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**Iroquois Suicide: A Study in
the Stability of a Culture Pattern**

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PHONETIC NOTE

The orthography employed in this paper, except where I am quoting others, reduces Iroquois transcription to a minimum of characters required by the economy of the dialects. The vowels: *a* (of English *father*); *ɑ* (of English *but*) which Waugh and I heard in Mohawk; *ä* (of English *hat*); *ε* (of English *met*); *e* (of French *été*); *i* (of French *fini*); *o* (of English *mote*); and *u* (before an *m* closure in Mohawk of St. Regis and (of English *boot*) in Cayuga), I think can be reduced to four: *a*, *e*, *i*, and *o*. They occur frequently in diphthongs and in Seneca less frequently in triphthongs. Nasalization is denoted by a hook beneath the vowel; vowel length by a raised period after the vowel. A raised comma indicates the glottal stop. In Waugh's and Hewitt's transcription, the spiritus asper (´) occurs, but I have used *h*. The character *š* is *c* (of English *shoe*). *s* and *t* followed by *h* are heavily aspirated. The weakly trilled *r* of Mohawk and Cayuga is related to the *l* series of Oneida. The asterisk * before a word indicates a reconstructed form; similar forms in capitals are so written where the pronunciation is not certain.

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IROQUOIS SUICIDE: A STUDY IN THE STABILITY OF A CULTURE PATTERN

BY WILLIAM N. FENTON

PART 1; GENERAL INFORMATION

INTRODUCTION

The problem of suicide frequency, its causes, and methods of commission among the Seneca Indians of western New York became the subject of a brief field study in 1935 when I was stationed on the Tonawanda Indian Reservation for the United States Indian Service. The Indian Office requested information for a survey which Mrs. Elna N. Smith was conducting, and although her interests were the psychological questions surrounding changing Indian life, on which specific data were requested, the general problem fitted nicely my own interests in the remarkable stability of Iroquois culture patterns, and, furthermore, the data illustrated relations between the individual participant and the culture of his group.

Informants on the Tonawanda Reservation supplied the modern cases of suicides occurring within their memory. First, Jesse J. Cornplanter (pl. 6, fig. 1), a nearly fullblood Seneca of middle age, the son of Edward Cornplanter, the speaker of Newtown longhouse, and a Tonawanda mother on Cattaraugus Reservation, related the first case which occurred in the conservative Seneca neighborhood of Jesse's youth. Following service in the World War, he lived at Allegany and later removed to Tonawanda, always living with the conservative longhouse people. Jesse's accounts were checked by Peter Doctor (pl. 6, fig. 2), now in his seventies, one-quarter white from his maternal grandfather. Peter was born and lived his youth at Tonawanda, before he turned Christian and married an Allegany woman and lived at Allegany many years before returning to his birthplace in 1905. He was long a member of the Tonawanda council, and lately has served as pastor of the Presbyterian church. He is a reliable informant of remarkable intellect with an excellent memory and respect for the truth, and being one of the oldest Senecas in full possession of his mind, he represents what the ethnologist hopes for in an informant. I gathered additional notes from William

Gordon who used to live at Newtown before he married a Tonawanda woman with whom he has lived during the generation of his children, 20 years, more or less; he still remains an unyielding adherent to the "longhouse party" who respect his knowledge of tradition. His genial wife, Abbie Brooks (pl. 6, fig. 3), principal female officer for her moiety in the Tonawanda longhouse, volunteered the case about the unsuccessful attempt of her father's brother to take *Cicuta*. Additional information on the medicinal uses of *Cicuta* and mayapple grew out of the extended investigations of F. W. Waugh, of the National Museum of Canada, the late J. N. B. Hewitt of the Bureau of American Ethnology, and my own field work on the Allegany Reservation.

The time perspective of this investigation runs from the recent to the past. Perhaps a bit unorthodoxly, the problem was pointed from the field to the library, rather than the reverse, and, therefore, the cases will be presented in the reverse of chronological order. This corresponds with the original interest in discovering the comparative frequency of suicides in the last two decades and in previous years, and my own interest in the stable character of Iroquois¹ suicide patterns over a period of 300 years, when I readily saw that the first case paralleled in its general framework another case I recalled from the seventeenth century Jesuit Relations (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 57, p. 165).

The library research followed several years after collecting the first cases among the Senecas, and several points have subsequently been pursued in the field and have yielded additional data. I originally attempted to determine the age, sex, degree of blood, and method employed by each participant. Informants generally volunteered the causes, which may not be the real ones, but at least they are the stock excuses supplied by the culture, and I had to depend on them for the scanty data on the personalities of the participants whom, excepting three, I did not know nor had I materials for their life histories, so that the personalities of my informants are more familiar to me than the subjects of the cases.

