

Clinton,

October 11, 1911.

Dr. William M. Fenton,
Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Dr. Fenton:

I have to thank you for the volume of Anthropological
Papers of the Smithsonian Institution, which I found here
on my return from Maine.

Your study of Iroquois Suicide interests me especially.
As I read it, I recalled an experience among the Oneidas
which Kirkland records in one of his journals. It is the
case of a young Oneida who, in despair because the family
of the girl he loved prohibited him from meeting with the
girl, went into the swamp, gathered the poisonous root, ate
it, and died on the doorway of the family's house at night.
Kirkland records that that action placed the responsibility
for his death upon the family, and that there was great
excitement in the village on that account. I tried to find
the story, but cannot now recall just where it is. When I
come upon it, I will send you a transcript.

I am also enclosing a copy of a passage from a letter
of Kirkland's about some religious beliefs of the Iroquois,
as printed in Winterbotham's Historical ... view of the
American U. S., which has to do with suicide.

The Pickering Papers, in the Massachusetts Historical
Society, contain some observations in regard to suicide
among the Iroquois which might be of further interest to
you. I supposed I had copied them, but cannot find any
copy, so I probably planned to get a photostst sometime.
I believe they are in the draft of a reply to inquiries in
regard to Indian medicine, in vol. 61 of the papers, folio
302 and following. The papers are indexed in the Collec-
tions of the Society, series 6, volume 2; but when I looked
in the index this morning I found nothing about suicide.
Pickering, as Indian Superintendent, was deeply interested
in their welfare, and has much to say about them.

Yours faithfully,

Joseph D. Dobson.

Indians Dr. Fenton's medical questions concerning

From a letter of Kirkland relating to the religious
beliefs of the Indians

The region of pure spirits, the Five Nations call Eskanane.

The only characters which, according to their traditions, cannot be admitted to participate in the pleasures and delights of this happy country, are reduced to three, viz. suicides: the disobedient to the counsels of the chiefs; and such as put-away their wives on account of pregnancy. According to their tradition, there is a gloomy, fathomless gulph, near the borders of the delightful mansions of Eskanane, over which all good and brave spirits pass with safety, under the conduct of a faithful and skilful guide appointed for that purpose; but when a suicide, or any of the above-mentioned characters, approach this gulph, the conductor, who possesses a most penetrating eye, instantly discovers their spiritual features and character, and denies them his aid, assigning his reasons. They will, however, attempt to cross upon a small pole, which, before they reach the middle, trembles and shakes, till presently down they fall with horrid shrieks. . . .

(Winterbotham, J. An historical, geographical, commercial, and philosophical view of the American United States. London, 1795, 4 vols. The extract from Kirkland's letter is in vol. 2, pages 358-360.)

Suicide

1793 May 25 Samuel Kirkland Journal at Kanonwalohale near Stock-
bridge
Journal 1792-1794. P. 22.

"25 Saturday. The whole village is now in confusion and appears half distracted in consequence of a suicide perpetrated here last Wednesday. The occasion of the horrid act, as related by both parties was this. A young sprightly Indian, a professed pagan and of a bad family, which resides in the south part of Brothertown, had for some time cohabited with a daughter of one of the Oneida Chiefs, whose name is Kanaghsadyesha, and a professor of the Christian religion. He had forbid his daughter associating with him any longer, and utterly refused his consent to this proposed match, unless he would agree to be married by a minister of the Gospel, agreeably to the practices and customs of religious people of every nation.

Tuesday evening, when a number of young people were collected, and among others, this young pagan, Joseph concealed his daughter and forbid her being present for the reasons above assigned. Some warm words took place between Joseph and his daughter's gallant. Blows would have ensued, had not the bystanders interposed.

Joseph still held to his integrity, and offered to submit the matter to the judgment of the Chief or their minister, if he were wrong, or unreasonable in withholding his daughter, or not giving her up to be his wife, but on condition he would be lawfully married to her. But the young man was so intoxicated with pride and passion, that he was deaf to all his reasoning.

The next morning he was observed to sit alone upon a log by the outside of the house for several hours. Being a malicious person, and sustaining a bad character, very few took notice of him. At length he was observed to start up suddenly, and make off to the woods, where he took a large portion of the muskrat root and soon after his return was so convulsed as to be speechless, and in a few moments expired.

The two surviving brothers (All three of whom were noted murderers) declared revenge for their brother's death, ascribed it to Joseph, and gave out that he was the sole cause of it.

They having been seen lurking about the outskirts of the town for two evenings, Joseph's clan being numerous and respectable, are all alarmed, and are constantly guarding Joseph.

