

## Handsome Lake (Seneca)

Handsome Lake, who related the original version of this narrative, was a chief in the League of the Iroquois and a half-brother of Cornplanter. He had a vision in the spring of 1799 in which three messengers of the Creator appeared to him in traditional Iroquoian dress and told him that he and the people must abandon alcohol, that witches were corrupting them, and that the people must repent their corruption and ensure that the traditional Strawberry Festival, which celebrated their relationship to the Earth, must be held every year. The other visions that followed apocalyptically predicted the destruction of the world by fire if the return to the old ways was not thorough and immediate. The prophet also rejected any attempts at further ceding of Indian lands to whites. Thus began one of the best-documented responses, which anthropologists call revitalization or nativist movements, to European impacts. Handsome Lake's Longhouse Religion prospered to good effect among Iroquois people; seventy-five years later, another revitalization movement, the Ghost Dance of the Great Basin and Plains Indians,

### PRIMARY WORK

A. C. Parker, *Seneca Myths and Folktales*, ed. W. H. Fenton, 1923, 1989.

### SECONDARY WORK

A. F. C. Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*, 1969.

## How America Was Discovered

According to Chief Cornplanter, Handsome Lake taught that America was discovered in the manner here related.

A great queen had among her servants a young minister. Upon a certain occasion she requested him to dust some books that she had hidden in an old chest. Now when the young man reached the bottom of the chest he found a wonderful book which he opened and read. It told that the white men had killed the son of

would lead to the tragedy at Wounded Knee.

In its reevaluation of Christian elements and its negative evaluation of the motives and influence of Europeans; this narrative represents an Iroquoian vision of what are today called Columbian consequences. For this reason, the relation is placed in this section of the anthology, which offers materials by writers who explored and settled in Iroquoian territory. The relation might be read in conjunction with the Samuel de Champlain selection, too, just as it would complement well the reading of the works contemporary with the original relation by Samson Occom and Hendrick Aupaumut.

The relation was recorded by Arthur C. Parker, himself a Seneca from a distinguished family, who was among the many Native Americans at the turn of the twentieth century who worked singly or with Anglo-American ethnographers to preserve traditions they felt were disappearing under the reservation and allotment systems.

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the Creator and it said, moreover, that he had promised to return in three days and then again forty but that he never did. All his followers then began to despair but some said, "He surely will come again some time." When the young preacher read this book he was worried because he had discovered that he had been deceived and that his Lord was not on earth and had not returned when he promised. So he went to some of the chief preachers and asked them about the matter and they answered that he had better seek the Lord himself and find if he were not on the earth now. So he prepared to find the Lord and the next day when he looked out into the river he saw a beautiful island and marveled that he had never noticed it before. As he continued to look he saw a castle built of gold in the midst of the island and he marveled that he had not seen the castle before. Then he thought that so beautiful a palace on so beautiful an isle must surely be the abode of the son of the Creator. Immediately he went to the wise men and told them what he had seen and they wondered greatly and answered that it must indeed be the house of the Lord. So together they went to the river and when they came to it they found that it was spanned by a bridge of gold. Then one of the preachers fell down and prayed a long time and arising to cross the bridge turned back because he was afraid to meet his Lord. Then the other crossed the bridge and knelt down upon the grass and prayed but he became afraid to go near the house. So the young man went boldly over to attend to the business at hand and walking up to the door knocked. A handsome man welcomed him into a room and bade him be of ease. "I wanted you," he said. "You are bright young man; those old fools will not suit me for they would be afraid to listen to me. Listen to me, young man, and you will be rich. Across the ocean there is a great country of which you have never heard. The people there are virtuous, they have no evil habits or appetites but are honest and single-minded. A great reward is yours if you enter into my plans and carry them out. Here are five things. Carry them over to the people across the ocean and never shall you want for wealth, position or power. Take these cards, this money, this fiddle, this whiskey and this blood corruption and give them all to the people across the water. The cards will make them gamble away their goods and idle away their time, the money will make them dishonest and covetous, the fiddle will make them dance with women and their lower natures will command them, the whiskey will excite their minds to evil doing and turn their minds, and the blood corruption will eat their strength and rot their bones."

The young man thought this a good bargain and promised to do as the man had commanded him. He left the palace and when he had stepped over the bridge it was gone, likewise the golden palace and also the island. Now he wondered if he had seen the Lord but he did not tell the great ministers of his bargain because they might try to forestall him. So he looked about and at length found Columbus to whom he told the whole story. So Columbus fitted out some boats and sailed out into the ocean to find the land on the other side. When he had sailed for many days on the water the sailors said that unless Columbus turned about and went home they would behead him but he asked for another day and on that day land was seen and that land was America. Then they turned around and going back reported what they had discovered. Soon a great flock of ships came over the ocean and white men came swarming into the country bringing with them cards, money, fiddles, whiskey and blood corruption.

Now the man who had appeared in the gold palace was the devil and when afterward he saw what his words had done he said that he had made a great mistake and even he lamented that his evil had been so enormous.