

THE IROQUOIS

THE IROQUOIS, as they were first called by the French, occupied the northern portion of present-day New York State in a territory extending roughly between the Genesee and Hudson Rivers. They were comprised of the five tribes of Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk.

Iroquois links with Mayan culture go back to the pre-Maya stages of civilization. In North America we find these links with the first agricultural societies—the Adena and the Hopewell. The Adena, or Early Woodland, spread into the valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and their tributaries. They were followed by the Hopewell culture around 500 BC. At this stage the surrounding hunters/gatherers assimilated completely the culture and spirituality of the farming communities. This is revealed by the record of physical anthropology; the skeletons and skulls found show two marked ethnic differences. The Adena's and Hopewell's cultivars of maize, beans, and squashes come from the Mayan area—giving us an indication that this was their likely origin. The Hopewell also had earthen pyramid constructions very similar to the ones of the pre-Classic Maya, as for example those found around the Kaminaljuyu area of Guatemala.⁽¹⁾ The ceremonial sites of the Ohio and Illinois were abruptly abandoned in AD 100-200, a time in which we have seen that important spiritual battles and transitions were going on in America.

The Iroquois share many elements with the archaic Hopewell culture. They are the only group in the East that continued the pottery tradition of the Hopewell, and like them are excellent sculptors, often representing the same kind of maternity figures and preserving their funerary traditions. Finally, they built the same kind of towns surrounded by pentagonal enclosures. The Iroquois, or rather their ancestors, invaded from the south, taking over Algonquin territory and went as far north as the cultivation of maize allowed.

The Iroquois division between civil and religious authority is common to all agricultural nations of the continent. In the astronomical realm they base their observations on the Pleiades, Venus, and Milky Way, as did many societies at the level of consciousness of the Third Age, as well as Mayan pre-Classic culture. Their New Year falls in February as it does for the beginning of the Tzolkin, and it begins with the extinction of the old fire in the Longhouse. Their festival of the dead is also celebrated in November.⁽²⁾

All of the above shows that the Iroquois share links with the Maya but only in the distant past. To the spiritual forces coming from the past the Iroquois added a completely original force of renewal.

The Legend of the White Roots of Peace: Deganawidah and Hiawatha

The Iroquois League of the Five Nations (later six, with the addition of the Tuscaroras) represents a radical departure from all previous models of government in North America. It is the first confederation of equal nations that does not depend on the idea of a monarch. The Five Nations' Confederacy traces its origin to the historical legend of the White Roots of Peace. The symbol of their legend, the tree of the white roots, stands for peace in the larger sense of the word, a peace that in their language corresponds with the sacred law.

In the past, the beginning of the Iroquois League was thought to have occurred in the fifteenth century.⁽³⁾ More recent studies argue for an earlier beginning to the League, as far back as the eleventh to twelfth century. Seneca historians based their calculations upon the tallies of generations passed down in the oral record, which led to the date of 1090. Mann and Fields have ascertained the date of 1150 by going back to the record of the so-called "Condolence Canes."⁽⁴⁾

There are many versions of the historical legend of the founding of the league. Variations can be ascribed to the degree of thoroughness of the sources relating the events, the witnesses recording them, and the time of these recordings. Some versions are obviously shorter renderings, trimmed of any legendary connotation and made fit for the modern, rational ear. Of all the versions known, we will mainly refer to Paul Wallace's retelling, taken at the turn of the nineteenth century from three different sources. Wallace is a thorough interpreter of Iroquois culture, and is completely immersed in their way of thinking. His legend is also most detailed than most. We will occasionally use other sources to amplify Wallace's version.⁽⁵⁾ The following is an abbreviated rendering of Wallace's version.

Deganawidah was born at a Huron settlement on the north shore of Lake Ontario. Before his birth, his grandmother received his name in a dream vision. The Great Spirit said to her, "It is the will of the Holder of the Heavens that your daughter, a virgin, shall bear a child. He will be called Deganawidah, the Master of Things, because he brings with him the Good News of Peace and Power. Care for him well, for he has a great task to perform in the world: to bring peace and life to the people on earth."

When Deganawidah had become a man, one day he said to his mother and grandmother, "Now I will build my canoe, for it is time for me to set out on my mission to stop the shedding of blood among human beings. I will go toward the sunrise, seeking the council smoke of nations beyond this lake."

Deganawidah crossed Lake Ontario in his canoe of white stone, and approached the land of the Iroquois. At that time the settlements were all back among the hills, whose steep sides offered protection to villages against their enemies. Those were evil days, for the five Iroquois peoples were all at war with one another, and made themselves an easy prey to the fierce Algonquin Adirondacks who came down on them from the northeast, and the Mohicans who assailed them from the east.

