



CHAPTER XLII.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND ANECDOTES.

I HOPE I shall be excused for bringing here together into one view a few observations and anecdotes which either could not well find their places under any of the preceding divisions of my subject, or escaped my recollection at the proper time. These additional traits will contribute something to forming a correct idea of the Indian character and manners.

I have observed a great similarity in the customs, usages, and opinions of the different nations that I have seen, however distant from each other, and even though their languages differ so much that no traces of a common origin can be found in their etymology. The uniformity which exists in the manners of the Christian nations of Europe is attributed to their common religion, and to their having once been connected together as parts of the Roman Empire. But no such bond of union appears to have subsisted between the Iroquois, for instance, and the Delawares, and yet, the language excepted, they resemble each other considerably more than the inhabitants of some European countries. I shall not endeavour to account for this remarkable fact, but I think it my duty to state it.

I have shown in a former chapter¹ that the mythological notions of the Delaware Indians prevailed in the same manner among the Wabash; it is not in that alone that those nations resemble each other, though living at a great distance. It is the custom among the Delawares that if a hunter shoots down a

¹ Ch. 34, pp. 255, 256.

deer when another person is present, or even accidentally comes by before the skin is taken off, he presents it to him, saying, "Friend, skin your deer," and immediately walks off. William Wells, whom I have before spoken of, once paid me this compliment, and when I asked him the reason, he answered that it was the custom among the Indians on the Wabash.

In the year 1792, I travelled with a number of Indian chiefs of various tribes from Post Vincennes to Marietta, and I found in most instances that their usages and customs were the same that I had observed among the Delawares.¹

The Indians in general, although they understand and speak our language, yet prefer speaking to a white man through an interpreter. For this they give various reasons. With some it is a matter of pride; as their chiefs deliver their public speeches through interpreters, they think that they appear with more dignity when they do the same. Others imagine that their words will have greater weight and effect when expressed in proper

¹ [These chiefs were representatives of the seven nations with whom Gen. Putnam concluded a treaty in September of the above-mentioned year, and were on their way to Philadelphia.]

Note.—The following is a copy of the letter written by the Secretary of War to Mr. Heckewelder, advising him of Putnam's request that he might be associated with him in his mission to the western Indians:

"WAR DEPARTMENT, 18 May, 1792.

"SIR.—I have the honour to inform you that the United States have for some time past been making pacific overtures to the hostile Indians north-west of the Ohio. It is to be expected that these overtures will soon be brought to an issue under the direction of Brigadier-General Putnam, of Marietta, who is specially charged with this business.

"He is now in this city, and will be in readiness to set out on Monday next, and being acquainted with you, he is extremely desirous that you should accompany him in the prosecution of this good work.

"Being myself most cordially impressed with a respect for your character and love of the Indians, on the purest principles of justice and humanity, I have cheerfully acquiesced in the desire of Gen. Putnam.

"I hope sincerely it may be convenient for you to accompany or follow him soon, in order to execute a business which is not unpromising, and which, if accomplished, will redound to the credit of the individuals who perform it.

"As to pecuniary considerations, I shall arrange them satisfactorily with you.

"With great respect, I am, sir, your most obedient servant,

"H. KNOX,
Secretary of War."]

grammatical language, while some are afraid of committing mistakes when speaking in an idiom not their own. Particularly when they have a joke to pass, a hint to give, or a shrewd remark to make, they wish it to have all the advantages of a good translation, and that their wit may not be spoiled by a foreign accent, improper expression, or awkward delivery.

Though the Indian is naturally serious, he does not dislike a jest on proper occasions, and will, sometimes, even descend to a pun. Once at a dinner given at Marietta by the late Colonel Sproat,¹ to a number of gentlemen and Indian chiefs of various tribes, a Delaware chief, named George Washington, asked me what the name of our good friend, the Colonel, meant in the Lenape language? It should be observed that Colonel Sproat was remarkably tall. I told him that *Sprout* (for so the name is pronounced) meant in English a shoot, or twig of a tree. "No, no," replied the Indian, "no shoot or twig, but the *tree* itself."