This paper, written in the spring of 1939, was first called "Seneca Suicide." However, I went to the field soon after and cleared up some of the problems that still remained in the first draft. Josephine Jimmerson, Dwight Jimmerson, and Sarah Snow (pl. 7, fig. 2,) Senecas of Allegany Reservation, furnished additional information on cases 1 and 3; and Charles Gordon, Harvey Jacobs, and Windsor

¹ The Iroquois proper were the confederated Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca tribes occupying central New York. Known also as the Five Nations, they became the Six Nations when the Tuscarora migrated north after 1714. The enemy Hurons of southern Ontario shared Iroquois culture and also spoke an Iroquoian language, but Cherokee and Tuscarora in the south were more distant languages of the same stock. However, the Delaware, Pequot, Shawnee, Algonkin, Micmac, Saukteaux, Sauk, Ojibwa, Ottawa, Miami, and Pottawatomi in the north spoke various Algonkian dialects; the Winnebago and Tutelo spoke languages of the Siouan stock. I have introduced this note here because these tribes enter later into our discussion, and may be confusing to the nonanthropologist.

Pierce, of the Cornplanter Band of Senecas, supplemented the data previously collected on waterhemlock and its uses, and one new suicide case emerged. Moreover, I visited St. Regis Mohawk Reservation, where I worked with Noah La France and Peter Hopps; and at Caughnawaga Mohawk Reservation near Montreal, I found Kate Debeau (D'Ailleboust) (pl. 8, fig. 1) with whom Waugh had worked in 1912. New cases gathered from the Mohawks parallel the Seneca cases, and Mohawk terms bridge the linguistic chasm between Seneca and Huron; therefore, the study is more properly called "Iroquois Suicide." The Hurons of Lorette no longer speak their own language so that they were unable to identify the Huron names for *Cicuta* that appear in the Jesuit Relations, nor did my informants, the daughters of Prudent Sioui of La Jeune Lorette, 9 miles from Quebec, recognize waterhemlock when I pointed it out to them in the field. It remains for future field work among the Oklahoma Wyandots to absolutely establish the Huron uses of the plant. At Six Nations Reserve in Ontario, Simeon Gibson (pl. 8, fig. 2), added cultural and dialectic parallels for the Cayuga and Onondaga Tribes but he added no new cases.

THE PROBLEM

The problem, then, set for this study is to answer so far as is possible five rather elementary questions concerning Iroquois suicides. First, what are the attitudes toward suicide as a value, or how does public opinion regard suicides and what is believed to be the destiny of their souls? Second, what is the comparative frequency of suicides in the present reservation life and in the older Indian life? Third, what are the causes? Fourth, what are the methods? And fifth, to what extent are the current causes, forms, and attitudes cultural norms that have been preserved during 300 years of contact with European cultures? Besides, there is the further theoretical consideration of the relative permanence of pattern as a cultural continuant for custom.

LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE ²

The Seneca language lacks an abstract term for suicide. While this is typical of Iroquoian languages which generally have few abstract terms, it does show that the act was not frequent enough to cause the progressive reduction of the descriptive verb to an abstract concept. "She has killed herself" (wa'agodadi'yo'), [the third person singular reflexive form of the verb "to kill" (-di-yo'), recent past], is the usual term for suicide among the Senecas. The third person singular feminine (nonmasculine) form is often made to thus stand

² The orthography employed in this paper is explained in the Phonetic Note, p. 80.

for the individual or society. One who is contemplating suicide will employ "I am about to kill myself" (egadadi'yo'), the future form (Cornplanter). When a death occurs through suicide and someone inquires how the person died, the informant simply replies, "she (someone) killed herself" (wa'agodadi'yo') (Evelyn Pierce).³

The terms are similar in the other Iroquoian dialects.

TRADITIONAL METHODS AND ATTITUDES

Suicide was known but informants believe that it was rather infrequently practiced in the old Seneca culture. It occurred often enough, however, for public opinion to be marshalled against it, and there come down to the present day a well-defined method, a set of attitudes frowning on its practice, and some excuses to condone the few cases that occur. Thus, there is a traditional definition of the situation when the proper causes precipitate it. My informants recall a few cases where individuals ate a poisonous herb, indicating waterhemlock, *Cicuta maculata* L. (pl. 7, fig. 1), as the source of the fatal root, and they express a seemingly old repugnance toward suicide as a means of departing this life.