As Deganawidah neared the land, he saw men running along the shore. Deganawidah swiftly beached the canoe and climbed the bank to stand before them. When the men told Deganawidah of the strife in their village, he said to them, "I am Deganawidah. Tell your chief that the Good News of Peace and Power has come, and that there will be no more strife in his village. If he asks where this peace will come from, say to him, 'It will come.'" The men were full of wonder when they saw that Deganawidah's canoe was made of white stone.

The hunters swiftly went to their chief, and told him of the Good News of Peace and Power. When the chief asked them who had told them this, they replied, "He is called Deganawidah in the world. He came from the west and he goes toward the sunrise. His canoe is made of white stone and it moves swiftly." And they told him of his message of peace. Then the chief replied, "Truly this is a wonderful thing. All will be glad and at peace in their minds to know that this thing will come to be, once men believe it."

After leaving the hunters, Deganawidah went to the house of a woman who lived by the warriors' path that passed between the east and the west. The woman placed food before him and, after he had eaten, asked him his message. "I carry the Mind of the Master of Life," he replied, "and my message will bring an end to the wars between east and west. All peoples will love one another and live together in peace. This message has three parts—Righteousness, Health, and Power (Gáiwoh, Skénon, and Gashasdénshaa)—and each part has two branches: Righteousness means justice between men and nations, and a desire to see justice prevail. Health means soundness of mind and body, and peace that comes when minds are sane and

bodies cared for. Power means the authority of law and custom, backed by such force as is necessary to make justice prevail, and also the desire of the Holder of the Heavens and has his sanction.”

“Your message is good,” said the woman, “but a word is nothing until it is given form and set to work in the world. What form will this message take?” “It will take the form of the Longhouse,” replied Deganawidah, “in which there are many fires, one for each family, yet all will live as one household under one chief mother. The five nations, each with its own council and fire, shall live together as one household in peace. They shall be the Kanonsiónni, the Longhouse. They shall have one mind and live under one law. Thinking shall replace killing, and there shall be one commonwealth.” Deganawidah told the woman, “In that Longhouse the women shall possess the power to name the chiefs. That is because you, my mother, were the first to accept the Good News of Peace and Power. Henceforth you shall be called Jigónhsasee, New Face, for your countenance reveals the New Mind, and you shall be known as the Mother of Nations. Now I will take my message toward the sunrise.” The woman told him that in that direction lived a man who eats humans. “That is my task,” said Deganawidah, “to bring such evils to an end, so that all men may go from place to place without fear.”

When Deganawidah came to the house of the “man who eats humans,” he climbed to the roof and lay flat on his chest beside the smoke hole. There he waited until the man came home carrying a human body, which he put in his kettle on the fire. Deganawidah moved closer and looked straight down into the smoke hole. At that moment the man bent over the kettle and was amazed to see a face looking up at him. It was Deganawidah’s face he saw reflected in the water, but the man thought it was his own. The face had such wisdom and strength as he had never seen before nor ever dreamed that he possessed. The man thought, “This is a most wonderful thing, which has never happened to me before. A great man looked at me out of the kettle. I did not know I was like that. I shall look again and make sure that what I have seen is true.”

When the man looked into the kettle once more, there again was the face of a great man looking up at him. Then he believed it was true that he had wisdom and righteousness and strength. “Now I will no longer kill humans and eat their flesh,” the man said. “But that is not enough. The mind is more difficult to change. I cannot forget the suffering I have caused, and I am miserable. Perhaps someone can

will tell me what I must do to make amends for all the human beings I have made to suffer.”

Deganawidah climbed down from the roof and met the man. They entered and sat down across the fire from each other. The man told Deganawidah what had happened to him that day. Deganawidah replied, “Truly, a wonderful thing has happened today. The New Mind has come to you, bringing Righteousness and Health and Power. And you are miserable because the New Mind does not live at ease with old memories. You can heal your memories by working to make justice prevail, and bringing peace to those places where you have brought pain. You will work with me in advancing the Good News of Peace and Power.”

Now nearby lived an Onondaga chief named Atotarho, who was a great and evil wizard. He had a twisted body and a twisted mind, and his hair was a mass of tangled snakes. Men feared to see him, and the sound of his voice sent terror through the land; but peace could not be completed without him.

“You will visit Atotarho,” said Deganawidah, “for he is of your people, the Onondagas. He is ugly, but we need him. When he asks you for your message, say, ‘It is Righteousness and Health, and when men take hold of it they will stop killing one another and live in peace.’ He will not listen to you, but will drive you away. Yet you will come to him again and at last prevail. You will be called Hiawatha, He Who Combs, for you will comb the snakes out of Atotarho’s hair.”

Deganawidah visited Atotarho to prepare him for Hiawatha’s message. “I have come to prepare your mind,” said Deganawidah, “for the Good News of Peace and Power. When men accept it, they will stop killing, and bloodshed will cease from the land.”

