by Chahnameed came home. When he got to the house he looked for his wife, but did not find her. Then he went in and looked around. He saw the dolls, and went over towards one. Immediately the one against the wall behind him began to scream. When he turned around to look at it, the first one began to scream. Every time he turned to look at one doll, the one that was behind him would begin to scream. He did not know what they were. Soon he saw that something was in the bed, and, taking a big stick, he went over to it. He struck the large doll that was under the

<sup>1</sup> Judging from the gestures of the narrator, the height of the dolls must have been about two feet. The large one was about three and a half feet high.

robes, thinking that it might be his wife. The large doll then screamed louder than the others. He pulled down the robes, and saw that it was only a doll. Then he threw down his stick, and ran down to his canoe. He knew that his wife had departed, for he saw that the mortar and pestle were gone.

When he got to the shore, he put his hands to his eyes, and looked for a long time toward the mainland. Soon he saw her paddling very hard for the land. He leaped into his canoe, and went after her. He soon began to gain, and before long he was almost up to her, and would have caught her, had she not suddenly crept to the stern of her canoe, and, lifting up the mortar, thrown it out into the water. Immediately the water where the mortar fell became mortars. When Chahnameed got there, he could go no farther. But he jumped out of his canoe and dragged it over the mortars, then pushed it into the water and jumped into it again. He paddled very hard to catch her up. His wife paddled very hard, too. But again he began to gain, and soon almost caught her. As before, however, she crept back to the stern, and raising the pestle, threw it over. Where it fell, the water became pestles. Then she paddled on again, very hard. Chahnameed could not pass these pestles either, so he jumped out and dragged the canoe over them; then jumped in and paddled as hard as he could to catch up. Again he began to gain, and almost caught her. But his wife crept to the stern of her canoe, and threw out all the eggs. Where the eggs fell, the water turned to eggs. Chahnameed could not get through these either. So he jumped out and dragged the canoe over them as before. This time he had to work very hard to get through the eggs, but at last succeeded. He paddled harder than ever, and soon began to catch up again. Now he would have caught her, for she had nothing more to throw out. But she stopped paddling, and stood up. Quickly she raised her hand to her head, and from the top pulled out a long hair. Then she drew it through her fingers, and immediately it became stiff like a spear. Chahnameed thought he was going to catch her now; he did not see what she was doing. When he got quite near, she balanced the hair-spear in her hand, and hurled it at him. She threw it straight; it hit him in the forehead, and he fell out of the canoe, and sank. He was dead. This all happened a very long time ago, back in the beginning of the world. The woman went back to her people. She was a Mohegan.

*Frank G. Speck.*

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