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# THE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN FOLK-LORE.

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## HURON FOLK-LORE.

### II.

#### THE STORY OF TIJAIHA, THE SORCERER.

ONE of the most notable of the many folk-tales of his nation which my eloquent friend, Chief Mandarong (Joseph White), related to me with much animation, and which his intelligent French wife translated with similar readiness and spirit, had a peculiar interest from its reference to the well-known belief of the Indians in a close connection between human beings and the lower animals, and in the preternatural powers which these brute colleagues could sometimes communicate to their human friends. This superstition was, of course, strongly discountenanced by the early missionaries, not, it would seem, for its absurdity (an objection which at that time could hardly be expected), but as partaking of sorcery, and of unlawful commerce with evil powers. It is a noteworthy fact that even at the present day, among the Hurons descended from five or six generations of nominally Christian ancestors, not only does a half-belief in these ancient opinions survive, but a certain resentment is manifested against the opposition of the missionaries to these opinions.

This sentiment will be apparent in the curious historical preface with which the chief introduced the story of Tijaiha. The legend itself displays in its framework not only the strong moral element which I have before noticed as characteristic of the Huron narratives, but also a weird, imaginative power, such as one would look for rather in a German story of *diablerie* than in a genuine Indian folk-tale, as this undoubtedly is. I give it precisely as it was transcribed in my journal, fifteen years ago, from notes taken at the time:—

When the French came (so the chief's words were rendered) the missionaries tried to prevail on the Indians to receive their religion. They asked the Indians if they knew anything about God. The

Indians replied that they did ; that three or four times a year they had meetings, at which the women and children were present, and then the chiefs told them what to do and warned them against evil practices.<sup>1</sup> The missionaries said that this was good, but that there was a better way, which they ought to know. They ought to become Christians. But the Indians said, "We have many friends among the creatures about us. Some of us have snake friends, some eagles, some bears, and the like. How can we desert our friends?" The priests replied, "There is only one God." "No," said the Indians, "there are two gods, one for the Indians and the other for the whites." The discussion lasted three days. Finally, the priests said it was true, — there were two Gods, Jesus and the Holy Ghost. One of these might be the same as the Indian God. The Indians could follow all his commands which were good, and also obey the commands of Jesus. But they would have to give up their allies among the brutes.

Some of the Hurons became Christians, but others refused to accept the new religion. Among these was a noted warrior, a young man, named Tijaiha. On one occasion he left the town with his family to hunt on the Huron River. One day, coming to a deep pool near the river, he beheld a violent commotion in the water, which was evidently made by a living creature. Of what nature it might be he did not know, though he believed it to be a great serpent, and to be possessed, like many of the wild creatures, of supernatural powers. Thereupon, after the fashion of the Indians, he fasted for ten days, eating occasionally only a few morsels to preserve life ; and he prayed to the creature that some of its power might be bestowed on him. At the end of the tenth day a voice from the disturbed pool demanded what he wanted. He replied that he wanted to have such power given to him that he could vanquish and destroy all his enemies. She (the creature) replied that this power should be conferred upon him if he would grant her what she desired. He asked what this was, and was told that she would require one of his children. If he would grant this demand, he might come at night and learn from her the secret which would give him the power he sought for. He objected to this sacrifice, but offered, in place of the child, to give an old woman, his wife's mother. (Mrs. White translated this unfilial proposition with an expression of quizzical humor.) The creature accepted the substitute, and the bargain was concluded.

<sup>1</sup> These meetings are still regularly held among the heathen portion of the Iroquois tribes, in connection with their ceremonial dances. I have been a spectator, and have heard the long and earnest exhortations of the elders, delivered with a truly diaconal solemnity.

That night Tijaiha returned to the pool, and learned what he had to do. He was to prepare a cedar arrow, with which he must shoot the creature when she should appear, at his call, above the water. From the wound he could then draw a small quantity of blood, the possession of which would render him invincible, and enable him to destroy his enemies. But as this blood was a deadly poison, and even its effluvia might be mortal, he must prepare an antidote from the juice of a plant which she named. On the following day he procured the plant, and his wife — who knew nothing of the fatal price he was to pay — assisted him in making the infusion. He also made a cedar arrow, and, with bow in hand, repaired to the pool.

