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## KANNEKUK OR KEEANAKUK.

### The Kickapoo Prophet.

BY MILO CUSTER.

According to a Kickapoo tradition, Kannekuk or Keeanakuk, the Kickapoo "Prophet" was born at a place in Illinois called the "Salt Lands."\* I have no doubt but that the old salt spring in Vermilion County, † near Danville, was the locality to which this tradition refers. No date of course, was assigned to his birth, but in view of the fact that according to John Masquequa, the Prophet was about twenty-five years old when he began to preach, which was about 1822, and that he was evidently a man in the prime of life when Catlin painted his portrait in 1831, it is probable that he was born about the year 1797. Of his parents and early life, as in the case of Masheena, we know nothing. He appears to have been a prominent man among the Vermilion River Kickapoos from an early date, his signature being attached to the treaty of cession made by the Vermilion Band at Vincennes, August 30, 1819. His name appears therein as "Kanekaka, or the Drunkards Son." From this circumstance we might infer that the Prophet's father was known among his people as "The Drunkard."

The Vermilion Band of Kickapoos had moved to some point near the south end of Lake Michigan some time prior to the year 1831, where they were living when Catlin visited them, and the Prophet was among them. He had already been "converted," had organized his "church," of whom part of the membership were Kickapoos and part were Pottowatomies, and had a considerable following. Just when his "conversion" took place we do not know, but from the dim light thrown upon the matter by the fact that he is said to have preached for about thirty years, and the meager

\* Weshkupakhakun Ashkeekee, in Kickapoo.

† This was near the site of the Kickapoo village at the forks of the Vermilion River four miles west of Danville, Illinois.

information furnished by the few writers who have chanced to record a few facts concerning his life, we might guess that it took place at or near Danville, Ill., about 1822, and that it was due partly to the efforts of pioneer Methodist missionaries. Kickapoo tradition says that after his conversion, he was very active in striving to prevent intemperance among his tribe; that he would frequently take a few of his faithful followers and meet Indians who might be returning from a drunken debauch at Danville, search their effects and taking from them any whiskey he might find, would pour it out on the ground.

It is likely that the story Catlin recites concerning the origin of the Prophet's "Church," which, as he states, was "told him by traders in the tribe," etc., is true. We can admit that the Prophet may have been inspired by some motives of self-interest in founding his "Church," yet the fact remains, as has been frequently stated by various writers who lived and wrote in his time, that Kannekuk exerted a wonderful influence for betterment over his followers.

When we consider the fact that he could neither read, write nor speak English, his life and work appear all the more remarkable.

The doctrines of his "Church" were no doubt founded on some of the cardinal principles of the Old Testament, though there appears to be very little of anything in them that approaches very near to Christianity. Its chief principles were given to me in a simple statement contained in a letter from John Mas-que-qua, who was pastor of Kannekuk's Church, on the Kickapoo Reservation in Brown County, Kansas, at the time the letter was written, July 20, 1906. In this letter Mas-que-qua says in part: "He (i. e., the Prophet) told his people that our Great Father worked six days and created everything; then on the seventh day He rested and prayed that everything be good," etc. Mas-que-qua also informed me verbally, on the occasion of my first visit to the Kickapoos in October, 1906, that Kannekuk had made certain prophecies, some of which were as follows: "He (the Prophet) told his people that the time would come when their church would be much reduced in numbers; also that the time would come when they would all go back to Illinois, where they were born; that the time would come when he (the

Prophet) would be known all over the world. He also told his people that he had left a written history of himself in Illinois and that it would some day be discovered." The first of these prophecies has been literally fulfilled.

