

## Project Canterbury

## Missions to the Oneidas

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In the month of January 1765, a young white man, accompanied by two Indians, was travelling through the wilderness, from Johnson Hall to the Mohawk country on a pilgrimage to the Senecas. He came from the Moor Charity School founded by the Rev. Dr. Wheelock of the Presbyterian church, at Lebanon, Conn. One object of the Moor School was the education of Indian youths, and the preparation of missionaries to instruct the red people. Among the pupils was Brant, the Mohawk, sent with others by Sir William Johnson, the friend of the Five Nations. Another of the students was Samuel Kirkland, preparing for the Presbyterian ministry. Young Kirkland resolved to become a missionary to the Senecas. His first step was to Johnson Hall where all friends of the Indians were made welcome. Sir William Johnson procured two faithful Senecas as guides, and the party set out on snow-shoes. The young missionary carried a pack of forty pounds. He slept on hemlock boughs. His Seneca friends were very kind to him; they would not allow him to work, he was told "to sit on a log and rest himself." The kettle for tea, "Chinese tea" was slung gipsy fashion over the fire, and slices of ham broiled Indian fashion; sticks sharpened at one end, and slit at the top for slices of ham tied on by shreds of bark, were inclined towards the fire, while pieces of bark to catch the drippings were placed beneath. Cakes of maize meal were baked in the ashes. Such was a luxurious repast in the Mohawk valley only a century since. At Kunawaloo, the Oneida town, the travellers were received very kindly, and urged to stay, for at least a year. But young Kirkland moved westward. Twenty-three days after leaving Johnson Hall the party reached the Seneca town where they were received very hospitably the chief Sachem; Councils followed. The Mission was received. Young Kirkland was regularly adopted into the family of the chief Sachem. He remained with "his relations" eighteen months, suffering many hardships, at times almost starving from want of food; kindly cared for by "brothers and sisters," but in danger from personal enemies, who wished to carry war into the Cherokee country, a step opposed by the missionary. In a letter written at this time he speaks of the "teas nature has provided for us in the wilderness, such as pine buds, sassafras blows, bark of spice-wood, and chips from the heart of the sugar maple." He wore a leather shirt and breeches. Famine fell upon the tribe. He sold a shirt for "four Indian cakes, baked in the ashes, which he could have devoured at one meal." At one time he lived for several days on white oak acorns, fried in bear's grease. He became violently ill. His "grandmother" an old woman of ninety, the Sachem's mother, walked half a mile to nurse him at night. She gave him a dose of three gills of refined bear's grease which cured him. The little game they had in April, was kept so long that it was scarcely possible to eat it; nevertheless as a stranger and "brother" he received a double portion on a piece of bark; shutting his eyes he contrived to swallow a little "well seasoned with salt and tears."

The danger of absolute starvation led him to return to Johnson Hall. His "brother" Tekanada went with him. A new canoe of bark was built for the purpose. The party consisted of two men, two women, and several children. At Fort Brewerton, on the Oneida river, he was

invited to dine with the commanding officer, and nearly killed himself by eating ravenously of rice soup and venison. "I felt I should not be satisfied after devouring all on the table. The officer, observing the violence of my appetite, said, with a pleasant air, 'Mr. Kirkland, you have been on the point of starvation; eat but half a meal now, and come in the evening and take a cup of tea.' 'Sir,' I replied with warmth, 'I am willing to pay for what I eat'--I had not a farthing of money! He replied that it was best to eat sparingly at first, and that he had spoken from pure friendship. I instantly dropped my knife and fork, and thanked him with tears in my eyes." In crossing Oneida Lake the party were nearly drowned, the canoe sprang a leak. The wind was high. Tekanada turned pale, and untying a squirrel skin took two pinches of magic powder which he cast upon the water, crying out with a loud voice, "Now wind, do your best! Do your best, I say! You cannot conquer now!" The wind increased. The danger grew imminent. 'Brother, pray to your God now; Jesus, you call him.' I answered that I was praying. He cried out, "I do not hear you!" I was obliged to pray in an audible tone." Half an hour later they reached the shore safely, but the canoe fell to pieces the moment they touched the beach. Early in May, the party reached a pleasant spot on the banks of the Mohawk, about three miles from Johnson Hall. Tekanada built a bark lodge, and here they remained about three weeks, receiving great kindness from Sir William Johnson. The wife of Tekanada died here of rapid consumption; she was decently buried in an orchard. Tekanada was inconsolable. With a bateau given by Sir William Johnson, and well supplied with provisions, they returned to the Seneca town, where Mr. Kirkland remained another year.

In June, 1766, he was ordained a minister of the Presbyterian Church, at Lebanon. There was then a missionary society in Scotland, and it exists to-day, called the "Honorable Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge." It was incorporated in 1710. In 1718 this society extended its labors to the colonies, and after that date, was often mentioned as the New England Society. It was from this society that Mr. Kirkland held his commission. It is said the celebrated English clergyman, the Rev. Mr. Whitfield, and the Rev. Mr. Kirkpatrick, who had been a chaplain in General Amherst's army, advised the young minister to devote his services to the Oneida. Instead of returning to the Senecas he established himself at Kunawaloo, the principal Oneida village, about fifteen miles to the southward of Oneida Lake. During forty-two years from that date he was, more or less, closely connected with the Oneidas. One of his first steps was to build himself a log house, ten feet square. Through constant hard labor for seventy days he succeeded in digging the cellar, cutting, hewing, and drawing the timber with his own hands. He was pleased with the people. "Many appear to have a hearing ear, and an understanding heart, and to be earnestly engaged for religion." These were undoubtedly the original catechumens of Andrews, Barclay, Ogilvie, and "Old Abraham." There was a great improvement in temperance. Eighty kegs of rum were brought to the town by traders, offered for sale, and even proffered as a gift--but the traders were balked. It was refused. "It is contrary to our agreement with the minister." Of course the traders persecuted him. He had many hardships to endure. After a time the Society in Scotland offered him a salary of £100. He then returned to Lebanon and married Jerusha Bingham, a niece of Dr. Wheelock, returning with her to Oneida. She was an excellent woman, and a faithful friend of the Oneidas. In the course of a few years there was manifest religious improvement. "A meeting-house was built"--in those days it would have been considered a grave theological error to call the building a "church." Two of the leading men of the tribe became the steadfast friends of the missionary. "Good Peter," a convert of one of the English missionaries, and Skenandoah. A saw-mill, a grist-mill, and a blacksmith shop were built. Oxen and farming utensils were purchased.

