

*TRAVELS in NEW ENGLAND
and NEW YORK*

BY TIMOTHY DWIGHT

*Edited by Barbara Miller Solomon
with the assistance of
Patricia M. King*

VOLUME IV

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*Moving The Stone
The War Rest,
1822*

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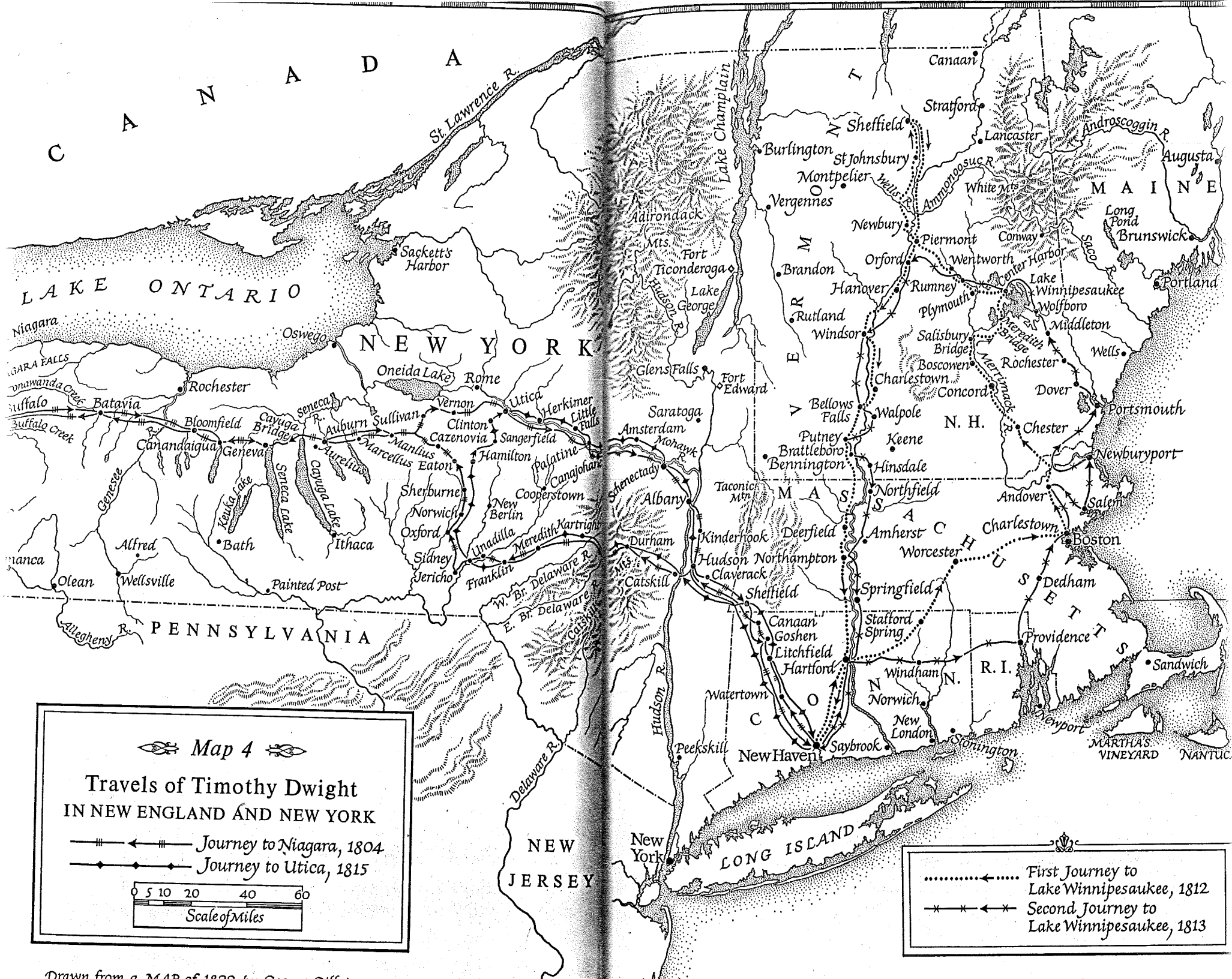
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TRAVELS;
IN
NEW-ENGLAND AND NEW-YORK:

BY
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LATE PRESIDENT OF YALE COLLEGE;

AUTHOR OF
THEOLOGY EXPLAINED AND DEFENDED.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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Return slowly along the Mohawk to Albany—Kinderhook—Hudson—Uncommon phenomena observed on Taconic Mountain

