

NOTES ON THE FOLK-LORE OF THE WYANDOTS.

I. RELIGION.

THE gods of the Wyandots were those of the Iroquois and the Hurons, but they were stamped with a strong Wyandot individuality, and in many respects differed in attributes from those of the nations named. The Wyandot was more Iroquois than he was Huron-Iroquois, and he was but little different from the Seneca. It need surprise no one if it is finally determined that the Wyandots were the oldest of the Iroquoian family. Their mythology makes clear some things left in uncertainty and obscurity by that of other tribes of the family. There are some things in it that are not found in the myths of any of the other tribes. Their myths, too, are clearer cut, more definite, and, I believe, more beautiful in form, than those of other tribes. The Iroquoian family has been supposed to possess little imagination, and a mythology deficient in beautiful conceptions. This opinion is the result, I believe, of an imperfect acquaintance with the folk-lore of this strong and bold people. The myths of the woman who fell from heaven, the creation of the great island, the birth of the twins, the enlargement of the great island and the peopling of it with man and animals, the destruction of these and their re-creation, the creation of the sun, moon, and stars, and many others, are but little inferior in their bold originality and beauty of conception to the Greek myths.

The words used by the Wyandots to express their conception of the God of the white man are as follows:—

1. Häh'-mėhn-dėh'-zhōōh. This word I have heard used by the Wyandots more frequently than any other, when they were speaking of God.

2. Hoh'-mėhn-dih'-zhōōh. This is the proper pronunciation of the word as it is written by Finley, in his "History of the Wyandot Mission."

3. Tāh'-mėhn-dėh'-zhōōh. This is the proper pronunciation of the word as it is written by John Johnston, in his vocabulary of the Wyandot language published in Howe's "Historical Collections of Ohio."

4. Shāh'-mėhn-dėh'-zhōōh. The word is sometimes so pronounced by the Wyandots.

These are only the variations of the same word, and they all mean precisely the same thing. The best translations are

"You are God," or

"Thou art God," or

"Thou art the Great Spirit."

The words are very ancient, but their use in this capacity and the meaning they now bear must be attributed to the Jesuits or other early missionaries; they express, in their modern acceptation, a conception entirely foreign to the ancient Wyandot mind. It is certain that no single "Supreme Ruler," or "Creator of the Universe," or of even the world, was believed in or conceived of by the ancient Wyandots.

What is here said of God as a Wyandot concept applies with equal force to the Devil of the white man. The Wyandots use two words as names for the Devil:—

1. Dēh'-shrōh-rōh'-nēh. This word is now translated "The Great Enemy" by the Wyandots.

2. Dēh'-shrōh-rōh'-nōh. Why this word should be used in this capacity at all is more than I have been able to find a reason for. It means "Many Devils," or a "Devil People." It may be impossible to determine the true derivation and proper ancient meaning of these Wyandot words, for the idea of the Devil, as we conceive of him, is as foreign to the ancient Wyandot mind as is our idea of God. And there is no word in the Wyandot language equivalent to our word "hell" as used to describe a place of punishment for the soul after death. In John Johnston's vocabulary of Wyandot words, "hell" is given as "Degh-shunt." This word is now unintelligible to the Wyandots, and meaningless, and could never have meant "hell."

Following is a list of the more important gods of the ancient Wyandots, together with a brief statement of their attributes and offices:—

1. *Hōōh-māh'-yōōh-wāh''-nēh'.*

The first name in Wyandot mythology is Hōōh-māh'-yōōh-wāh''-nēh'. It is very difficult (if, indeed, it is not quite impossible) to make, at this time, an accurate translation of this name. The best renderings are

"Our Big Chief up there," or

"Our Big Chief Above," or

"He is our Big Chief that lives above the sky."

But all these renderings may be more nearly the ideas of what he is than correct translations of his name.

Hōōh-māh'-yōōh-wāh''-nēh' ruled the world above the sky, and was the father of the Woman who fell from Heaven. The land above the sky was in no sense an equivalent to the white man's heaven, for after death the Wyandot went to a place prepared for him in the interior of the earth, and good and bad alike went to this place. Want of space forbids any further account of Hōōh-māh'-yōōh-wāh''-nēh' at this time.