The pretended revengers of blood give out, that either Joseph, his wife, or his daughter, shall fall a sacrifice to their resentment. Some had been so intimidated that they had proposed giving up Joseph to save life and preserve the peace of the town. This again roused the resentment of Joseph's two brothers and of a great part of his clan. They gave out, that on condition the suicide were revenged by the surviving brothers of the self-murderer, upon their Chief Joseph, or any of his family, they would instantly kill and exterminate the whole surviving family of this Indian, who had murdered himself. Joseph's two brothers came to me with even mark of distress and anxiety. They told me that they would

do nothing that should dishonor religion, or offend God. If they really thought their brother Joseph was the cause of that man's death, or had murdered him, they would resign him up for slaughter; and with great freedom, if he had been a good man, instead of a murderer and pagan.

They then asked, if it did not appear to me, that the man's own wicked heart was the cause of his death? They entreated me to give a decisive answer, and my judgment was to be agreeably to the light of God's word, without favor or friendship to any one.

This man, said they, did not fear God, nor love his own life, or soul, therefore he murdered himself. I answered in the affirmative. It soon spread through the town, by some of Joseph's and my enemies, that I had wholly exculpated Joseph and given judgment against the self murderer. Joseph's friends and many others, are now much concerned, but I should be marked out as the object of their revenge. The scene has been really affecting. The fury of revenge, the warmth of natural affection, the dictates of conscience, and the fear of God, discordant passions, seem to be all alive in town."

(Nothing more appears as to this matter. C.E.C)

Letter from Samuel Kirkland to Alexander Miller, May 24th, 1800, from Oneida, 13 pp. From a draft in the hand of his daughter signed by Kirkland in Hamilton College Library. Another copy, in Kirkland's hand, is dated May 30, 1800, p. 8. "Moreover, some extraordinary and instructive events have attended the last sacrifice of the pagans, which was celebrated the week before last with pomp and solemnity. It was the second time it has been performed here for 36 years.

The ceremonies lasted four days, including the religious festival and the game of chance with which it generally closes. While their volaries have increased in number since its revival last autumn, a spirit of candor and professed philanthropy is visibly increased. And the whole of Ohsweyega village, tho' a small one, at the last festival embraced their religion, likewise some more of the Oneidas. The old Priest at the introduction, fenced, not literally the tables, but the pagan altar, by forbidding the use of strong liquor for four days, and forbid all persons, in any degree intoxicated, coming near the sacrifice, with its appendages, and advised them to refrain from the use of rum for ten days if they expected to receive a full blessing, a rich and ripe harvest next fall. Yea, it would be well for those who had the gift, to refrain six moons or longer, and by all means till the next autumnal sacrifice; which however would be revealed by a dream or vision; yea, it would be good if some among them would quit the use of rum forever.

Then he exhorted with great earnestness the whole of his disciples to exercise candor and gentleness towards their brethren, the Christians; never to tantalize or insult them for the path they had chosen. Lastly, he told them that as the religious rites of their ancestors did not require them to meet every Sunday, as the Christians do, they were at liberty, whenever so minded, to attend the Sabbath worship of the Christians and learn what good they could there.

Their feasts and sacrifices bore greater resemblance to the Christian sacrament than to Sabbath worship, both as to the ingredients, or elements and seasons of administration. The Christians use bread and wine; they had flesh and broth. Both most commonly celebrated once, twice, or three in a year. However, it may be noted that Aghwistonic the high priest and his nephew Peter (natural son of Good Peter, deceased) do not want sagacity, neither are they deficient in address, art, enticement and dissimulation. For three months past, several who had apostatized from the Christian faith, and become their most zealous notaries, were so condescending and civil as to visit me at my request, and even repeatedly; and it was found, upon examination, they had spent many hours of serious and interesting conversation with me. A few Sabbaths since, one of them rose, unasked, and made a public confession in the church. Several others have occasionally attended, and some regularly attend religious worship. But I apprehend, from observations that I have already been able to make, that the candor and apparent benevolence of the last masterly address of the High Priest will tend more to confirm his worshippers of idols and gain more proselytes than the sacrifice of 80 dogs.

While I was told of the uncommon solemnity and order preserved in their pagan festival, I felt an almost unconquerable wish to be a spectator; but I found it would be difficult, if not unpracticable, to reconcile it to the present views and feelings of the Christian Indians. Pagan Peter, at the first revival of this ancient religion, had the confidence, or as I may say the effrontery, to propose to the Nation unanimously to embrace this traditionary superstition as their national religion, and to recommend and urge their acceptance; and had it not been for the influence of Martinus Nicholas Sharp, and Peter Bread, together with the more discerning of the communicants, I think in all human probability he would have effected his nefarious design."

(This is all about that.) C.H.C.