Dear Sir,

I left Staniford's, Tuesday, October 15th, and rode to Vernon, about twenty miles, in the stage wagon. We started at twelve o'clock. It had rained most of the preceding day, the whole night, and the whole forenoon of this day. The road had become a mass of deep mire; and the horses were obliged to walk, or rather to wade, at the rate of two miles an hour. In the afternoon it rained again, but with less violence. We were seven passengers in a vehicle so small as to be crowded, and so crazy as to be threatened even by a slight accident with being broken down. We were also from very distant countries and of different nations. The day was sufficiently gloomy; and the country presented little to our view besides thick forests, interspersed here and there with log houses. In solitary instances some have a better appearance. In the township of Sullivan, a large tract lying immediately eastward of Manlius, we found, however, an exception. As we descended a hill of considerable height, we were presented with a delightful prospect of the Oneida Lake, and a noble view of the circumjacent country. When the trees shall be sufficiently cut down, this hill will furnish one of the most interesting views between Albany and Buffalo.

Another variety in our journey was the Oneida Village, built on the reservation belonging to that people, and lying immediately south of the lake. We saw this village by moonlight. The houses in it appeared to differ very little from the log houses already described, except that they are smaller, worse built, and less carefully repaired. Skenandoa, their chief, lives in a framed house which is painted and decent.¹ He is said to be in easy circumstances. A small church stands in the center of the village. On the character and situation of this people, I propose to make some observations in another place, and shall only add here that at Young's, an inn at which we stopped in Vernon, several of them, who were half drunk, disturbed us not a little by their contention and outcries.

We took supper at Young's; and all the passengers who were bound to Utica, except one, concluded to proceed in order to take the Albany stage

the next morning. Accordingly we set out in a dense mist, which deprived us of the moonlight, and effectually chilled us during the remainder of our journey. Our progress was snail-like and sufficiently tedious, and our prospect scarcely extended to the horses. But our driver was careful and obliging; and we all determined to make the best of our circumstances, and to lessen with patience and good humor the disagreeableness of our situation. We stopped once at Laird's in Westmoreland about one o'clock. The family rose without murmuring, and obligingly furnished us such refreshments as we wished, and, what was peculiarly agreeable to us all, a good fire. After we had passed through New Hartford, we found a better road, and the coachman was able to drive his horses on a trot. Here, however, we met a light breeze from the north, which, with the aid of the fog, pierced us through; so that, when we arrived at Utica just before five, we were almost frozen. In very few instances have I suffered more from the severities of winter. From Young's to Utica the distance is nineteen miles; from Manlius to Young's, twenty-two. In traveling the whole distance we had spent seventeen hours.

My companions had reached Utica the preceding evening.

The country through which I had traveled from Manlius consisted of the townships of Sullivan, Vernon, Westmoreland, and Whitestown. Sullivan and Vernon are new settlements, much more recent than most of those which we had passed on the road. The land is good, and the number of inhabitants fast increasing. Westmoreland is much improved since my journey into this country in 1799. Dark as the night was, I saw several well-built houses.

The village of New Hartford is also greatly improved. Here the mist had lost much of its density, and permitted us to discern a considerable number of good buildings, surrounded by neat appendages.

Sullivan was formerly in the county of Chenango. By the late division of that county it is become a part of Madison. The other three townships are in the county of Oneida.

Sullivan contained in 1810, 1,974 inhabitants. Vernon contained in 1810, 1,519 inhabitants. Westmoreland contained in 1800, 1,542; and in 1810, 1,135 inhabitants.

Sullivan and Vernon are not mentioned in the Census of 1800. The latter I suppose to have been then included in the township of Westmoreland.

Utica is still more improved. In 1790, there were fifty houses in this village, many of them small and temporary buildings. In 1804, the number was 120. The number of stores also and mechanics' shops is very great in proportion to that of the houses. Utica now exhibits the appearance of a handsome town. Its trade has increased much faster than its buildings, and is greater than that of any other town in the state, New York, Albany, and Troy excepted. Its advantages for business are its situation on the Mohawk,

was unable to preach on the afternoon of a certain Sabbath, and told Good Peter, one of the head men of the Oneidas that he must address the congregation. Peter modestly and reluctantly consented. After a few words of introduction, he began a discourse on the character of the Saviour. "What, my brethren," said he, "are the views which you form of the character of Jesus? You will answer perhaps that he was a man of singular benevolence. You will tell me that he proved this to be his character by the nature of the miracles which he wrought. All these you will say were kind in the extreme. He created bread to feed thousands who were ready to perish. He raised to life the son of a poor woman who was a widow, and to whom his labors were necessary for her support in old age. Are these then your only views of the Saviour? I tell you they are lame. When Jesus came into our world he threw his blanket around him, but the God was within." This I had from Mr. Kirkland himself.