At his call the water began to rise, boiling fearfully. As it rose, an animal came forth. It proved to be a large bird, a "diver," and the warrior said, "This is not the one," and let it go. The water boiled and rose higher, and a porcupine came out. "Neither is this the one," said the warrior, and withdrew his arrow from his bow. Then the water rose in fury to the level of the bank, and the head of a huge horned serpent, with distended jaws and flaming eyes, rose and glared at Tijaiha. "This is the one," he said, and shot the creature in the neck. The blood gushed forth, and he caught, in a vessel which he held ready, about half a pint. Then he ran toward his lodge, but before he reached it he had become nearly blind and all but helpless. His wife put the kettle to his lips. He drank the antidote, and presently vomited the black poison, and regained his strength. In the morning he called to his wife's mother, but she was dead. She had perished without a touch from a human hand. In this manner he became possessed of a talisman which, as he believed, would give him a charmed life, and secure him the victory over his enemies.

But in some way it became known that he had been the cause of the mother's death. This crime excited the indignation of his people, and he dared not go back to them. He took refuge with the Iroquois, and became a noted war-chief among them. After some time he resolved, in an evil hour, to lead an attack against his own people. He set forth at the head of a strong party of warriors, and arrived at the Wyandot settlement, near the present town of Sandwich. It was the season of corn-planting, and two of Tijaiha's aunts had come out on that day to plant their fields. They were women of high rank in the tribe ("for," said Mrs. White, "they have high-people and common people among them, just like the white folks"), and Tijaiha knew that their death would arouse the whole tribe. He ordered his followers to kill them. This they did, and then retreated into the forest to the northward, carefully covering their tracks, to escape pursuit. Their leader's expectation was that the Huron warriors would go off in another direction in search of their enemies, thus leaving their defenceless town at his mercy.

When the Hurons found the bodies they were greatly excited. They searched for ten days without discovering any trace of the murderers. Their chief then consulted a noted soothsayer, who promised that on the following day he would tell him all. During the night the soothsayer made his incantations, and in the morning informed the Hurons that the deed had been done by a party of Iroquois, under the lead of Tijaiha. The enemy, he said, was lurking in the woods, and he could guide them to the spot; but they must wait ten days before starting. The Hurons waited impatiently until the ten days had expired, and then placed the old soothsayer on horseback, and followed him. He led them through the forest directly to the encampment of their enemies. On seeing them they waited till evening, and then through the night, till daybreak. Then, according to their custom, they shouted to their sleeping foes, and rushed upon them. They killed every man in the camp; but on examining carefully the bodies, they were annoyed to find that Tijaiha was not among them.

Being hungry, they seated themselves to eat, and the chief, feeling thirsty, told his son to take his kettle and bring him some water. "Where shall I find water here?" asked the boy. "These men must have had water," replied his father. "Look for the path they have made to it." The lad looked, and found the path, and, following it, came to a deep spring or pool under a tree. As he was stooping down to it a man rose partly out of the pool, and bade the youth take him prisoner. The affrighted boy ran to the camp and told what he had seen. All shouted "Tijaiha," and rushed to the pool, where they dragged him forth by the hair. He stood defiant and sneering, while they attempted to kill him. Their blows seemed powerless to injure him. He caught the tomahawks which were aimed at him, and hurled them back. At length a warrior, exclaiming, "I will finish him," plunged a knife into his breast and tore out his heart. Thrown on the ground, it bounded like a living thing, till the warrior split it open with his knife. Thus ended Tijaiha's evil career. His contract with the serpent had only led him to crime and death.

Such was the "story of Tijaiha," as related by the old chief, speaking with the earnestness of assured belief, and with the readiness evidently due to frequent repetition. The dramatic character of the incidents, and the ingenuity of the plot, from the first movement of the hidden temptress until the renegade is dragged to his death from a pool similar to that in which he had met his beguiler, would do honor to the most experienced romancist. It was plain enough that the credit of this imaginative talent and narrative skill was not due to the worthy chief himself, but, like the same qualities shown in the

"Arabian Nights" and other similar creations, was the accumulated product of native genius, transmitted through many generations of practised story-tellers.