The old (Seneca) method of committing suicide is by eating the muskrat root which we call o'nqhsε'ε. It is a white flowering plant with a tuberous root that exudes a strong, pungent smell. It is eaten raw. It causes rupture of the internal organs and bleeding at the mouth. [Cornplanter.]⁴

There is an old belief that anyone who is contemplating suicide by taking muskrat root need not necessarily know the plant, for he can easily find it. [Cornplanter.] The plant is said to call and show itself. You can go right up to it in the dark. It has a strong smell. [Peter Doctor.] The old people say that muskrat root is like any other herbal medicine which you want. They believe that when you want it, it stands up there where it grows calling to you. That is why it is easy to find a medicine which you seek, especially this one with its strong odor. [Cornplanter.]

The Senecas do not use waterhemlock as an internal medicine. Chauncey Johnny-John pointed to it growing by the spring behind his house in Coldspring, Allegany Reservation, saying, "the root

³ Miss Evelyn Pierce, Assistant Guidance Officer, Office of Indian Affairs, went over the Seneca terminology with me at the time of writing (1939), and confirmed Cornplanter's statements.

⁴ This plant, which has similar names in the several Iroquoian dialects (see p. 113), was collected on several occasions independently by F. W. Waugh and myself, and it was identified by informants and competent botanists (Prof. William P. Alexander and Dr. Robert B. Gordon, of the Allegany School of Natural History, and E. C. Leonard, of the U. S. National Museum) as the "fatal root," waterhemlock, *Cicuta maculata* L.; and only once did an Iroquois confuse it with another plant, although some Senecas consider that hairy Angelica, *Angelica villosa* (Walt.) BSP., is the female of the species, while others say Queen Anne's Lace, *Daucus carota* L. [introduced], is in the same family. The Indian descriptions of its form, structure, and properties are fairly consistent with the facts established by modern research. (See Muenscher, 1939, pp. 170-173; Marsh and Clawson, 1914; Pammel, 1911, pt. 1, p. 49, pt. 2, pp. 652-656.) The root when cut exudes an aromatic oil of peculiar odor which contains a resinlike substance, *cicutacin*, but the leaves and fruits may be edible at certain seasons without poisoning. Even a very small quantity of the root produces fatal poisoning—a piece of root the size of a walnut will kill a cow. The symptoms of poisoning in man are: "pain in the stomach, nausea, sometimes violent vomiting, diarrhoea, dilated pupils, labored breathing, sometimes [bloody (Pammel)] frothing at the mouth, weak and rapid pulse, and violent convulsions. If free vomiting is promptly produced, the patient is likely to recover" (Muenscher, 1939, p. 173).

looks like a radish and is poison; it is not used for medicine.⁵ It will kill you in ten minutes." When I showed the root to Josephine Snow, she said, "Women used to think it was poison, and my mother said the women used it to commit suicide." Her sister, a noted Seneca woman herbalist whose grandmother had taken the root, knew it. "It has a white flower. It is poison, and it does not mix with any other medicine. It is good for nothing [internally]." (Sarah Snow.) Another Seneca woman from Cattaraugus said, "I am afraid of it. Mother always said it was poison." (Josephine K. Jimmerson.) Other Seneca men seemed afraid of the plant (Charles Gordon and Harvey Jacobs, of Cornplanter Reservation), but they all know it makes an effective poultice for dislocated joints. (Windsor Pierce, Cornplanter Reserve.) One informant remarked that it frequents graveyards, and he knew of a ceremony which was performed at Cattaraugus on the fourth night of the new moon to ask its help for strengthening some other remedy. A priest goes into the cemetery, clears the brush away, and builds a fire near the stalk. He offers tobacco and asks the plant to lend its strength to the medicine, but he does not use the root.⁶ (Windsor Pierce.)

Another Seneca informant remarked:

That plant is poison. All the Indians—every nation in western New York and Canada [the Iroquois tribes]—know that that plant is poison. They all know that Indians have taken it to commit suicide.

That root will take effect immediately. They die in 2 hours. I know of no antidote that will counteract it.⁷ A teaspoonful of the root will kill a man. I have tasted it and spit it out, and it does not taste badly. There is nothing good about the plant [and this informant does not even use it as a poultice]. Those who eat it die in 2 hours. It must be a painful death. It twists the arms and ankles and turns the head back. Finally they die in a last wrenching convulsion. They say it turns the eyes back. They turn in awful shape.

He had never heard that the plant grows on its victim's grave. "There is no compulsion about the plant. Unless you want to take it, it will not make you." (Dwight Jimmerson.) Dwight scouted the idea heard from other conservatives that the plant "grows inside the head of its victim until he takes it and then it comes up later from his grave." (Cornplanter, David Jack, and others.)