2. *Tsēh'-zhōōh-skāh'-häh.*

Tsēh'-zhōōh-skāh'-häh was the name of the Wyandot God of the Forest and Nature. His name means "The Great One of the Water and the Land." He was the deification of the mythical Tsēh-sēh-howh-hōōh^{ngk}, the Good One of the Twins born of the Woman who fell from Heaven.

3. *Skēhn-rīh'-äh-täh'.*

Skēhn-rīh'-äh-täh' was the War God of the Wyandots. The only translation of this name that I could ever get is

"Warrior not afraid," or

"Warrior not afraid of Battle."

4. *Täh-rēh'-nyōh-träh''-squäh.¹*

Täh-rēh'-nyōh-träh''-squäh was the Wyandot God of Dreams. The name signifies

"The Revealer," or

"He makes the Vision," or

"He makes the Dream."

He was supposed to have something to do with the supernatural influences that acted upon this life, and he revealed the effects of these influences to the Wyandots in dreams. All visions and dreams came from him, for he had control of the souls of the Wyandots, while they slept, or were unconscious from injury or disease. The Hōōh''-kēh' could detach his soul from his body, and send it to Täh-rēh'-nyōh-träh''-squäh for information at any time, and during its absence the Hōōh''-keh' was in a trance-like condition.

No god of the ancient Wyandots had more influence upon their lives and social institutions than Täh-rēh'-nyōh-träh''-squäh.

5. *Hēh'-nōh.*

Hēh'nōh was the Thunder God of the ancient Wyandots. They called him Grandfather. By some accounts he came into the world with the Woman who fell from Heaven. By the merest accident I learned many additional facts concerning this god, while in the Indian Territory a few weeks since, but cannot afford to write them here until they are verified fully, something I am trying to do.

6. *The Animals.*

The Wyandot mythology endowed the ancient animals with great power of the supernatural order. This is especially true of those animals used by them as totems or clan insignia, and from whom

¹ The apostrophe denotes a suppressed repetition of the vowel sound which it follows. The syllable which it follows here is pronounced "trähäh."

they were anciently descended. Of the animals, the Big Turtle stands in first place. He caused the Great Island (North America) to grow on his back, for a resting-place and home for the Woman who fell from Heaven. He is supposed to carry the Great Island on his back to this day.

The Little Turtle is second in rank and importance in the list of animals. By order of the Great Council of these animals, he made the Sun; he made the Moon to be the Sun's wife. He made all the fixed stars; but the stars which "run about the sky" are supposed to be the children of the Sun and Moon. The Sun, Moon, and stars were made for the comfort and convenience of the Woman who fell from Heaven. To do this it was necessary for the Little Turtle to go up to the sky, and this difficult matter was accomplished by the aid of the Thunder God. The Deer was the second animal to get into the sky; this he did by and with the assistance of the Rainbow. And afterwards all the other totemic animals except the Mud Turtle went up to the sky by the same way, and they are supposed to be living there to this present time. The animals seem to have governed the world before the Woman fell from heaven, and for some time after that important event.

7. The Woman who fell from Heaven.

The Woman who fell from Heaven is an important personage in the mythology of the Wyandots. I have no space here to dwell upon the cause of her falling into this lower world, her peculiar place in the mythology of the Wyandots, etc.

8. The Twins.

According to the mythology of the Wyandots, the Twins were begotten in the country from which the Woman fell, and which the myth calls heaven. I pass over their parentage, the great work they wrought in this world, and the destruction of the Bad One by the Good One, the destruction of all the works of the earth, and their recreation by the Good One.

9. Täh'-tēh-kěh'-äh, or The Little People.

The Täh'-tēh-kěh'-äh, or The Little People, occupy an important place in Wyandot mythology. Their name signifies "The Twins." They are very diminutive in size, but they possess marvelous supernatural powers. They lived (and they are supposed to yet live) in stone caves in the bowels of the earth, made by the Mud Turtle, when he was digging the hole through the Great Island for the pathway of the Sun at night when he was going back to the east to rise upon a new day. In these caves are forests, streams, game,

night and day, heat and cold, as on the surface of the earth. These Little People are represented as living precisely like the ancient Wyandots, and that it is their task, duty and pleasure to preserve in all their primeval purity the ancient laws, customs, social organization, and political and religious institutions for the use of the Wyandots after death, for this is the land to which the Wyandots go when they leave this world. It is presided over by the Mud Turtle, who did not go into the sky with the other animals. I have no space here to enumerate the many achievements of the Little People.