Atotarho said to Deganawidah, “When will this be?” and then he cried: “Hwe-do-né-e-e-e-eh!” It was the mocking cry of the doubter who killed men by destroying their faith.

“It will be,” replied Deganawidah. “I shall come again, with Hiawatha, who will comb the snakes out of your hair.”

Then Deganawidah took his course toward the sunrise, toward the land of the Mohawks. Deganawidah made camp by the Lower Falls of the Mohawk River, and in the evening sat beneath a tall tree and smoked his pipe. A Mohawk man passing by saw him and asked Deganawidah who he was. “I am Deganawidah,” he replied. “The Great Creator sent me to establish the Great Peace among you.” “There is no peace here,” said the man. “But I will take you to

my village, so that you can explain this message to the people.”

So Deganawidah presented the Good News of Peace and Power, of Reason and Law, to the Mohawks in that place, and the people were glad, for they found it a good message.

But their chiefs were cautious and held back. The Chief Warrior would not believe Deganawidah's words were true without a sign. He decreed that Deganawidah should climb to the top of a tall tree by the falls, and then the tree would be cut down over the cliff. If by morning Deganawidah were still living, the Chief would accept his message.

Deganawidah climbed the tree to the topmost branch. Then the Mohawks cut the tree down so that it fell over the cliff into the water. The people watched to see if Deganawidah came up, but there was no sign of him.

Next morning, before sunrise, a man of the Mohawks came to the place by the falls where the tree had fallen, and saw at a little distance across the cornfields a column of smoke rising. Going toward it he saw a man seated by his fire. It was Deganawidah.

The people brought Deganawidah back to the place of council, and the Chief Warrior said, “Now I am in doubt no longer. This is a great man, who reveals to us the Mind of the Master of Life. Let us accept his message. Let us take hold of the Good News of Peace and Power.” Thus the Mohawks were the first nation to take hold of the Great Peace. They were the founders of the League.

Meanwhile, Hiawatha could make no headway against Atotarho. Three times Hiawatha set out with the Onondagas to straighten Atotarho's twisted mind. But each time the wizard's evil power thwarted them. Some of the Onondagas were drowned in their canoes by the waves. Others were set fighting among themselves. Hiawatha was not injured in his body, but was wounded in his mind by the obstructions placed in his path.

One day he heard Atotarho's voice crying out, “Hiawatha-a-a-a-a-a!” and he was troubled, for he knew that mischief was hatching. Soon Hiawatha's three daughters were taken ill, and all died. Hiawatha's grief bowed him down. Seeing him thus depressed, the people arranged a game of lacrosse to comfort him. But when a mysterious bird dropped out of the sky, the crowd trampled Hiawatha's wife to death in pursuit of it, and his grief overcame him. He left the land of the Onondagas and traveled south.

Hiawatha soon came to the Tully Lakes. As he crossed one of them, at his request the ducks lifted the water for him to pass with dry moccasins. Picking up shells from the lake bottom, he threaded them on three strings of jointed rushes as a mark of his grief.

Every night when he made his fire, Hiawatha set up two crotched sticks with a third stick across them, and from this he hung the three strings of shells. Then he sat down and said, "If I found anyone burdened with grief as I am, I would take these shell strings in my hand and console them. The strings would become words and lift away the darkness covering them. Holding these in my hand, my words would be true."

For many days Hiawatha wandered through the forest without direction. When he came near settlements, the people saw the smoke from his fire at evening, but no one came to console him. The people knew that it was Hiawatha, for they had heard of his departure from the land of the Onondaga.

In his loneliness, Hiawatha built himself a canoe and paddled down the Mohawk River until he came to the village by the Lower Falls, and built his fire at the wood's edge.

That night Deganawidah went to Hiawatha's fire. As he approached, he heard Hiawatha saying, "If I found anyone burdened with grief as I am, I would take these shell strings in my hand and console them. The strings would become words and lift away the darkness covering them. Holding these in my hand, my words would be true." Then Deganawidah came to Hiawatha and taking the strings, he spoke the words of the Requickenning Address, used for all generations since in the Iroquois Condolence Ceremony: "I wipe away the tears from your face using the white fawn-skin of pity...I make it daylight for you. I beautify the sky. Now your thoughts will be peaceful when your eyes rest on the sky, which the Perfector of our Faculties, the Master of All Things, intended to be a source of happiness to man." Thus Hiawatha's mind was cleared of its grief.

"Now," said Deganawidah, "Reason and judgment have returned to you. You are ready to advance the New Mind. Let us together make the laws of the Great Peace, which shall abolish war." So when the Great Law was completed, and a string or belt of wampum for each item was provided to enable them to remember it more easily, Hiawatha and Deganawidah carried the words of the Great Peace to the nations of the west: the Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas.