The invention of the prayer-sticks and the symbolic characters carved upon them was, it appears to me, an original work of Kannekuk, notwithstanding the statement of some other writer to the contrary. Of the meaning of these characters and the form of service invented by the Prophet, perhaps the best description we have is that by Rev. Isaac McCoy, a Baptist missionary, who labored among the Kickapoo shortly after their removal to Kansas in 1832. His account is substantially as follows: "Kalukuk (Kannekuk), or the Kickapoo Prophet, one of the Kickapoo chiefs, is a professed preacher of an order which he himself originated some years ago. \* \* \* He teaches abstinence from the use of ardent spirits, and some other good morals. He appears to have little knowledge of the doctrines of Christianity only as his dogmas happen to agree with them. Congregational worship is performed daily and lasts from one to three hours. It consists of a kind of prayer, expressed in broken sentences, often repeated in a monotonous sing-song tone, equalling about two measures of a common psalm tune. All in unison engage in this; and in order to preserve harmony in words each holds in his or her hand a small board, about an inch and a half broad and eight or ten inches long, upon which is engraved arbitrary characters, which they follow up with the finger until the prayer is completed. \* \* \* Whipping with a rod is one article of their creed, and is submitted to as an atonement for sin."\* This account was written January 1, 1835.

The characters on Kannekuk's prayer-sticks were five in number. The first represents the heart; the second the heart and flesh; the third, life; the fourth, their names; the fifth, kindred—i. e., their relations. McCoy says: "Putting the finger to the lowest character, they say: 'O our Father, make our heart like Thy heart, as good as Thy heart, as strong as Thy heart,' " etc. The words accompanying the other characters are very similar.†

\* I was shown one of these rods by John Masquequa. He explained to me that it was no longer used, but was only kept in their church as a relic.

† I have a pen drawing of these characters. M. C.

McCoy makes a further statement that polygamy was allowed and that the Prophet had three or four wives. This statement is amply refuted, however, from information supplied me by Old Jesse (Mahkuk) and John Mas-que-qua, through which it appears that Kannekuk did not have "three or four wives" at one time, but that he had four different wives at as many different periods in his life, three of whom died consecutively, and the other of whom survived him.

The services of Kannekuk's Church have been much abbreviated since his time. The prayer-sticks are no longer used by the remnants of his followers, and "whipping with a rod" is no longer submitted to. Services are now held only on Sundays and the sermon that is preached—or, rather, recited—as well as the few songs and the prayers that are used, are those composed by the Prophet himself and written by Wansuck, his immediate successor as pastor of his "Church."

As to the personal appearance of Kannekuk, we are told by John T. Irving, Jr., in his "Indian Sketches" (page 81), that "the Prophet was a tall, bony Indian, with keen black eye, and face beaming with intelligence." \* \* \* Irving says further of him: "There is an energy of character about him which gives much weight to his words and has created for him an influence greater than that of any (other) Indian in the town," etc.

Kannekuk left Illinois in May, 1833. The balance of his life was spent on the Kickapoo reservation near Fort Leavenworth, where he died of the smallpox in 1852. He was buried near Kickapoo, a village on the Missouri River, in the north part of what is now Leavenworth County, Kansas.

His signature as "Ka-ana-kuk," etc., appears on the treaty of St. Louis, October 24, 1832. In the notebook of General William Clark, preserved in the library of the Kansas Historical Society, the following entry appears under date of September 30, 1833, viz: "Wm. Christy. For amt. p'd. for 2 horses for the Kickapoo Prophet; \$120." These two horses were probably the "mare and colt" referred to in General Clark's letter of January 16, 1833. This letter, together with an earlier one, dated August 31, 1832, also written by General Clark, and a hunting permit, dated July 5, 1832, signed by William Marshall, Indian Agent, are now

in possession of Optukkee (Commodore Catt.), Kannekuk's grandson, on the Kickapoo reservation, in Brown County, Kansas.

