



PINXIT LE ROY H. APPLETON

An Easter Lily — The Lily of the Mohawks, Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha

## IROQUOIAN MYTHOLOGY

### THE "CREATION" STORY

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#### PREFACE

The following articles give a short account of Iroquoian traditions concerning the origin of the earth and of humanity. As with all ancient peoples who did not have a system of formal writing, such verbal tradition produced a number of additions and variations; the original content and meaning, however, remains clearly recognizable. There also appeared elements occasioned by outside events and influences. They joined the primary tradition like rivers flowing into a mighty stream and becoming united with it. One example of such later acculturation is the charming report on the creation of White Man. This detail was, of course, inserted only after the Europeans had arrived. The Iroquois, with their high intelligence and keen powers of reasoning, soon discovered logical answers to some of their puzzling problems in the accounts of Christian teachings. During the 17th and 18th centuries they gradually molded various incidents of the Bible story very skillfully into their ancient tradition, without, however, abandoning their own ancient beliefs and convictions (except for those tribal members who became Christians).

The old Iroquoian cosmology (explanation of the world) is a fascinating attempt at presenting in the language of mythology desired and satisfying answers to the problems of man's existence, of nature's manifestations, of good and evil, etc. This attempt produced a keenly intelligent and logical structure of narration that is far superior to the crude, often irrational and incoherent mythologies of many other primitive cultures.

Our report is based on scientific editions of Mohawk, Onondaga and Seneca texts, published with interlinear verbatim translation and an accurate version in the modern English idiom. (See the bibliography at the end of the series).

The following account gives but a short survey of the essential and most interesting details of the Iroquoian creation story. A complete presentation of all available textual versions, with their innumerable narrative details and variations, would fill several volumes. Still, it is hoped that even this modest survey will accomplish the purpose for which it was written: to inspire the reader with respect and sincere admiration for the splendid cultural heritage of the great people who form the famous confederation of the Six Nations of the Iroquois.

(Explanatory notes and comments of the author are placed in brackets).