This conclusion is confirmed, and the true purport and importance of the legend are more distinctly shown, by a variation of it, furnished by Peter Dooyentate Clarke, the native annalist, in his little book on the "Origin and Traditional History of the Wyandotts." In this version a new coloring is given to the story. The odium of the sorcery and of the resulting crimes is cast, not upon an individual, but upon a whole society or *gens*, the "Prairie Turtle Clan," whose members had become noted and finally infamous for their addiction to occult and pernicious arts. It was the chosen leader of this clan who, at the instance of his followers, obtained the venomous blood from the creature of the "sulphurous pool." That mysterious visitant, in this version, was not a serpent, but a "white panther," which disappeared from the spring after yielding some of its blood into the leader's vessel. The coagulated and hardened blood was broken into fragments, which were distributed among the members of the clan, to be kept in their "medicine bags," as charms for bringing good-luck to their possessors and ill-fortune to their enemies. The result, however, was that the clan became obnoxious to the rest of the nation. Accused of witchcraft, they were hunted down persistently by those who believed themselves to have suffered by their arts; and the whole clan is now extinct. The leader turned traitor to his nation, joined the Iroquois, led them against his own people, and was captured and killed by them, as related by Chief Mandarong. The narrative of the chief, however, is much more detailed and picturesque than that of the historian, except in one particular. The latter, in describing the occurrences which took place at the panther's pool, adds, in his quaint fashion: "These devoted seekers after a strange god, like the sons of Belial in ancient days, dedicated their *heathen altar* to this mysterious spirit, and offered burnt offerings, and signified their sincere devotion by casting valuable articles into the spring, — which consisted of various kinds of ornamental silver works, such as are worn by the Indians, and which were obtained from the French at that period. They also cast wampum belts, beads, and other articles into the pool, as sacrifice offerings to the strange god." He tells us further that, "while the leader stood beside the spring, chanting a song made by one of the party for the occasion, his friends at the altar offered burnt-offerings of tobacco and medicinal substance of some kind to the strange god, at the same time chanting their devotional song."

This description recalls the similar scene which I witnessed some years ago among the Iroquois pagans, on their Canadian Reservation, at their well-known annual ceremony of the "Burning of the White

Dog." The "altar" in this case was a low pile of firewood, regularly laid, about four feet square and two feet high, with a hollow in the centre. Into this centre, when the pile was alight and burning fiercely, the white dog, which had been previously strangled and decorated for the sacrifice with strings of wampum beads and ribbons of various colors, was suddenly thrown; and as the fire consumed the body, handfuls of finely cut tobacco were cast, from time to time, as incense, into the flames. During this ceremony the leader, standing at one side of the pile, chanted a long hymn of prayer and praise to Hawenniyo (literally, "Our Great Master"), to which his followers, on the other side, responded at intervals by an assenting chorus. The words of the hymn, as I ascertained, were traditional, having been handed down from time immemorial.<sup>1</sup>

In Clarke's version, also, the French missionary influence plays an important part. The members of the errant clan, we are told, were warned by the Catholic priest of Detroit against their evil practices. "Throw away," he urged them, "the baleful substance which came to you from the devil, by one of his emissaries in the shape of a panther; for if you keep it among you, you will be ruined by it, body and soul." The author styles them a "heathen association," compares them to some of the "wayward and refractory tribes of Israel" and to the "Salem witches," and tells how at last they were, in a body, accused of sorcery, and "killed outright, on refusing to throw away the baneful substance and renounce the evil god."

It would thus appear that Tijaiha and his followers, whose fate has made such a profound impression on the survivors of the Huron (or Wyandot) nation, were merely the last representatives of the old heathen party in that nation. In some access of religious fury among the Christian majority, these holders of the ancient faith, accused of necromantic arts and malignant practices, were either exterminated or driven to take refuge among the still unconverted Iroquois. That the memory of this outbreak of fanaticism was not pleasing to my friend, the genial and liberal-minded chief, was shown by the exclusion of all reference to it from his version of the legend, except such as may be gathered from the significant remarks with which he prefaced his narrative. The story, as thus explained, may serve as a picture of the mental condition of the Indians, and doubtless of all other savage converts, in their transition from heathenism to Christianity.

*Horatio Hale.*

<sup>1</sup> A translation of this remarkable hymn, as I obtained it afterwards from the leader of the ceremony, with the aid of the official interpreter of the Six Nations (Chief George Johnson, "*Onwanonsyshon*"), and a full description of the ceremony, will be found in the *American Antiquarian* for January, 1885. The Seneca form of the chant is given in L. H. Morgan's *League of the Iroquois*, page 219, with many interesting particulars relating to the rite.