The Cayugas of Six Nations Reserve in Ontario call waterhemlock *onas'ε'* and the Onondagas there call it *onasε'ε'*" (Simeon and

⁵ Herbalists throughout the Six Nations know that, although waterhemlock root is a deadly internal poison, the smashed root makes a powerful drawing poultice for quickly reducing swollen joints, particularly ankles, and for relief in cases of rheumatism and arthritis, but they caution against leaving the poultice on too long lest it draw out all the fluid leaving a stiff joint. This use is recorded for the Cayugas, Onondagas, and Mohawks of Six Nations Reserve, Ontario; the Mohawks of St. Regis, Caughnawaga, and Oka (Two Mountains Iroquois) in Quebec (Waugh, 1912, 1914; Fenton, 1939), the Senecas of Cornplanter, Pennsylvania, and of Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Tonawanda reservations in New York (Fenton, 1935, 1938, 1939); and by a savage at Missilimakinak around 1720 (Laftau, 1724, vol. 2, p. 369).

⁶ James Crow of Newtown, Cattaraugus Reserve, is reputed to know this ritual, but I have not had it from him directly.

⁷ He was very much interested when I read him the account in Muenscher, 1939, p. 173, after he had described the reaction so closely.

Jemima Gibson), but my informants were unable to analyze the terms. They know it is poison to take, but there have been no recent suicides there, and they only know that a woman on one of the Seneca reserves in New York (case 1) took it. Gibson thought it a wicked thing to take one's life because Handsome Lake had said that suicides are deprived of a place in the hereafter; that it is as bad as murder. Nevertheless, Waugh's data of a generation ago say that these people believe waterhemlock compels the potential suicide to seek it, and that contrary to the usual attitude of medicinal herbs that stand willing to respond to man's call for assistance in curing, this one is willing to destroy him.

A preacher in the longhouse will say that it [the plant as symbolic of the suicide preachment] will grow in your head. By this is meant that it is willing to kill you . . . When eaten it will make a man crazy; he will die shortly. When the root is chewed and swallowed [it is believed that] it becomes whole again within the stomach. [David Jack; Waugh, 1912, No.4, p. 13.]

Furthermore, we find the belief among the Mohawks that not only does the root of waterhemlock re-form within the stomach but that it subsequently grows upon the victim's grave. The Mohawks of St. Regis, Caughnawaga, and Oka in the St. Lawrence Valley know waterhemlock as o'naſq'ra (St. Regis and Oka) and onáhsaT (Caughnawaga), meaning "whitish feather" or "white plumed"—a name given to the umbellate blossoms so characteristic of the plant (pl. 7, fig. 1). They all use the root as a poultice, and fear the danger of taking it internally. Katie Debeau related to Waugh and me at intervals of 27 years the tragic case of two little St. Regis children.

A brother and sister followed their father who was plowing new land one spring of the year. The plowshare turned up some roots which they picked up, washed and ate without knowing what they were. When the parents realized that the children had been poisoned, they tried every possible means to get them to throw up, but they failed and the children died from the effects. Later on, after they had been buried, the plant grew up on their graves.

This was evidently one of those unfortunate spring accidents that recur infrequently wherever the plant grows. Katie recalled a second tragedy which occurred at Caughnawaga; it points a moral to the Iroquois habit of tasting roots to identify them when collecting medicinal herbs. "A boy and his brother here were looking for medicinal herbs. They had been instructed to procure a'dja (*Dentaria dyphylla* Michx.) [which has a peppery taste], and they ate the poisonous root by mistake." (Kate Debeau.)

The use of waterhemlock as a suicide poison has been recorded for all of the Six Nations, excepting the Oneidas, and including the Tuscaroras, the latest settlers in the North.⁸

⁸ Hewitt's manuscript, "31 remedies for disease," (Tuscarora ms. No. 435, Bur. Amer. Ethnol., 1888) lists, "14. For the commission of suicide it was customary to eat a piece of the root of Spotted Cowbane (o'ná-sên'-á') . . ., *Cicuta maculata*."

THE CONCEPT OF ALLOTTED LIFE

The concept of the allotted life span and the view of natural death as the departure on the long trail leading westward to the spirit world marshals Seneca public opinion against suicides. The conservatives still believe that a man has an allotted number of days which the Creator sets for him to live. When his time comes, whether he be abroad hunting, at home in bed, or down sick he will go regardless of medicine, science, or the persuasion of his relatives. The followers of Handsome Lake, the Seneca prophet who preached 15 years following 1800, believe "the events of all our days are foreknown" (Parker, 1913, p. 49), and they repeat in the funeral address the Creator's message to the prophet:

When you, the beings of earth, lose one of your number you must bury your grief in their grave. Some will die today and some tomorrow for the number of our days is known in the sky-world. [Parker, 1913, pp. 57, 103.]