Accompanied by Mohawk chiefs, Deganawidah and Hiawatha approached the Oneidas and the Cayugas, who readily accepted the Great Peace. Now, with three nations at their back, Deganawidah and Hiawatha returned to the politically minded Onondagas, and were able to convince their chiefs (all but Atotarho) that it would be well to join. Then, accompanied by the chiefs of four nations—Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, and Cayugas—they carried the Peace Hymn to Canandaigua Lake, where they persuaded the Senecas to end their rivalries and enter the Longhouse.

“Now,” said Deganawidah, “we must go to Atotarho. He alone stands across our path. The twists in his mind and the seven crooks in his body must be straightened if the League is to endure.” “Come,” said Deganawidah to Hiawatha, “first you and I alone will go to the Great Wizard. I will sing the Peace Song and you will explain the Words of the Law, holding the wampum in your hand. If we can straighten his mind, the Longhouse will be completed and our work accomplished.”

As they neared the middle of the lake, they heard the voice of Atotarho: “Asonke-ne-e-e-e-eh? Is it not yet?” The wind blew and the waves struck angrily against the canoe, and again they heard Atotarho’s cry rush out to meet them: “Asonke-ne-e-e-e-eh! It is not yet!” But Deganawidah put his strength into his paddle, and in a few moments they beached their canoe on the east shore of the lake, and stood before the wizard.

Holding the strings of wampum in his hand, Hiawatha said to Atotarho, “These are the words of the Great Law, on which we will build the House of Peace, the Longhouse with five fires that is yet one household. These are the words of Righteousness and Health and Power.”

“What is this foolishness about houses and righteousness and health?” said Atotarho.

Then Deganawidah spoke his message: “The Words we bring constitute the New Mind, which is the will of the Holder of the Heavens. There shall be Righteousness when men desire justice, Health when men obey reason, Power when men accept the Great Law. These things shall be given form in the Longhouse, where five nations shall live in quiet as one family. At this very place, Atotarho, where the chiefs of five nations will assemble, I shall plant the Great Tree of Peace, and its root shall extend to far places of the earth so that all mankind may have the shelter of the Great Law.”

“You yourself,” said Deganawidah, “will tend the council fire of the Five Nations, the Fire That Never Dies. And the smoke of that fire shall reach the sky and be seen by all men. If you desire it, you will be the Head Chief of the Five Nations.”

“Of course I desire it,” said Atotarho, “if there be anything in it. But you are a dreamer—where is the power to bring it to pass? At that Hiawatha and Deganawidah returned across the lake to bring the chiefs to Atotarho. They heard the voice of Atotarho rush out to meet them, crying, “Asonke-ne-e-e-e-e-eh! It is not yet!” The wind lifted the waves against the canoes, but they put their strength into their paddles and, before the voice had died away, they stood before Atotarho.

“Behold!” said Deganawidah. “Here is the power of the Five Nations. Their strength is greater than your strength. But their voice shall be your voice when you speak in council, and all men shall hear you. This shall be your strength in the future: the will of a united people.” Then the mind of Atotarho was made straight, and Hiawatha combed the snakes out of his hair. Deganawidah laid his hand on Atotarho’s body and said, “The work is finished. You will now preside over the Council, and you will strive in all ways to make reason and the peaceful mind prevail.” Then Deganawidah placed antlers on the heads of the chiefs as a sign of their authority, and gave them the Words of the Law.

Let us now look at the implications of this legend and the historical facts that ensued. In the language of the legend, the “New Mind” has to bring about a “New Form”; new ideas shape a new reality in the social world.

The Actors of the Drama

In most versions of the legend, Hiawatha and Deganawidah form a duality. Occasionally they merge into the single individuality of Hiawatha. The dynamic of the legend revolves around the two of them and Atotarho.

Deganawidah’s biography is by far the most extraordinary of the three. He is conceived by a virgin, thus echoing the manner of birth of Ixbalamqué in the ancient Mexican Mysteries at the time of Christ. As we have abundantly illustrated, the virgin birth forms a link to Native American precedent and tradition rather than a concession to Christianity as some authors have argued. Deganawidah’s mission is clearly defined by a messenger of the Great Spirit. In some versions of the legend, the messenger also prophesies that Deganawidah would indirectly bring the downfall of his

people, the Hurons. The Grandmother tries to kill him by throwing him in the freezing waters and twice more in unspecified manners.