I have spoken before² of the wit of the Indians, and the shrewd and pointed remarks which they occasionally make, but passed rather lightly on the subject. A few characteristic anecdotes will best supply this deficiency.

An Indian who spoke good English, came one day to a house where I was on business, and desired me to ask a man who was there and who owed him some money, to give an order in writing for him to get a little salt at the store, which he would take in part payment of his debt. The man, after reproving the Indian for speaking through an interpreter when he could speak such good English, told him that he must call again in an hour's time, for he was then too much engaged. The Indian went out and returned at the appointed time, when he was put off again for another hour, and when he came the third time, the other told him he was still engaged, and he must come again in half an hour. My Indian friend's patience was now exhausted, he turned to me and addressed me thus in his own language: "Tell this man," said he, "that while I have been waiting for his con-

¹ [Col. Ebenezer Sproat was one of the colony which, under the auspices of the recently formed Ohio Company, and led by Gen. Putnam, emigrated to the Ohio country in the spring of 1788, and founded Marietta.]

² Ch. 6, p. 104.

venience to give me an order for a little salt, I have had time to think a great deal. I *thought* that when we Indians want any thing of one another, we serve each other on the spot, or if we cannot, we say so at once, but we never say to any one 'call again! call again! call again! three times call again!' Therefore when this man put me off in this manner, I *thought* that, to be sure, the white people were very ingenious, and probably he was able to do what no body else could. I *thought* that as it was afternoon when I first came, and he knew I had seven miles to walk to reach my camp, he had it in his power to stop the sun in its course, until it suited him to give me the order that I wanted for a little salt. So *thought* I, I shall still have day light enough, I shall reach my camp before night, and shall not be obliged to walk in the dark, at the risk of falling and hurting myself by the way. But when I saw that the sun did not wait for him, and I had at least to walk seven miles in an obscure night, I *thought* then, that it would be better if the white people were to learn something of the Indians."

I once asked an old Indian acquaintance of mine, who had come with his wife to pay me a visit, where he had been, that I had not seen him for a great while? "Don't you know," he answered, "that the white people some time ago summoned us to a treaty, to buy land of them?"¹—"That is true," replied I, "I had indeed forgotten it; I thought you was just returned from your fall hunt."—"No, no," replied the Indian, "my fall hunt has been lost to me this season; I had to go and get my share of the purchase money for the land we sold."—"Well then," said I, "I suppose you got enough to satisfy you?"

INDIAN. "I can shew you all that I got. I have received such and such articles, (naming them and the quantity of each), do you think that is enough?"

HECKEW. "That I cannot know, unless you tell me how much of the land which was sold came to your share."

INDIAN. (after considering a little), "Well, you, my friend! know who I am, you know I am a kind of chief. I am, indeed, one, though none of the greatest. Neither am I one of the

¹ For "*them*" read "*us*."

lowest grade, but I stand about in the middle rank. Now, as such, I think I was entitled to as much land in the tract we sold as would lie within a day's walk from this spot to a point due north, then a day's walk from that point to another due west, from thence another day's walk due south, then a day's walk to where we now are. Now you can tell me if what I have shewn you is enough for all the land lying between these four marks?"

HECKEW. "If you have made your bargain so with the white people, it is all right, and you probably have received your share."

INDIAN. "Ah! but the white people made the bargain by themselves, without consulting us. They told us that they would give us so much, and no more."

HECKEW. "Well, and you consented thereto?"

INDIAN. "What could we do, when they told us that they must have the land, and for such a price? Was it not better to take something than nothing? for they would have the land, and so we took what they gave us."

HECKEW. "Perhaps the goods they gave you came high in price. The goods which come over the great salt water lake sometimes vary in their prices."