Some speakers make a special plea to the surviving relatives to take their minds off the deceased lest the fixation lead them to neglect their dependants or destroy their own lives (Henry Redeye).

And our belief is that for anyone who will destroy his own life, his spirit will always be earth-bound (*dedwadi*). My father [Edward Cornplanter, speaker and ritual holder in Newtown longhouse who recited the Code of Handsome Lake to Arthur C. Parker] used to say that the spirit [of a suicide] will just wander around where the [waterhemlock] plants grow, and it will always be expecting another person to follow its example. Indians [Senecas] believe it is a sin (*gaiwane'akshé'*) to take one's own life, to shorten the span of days which the Great Spirit has given to each one of us; therefore as a punishment he shall not go on the path to the spirit-world, but shall always remain on earth among the plants which he took for death. [Cornplanter.]

To guard against seeing one of these earth-bound spirits people drop their curtains at dusk or pin up a white cloth or newspaper at the windows. They warn the children not to look out, partly for discipline, and partly lest they see one of these hungry earth-bound souls peering in after some food (John Jacobs).

A maple leaf is the thickness of the partition between us and the dead. A person who has died of violence—witchcraft poisoning, suicide, and murder—remains earth-bound until judgement day. [Handsome Lake by Cornplanter.]

These foreshortened souls are conceived as wandering about the scenes of their crimes, and they remind the living of their passage by mysteriously opening and closing doors.

Occasionally the dead appear to the living during dreams to request food, or a song; the surviving clansmen should placate the ghost by sponsoring the great feast of Chanters for the Dead (*'ohgi'we*), because the dreamer might become sick and follow the relative, or, it would seem, there is danger that he might willfully take his life in a vain effort to join the deceased in the land of the dead.

My informants believe that there are fewer suicides among the Indians than among the whites, and this it seems is because the causes are fewer, although they cite the sanctions imposed by belief in the destiny of souls. We shall examine the possible extent of these beliefs into aboriginal culture when we have presented the cases, for it is likely that the bulk of them are aboriginal and antedate the coming of the Jesuits and Handsome Lake who borrowed Christian morality and sanctions to bolster up a basically native religion (Wolf, 1919, pp. 59-65).

My father always said that our mind, or will power is stronger than the whites', and, therefore, we overcome those trifles under which they break down. We look upon life [death] with the prospect of an everlasting life beyond the grave, and we have no desire to forbid ourselves the path to the spirit-world. [Cornplanter.]

Holding these beliefs and values has not prevented one Seneca from entertaining suicidal thoughts. According to his wife, he once threatened to kill her and then kill himself, and, fortunately, in a drunken shooting episode he was lucky enough not to hit his wife's brother and bring himself to the position from which suicide might be the only easy exit. On a previous occasion he told me that after his regiment demobilized in 1918, he was considering jumping over the falls of the Genesee River at Rochester when an officer accosted him and persuaded him to spend the night at the station house.

The modern Iroquois commit suicide for two principal reasons that appear in the following case studies. Women who have been mistreated in love affairs or marriages in most instances revenge themselves by taking poison and thereby bring critical public opinion on the head of the abusive male consort. Men who think that they have committed some violent crime and have lost face put an end to themselves to escape revenge or apprehension. Their suicides are most apt to be violent. The first type of case is the one which the Iroquois condone and most frequently, mention.

The only cause of suicide with us [Senecas] would be a love affair or marriage (ganohgwa') [the same term is used for both], or a broken and unhappy marriage. [Cornplanter.]

Child suicides, to escape restrictions or in revenge of punishment, and the few cases of suicide among the chronically ill are mentioned infrequently.

Iroquois suicides fall more surely into two fundamental types based on a formal method of commission. Here the ethnologist is on safer ground than when he is discussing causes and motives which cannot always be established after the fact. Type A are the cases of root poisoning, and type B are violent cases. The cases bear out the Iroquois who say that the type A cases are apt to be women following broken love affairs, whereas the type B cases are most apt to be men who seek to escape the consequences of violent crimes or loss of status.

Besides, there is a group of miscellaneous cases. We present all of the modern cases and then the earlier cases from the literature, proceeding upstream historically.

PART 2: CASES

MODERN CASES

TYPE A CASES: POISONINGS

Case 1.—Josephine L., a full-blood Seneca woman of middle age.