The object to which these people sacrificed all others was the maintenance of their superiority over surrounding nations. Glory and dominion with them, as with the Romans, constituted their only aim. Hence their favorite title, *Ongue-Honwe*, "*men superior to all others*." Perhaps no example more strongly illustrates the efficacy of the human faculties employed for the accomplishment of a single end than the success of the Iroquois in accomplishing this lofty purpose.

The language of these people was melodious, as well as energetic. Of this, the names of persons and places which are known to us are no bad proof. The names of some of their sachems were *Garangula*, *Cheyra*, *Decanesora*, *Tahajedoris*. The governor of Canada, they called *Onondio*. A mountain they called *Shenandoa*. Among their rivers were *Allegheny*, *Monongahela*, *Miami*, *Susquehanna*, *Tioga*, *Chenango*, and *Unadilla*.

They valued themselves not a little on their pronunciation. The Oneidas are considered by them as speaking their language in a manner more graceful and mellifluous than the rest of the tribes. All of them use the guttural aspirate. The Tuscaroras terminate a great part of their words with this aspirate, and are laughed at by the rest of their countrymen for the harshness which this circumstance introduces into their pronunciation. The Oneidas say that the pronunciation of a Tuscarora is like the noise of the white man's wagon running down a stony hill.

You will naturally suppose that among such a people eloquence was cultivated with great care, and holden in the highest estimation. To be eloquent was among the Iroquois the next glory to that of a renowned warrior. By his tongue only, *Red Jacket* rose to the rank of a chief among the Senecas, without the aid either of birth or exploits. I have seen this man, whose proper name is *Sagoyewatha*, and conversed with him. There was nothing dignified in his appearance, nor in his character. He intoxicated himself whenever he could get ardent spirits, and was on this account re-

garded with contempt by his nation. This they freely confessed to the white people; yet they said, "He is necessary to us on account of his eloquence." *Red Jacket*, in the year 1804, was accused by the Seneca Prophet, brother of *Complanter*, of witchcraft. *Red Jacket* defended himself before the council of the nation in a speech of near three hours, and prevailed against his enemies. "Perhaps," says Mr. Clinton, "the annals of history cannot furnish a more conspicuous instance of the triumph and power of oratory in a barbarous nation devoted to superstition, and looking up to the accuser as a delegated minister of the Almighty."²

The language of the Iroquois has no labials. They observe, with not a little significance, "When white men speak, they shut their mouths; red men, when they speak, open their mouths."

In variety of particulars, their manners resembled those of the Mahicans already mentioned. The women labor in the same exclusive manner. Their amusements are running, wrestling, throwing the hatchet, shooting at a mark, and gambling. An Indian will gamble till he has lost all his property, his blanket, and sometimes even his gun.† When they are not employed in these or more serious pursuits, they lie down in any place which suits them, and doze away half or even the whole of the day. The Iroquois are tall and straight, have at times good features, and some of them a very dignified appearance. A Seneca chief named the *Great Tree* came with eleven men of distinction, chiefly Tuscaroras, to West Point while I resided there during the Revolutionary War. This man, in his shape, stature, features and deportment, was one of the most dignified and well-appearing men whom I have ever seen. He had a fine eye, a lofty demeanor, and an aspect marked with strong lines of intelligence. Indians, even those who are shrewd, have generally smooth, vacant faces. His was distinguished by that conformation of features which indicates intense and laborious thought. Another, whose name I do not now recollect, had eyes more strongly resembling those of a rattlesnake than I should have believed to be possible, but for the testimony of my own. This band of chiefs exhibited to us a war dance, such as has been often described, a war song, and the war whoop.

"*Nil admirari*" is much more strongly and universally a rule of action to the Iroquois than it could have been of Horace,³ a rule to which they conformed in the most absolute manner.§ It was strongly exemplified on the occasion mentioned above. They permitted themselves in no instance to indicate that they thought any other persons equal to the "*Ongue-Honwe*"; or anything done or possessed by other nations to be equally excellent with what is done or possessed by themselves. Accordingly, whenever they were among the English, they appeared to take no notice of anything which they

† Mr. Kirkland. [Apparently another reference to Dwight's 1798 conversation with Samuel Kirkland; see also "Journey to Berwick," Letter XI.]