In Deganawidah we see an initiate who tries to introduce new spiritual principles. That he is an initiate or an exceptional individual is also indicated by the fact that he rides a white canoe made of stone, symbol that in another context is associated with Chebiabos, the guide who carries the souls to the land of the dead. This white canoe is also the one used by Glooskap, the equivalent of the initiate in the Algonquian Northeast. Glooskap too is a Guardian of the Threshold, awaiting the souls at their death.⁽⁶⁾ In one version of the legend, once his mission is accomplished, Deganawidah rows his canoe towards the setting sun, never to be seen again. In the version given by Horatio Hale it is also said that Deganawidah's name is the only one that cannot be used down the line of heredity, contrary to all the other names of chiefs present at the foundation of the League. This is because none can do what he has done.⁽⁷⁾ The confusion between Manabozho and Hiawatha that Longfellow perpetuated becomes more understandable now, in the light of the fact that in some versions the Hiawatha character is in fact a blending of Hiawatha and Deganawidah, and appears therefore as the initiate.

Like Deganawidah, Atotarho (sometimes alternatively spelled Thadodaho) shares a mixture of human and superhuman attributes. His cry is "the mocking cry of the doubter who killed men by destroying their faith." The translation of the cry means, "When will this be?" This impatient attitude is typical of a being who wants to bring forth events before their time. The physical appearance of Atotarho—his crooked body, his head garlanded with snakes—denotes an unlawful penetration by earthly powers. It can be said that in him work the powers of Ahriman, which enable him to use magic and hurt enemies at a distance.

Between these two extremes stands Hiawatha. His flaw, cannibalism, is a major spiritual trespass that he has adopted as a cultural habit from society around him. Cannibalism stands at the center of the encounter between Hiawatha and Deganawidah. It is used like human sacrifice among the Aztecs, although on a minor scale, as a means to revive ancient atavistic inspirations. Because Hiawatha is in touch with his true humanity, he is able to recognize his lower self. His encounter with Deganawidah is a beautiful portrayal of the meeting with the Lower Guardian, showing the shortcomings of the lower self and submitting to the guidance of the higher self. The encounter brings about the recognition of the pain caused to others and the desire to redeem the lower self, made possible by Deganawidah's message.

Soon after, Hiawatha takes on the task of helping his people. This

brings upon him the karma of his community, a pain that he has not karmically deserved but that he willingly embraces. The length of the process of grief is emphasized by the establishment of the Ritual of Condolence, the burdensome journey to the Mohawk nation, and the earnest desire to bring consolation to others. Only Deganawidah knows the depth of Hiawatha's sorrow; he can reach to the spiritual source that offers him peace and allows the perception of the truth that suffering has obscured.

The dynamic of development played by the two founders shows significant nuances not immediately perceptible. Hiawatha is as much a pupil of Deganawidah as he is a collaborator. While the prophet carries the vision, he is impaired by stuttering. He needs someone else with oratorical skills; that is Hiawatha's role. Although Deganawidah guides and inspires, it is Hiawatha who carries out the burden of the central confrontation with Atotarho. He cannot make use of supernatural powers as Deganawidah does in the instance of the test of the fallen tree. However, it is Hiawatha who establishes the Ritual of Condolence and who combs Atotarho's hair. The initiate has to find a willing companion before he can realize his mission. Hiawatha represents in the will what Deganawidah carries in the realm of ideas. His is a will imbued with heart forces. Atotarho embodies a ruthless will, devoid of morality. With the achievement of the League, Deganawidah's task of the spirit comes to an end; Hiawatha still has a political task to carry out.

The New Path to the Social Mysteries

We can now revisit the main events in the drama. Two pivotal points will underline the character of the mysteries inaugurated by Deganawidah with the help of his pupil Hiawatha. We have already pointed to the first event: the initial meeting of Hiawatha with Deganawidah. After seeing the reflection of the initiate's face in the water kettle, Hiawatha says: "It is my own face in which I see wisdom and righteousness and strength. But it is not the face of a man who eats humans. I see that it is not like me to do that." Thus the first stage of what we have defined as the meeting with the Lower Guardian of the Threshold is marked by the perception of one's shortcomings.

After emptying the kettle Hiawatha continues: "Now I have changed my habits. I no longer kill humans and eat their flesh. But that is not enough. The mind is more difficult to change. I cannot forget the suffering I have caused, and I am become miserable." At this stage Hiawatha truly meets the Guardian with the desire to take on a different direction in life. He wishes that somebody would tell him what to do next. This is when Deganawidah

appears to him bringing the message of the White Roots of Peace. The initiate only speaks when the pupil has readied himself in soul and spirit. Deganawidah first confirms to Hiawatha what he has already understood, then shows him the way to redeem himself: "The New Mind has come to thee, namely Righteousness and Health and Power. And thou art miserable because the New Mind does not live at ease with old memories. Heal thy memories by working to make justice prevail. Bring peace to those places where thou hast done injury to man." These are the words that set Hiawatha on his new course. He then works to spread the word of the New Mind. The ensuing events bring him the grief of the deaths of his wife and daughters.