About 1902-3 there was living at Newtown on the Cataraugus Reservation a woman we shall call Josephine L. "She was one of those Seneca women of regal bearing whom I remember used to live at Newtown" (Cornplanter, my younger informant, was a small boy at this time). She was a fine looking woman, and she was probably nearly a full-blooded Indian (Peter Doctor).⁹ Her husband came from Allegany (P. D.), he was a much younger man (C.); and while he was visiting at Newtown, they went to living together in her house, and it seems that he had been living matrilocally with her at the time of her death. "He caused her a lot of worry. He was undecided about her, and he was teasing her," and my informant implied that he had made her feel his interest in other women (C.). Much of this is undoubtedly imputed Seneca behavior, but as such it is interesting cultural data.

As the result of a quarrel she went to the woods, unknown to the others, where she secured and ate the fatal root. She got home and died quickly after her arrival. They say she went into spasms—she had convulsions—and that witnesses heard noises in her vitals. She emitted blood from her mouth as if she had burst internal blood vessels. [C.]

Jesse Cornplanter was in district school at the time, "and when they heard she had died school was dismissed. Many were taken with the strangeness of her death and came to the funeral. Many wondered why she had reached a state where she could take her own life. It was discussed a great deal for many years."

Undoubtedly, my informant gained his knowledge of the attitudes toward suicide current at this time from his father who was well versed in Seneca traditions. It is also evident that the case of Josephine L. made a strong impression on him, and that the Newtown community was stirred by the event. The news soon spread to Allegany and Tonawanda. It was one of those rare occurrences that a community recalls as happening infrequently but for which there was a well-defined pattern of behavior.

There are other versions of this case, differing according to locality. My Cayuga informants had heard of the affair, but they were unfamil-

⁹ Probably all recent Seneca generations have carried some white blood. I have no genealogies going back over more than four generations which do not reveal a white ancestor. What Doctor means is that not knowing any white antecedent in her pedigree, she appeared to be all Indian.

iar with details. However, at Allegany the case is better known among the Senecas. Dwight Jimmerson of Bucktooth (West Salamanca), in Peter Doctor's generation, remembers the following story about a suicide at Newtown, Cattaraugus Reservation, about 1900, and he thinks it may concern the case of Josephine L.:

At Cattaraugus Reservation in the Newtown longhouse community a young man and woman got together as man and wife, and they were living that way. It came fourth of July and the man wanted to go to Buffalo where there was to be a celebration, and his wife also wanted to go, but he did not want to have her with him. He knew the time that the train would leave the nearby Lawtons depot, and they walked toward the depot, and she was still teasing to accompany him. Not willing to give in, he stalled along leading her as far away from the depot as he calculated he could dash for the train, which only stops there briefly since Lawtons is a small station. When he heard the train coming, he sprinted for the depot. He made the train, but she could not run fast enough and was left standing breathless. She turned around and went into the woods and procured and ate the root of waterhemlock. She barely reached home when she died.

Case 2: A supplement to case 1.—Louisa S., niece of Josephine L.

William Gordon, who knew *Cicuta* by its Seneca name both as a reducing poultice for sprains and as a suicide poison, gave the following supplementary information on the case above:

Louisa S. [whom] we called Ska'di' at Newtown [William's wife's nickname] took that medicine. It is poison. It grows on wet ground. She was married once and she got mad and thought she kill herself. She was still [a] young woman when she took it.

Now a year later and her aunt [mother's sister], Josephine L. [case 1] took it. Alfred L. is her brother and he is now living at Cattaraugus.

This informant thinks that Josephine L. "went to the woods," procured the poisonous root, and did not take it until she had returned home and entered her house. Both Cornplanter and Gordon agree on the immediate cause of her suicide: "*She must have been jealous of another woman.*" They said that this trait is apt to run in families.

Josephine K. Jimmerson has heard her mother tell how the deceased Ska'di' (ska-di'géqk) took waterhemlock, but she attributes the act to fear of blood revenge.

Mother always said it [water-hemlock] was poison. Ska'di' who took that lived across from my mother at Newtown. They drink it, but I do not know whether they take it raw or boil it. I am afraid of it. There was another case about the same time. Her sister, Hattie, took it. Something was wrong. They had a big quarrel around the neighborhood during which they murdered someone. Then they killed themselves before they could be punished.

Since this informant is both very deaf and quite feeble, I could not press her for additional details which she did not seem willing to volunteer.

Case 3.—Abandoned Seneca mother takes waterhemlock, circa 1885.

Josephine and Sarah Snow of Allegany relate how their mother's mother was abandoned by her husband (their mother's father).

Another woman took her husband away from her when their mother was a baby just walking at her side, and she became angry and ate the root. This happened along the Allegheny river, Sarah calculates, in 1853 because her mother was 20 when Sarah was born in 1871. Both women had the story from their mother who learned about it later.