10. *The Hōōh'''-kēh'.*

The Hōōh'''-kēh' was the "Medicine Man" of the ancient Wyandots, and the ŌŌh'''-kēh' was the "Medicine Woman." Their office was practically the same in all the Iroquoian tribes, and their functions have been so often described that it is unnecessary to repeat them here had we time and space.

The foregoing is the merest outline of the principal gods of the Wyandots. The mythology of the ancient Wyandots was very complete, and everything in the whole universe was accounted for. Nothing was left in doubt. In its study I have often believed that I could see that after man had emerged from savagery, he was incapable of formulating a religious system which would in all respects satisfy the human mind. He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow, and doubt and uncertainty seem to be inseparable from advancement in knowledge.

I give a few specimens of the myths of the ancient Wyandots which I have preserved. They are not altogether in connected order as given here, and are intended to show the style in which they were related by the "Keepers of the True Traditions" of the Wyandot people. Anciently they were preserved in the form of songs.

The Woman who fell from Heaven.

The people lived in Heaven (Yāh-rōhn'-yīh-yēh). They were Wyandots. The head man's name was Hōōh'-māh'-yōōh-wāh''-nēh', the Big Chief, or the Mighty Ruler. He had a very beautiful daughter. She was the favorite of the people. She became sick. The Hōōh'''-kēh' came. She could not be cured by his medicine. The Hōōh'''-kēh' said, "Dig up the wild apple-tree; what will cure her she can pluck from among its roots." This apple-tree stood near the door of the lodge of Hōōh-māh'-yōōh-wāh''-nēh'.

The Hōōh'''-keh' advised that while they were digging up the wild

apple-tree, they should bring the young Woman, and lay her down upon the ground under its branches, so that she might see down where the men¹ were at work, and the more quickly pluck away the medicine (Noh''-quäht) when it should be reached.

When they had dug there for a while, the tree and the ground all about it suddenly sank down, fell through, and disappeared. The lap or treetop caught and carried down the young Woman. Tree and Woman disappeared, and the rent (Kōh'-mēhn-säh'-ēh-zhäh'-äh, *i. e.* broken world, or the rent earth) was closed over both of them.

This point where the tree sank down through heaven is called in the Wyandot mythology, Těh'-ōōh-kyäh'-ēh, the point of breaking through. In some versions of this account it is called the "Jumping-off Place;" for the Woman is represented as jumping or springing from the sky. The same Wyandot term is used, though, in all versions.

Underneath, in the lower world, was only water, — Yōōh^{ng}'-tsähⁿ-rēh'-zhōōh, The Great Water. Two Swans² were swimming about there. These Swans saw the young Woman falling from heaven. Some accounts say that a mighty peal of thunder, the first ever heard in these lower regions, broke over the waters, and startled all the swimmers. On looking up, the Swans beheld the Woman standing in the rent heavens, clad in flames of bright lightning. She was taller than the highest tree. Thus was she accompanied in her fall from heaven by Hēh'-nōh, the Grandfather and the Thunder God of the Wyandots.

One of the Swans said : —

"What shall we do with this Woman?"

The other Swan replied : —

"We must receive her on our backs."

Then they threw their bodies together side by side, and she fell upon them.

The Swan that had first spoken said : —

"What shall we do with this Woman? We cannot forever bear her up."

To this question the other Swan replied : —

"We must call a council of all the swimmers and all the water tribes."

This they did. Each animal came upon special invitation. The Big Turtle came by special invitation to preside over the Yäh'-häh-shěh'yěh, the Great Council.

¹ Some versions say women were doing the digging; others use the word "people."