But the storms of the approaching Revolution were already lowering over the country, interfering grievously with the work at Oneida. Sir William Johnson, the friend of the red

man, and patron of Mr. Kirkland, died. His son, Sir John Johnson, and his son-in-law, Col. Guy Johnson, were entirely under English influences, and strongly opposed to the struggles of the Colonists. Mr. Kirkland's sympathies were naturally with his countrymen. Quite early in the struggle he was employed as an agent of the Colonies, in endeavoring to withdraw the Six Nations from the guidance of the Johnsons. But the influence of the Johnson family was of much older date, far more widely spread, and far more deeply seated than his own. Eventually the very great majority of the Mohawks, and a large proportion of the Senecas, Cayugas, and Onondagas followed Sir John Johnson to Canada, where their descendants now form several very respectable communities in a healthful condition of improvement. The American leaders had asked them to remain neutral. England offered them the war-hatchet. The Oneidas were the only tribe who retained their foothold on the old ground, the only tribe who became allies of the Colonists. That they did so was owing chiefly to the influence of Mr. Kirkland. Even of the Oneidas one hundred and twenty followed their kinsmen to Canada. On the other hand "Old Abraham" and a few of the Mohawks joined the American party, and became blended with the Oneida tribe. Most of the Tuscaroras also followed the example of the Oneidas.

At that time the Oneidas had two principal villages, their "castle," called Kunawaloo, lying about twenty miles west of the portage between the Mohawk and the Wood Creek, and fifteen miles southward of Oneida Lake. A second smaller village lay about twelve miles west of the lake, on the Oneida river. Kunawaloo had many cabins of hewn and unhewn logs, built by the red men; two houses of boards, built by whites, and also wigwams of bark. The furniture consisted of rough bunks to sleep in, rough tables and benches, wooden bowls and spoons, gourds for water-vessels, and many articles of bark and basket-ware very skillfully made. In each cabin was a metal kettle purchased from the whites. The American officers were opposed to employing the Indians in active warfare. When the Oneidas offered their services to General Schuyler, they were at first rejected. But two years later, after the ravages in the valley of the Mohawk by Col. St. Leger, who had a large Indian force with him, the services of the Oneidas were accepted by the American officers, and 250 were employed as scouts, often under the leadership of Skenandoah, a Christian warrior and a remarkable man.

Let us pause for a moment to look at an Oneida warrior of the olden time. Skenandoah, or the "Peace-maker," as the name implies, was born in 1706, at Conestoga, on the Susquehanna, of Oneida parents. He grew up to a stately savage manhood, tall, muscular, erect and dignified, his skin being rather light for a full-blooded Indian, "which he certainly was." His voice was so powerful that he could make himself heard at a distance of half a mile. A very skillful hunter, he was brave and intrepid in war, bland and mild in peace. With a naturally strong and vigorous mind, he was never passionate, but weighed every question calmly. His sense of justice is said to have been remarkable. When he spoke in public it was with the dignified manner, natural grace of gesture, and wild eloquence of an Iroquois Sachem. His lips are said to have been peculiarly pleasing and expressive. The native strength of the man's character is clearly proved in a way unusual among his race, and rare among white men. He was a Pagan for the first three-score years of his life, and he often drank to excess. On one occasion, he came proudly along the trail through the forest, from the Oneida Castle, fully armed and equipped with all his highly-prized savage ornaments on his person, to attend a Council at Albany. He drank to excess. He awoke after his debauch, a degraded wretch lying in the street, entirely naked, stripped of all clothing, and of every ornament. As he came to himself, and rose to his feet, he resolved never again to touch ardent spirits; and that resolution made at the age of 47, he kept through a life extending to 110 years! From that hour he was never known to take a single draught of any intoxicating liquor. In 1767, Skenandoah, the "White man's Friend," was baptized by Mr. Kirkland. He

continued faithful to his Christian vows for half a century, until his death. His heart opened to the lessons of civilization. He learned to plough, a wonderful step at that date! But he failed to influence his people on this point. They still left all the hard labor to the women. Neither would they give up painting themselves after their old fashion. With other Oneida braves, Skenandoah was sent to Niagara on a scouting party, in 1780. The Oneidas were taken prisoners and sent to Canada as spies, but were eventually liberated on parole. Returning to Kunawaloo, they found their village a ruin. A party of English, and hostile Indians, in the same year, had fallen upon Kunawaloo, and burnt it to the ground. The Oneidas fled to Schenectady, where they lived two years, in rude huts, on the banks of the Mohawk, fed by the Americans on army rations. In 1782 they returned to Kunawaloo.

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