She went after water and on her way she pulled that plant. She got the water all right, and on her way back she ate the root which she had washed at the spring which was quite a distance from the house. On the long carry she started puking blood [here Sarah rolled her hands from her stomach upward to her mouth to illustrate vomiting], and she fell by the way. Some men who were working in the garden nearby saw her fall and rushed over. In her body she was having cramps and she soon began having convulsions. She was dead by the time they reached her. She was buried from the longhouse. [Sarah.]

She received a regular funeral and burial, and Sarah had never heard that the plant grows out of the victim's grave. The attitude of both women is that their grandmother had revenged herself of her husband's adultery, and though not especially proud of the suicide in their maternal family, Josephine had originally volunteered the information to me one day at breakfast, and neither sister seemed loath to discuss the affair.

Case 3a.—Mary J., abandoned by her Seneca lover, *circa* 1889.

Dwight Jimmerson gave me this case in the summer of 1939; it was one that he remembered vividly as occurring in the Allegany community during his youth.

I knew these people well. George G. was older than I and he was going with Mary J. Both were Allegany Senecas. Finally they had a falling out, and he went home in the night telling her that he was leaving her for good, that he would not return. The following morning she went out and dug up the root of o'nq'shęę [Cicuta] and ate it and died.

Apparently, Dwight's knowledge of how the poison affects its victims came to him from this case. (See p. 87.)

Case 3b.—Neglected Mohawk wife takes *Cicuta*, *Circa* 1850.

Katie Debeau of Caughnawaga, with whom I worked in 1939, recalled one case of suicide among the Mohawks that occurred within her grandmother's time. This was presumably in the Catholic settlement near St. Regis.

In the family living neighbors to my grandmother the husband was not supporting his wife. She became discouraged and told my grandmother that she intended to fix up a medicine to take, and only God knows whether it is a cure or a kill.

That same evening the little girl of the family came running over to tell my grandmother that her own mother was very ill. So my grandmother, who was a great herbalist, prepared herself with different kinds of roots from her stock and went over to see her neighbor.

When she arrived, she asked, "Where is the pain?" "All over my insides," her neighbor replied.

She did not last but a very few minutes before she died. Whenever my grandmother would lift the woman to give her some medicine or water to drink, she would sigh and breathe a strange odor. Her eyes blinked and dilated rapidly, and she had difficulty swallowing. The odor she breathed was like liquor, and all around her mouth was black. She died a terrible death—she finally suffocated.

The next morning when my grandmother looked around the house, she discovered the remnants of the root and the stalk of *o-nasa'ta* [waterhemlock] that had been cut away. She broke the root in twain and it gave off the same odor that she had detected on the breath of her poisoned neighbor.

Katie claims to know an effective emetic for cases of *Cicuta* poisoning.

Take fresh cream and a pinch of baking soda and some sugar. Mix it and give it to the patient. Then turn the patient on his stomach and roll him and massage the stomach to mix the medicine in the stomach. They will throw up. If they throw up they will recover.

Witnesses said that Katie had cured a child who had accidentally taken "Paris green" that his father had prepared in solution for bug-ging potatoes. This poison produces violent diarrhoea, she said, and ultimately death follows. Katie used the above treatment and employed a feather to induce vomiting.

Case 4.—Elijah Brooks who was saved from *Cicuta* poisoning.

The following case is exceptional because it is the first of two modern cases of Seneca males attempting poisoning. Abbie Gordon (Ska'di') recalled that Elijah Brooks, her father's brother, took *Cicuta* but he did not die. Somebody discovered him and doctored him quickly, giving him a large dose of mashed boiled beans (as an emetic(?)). Abbie did not know the cause of the attempt, and she seemed unwilling to discuss it further. Elijah died somewhat later of natural causes. (This case should be read in connection with case 12 of my informant and her daughter who wanted to die.)

Case 4a.—Informants of the Cornplanter Band of Senecas in north-western Pennsylvania identified waterhemlock, which grows along the flats near the Allegheny River, as the fatal root which they call *o'nó'shé'ε*, which they think means, "it looks like onion." (Charles Gordon, Harvey Jacobs, Ezra Jacobs, and Windsor Pierce.)