The later part of the narrative offers us further clues about Hiawatha's transformation. Two consequences follow the tragedies occurring in Hiawatha's life. Grief overcomes him to such a degree that he is unable to regain his place in society; he wanders off aimlessly. Implicit in his wandering is a renouncement of vengeance. Though he seeks consolation and everyone knows who he is, no one is able to offer consolation to the Onondaga chief. At this point an enigmatic imagination occurs. Hiawatha in his grief arrives at one of the Tully lakes. To ease his way the ducks lift the water to let him pass. From the bottom of the lake he picks up shells that he threads into three strings. With these, which he sets on a horizontal pole, he institutes the Ritual of Condolence. A further change has occurred at this stage. Not only has Hiawatha given up all thought of vengeance, but he can now offer consolation to anyone else who grieves, just as he wishes to receive consolation himself. The narrative underlines that this is an important step. Hiawatha recognizes not only his personal grief but also the collective grief that the practices of cannibalism, warfare, and black magic have brought upon his people. The first experience of the wrong he had committed through cannibalism was an experience in the realm of thought. At this stage Hiawatha receives the full impact of it in the realm of his feelings and will. It is the kind of experience that overwhelms the life of feelings and that is usually avoided in every way— outwardly through revenge, inwardly with drugs or anything that can provide oblivion. Hiawatha is as if immobilized by the experience. All his activity is turned inward towards the experience of grief. He is as if absent to the outside world, but new powers are coming to birth in his soul.

Deganawidah arrives at the place where Hiawatha is staying in Mohawk territory. Approaching unbeknownst to the Onondaga chief, he hears him pronouncing the words of the "Requickenning Address," used for the Ritual of Condolence. Then, and only then, does the initiate offer consolation to Hiawatha. Once again the initiate awaits indication of

readiness on the part of his pupil. Hiawatha, cleared of his grief, can now work for the good of the whole Iroquois people. This crucial point in the narrative corresponds in effect to the meeting with the Christ, the Higher Guardian of the Threshold. Deganawidah has a role reminiscent of the hierophant, but now outside the precinct of the mysteries.

To the Lower Guardian, Hiawatha has expressed his desire to overcome his lower nature. He has set himself a positive task, an ideal that would curb his cannibalistic habit. He has taken on the task of transforming his double, who is his own creation. Once this transformation is completed Hiawatha meets the Higher Guardian of the threshold. This is how Steiner describes in imaginative terms the difference between the meetings with the Lesser and the Higher Guardians. “Hitherto you have sought only your own release, but now, having yourself become free, you can go forth as a liberator of your fellows. Until today you have striven as an individual, but now seek to coordinate yourself with the whole, so that you may bring into the supersensible world not yourself alone, but all things else existing in the world of the senses. You will someday be able to unite with me [Higher Guardian]”⁽⁸⁾ Henceforth Hiawatha can in effect work to further the condition of his people and the Five Nations.

The roles of the initiate and his pupil should not hide the fact that the whole of society participates in the unfolding of the events. First, in a passive way, the tribes of the west accept the message of Deganawidah. It is still a very superficial acceptance as the narrative shows: “Deganawidah passed from settlement to settlement, finding that men desired peace and would practice it if they knew for a certainty that others would practice it too.” When Hiawatha starts spreading the new message among the Onondagas, the black magician reacts by drowning some of his followers, or by setting them against each other. When Deganawidah wanders towards the east he reaches the Mohawk who take up his message actively. Later Deganawidah and Hiawatha proceed to meet the black magician only because they have the full support of the five tribes.

We now come closer to the understanding of the Mysteries inaugurated by Deganawidah and Hiawatha. These are mysteries that unfold in the social world itself, no longer in isolated Mystery centers. These Mysteries leading to the time of the Consciousness Soul tackle the matter of coming to terms with evil and its representatives. To Hiawatha the initiate says: “Thou shalt visit this man Atotarho, for he is of thy people, the Onondagas. He is ugly but we need him.” Thus from the beginning the encounter with Atotarho is unavoidable. Atotarho is an essential protagonist in the unfolding of the story.

The importance of Atotarho appears in the outcome of the legend. He has a place as an important obstacle in the way and realistically he cannot be swept aside. The final meeting between Deganawidah and Atotarho has the appearance of a bargaining party. Atotarho wants to know why he should yield to the desire of the five tribes. When he is told that he himself will have an important political role, he willingly accepts. Evil cannot be transformed without the higher forces of trust. Deganawidah has to trust Atotarho by taking a calculated risk. This can be done because as the initiate says: "Their strength [Five Nations] is stronger than thy [Atotarho] strength." Without the black magician the five tribes would not have found their greater strength. Without the new power of the tribes Atotarho could not have been healed.

