

## THE INDIAN'S NEW RESURRECTION MYTH

The waking of animals from their winter sleep, the breaking up of the ice on the rivers, the loosening of icicles from the trees, and the return of the sun to the northern part of the sky, all represent certain stages in a terrific warfare waged each year between the Winter God and the Life God, according to an ancient legend of the Iroquois tribes. And quite recently a Government employee who spends much of his time among the survivors of these tribes has come upon a hitherto unknown version of the Indian myth of the coming of spring, with a suggestion in it of resurrection for all humankind and all living things.

Life, according to Iroquois cosmology, began on the other side of the sky. One day He-who-Holds-the-Earth became jealous of his wife, the Daylight, and tore a hole in the vault of the heavens and pushed her through. Down, down she tumbled, with her baby daughter on her back. The creatures floating on the surface of the primal sea saw her coming, and the water birds caught her and landed her unharmed on the back of a great turtle.

On earth, the baby daughter, the Air, grew to womanhood, married the Wind, and bore twin sons, the Winter God and the Life God. Unfortunately, she died in giving them birth, and the grandmother (Earth) asked the twins which one was responsible for the calamity. The Winter God quickly accused his innocent brother, who was immediately seized by the angry grandmother and cast into the grasses. From that time forth the Life God had a continual struggle against the machinations of his brother and grandmother. But he went right on preparing the world for man, raising corn, learning how to roast it, creating birds and animals for game, and at last creating man and breathing the breath of life into him. As recounted by Nell Ray Clarke in the Philadelphia Public Ledger, the myth runs on this way:

But the grandmother became angrier at each successful accomplishment of her grandson, and in order to punish him she stole from its fastening the head of his mother, which had been cut off at her death, and carried it away with her

across the cosmic sea. The head of Daylight was of, course, the Sun, and the carrying of it away by the Earth is the personification of the natural phenomenon of the sun's moving to the south during the winter in the Northern Hemisphere. Then the Life God and his associates did what the Indian logically concluded he would do under such circumstances—he went after the sun to bring it back again, because, as the Life God argued to himself, it was not a good thing that human beings who were to dwell on earth should continue to go about in darkness.

The Fisher, the Raccoon, the Fox, the Beaver, the Otter, and the Yellowhammer went with the Life God on his expedition in search of the sun. The Beaver made the canoe, the Yellowhammer hollowed it out, and, with the Beaver and the Otter steering it, they set out in the black darkness after the grandmother and the Winter God, who had fled to the eastward with the sun. Finally, as they approached an island, daylight dawned and they saw the light orb fastened in a tree top. The Fisher climbed out of the canoe on the branches of the trees, which dipped into the water, and traveled along from tree to tree until he reached the sun.

The Fox, meanwhile, had followed along on the ground. So the Fisher bit the cord holding the sun in the treetop, dropped the orb down to his friend the Fox, who ran away with it toward the canoe. When they had got half-way across the island, the grandmother noticed what had taken place and began running after them. So rapidly did she gain on them that she almost seized the Fox when he cast the sun up to the Fisher, who was running along on the branches of the trees. Back and forth the sun was hurled between them as the grandmother gained on first one and then the other until they reached the canoe.

Despite the pleadings of the old woman, who stood on the bank and begged that the sun be returned to her, they sailed away with it. The only one who even lent an ear to her petition was the Otter, whom, in punishment for his weakening, the Beaver struck with the paddle of the canoe and thereby flattened his face forever.

When they arrived back home, the Life God fastened the sun high up in the heavens, where it has remained fixed ever since.

The legend goes on to relate how the Winter God, envious of his brother's creation of man, began imitating his handiwork, and produced the monkey, the ape, the great horned owl, bats, toads, worms, and other creeping things. When the Winter God refused to stop work along this line the Life God compelled him to occupy the back part of the bark-lodge where they both lived—the low-roofed part behind the lodge-fire; and as the Winter God was made of crystal ice, the poor fellow soon began to melt away. Thus, to the minds of some of the first Americans, did summer triumph over winter.

J. N. B. Hewitt, of the Smithsonian Institution, who has spent some thirty-odd years in writing down old Indian myths, recently met an aged Indian who furnished the following conclusion to the story—a conclusion, the Ledger contributor declares, never before published.

“After the victory over the Winter God,” Mr. Hewitt said, “this old man told me that the Life God taught the human beings he had made that he would make a path on the earth. This, of course, did not mean such a path as immediately suggests itself to our minds, but the meaning was that they would have to follow the natural course of life, governed by their customs and their culture.

“Over this path, according to the Life God's teachings, two persons, a young man and a young woman at the flowering of their lives, should be appointed to follow. At the end of the path, they were told, they would find a mound of earth, and on this mound they would see three plants growing—the corn, the bean, and the squash (symbols of our life). The woman was directed to stand on the west side of the mound, because the flow of life is westward, and in order to receive it she must face the current.

“The Life God in his instructions further added: ‘Now you see why there must be a mound of earth at the end of your path, for each will know why he has to die, the growth of the plants on the mound symbolizing that life, or immortality, must come out of a mound also—the hope and the assurance of a resurrection.’”—The Literary Digest.