Kannekuk's descendants living on the Kickapoo reservation in Kansas in 1906 numbered ten persons. These, together with the wives of the married men, made a total of thirteen. All of his descendants are also descendants of Masheena, by reason of the latter's daughter, Ahsahmeeno Tenwawkwa, having been the Prophet's second wife. Kannekuk was married four times, according to the account given me by Old Jesse (Mahkuk), the oldest Kickapoo man living on the Kansas reservation in 1906. According to this account, the Prophet's first wife was Sawkeetokwa, by whom he had one son, the chief John Kennekuk (Pahkahkah), who died about 1868, leaving no descendants. Sawkeetokwa died in Illinois, probably about 1830. Shortly after removing to Kansas, Kannekuk married Masheena's daughter, by whom he had three children—Kachassa, Netinahpee and Kwahtheet. Kachassa lived to maturity and became the wife of Katnahmee, by whom she had six children, three sons of whom lived to maturity. The two youngest children of the Prophet died in childhood.

The Prophet also survived Masheena's daughter, and after her death he married Ahkwona, a Pottawatomie woman, whom he also survived. After her death he married Wahmeetukoosh, who survived him. No children were born of either of his last two marriages.

The children of Kachassa and Katnahmee who lived to maturity were Wahwahsuk, Wahpoahtek (John Winsee) and Optukkee (Commodore Catt.) The first named is now dead, leaving two children, viz: Robert Wahwahsuk and Minnie Wahwahsuk. The son, Robert Wahwahsuk, is married and has two children. The daughter, Minnie Wahwahsuk, was employed as assistant matron of the Government School on the Kickapoo reservation in Brown County, Kansas, 1909. It is said she was the first Kickapoo woman to hold a Government position.

The two brothers of Wahwahsuk are both married and have families. (For the names of their children and wives see the account of Masheena.) \*

\* In publication No. 16, 1911, Illinois State Historical Society.

The Prophet's successors as pastors of his "Church" were as follows: Wansuk, a Pottawatomie, who reduced the Prophet's doctrines to writing at the latter's direction, in 1851. Some years afterward he gave place to Mas-que-qua, Sr. (father of John Mas-que-qua), who died in 1877, and was succeeded by Nahkukkum, who died in 1886(?) after which the office was again taken by Wansuk, who died April 18, 1900, aged 85 years. The place was then taken by John Mas-que-qua, who died May 7, 1907. I can not now recall the name of his successor.

The remnant of the Prophet's Church members at the present time probably do not number over thirty persons. His two grandsons are adherents of the ancient "dance religion" of the Kickapoos, and have no faith in the "divine inspiration" of their noted ancestor. One of them, John Winsee, has the prayer-stick which it is said the Prophet made for his own personal use, also the letters written to Kannekuk by General Clark, and the hunting permit given him by the agent, William Marshall. These are carefully preserved as family heirlooms only.

The Prophet's doctrines, as written by Wansuk, consisted of several small volumes of the Kickapoo dialect in English script. I was permitted to see one of these and was also allowed to copy a part of it by John Mas-que-qua, in 1906. For the curiosity of the reader, I will give the text of what I have of this, which is as follows:

"Apa Nekanaetak otasa Kapiyatonuk.  
 Kapyawitmonuk Kenan Shota Gik  
 Gamagsieko Nesoyak Azchenmeshkigo.  
 Apa otamacha Kashawapzet.  
 Kosnan Akemekchawit.  
 Akewshatot otta Ka Negom.  
 Achayaeko Mena Akewshanuk.  
 Wekape Wapsenna Kosnan Ota.  
 Appewamsha Shota Tekoyko.  
 Nawyukwanwinpinma Shota.  
 Achayiko.  
 Wekuppi Sheya Choma.  
 Netukkesh Kittozen.  
 Wanejansetmen Ashataat.

Wekapi Sheya Apcha.  
 Amosh Kenashkagot.  
 Onapwakawin Wekappi Sheya.  
 Appeyaneswatot Omekchawewin.  
 Wekappi Sheya Shotasa Goyattak.  
 Waenejansetman Ashattaat Emacha.  
 Apkanak Ewota Sheatot Emacha.  
 Akesguk Opeskamwakin.  
 Maktawanuk Otakoswa Nejangsittak.  
 Matmashchak Atuk Ewota.  
 Kupkannak Ema Awapkenongot.  
 Ewta Kachnaw Pisha Ewota.  
 Akanongot.