The Iroquois Mysteries can also be defined as "Social Mysteries," borrowing a term coined by Harry Salmon.⁽⁹⁾ Hiawatha's initiation occurs within the world, and to each of the transformations of his soul correspond outer events. Inner and outer are continuously intermeshed. The first meeting of the cannibal with Deganawidah marks the beginning of Hiawatha's social work. It sets in motion the first challenge to Atotarho's authority. The second meeting with the Higher Guardian sets in motion the goal of uniting the tribes. We could say that Hiawatha's soul transformation ushers in a new epoch. The New Mind has completely penetrated an individual other than the initiate, through the levels of thinking, feeling, and will. This is all that is needed for others to be able to follow. Finally, the healing of Atotarho's mind and body is simultaneous with the forming of the League. The outer transformation of a decadent social form is intimately connected with the healing of its most representative individual, the black magician.

From all of the above we see that it is a particular kind of meeting that Hiawatha has with the forces of the Christ. The path that Hiawatha treads is similar to the one followed by Johannes Thomasius in Steiner's *Mystery Dramas*. Thomasius experiences the pain he has caused to a young girl who loved him and whom he abandoned; he feels her pain as if it were his. Steiner in fact indicates that the pain Thomasius has caused to the young girl stands as a theatrical device for the whole of Thomasius' encounter with the Lower Guardian, an experience normally incurred after death in the state of *kamaloka*. It is accompanied in Thomasius by the painful recognition of the reality of his lower nature. It is expressed in the following words in Scene Two of the *Portal of Initiation*: "Yet how do I behold myself. My human form is lost; as raging dragon I see myself, begot of lust and greed. I clearly sense how an illusion's cloud has hid from me till now my own appalling

form.” We find this inner experience of Thomasius prolonged in the inability to continue exerting his life-task of painting, a sort of soul numbness comparable to Hiawatha’s grieving. Yet it is through this trial that new forces emerge from Thomasius’ soul. It is in fact the starting point of Thomasius’ later experiences in the spiritual world and the recognition of the reality of his higher self.⁽¹⁰⁾

The Iroquois Mysteries play a counterpart to the Mysteries that the Cathars and Templars developed in Europe, both at least partly influenced by Mani’s doctrines. The Mysteries have in common the emphasis on the cultivation of a way of life within new social structures. Cathars and Templars strove to create a social order that made manifest the essence of the Christ impulse and prefigured social impulses of the future. The Cathars and Albigensians especially held a truly Manichean attitude towards evil, based on the belief that it could only be opposed through gentleness and transformed by the good. The Templars attempted to establish a truly Christ-imbued social order in which the individual would be emancipated from both religious and worldly authority, as they expressed it in the motto: “May every man be his own Pope and King.”

The Iroquois Mysteries are mysteries of education of the will through thinking, equivalent to what Prokofieff calls a “path of forgiveness.”⁽¹¹⁾ The education of Hiawatha starts with remorse, leading to his encounter with the Lower Guardian. A conscious, retrospective review of one’s life, corresponding to the experience of kamaloca after death, allows the development and cultivation of tolerance. Understanding our shortcomings allows us to develop tolerance for ourselves and others. A more precise word for tolerance may be empathy, as it denotes a mastery over the astral body in the overcoming of sympathy and antipathy. In empathy, we avoid either extremes of separation in antipathy and an unconscious identification with the experience in the other person’s soul in sympathy.

Hiawatha moves the process of empathy a step further in the ability to offer forgiveness. The act of forgiveness is the elevation and potentization of empathy, since it requires more than simple understanding. It is a stage in which the soul experiences inner powerlessness. This is an experience of death of the lower ego, allowing the higher ego to assert its presence and influence. In effect we can only forgive through our Spirit Self. The process of forgetting the evil perpetrated against oneself sustained in forgiveness can only be achieved through repeated effort, in order to avoid the pitfalls of retaliation or renunciation, the Ahrimanic and Luciferic temptations. In Hiawatha’s case forgiveness means passing through a long period of “soul-numbness” before the higher self can start sending down its rays into the

soul.

Finally, the awakening of his Spirit Self redirects Hiawatha to the higher calling of his individuality, to the pre-birth resolution that he carried into incarnation. This is the intention to take on his people's karma, working at the redemption of an evil that has its roots beyond his personal karma. Hiawatha's determination leads to the formation of the League and the transformation of the Ahrimanic impulse in the person of Atotarho, leading to his healing. Here, we may surmise, it is the influence of the initiate Deganawidah that plays a pivotal role in such an exalted task.