§ Mr. [Samuel] Kirkland.

saw or heard as extraordinary or meriting commendation, or especially as exciting their surprise. One of them, in the year 1776, came to Hartford as a spy, to discover whatever he could concerning the strength of the Americans. While he was present at the election, at which there are usually collected from six to ten thousand people, and such scenes of parade and splendor as were very remote from anything which he had ever seen or imagined, he apparently took little more notice of what he saw and heard than if he had been asleep; yet, when he returned, he told his countrymen that the people of Connecticut alone were as numerous as the leaves on the forest trees, and that it would be unsafe for the Six Nations, therefore, to enter into a war with the British colonists. At the same time if I remember right, he described minutely, and in strong language, everything which had passed while he was present. Their inattention and apparent stupidity are therefore chiefly affected.

In one thing, however, they acknowledge the white men to be superior to them. This, as they express it, is "*making the paper talk.*" Among the proofs of inferiority on the part of the whites, they never fail to enumerate laboring and sleeping on beds.

The introduction of ardent spirits among this people, and indeed among all the Indian tribes, has done more mischief to them than both their diseases and their wars. Indeed a more profligate and pernicious class of men than a great part of those who are called Indian traders has perhaps never existed. They have been most abominable corrupters of the Indians, plundered them by the grossest frauds, and have been the chief means of preventing them from becoming Christians.

The most fatal disasters which they ever experienced were effectuated by General Sullivan, during his march through their country in the year 1779. After defeating them in a general engagement at a place now called Newtown in the county of Tioga, he marched through a considerable part of their country, and destroyed the villages, fields, and orchards which were in his course. From this blow they never recovered. The sachem, whom I have before mentioned under the name of the *Great Tree*, stood on a mountain and saw his own possessions destroyed. As this chief was a friend to the Americans, and had strenuously urged his countrymen to observe a strict neutrality between them and the British, and had himself observed it with great exactness, his countrymen said to him, "You see how the Americans treat their friends." *Great Tree* calmly replied, with much good sense, "What I see is only the common fortune of war. It cannot be supposed that the Americans could distinguish my possessions from yours, who are their enemies." This man was never known to violate his word, and did not, on account of this disaster, lessen at all his attachment to the Americans.

After this event the Iroquois never recovered their former lofty spirit. A part of the character of those whom I have heretofore called tame Indians is

strongly visible in these people, at least in many of them as I had a painful opportunity of seeing at Buffalo in the year 1804. Most of their lands they have surrendered to the state of New York. Were they farmers, they have reserved enough to furnish them ample means of subsistence. The Senecas indeed might in this case be said to be rich, having reserved almost one hundred acres for each individual of their nation, man, woman, and child; and having owned more than one hundred thousand dollars in the stock of the late Bank of the United States. Cornplanter, the principal chief among the Senecas, has within the last twenty years labored earnestly to induce his nation to form their possessions into private property, and betake themselves industriously to farming.⁴ He has also endeavored to put a stop to their drinking. It was probably at his instance that the Prophet, who was his brother, made all those exertions for this purpose which some years past occupied a considerable part of our newspapers. The impressions made by this man on the superstitious feelings of the Six Nations were considerable, and a part of them directed to valuable purposes; but among other things he undertook to purge the nation from witchcraft, and in this way became the cause of violent death to one or more women belonging to these tribes. This probably was one source of his final unpopularity. Whatever was the cause, he actually became unpopular. Cornplanter therefore failed of accomplishing his benevolent design. This chief is a respectable man, possesses a large estate, and seems well to understand the superiority of civilized to savage society. Of late he has discovered serious and favorable sentiments concerning the Christian religion. Mr. Deane informed me that the Six Nations entertain many thoughts of removing into the western wilderness. He observes that they cherish no good will toward the Americans. Individuals they regard with affection, but the people of the United States as a body, they consider as their enemies. The mischiefs brought upon their country by General Sullivan, they undoubtedly remember with the deepest chagrin and resentment. But the evil which is most keenly felt by them is their own degradation, and the vast superiority which the Americans have acquired over all the savage tribes. One of their countrymen was in the year 1804 arrested for the crime of murdering a white man, and confined in jail at Canandaigua. The Senecas very strenuously remonstrated against his imprisonment. They seemed to have no serious objections to his being put to death, but they insisted that imprisonment was proper only for a slave.

