

The Traditions of the Delawares,

AS TOLD BY CHIEF WAUBUNO.



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From The Traditions of the Delawares as told by Chief Waubano (no date)

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Note: Chief Waubano is John Wampum. He was born at Munceytown in 1815. He is buried at the Delaware Chapel (Six Nations)

Traditions of Forefathers

For some years past I have made it a subject of inquiry among the aged sachems of the Muncey or Delaware nation of Indians what are the opinions entertained by them and transmitted from our forefathers regarding the origin of our race. All the information I have been able to gain in relation to this question amounts to the following:-that many years ago the Great Spirit whom we call in Munsee or Delaware, Kaunzhe Pah-tum-owans or Kacheh Munitto (Great Spirit or Benevolent Spirit), created the Indians and placed them on the continent of America; that every nation speaking a different language is a separate creation but that all were made by the same Supreme Being. They say that when the Great Spirit made the different nations of the earth he gave them various languages, complexions, and religions, as well as divers customs, manners, and modes of living; when he gave the Munsees of Delawares their religion he told them how they were to act, and with this knowledge they think it would be wrong and give great offence to their Creator to forsake the old ways of their forefathers. Some tribes believe that a great man-Amen-a-push-made the world and the Indians in America. This tradition, as preserved by the Munsees, is as follows:-

Before the General Deluge there lived two enormous creatures, each possessed of great power: one was an animal with a great horn on his head, the other was a huge toad. The latter had the whole management of the waters, keeping them secure in its own body, and emitting only a certain quantity for the watering of the earth. Between these two creatures there arose a quarrel, which terminated in a fight. The toad tried in vain to swallow its antagonist, but the latter rushed upon it and with its horn pierced a hole in its side, out of which the water gushed in floods, and soon overflowed the face of the earth. At this time Amen-a-push was living on the earth and observing the water rising higher and higher he fled to the loftiest mountain for safety. Perceiving that even this retreat would be inundated he selected a large cedar tree which he purposed to ascend should the waters come up to him. Before they reached him he caught a number of animals and fowls and put them in his bosom. At length the water covered the mountain; Amen-a-push then ascended the cedar tree, and as he went up he plucked its branches and stuck them in the belt which girdled his waist. When he reached the top of the tree he sang, and beat the time with an arrow upon his bow, and

as he sang the tree grew and kept pace with the water. At length he abandoned the idea of remaining on the tree and took the branches he had plucked and with them constructed a raft, and on this, with the animals and fowls, floated about till all the mountains were covered, and all the beasts of the earth and fowls of the air, except those he had with him, perished. After some time Amen-a-push thought of forming a new world, but how to accomplish it without any materials he knew not till it occurred to him that if he could only obtain a little of the earth from under the water he might succeed in making a new world out of the old one. He accordingly employed the different animals he had with him that were accustomed to diving. First, he sent the m-tay-wee-lay-on, or loon, into the water, in order to bring up some of the old earth, but it was not able to reach the bottom, and after remaining in the water some time came up dead. Amen-a-push then took it, blew upon it and it came to life again. He next sent the otter which, also failing to reach the bottom, came up dead, and was restored to life in the same manner as the loon.

He then tried the skill of the beaver, but without success. Having failed with all these diving animals, he last of all took the muskrat. On account of the distance it had to go to reach the bottom it was gone a long time and came up dead. On taking it up Amen-a-push found to his great joy that it had reached the earth and had retained some of the soil in each of its paws and mouth, he then blew upon it and brought it back to life again, at the same time pronouncing many blessings on it, saying, that as long as the world he was about to make should endure the hwusk-ksiss or musk-rat should never become extinct. This prediction of Amen-a-push is still spoken of by the Indians when referring to the rapid increase of hwusk-ksiss or muskrat. Amen-a-push then took the earth he found in the musk-rat's paws and mouth, and having rubbed it with his hands to a fine dust he placed it on the waters and blew upon it, then it began to grow larger and larger until it was beyond the reach of his eyes. In order to ascertain the size of the world and the progress of its growth and expansion he sent a wolf to run to the end of it, measuring its extent by the time consumed in the journey. The first journey he performed in one day, the second took him five days, the third ten, the fourth a month, then a year, five years, and so on, until the world was so large that Amen-a-push sent a young wolf that could just run which died of old age before it could accomplish the journey. Amen-a-push then said the world was large enough and commanded it to cease from growing. After this Amen-a-push took a journey to view the world he had made, and as he travelled he created various tribes of Indians and placed them in different parts of the earth. He then gave them various religions, customs, and manners. This Amen-a-push now sits at the North Pole, overlooking all the transactions and affairs of the people he has placed on the earth, The northern tribes say that Amen-a-push always sleeps during the winter, but previous to his falling asleep he fills his great pipe and smokes for several days, and that is the smoke arising from the mouth and pipe of Amen-a-push which produces what is called Indian summer.