The Message and the Form

The tree of the White Roots of Peace, with roots spreading in the four directions, is a reference to the Tree of Life in other Iroquois myths. The eagle is the embodiment of the God Hinum, the Storm God (7 Elohim/Great Spirit) represented by the Thunderbird who brings the grace of the rain upon the earth. The cosmic tree is often represented standing on the back of a turtle. This animal—a symbol of the land surrounded by the world waters—fittingly portrays the lingering Atlantean consciousness of the Native American. All the elements of the symbol of the White Roots of Peace point to a law that brings harmony between heaven and the earth.

The legend has yet other implications on the social level. The Ritual of Condolence has a central place in Iroquois society, not immediately noticeable from the legend. Previous to the advent of the League, the strife between the tribes was perpetuated by cycles of war and revenge, cannibalism, and black magic. Overcoming grief occupies a central place in Iroquois ceremony and worldview. The cornerstone of Iroquois society is the recognition of the need for the process of grief and consolation to replace the cycle of violence. The Iroquois believed that grief is what renders a human being irrational, anti-social, and dangerous. "These people believe that sadness, anger, and all violent passions expel the rational soul from the body, which meanwhile is animated only with the sensitive soul that we have in common with the animals," wrote the French Jesuit, Jean de Quen, in the seventeenth century. The same principle pervaded their system of justice. In the case of murder, the Law of Atonement envisioned a system of symbolic and material compensation to help restore harmony. The offender had to humiliate himself in order to expunge the community and his own shame. He had to compensate the offended party by giving them twenty strings of wampum, ten of which went for the life of the victim and ten others for his own life, symbolically forfeited in the crime. Finally, an equivalent principle was at work in the idea of mitigating loss through

adoption. The adopted person took the place of a deceased person. The practice was so widespread that Jesuit missionaries report that in some villages there were more adopted strangers than Iroquois themselves.⁽¹²⁾

The birth of this new “social ritualism” enshrines the recognition of the role of individual destiny in the social fabric. The Ritual of Condolence makes possible the harmonization of the aims of the community by allowing individuals to overcome their grief and align their destiny with the community’s endeavor. Grief is seen as a veil coming over the senses and the heart. The Ritual of Condolence lifts this veil and makes explicit the second principle expressed by Deganawidah: health as harmony between spirit and body.

An equally important outcome of the legend in the form of government that appears with the Iroquois League—the Haudenosaunee. The New Word is the message of justice, health, and power. The Iroquois know that a word is nothing without a form. They have embodied the word in the form of the Longhouse—the union of many fires—representing the idea of confederacy. For the first time nations stand as equals, no longer as vassals. Authority is shared by a complex hierarchy of power, built to ensure that no individual or single nation can at any time impose their will over the community. It is in fact a system of checks and balances, obliging the representatives of power to seek broad consensus in all their decisions. Hereditary titles within family lineages were conferred through decisions of the leading women; otherwise, especially at the time of the colonies, “pine-tree chiefs” were elected based on their merits and outside hereditary considerations. Any chief could be revoked if he had broken the provisions of the law. Additionally, each nation nominated a war chief who raised fighters in time of war. The system of clans was built in such a way to overlap the boundaries of the nations and build social cohesion within the league. More detail about the Iroquois form of government can be found in the fine analysis of Bruce Johansen.⁽¹³⁾

Iroquois spirituality cannot be properly understood if we do not perceive how intimately the new form of government is linked with what we could call the new Social Mysteries. A government structure alone does not define and hold a new social vision; society requires a new spirituality. The Iroquois have a true “social spirituality,” naturally added to all previous sacred practices that continue to be carried on through centuries of tradition.

The Ritual of Condolence is a spiritual cornerstone of the Iroquois form of government, as are the Law of Atonement, the practice of Adoption, and other social practices. Through these relatively recent traditions the

individuals can reach in stages a perception of their own karmic doubles, meet with the Lower Guardian of the Threshold, and eventually in the distant future, with the Higher Guardian of the Threshold. The new rituals give a dimension of sacredness to the cultivation and restoration of healthy relationships within the social body. In a sense they are the esoteric aspect of government, the inner aspect of the problem of governance. Left to themselves, the Iroquois forms of government are nothing more than beneficial but empty shells. The social rituals contain the life that sustains these forms.

In the Iroquois legend, one may perceive a continuation of the fight against the decadent Mexican Mysteries as they are reborn in a milder form in Northern America through the practices of cannibalism and black magic. For the first time in North America the structures of government respect personal individuality. Power has only a temporary and limited nature and can be transferred according to personal merit, not heredity alone. The Iroquois League also marks a remarkable departure from the idea of the old blood ties. Anyone who can accept the ideas of the legend of the White Roots of Peace can belong to the Iroquois society. In fact, adoption becomes a common principle, a practice extended to numerous European colonists in later centuries. Another major advance is that now evil can be at least partly redeemed, as is made clear in the figure of Atotarho. This is the important next step that the Iroquois Mysteries add to the Mexican Mysteries.