**THE IROQUOIS INDIAN'S LAW OF HOSPITALITY.**



Among the Iroquois hospitality was an established usage. If a man entered an Indian house in any of their villages, whether a villager, a tribesman, or a stranger, it was the duty of the women therein to set food before him. An omission to do this would have been a discourtesy amounting to an affront. If hungry, he ate; if not hungry, courtesy required that he should taste the food and thank the giver. This would be repeated at every house he entered, and at whatever hour in the day. As a custom it was upheld by a rigorous public sentiment. The same hospitality was extended to strangers from their own and from other tribes. Upon the advent of the European race among them it was also extended to them. This characteristic of barbarous society, wherein food was the principal concern of life, is a remarkable fact. The law of hospitality, as administered by the American aborigines, tended to the final equalization of subsistence. Hunger and destitution could not exist at one end of an Indian village or in one section of an encampment while plenty prevailed elsewhere in the same village or encampment. It reveals a plan of life among them at the period of European discovery which has not been sufficiently considered.

A singular illustration of the powerful influence of the custom upon the Indian mind came to my notice some years ago at the Seneca Reservation in New York. A Seneca chief, well to do in the world, with farm lands and domestic animals which afforded him a comfortable subsistence, had lost his wife by death, and his daughter, educated in the usages of civilized life, took the position of housekeeper. The old man, referring to the ancient custom, requested his daughter to keep the usual food constantly prepared ready to offer to any person who entered their house, saying that he did not wish to see this custom of their forefathers laid aside. Their changed condition, and particularly the adoption of the regular meals of civilized society, for the time of which the visitor might reasonably be expected to wait, did not in his mind outweigh the sanctity of the custom. [Footnote: William Parker was the chief named, a noble specimen of a Seneca Iroquois.]

In July, 1743, John Bartram made a journey from Philadelphia to Onondaga to attend, with Conrad Weisar, a council of the Onondaga, Mohawk, Oneida, and Cayuga chiefs. At Shamokin he quartered with a trader who had an Indian wife, and at a village of the Delawares. "As soon as we alighted," he remarks, "they showed us where to lay our luggage, and then brought us a bowl of boiled squashes, cold. This I then thought poor entertainment, but before I came back I had learned not to despise good Indian food. This hospitality is agreeable to the honest simplicity of ancient times, and is so persistently adhered to that not only what is already dressed is immediately set before a traveler, but the most pressing business is postponed to prepare the best they can get for him, keeping it as a maxim that he must always be hungry. Of this we found the good effects in the flesh and bread they got ready for us." [Footnote: Bartram's Observations, &c, London edition, 1751, p. 16.] We have here a perfect illustration among the Delawares of the Iroquois rule to set food before a person when he first entered the house. Although they had in this case nothing better than boiled squash to offer, it was done immediately, after which they commenced preparing a more substantial repast. Delaware and Iroquois usages were the same.

The council at Onondaga lasted two days, at the close of which they had each day a dinner in common. "This council [first day] was followed by a feast. After four o'clock we all dined together upon four great kettles of Indian-corn soup, which we emptied, and then every chief retired to his home…. The conference [second day] held till three, after which we dined. The repast consisted of three great kettles of Indian-corn soup, or thin hominy, with dried eels and other fish boiled in it, and one kettle full of young squashes and their flowers boiled in water, and a little meal mixed. This dish was but weak food. Last of all was served a great bowl-full of Indian dumplings made of new soft corn cut or scraped off the ear, with the addition of some boiled beans, lapped well in Indian-corn leaves. This is good hearty provision." [Footnote: Bartram's Journal p. 59.]

"Again," he remarks, "we prepared for setting forward, and many of the chiefs came once more to make their farewells. Some of them brought us provisions for our journey. We shook hands again and set out at nine." [Footnote: ib. p. 63]

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