INDIAN. "The traders sell their goods for just the same prices that they did before, so that I rather think it is the *land* that has *fallen* in value. We, Indians, do not understand selling lands to the white people; for when we sell, the price of land is always low; land is then cheap, but when the white people sell it out among themselves, it is always dear, and they are sure to get a high price for it. I had done much better if I had stayed at home and minded my fall hunt. You know I am a pretty good hunter and might have killed a great many deer, sixty, eighty, perhaps a hundred, and besides caught many raccoons, beavers, otters, wild cats, and other animals, while I was at this treaty. I have often killed five, six, and seven deer in one day. Now I have lost nine of the best hunting weeks in the season by going to get what you see! We were told the precise time when we must meet. We came at the very day, but the great white men did not do so, and without them nothing could be done. When after some weeks they at last came, we traded,

we sold our lands and received goods in payment, and when that was over, I went to my hunting grounds, but the best time, the rutting time, being over, I killed but a few. Now, help me to count up what I have lost by going to the treaty. Put down eighty deer; say twenty of them were bucks, each buckskin one dollar; then sixty does and young bucks at two skins for a dollar; thirty dollars, and twenty for the old bucks, make fifty dollars lost to me in deer skins. Add, then, twenty dollars more to this for raccoon, beaver, wild cat, black fox, and otter skins, and what does the whole amount to?"

HECKEW. "Seventy dollars."

INDIAN. "Well, let it be only seventy dollars, but how much might I have bought of the traders for this money! How well we might have lived, I and my family in the woods during that time! How much meat would my wife have dried! how much tallow saved and sold or exchanged for salt, flour, tea and chocolate! All this is now lost to us; and had I not such a good wife (stroking her under the chin) who planted so much corn, and so many beans, pumpkins, squashes, and potatoes last summer, my family would now live most wretchedly. I have learned to be wise by going to treaties, I shall never go there again to sell my land and lose my time."

I shall conclude this desultory chapter with another anecdote which is strongly characteristic of the good sense of the Indians and shews how much their minds are capable of thought and reflection.

Seating myself once upon a log, by the side of an Indian, who was resting himself there, being at that time actively employed in fencing in his corn-field, I observed to him that he must be very fond of working, as I never saw him idling away his time, as is so common with the Indians. The answer which he returned made considerable impression on my mind; I have remembered it ever since, and I shall try to relate it as nearly in his own words as possible.

"My friend!" said he, "the fishes in the water and the birds in the air and on the earth have taught me to work; by their examples I have been convinced of the necessity of labour and industry. When I was a young man I loitered a great deal

about, doing nothing, just like the other Indians, who say that working is only for the whites and the negroes, and that the Indians have been ordained for other purposes, to hunt the deer, and catch the beaver, otter, raccoon and such other animals. But it one day so happened, that while a hunting, I came to the bank of the Susquehannah, where I sat down near the water's edge to rest a little, and casting my eye on the water, I was forcibly struck when I observed with what industry the *Meechgalingus*¹ heaped small stones together, to make secure places for their spawn, and all this labour they did with their mouths and bodies without hands! Astonished as well as diverted, I lighted my pipe, sat a while smoking and looking on, when presently a little bird not far from me raised a song which enticed me to look that way; while I was trying to distinguish who the songster was, and catch it with my eyes, its mate, with as much grass as with its bill it could hold, passed close by me and flew into a bush, where I perceived them together busy building their nest and singing as they went along. I entirely forgot that I was a hunting, in order to contemplate the objects I had before me. I saw the birds of the air and the fishes in the water working diligently and cheerfully, and all this without hands! I thought it was strange, and became lost in contemplation! I looked at myself, I saw two long arms, provided with hands and fingers besides, with joints that might be opened and shut at pleasure. I could, when I pleased, take up anything with these hands, hold it fast or let it loose, and carry it along with me as I walked. I observed moreover that I had a strong body capable of bearing fatigue, and supported by two stout legs, with which I could climb to the top of the highest mountains and descend at pleasure into the valleys. And is it possible, said I, that a being so formed as I am, was created to live in idleness, while the birds who have no hands, and nothing but their little bills to help them, work with cheerfulness and without being told to do so? Has then the great Creator of man and of all living creatures given me all these limbs for no purpose? It cannot be; I will try to go to work. I did so, and went away from the village to a spot of good land, built a cabin, enclosed ground, planted corn,

¹ Sun-fish.

and raised cattle. Ever since that time I have enjoyed a good appetite and sound sleep; while the others spend their nights in dancing and are suffering with hunger, I live in plenty; I keep horses, cows, hogs and fowls; I am happy. See! my friend; the birds and fishes have brought me to reflection and taught me to work!"

