

A Story of Early Litchfield

In researching the Indians who lived in northwest Connecticut during colonial times, this story came to light, which provides an insight into the true makeup of the Native Americans. This story is taken from a volume entitled "The Indians of the Housatonic and Naugatuck Valleys" by Samuel Orcutt (1882).

"There is one story belonging to the early history of Litchfield, which it is proper to record here. It illustrates, like other incidents that have been mentioned, the Indian mode of warfare, but at the same time brings to view some of the better traits of the Indian nature. It is taken, in a somewhat abridged form, from the 'Travels in New England and New York,' of President Dwight of Yale College, who vouches for its authenticity."

"Not many years after the settlement of Litchfield, a stranger Indian came one day to a tavern in the town, in the dusk of the evening, and asked the hostess for some drink and a supper. He told her he could pay for neither, as he had had no success in hunting, but promised payment at some future time. The hostess refused him, calling him a lazy, good-for-nothing fellow, and told him she did not work hard to throw away her earnings upon such creatures as he. A white man who sat by, saw in the Indian's face that he was suffering severely from want and weariness and directed the woman of the house to feed him at his expense."

"When the Indian had finished his supper, he turned to his benefactor, thanked him, and assured him he would remember his kindness, and if possible, repay him for it. For the present he could only reward him with a story. 'I suppose,' said the Indian, 'you read the Bible?' The man assented. 'Well,' said he, 'the Bible say God made the world and then he took him and looked on him and say 'It is all very good.' He made light, and took him and looked on him, and say, 'It's all very good.' Then he made dry land and water, and sun, and moon, and grass, and trees, and took him and looked on him, and say, 'It's all very good.' Then he made man, and took him and looked on him, and say, 'It's all very good.' Then he made woman, and took him and looked on him; and he no dare say one such word."

Having told his story, the Indian withdrew, with a sly glance at the landlady."

Some years after, the man who had befriended him, having occasion to go some distance into the wilderness between Litchfield and Albany, was taken prisoner by an Indian scout and hurried away to Canada. When he arrived at the principal seat of the tribe, on the southern bank of the St. Lawrence, it was proposed that he should be put to death; but an old Indian woman demanded that he should be given to her, that she might adopt him in place of a son whom she had lost in the war. He was given to her, and spent the succeeding winter in her family. The next summer, while at work alone in the forest, an unknown Indian came to him and asked him to meet him at a place which he pointed out, on a given day. The captive agreed to the proposal; but before the day arrived, his apprehensions of intended mischief had increased to such a degree, that he determined not to keep the engagement. Soon after, the Indian found him at his work again, reproved him for breaking his promise, and made another appointment with him for another day. This time the white man was true to his word. When he reached the spot he found the Indian provided with two muskets, two knapsacks and ammunition for both. The Indian ordered him to follow him, and set off toward the south. Within a short time the white

man's fears subsided, although his companion preserved a profound silence concerning the object of their expedition. In the daytime they shot such game as came their way, and at night kindled a fire and slept by it. After a tedious journey of many days through the wilderness, they came one morning to an eminence whence they beheld a cleared and partially cultivated country, and a number of houses. The man knew his home; it was Litchfield. His guide reminded him that some years before, he had relieved the wants of a famished Indian at a tavern in that town, and said, 'I that Indian! Now I pay you! Go home.' Without another word he bade him farewell, and the white man hastened joyfully to his own house."

"The Indian looks out no more from any hilltop upon the cultivated fields of Litchfield, or any part of the valley that was once his own hunting ground. He is gone, and the succeeding race is glad to be well rid of him. The only remains, except the title deeds and traditions to which reference has been made, are the few names of places that echo on the white man's lips, the strange tones of their language, and the stone implements, which are turned up by the plough in our fields. He is gone. But it is pleasant to think of him, the untutored child of the woods, and to reflect that he had much that was good in him, and not a little that is worthy of remembrance. It may be hoped that what is here given will serve to interest us in his character, and render us wiser and kinder in our estimate of those who bear the same name, who in the far West are still carrying on the same hopeless fight with the relentless forces of the Anglo-Saxon civilization."

The disruptions and anxiety caused by the episode known as the French and Indian Wars were widespread throughout our region, but as stated before, the local Indians remained staunch allies of the colonizing whites. For example, early in 1707, the colony was aroused to special diligence in preparations for defense, by the intelligence that the French and enemy Indians were preparing to make a descent upon the frontier towns of New England. There was also reason to suppose that the Pootatuck and Weantanuck Indians (the Woodbury and New Milford tribes) had been invited to join the enemy, and that measures must be taken to secure their fidelity and to preserve the small frontier towns. It appears that this rumor had been circulated by someone whose intent was to discredit the local Indians and make trouble for them, as it was quite evident that these Indians had not the slightest inclination to unite against the whites in a war. It was only a few short months after this, in the autumn of 1707, that John Noble, then the only white settler in New Milford, left his daughter with the Indians at Weantanuck several weeks or months, while he was absent, and on his return found her safe and the Indians true friends.

Historic Bytes
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