² The Wyandot word for swan is used in this place, but the description of the birds would seem to indicate gulls or geese. They are described as "flat-backed birds," half a tree tall, *i. e.* very large.

Much discussion was had by the Great Council. But it seemed for a long time that the deliberations would be fruitless. No plan for the disposition of the Woman could be agreed upon. When the Great Council was about to adjourn without coming to a conclusion, the Big Turtle said:—

“If you can get a little of the earth which, with the Woman and the Tree, fell down from heaven, I will hold it.”

So the animals took it by turns to try to get the earth. They dived down into the deep where the Tree had fallen. But they could get none of the earth, which, so the Wyandots claim, shone with a brilliant light to guide them. In this search many of the animals were drowned, and came to the surface dead. When it seemed that none of the earth could be obtained, the Toad volunteered to go down and try and see what success she might have.

The Toad was gone a long time. The Great Council despaired of her coming back again. Finally she came up, with her mouth full of the earth; but she was dead when she reached the surface.

There was very little of the earth,—too little, it was supposed,—and the Great Council was discouraged. But the Little Turtle urged that it be used. She rubbed it carefully about the edges of the Big Turtle's shell. And from this small amount soon there was the Great Island upon the Big Turtle's back.

The Woman was removed from the backs of the Swans to the Great Island, which was, from that time, her home.

The Toad was the only swimmer that could get the earth. This is why the Toad has always been called Mäh'-shōōh-täh'-äh—Our Grandmother—by the Wyandots. The Toad is held in reverence by the Wyandots, and none of them will harm her to this day.

Yōōh^{ng'}-tsähⁿ-dēh'-kōh-rēh'-zhōōh, or The Great Island.

The Island grew to be a great land,—all of North America, which, to the Wyandot, was all the earth. The Wyandot name for the Great Island is Yōōh^{ng'}-tsähⁿ-dēh'-kōh-rēh'-zhōōh. It means, literally, “The Land which stands up from the Great Water;” but it is correctly rendered “The Great Island.” It rests yet on the back of the Big Turtle. He stands deep down in the Yōōh^{ng'}-tsähⁿ-rēh'-zhōōh, or the Great Water, in which the Swans were swimming when they saw the Woman fall from heaven. Sometimes he becomes weary of remaining so long in one position. Then he shifts his weight, and moves (changes) his feet. And then the Great Island trembles, and the Wyandots cry out, “Häh'-käh-shäh-tēhn'-dīh! Häh'-käh-shäh-tēhn'-dīh! He moves the earth! He moves the earth!”

Thus does the Wyandot account for the Ōōh'-tōh-mēhn-säh-zhāht', the Earthquake.

The Twins born.

The Great Island was the Woman's home. It was not then so large as it afterwards was made. The Woman went all about the Great Island. Těh'-ěh-tōh-rōhn'-tōhs¹ was her lot and part. But in her wanderings she found a lodge, and, living in it, an Old Woman. She called the Old Woman Shōōh-tāh'-āh, — "Her Grandmother." In the Wyandot mythology, the point where the lodge of the Old Woman stood is called Rōhn'-yih-shōōh-tāh''-tēhk-trāh-zhōōht, — "The place where the Woman who fell from Heaven met (or found) her Grandmother."

The Woman lived with her Grandmother. She is well now, her sickness having disappeared. But she is yěhn-děh'-rīh (*i. e.* with child), however, — and with the Tāh-kěh'-ěh (*i. e.* with The Twins).

The time of the Woman who fell from Heaven was full. Of her were now born the Two Children, — The Brothers, — The Twins. Of these Children, one was Good, — the other Bad, or Evil. Hōōh-māh'-yōōh-wāh''-nēh' directed how The Twins should be named. The Good One was named Tsēh'-sēh-howh'-hōōh^{ngk}, — *i. e.* made of Fire, or The Man who was made of Fire. The Evil One was named Tāh'-wěh-skāh'-rōōh^{ngk}, — *i. e.* made of Flint, or The Man who was made of Flint.²

The Deer and the Rainbow ; or, How the Animals got into the Sky.