Upon the whole, the Iroquois have certainly been a very extraordinary people. Had they enjoyed the advantages possessed by the Greeks and Romans, there is no reason to believe that they would have been at all inferior to these celebrated nations. Their minds appear to have been equal to any efforts within the reach of man. Their conquests, if we consider their numbers and their circumstances, were little inferior to those of Rome itself. In their harmony, the unity of their operations, the energy of their char-

acter, the vastness, vigor, and success of their enterprises, and the strength and sublimity of their eloquence, they may be fairly contrasted with the Greeks. Both the Greeks and the Romans, before they began to rise into distinction, had already reached that state of society in which men are able to improve. The Iroquois had not. The Greeks and Romans had ample means for improvement. The Iroquois had none.

In the preceding letter, I mentioned from Mr. Deane the sacrifice of a dog, annually performed by the Six Nations. The following account of this subject, as it exists among the Senecas, was given me in August 1812 by the Rev. Thaddeus Osgood, who has spent several years as a missionary, partly in the United States and partly in Canada.⁵ Mr. Osgood was present at one of these solemn festivals, and acquired additional information, such as he wished, from the national interpreter.

At the time when the Senecas return from hunting in January or February, they annually keep a feast seven days, the professed object of which is to render thanks to the Great Spirit for the benefits which they have received from him during the preceding year, and to solicit the continuance of them through the year to come. On the evening before the feast commences, they kill two dogs, and after painting them with various colors and dressing them with ornaments, suspend them in the center of the camp, or in some conspicuous place in the village.

The whole of this solemn season is spent in feasting and dancing. Two select bands, one of men and another of women, ornamented with a variety of trinkets, and furnished each with an ear of corn which is held in the right hand, begin the dance at the council house. Both choirs, the men leading the way, dance in a circle around the council fire which is kindled for the occasion, and regulate their steps by music. Hence they proceed to every house in the village, and in the same manner dance in a circle around each fire.

On one of the festival days they perform a peculiar religious ceremony for the purpose of driving away evil spirits from their habitations. Three men clothe themselves in the skins of wild beasts and cover their faces with masks of a hideous appearance, and their hands with the shell of the tortoise. In this garb they go from house to house, making a horrid noise, and in every house take the fuel from the fire and scatter the embers and ashes about the floor with their hands.

Toward the close of the festival they erect a funeral pile, place upon it the two dogs, and set it on fire. When they are partly consumed, one of them is taken off and put into a large kettle, with vegetables of every kind which they have cultivated during the preceding year. The other dog is consumed in the fire. The ashes of the pile are then gathered up, carried through the village, and sprinkled at the door of every house. When this ceremony is ended, which is always near the close of the seventh day, all the

inhabitants feast together upon the contents of the kettle; and thus the festival is terminated.

This mode of exhibiting their gratitude is certainly far from satisfying the feelings of a Christian; yet I think several of the American states might learn from these savages the important lesson that it becomes a people possessing the light of revelation to render annually a public tribute of thanksgiving to the Great Benefactor of mankind for the blessings which they have received during the year from his bountiful hand. This, however, is not the only religious service which has existed among the Six Nations. Mr. Kirkland informed me that while he was crossing the Oneida Lake with a fleet of canoes, a violent storm arose, from which the fleet was in the utmost danger of perishing. The chief sachem, in whose canoe Mr. Kirkland was, took from a box in the stern a small quantity of fine powder made of a fragrant herb unknown to Mr. Kirkland, and scattered it on the water. This he found was intended as an oblation to the deity acknowledged by the sachem.

There is a stone too large to be carried by a man of ordinary strength, at some distance eastward from the Oneida village, which some of these people regard with religious reverence, and speak of it as their god. They say that it has slowly followed their nation in their various removals, and allege as decisive evidence of the declaration that a few years since it was much farther to the east than it now is. The truth is, a stout young man of the Oneidas, being a wag, resolved to amuse himself with the credulity of his tribe; and therefore, whenever he passed that way, took up the stone and carried it some distance westward. In this manner the stone, advancing by little and little, made in a few years a considerable progress, and was verily believed by some of the Oneidas to have moved this distance spontaneously. The young fellow told the story to an American gentleman, and laughed heartily at the credulity of his countrymen.

I am, Sir, yours, etc.