\* \* \* \* \*

John Mas-que-qua's translation of the foregoing is substantially as follows: "Now, then, my brethren, this is that which created us explained to us who are here in this world. We are poor; three-colored.(?) Now, then, this is how it was. Our Father, when he worked and made this world where we are now, afterwards made us. After a while our Father began to have compassion for us.(?) (Before that) there was nobody right here where we now live. After a while we began to wander (away from the Father?) 'If I can not have them to be my children,' he thought (then what shall I do?) His heart was filled with good knowledge. After a while 'I will bring it down' (to men?) he thought. 'It will stay with them and I will have them to be my children,' he thought. He gave a part of His heart and put it here, and then He took off His coat. It was a black one. 'This is from your Father, my children; worship Me.' He said to His heart (and to His coat) which He took off. It was His heart, a part of His own self, which He talked to."

The meaning of the foregoing seems to me to be rather obscure. It may be that it was tinctured considerably with the ancient folk-lore, or it may be that it was dictated when the Prophet's mind was weak from sickness and his ideas were not clear. Again, it may be that Mas-que-qua's lack of a better knowledge of English grammar prevented his mak-

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The original of the above is written in a beautiful hand, and is perfectly legible.—M. C.



ing a clearer translation. The words in brackets, also the question marks, were supplied by me.

It was my privilege to attend a service of his "Church" on the Kickapoo reservation, Brown County, Kansas, on Sunday, October 7, 1906, and I recall two lines of one of the hymns sung at that service. These were:

"Mahnahkuk Inguk Nosendeh,  
Mahnahkuk Inguk Nosaw."

George Mas-que-qua, the preacher's son, afterwards told me the English meaning of this was, "Give us strength now! Give us strength, Father!"

An English translation of one of Kannekuk's sermons, preached near Danville, Illinois, July 17, 1831, has been preserved and is now in print. The translation was made by Gurdon S. Hubbard, the first publication was in Judge James Hall's magazine at Vandalia, Illinois, in October, 1831, and a reprint appeared in Hamilton's "Life of Hubbard," published in Chicago, Illinois, in 1888. I have a copy of this sermon, taken from the last mentioned work, together with a retranslation into Kickapoo made by Arthur Whitewater, a young Kickapoo of Brown County, Kansas. A part of the sermon is as follows:

"My friends, where are your thoughts today? Where were they yesterday? Were they fixed upon doing good? Or were you drunk and tattling, or did anger rest in your hearts? If you have done any of these things your Great Father in Heaven knows it. His eye is upon you. He always sees you and will always see you. He knows all your deeds. He has knowledge of the smallest transactions of your lives."

\* \* \* Whitewater's retranslation of the foregoing is as follows:

"Neekahnehteekeh tahnahka ehtahshetehehye que eno-kee? Wehnahnehkakee? Ehwehmehnwahye que kehteshetchehbwa, kehmehnokwabwa nkehtahshemwabwa awe-yeah yokeh? Kehtah queetehehbwa? Eneesheweye queh nehkotwehyahweko. Sehnahnah, ahbehmehkee, ehwetah, kehkehnehtahmwa kehneh okowawa, ahbehnehchu. Ahbehneh-chu kehneh okowawa, kehkehnehmeh kowaewa kahmekehtheye que kehkehnehtamwa."

I have seen somewhere a copy of a translation of a speech made by Kannekuk to General Clark at St. Louis, about 1832, in which he made a strong plea that the Kickapoos be permitted to remain in Illinois. His words, "My father, take not our lands!" were many times repeated in this speech.

His grandson, Optukkee, has a letter written to Kannekuk, under date of August 31, 1832, by General Clark, wherein the latter advised the Prophet and his band in strong terms to leave this State at once.

The original portrait of Kannekuk, painted by Catlin, is now in the National Museum at Washington, D. C. A full size copy of it in oil, by Miss Florence Harris, is in the court house at Bloomington, Illinois, and a half-tone engraving from the original was published in the Bureau of Ethnology Bulletin, entitled "Hand-Book of Indians North of Mexico."