The animals were greatly distressed and much offended by the works of Tāh'-wěh-skāh'-rōōh^{ngk}. They saw how fortunate was the Little Turtle, who spent most of her time "keeping the heavens." She always came, to attend the Great Council, in the Black Cloud, in which were the springs, ponds, streams, and lakes.

One day the Deer said to the Rainbow : —

"Carry me up to the sky. I must see the Little Turtle."

The Rainbow did not wish to comply with the request of the Deer at that time, but wished to consult the Thunder God about the matter, and so replied : —

"Come to me in the winter, when I rest on the mountain by the lake. Then I will take you up to the house of the Little Turtle."

The Deer looked and waited all winter for the Rainbow, but the Rainbow did not come. When the Rainbow came in the summer, the Deer said : —

"I waited for you all winter on the mountain by the lake ; you did not come. Why did you deceive me ?"

¹ This word signifies deep grief and sorrow ; and it carries, too, some idea of repentance.

² These names carry no signification of good and evil as we understand those terms.

Then the Rainbow said :—

“When you see me in the fog over the lake, come to me; then you can go up. I will carry you up to the house of the Little Turtle in the sky.”

One day the fog rolled in heavy banks and thick masses over the lake. The Deer stood on the hill by the lake, waiting and looking for the Rainbow. When the Rainbow threw the beautiful arch from the lake to the hill, a very white and shining light flashed and shone about the Deer. A straight path, with all the colors of the Rainbow, lay before the Deer; it led through a strange forest. The Rainbow said :—

“Follow the beautiful path through the strange woods.”

This the Deer did. The beautiful way led the Deer to the house of the Little Turtle in the sky. And the Deer went about the sky everywhere.

When the Great Council met, the Bear said :—

“The Deer is not yet come to the Council; where is the Deer?”

Then the Hawk flew all about to look for the Deer, but the Hawk could not find the Deer in the air. Then the Wolf looked in all the woods, but the Deer could not be found in the woods anywhere.

When the Little Turtle came in the Black Cloud, in which were the streams, the lakes, and the ponds, the Bear said :—

“The Deer is not yet come to the Council; where is the Deer? There can be no Council without the Deer.”

The Little Turtle replied :—

“The Deer is in the sky. The Rainbow made a beautiful pathway of all her colors for the Deer to come up by.”

The Council looked up to the sky, and saw the Deer running about there. Then the Little Turtle showed to the Council the beautiful pathway made for the Deer by the Rainbow. All the animals except the Mud Turtle went along the beautiful way which led them up into the sky. They remain there to this day. They may be often seen, flying or running about the sky.

From this circumstance, the Deer is sometimes spoken of as *Dēh'-hēhn-yāhn'tēh*, — “The Rainbow,” or, more properly, “The path of many colors made for the Deer by the Rainbow.” This is one of the oldest names for men in the list of names belonging to the Deer Clan. It is one of the Wyandot names of the writer.

*William E. Connelley.*¹

¹ The writer of this paper, author of the *Provisional Government of Nebraska Territory*, member of the Nebraska State Historical Society, and chairman of the Committee on American Ethnology, Western Historical Society, Kansas City,

Mo., is an adopted Wyandot of the Deer Clan, raised up to fill the position of Sähr'-stähr-räh'-tsēh, the famous chief of the Wyandots known to history as the Half-King. The latter was chief during the war of the Revolution, and one of the founders of the Northwestern Confederacy of Indians, that opposed so long the settlement of the territory northwest of the Ohio River. The Wyandots stood at the head of this confederacy, and were the keepers of the Council Fire thereof.

The writer, who has also received the Wyandot name of Dēh'-hěhn-yähn'-tēh, The Rainbow, has had frequent occasion to transact business for this people, and in the course of such duty has become interested in their language, history, manners, customs, and religious beliefs. He has also written an account of the clan system and other features of the tribal society. He has prepared an extensive vocabulary of the language, not yet published, and made a collection of the songs which by missionaries and others have been rendered into the Wyandot tongue. At the present time the opportunity for such studies has passed away, inasmuch as the old Wyandots from whom this information was received, with one exception, have died, and the present generation is wholly ignorant of the ancient beliefs. No folk-lore could be obtained from any Wyandot now living, and few can speak the language.