Charles Gordon's mother used to relate how a Seneca outlander, i. e., a Seneca from up the river or from Cattaraugus who is not a descendant of Cornplanter, came there to stay. "He came here to get a wife, and someone else got her away from him. He poisoned himself with this plant which you see here."¹⁰

This case interested me because it shows that one Seneca male was unable to endure the shame and ridicule that would follow losing a mate to another suitor. I recall one young man of Allegany who brought home a young Cayuga bride and soon lost her to a neighbor

¹⁰ At this particular sitting, my informants identified the sulcicide root from the illustration (fig. 54.—*Cicuta maculata*) on p. 171 of Muenscher. The following day we collected a specimen, which was independently identified by another informant.

whereupon even his own father remarked that his son had just rented her for a while. However, in this case the youth soon acquired another wife from the same community, and his unsuccessful affair is no longer mentioned.

While writing this paper, two type A cases that occurred near Onondaga were related to me by Earl Jones, a young Onondaga-Mohawk employed at the Smithsonian Institution. Similarly, both cases are of young women who found the adjustment between reservation culture and city life difficult, and both cases involve lovers. One young woman recovered. The other was an

Oneida girl living with an Onondaga man. They had been to the nearby city of Syracuse, and returning to the reservation a little drunk they got into an argument. This continued after they entered the house. She went to the cupboard and drank the contents of an ammonia bottle. Her "boy friend" said afterward that she habitually took medicine, that she had been drinking this night, and that in the dark she had grabbed at a bottle, the wrong one. That was his alibi.

Earl Jones has heard of a poison root that was anciently used at Onondaga for suicide. He recognized Cusick's O-nah-san-a (*Cicuta maculata* L.)¹¹ as probably o'ne'sä'na', which is close to the form Hewitt gives in Tuscarora (footnote 8, p. 88), but he does not know the plant. However, he suggested it should be a poisonous plant because the modern Onondaga apply the same term to poison ivy.

Jones believes that Onondaga suicides were formerly less frequent, and they are certainly of less frequency than the cases he cited of whites who had married on the Reservation and among the neighboring city dwellers.

TYPE B CASES: VIOLENT SUICIDES

Male suicides among the modern Iroquois are apt to be violent. Thinking they have committed a violent crime, they seek a violent end as an escape. In three of the following cases a jealous husband killed his wife and then killed himself to avoid blood revenge or criminal prosecution. One gains the impression from talking with informants that he killed himself out of self-pity. The basic information in these cases came from Peter Doctor.

Case 5.—Albert S., an unsuccessful-spouse suicide, 1925.

Albert S. of Tonawanda Reservation, got very drunk and shot his wife Phoebe early on the morning of December 7, 1925, and then shot himself in the head. Phoebe died the following night, but he lived to be tried for murder and sentenced to the Atlanta jail, where he died May 29, 1928.

Although Phoebe is survived by three sisters and two brothers (1935), I acquired no information about the motives, other than the bare facts and that he was drunk, which seemed sufficient to my informant.

¹¹ See Beauchamp's notes appended to Pursh's Journal of 1807, p. 75.

Case 6.—Hiram Redeye, an unhappy-marriage suicide, *circa* 1900.

Perhaps the most famous suicide is the case of Hiram Redeye, of Coldspring on the Allegheny Reservation, who hurled himself under a passing freight after beating out his unfaithful wife's brains with a trackmaul.¹²

Hiram Redeye, whom we nicknamed swé' 'nq, father of Newman and brother of Amos, lived at Coldspring around 1900. He was a great athlete, an especially talented runner and baseball player. He used to live with Phoebe Cooper, widow of Solon Jimmerson, of Jimmersontown [a settlement on the bank of the Allegheny below Salamanca]. After the death of her husband, she stayed with her brother, Hiram Cooper, at Coldspring. It was here that she met Hiram Redeye, and they went to living together at Hiram's house.

Hiram was abusive, he licked his woman, Phoebe, and he frequently threatened her life. He had a jealous disposition.

Another informant ventured that she was unfaithful, and, whatever the fact, Hiram believed the rumor.

Phoebe finally despaired and went back to her brother's, to the house of her clansman; and while she was living there Hiram went over repeatedly and begged and coaxed her to come back to his house. However, she did not in the least want to return, but her kinsman kept urging her to make up with her consort, saying that everything would probably be all right from now on. [Peter added parenthetically, "the old folks [parents and relatives in upper generations] usually try to patch up these broken affairs, just as they formerly selected mates for their children and arranged the weddings with the opposite parents."] But Phoebe wept and carried on because her folks insisted that she return with Hiram.¹³ Reluctantly, she packed her few clothes, her sewing, and a splint basket she was working on. In going she remarked, "If anything happens, it will be up to you [you will be responsible]," meaning that her relatives were responsible for her fate.

They started out single file, Hiram going ahead. [It was customary for a man to walk in front of his wife.] She looked back again and again as they went along the path until finally, stopping to take one last longing look, she turned and followed.

When they arrived at Hiram's house, he opened the door and they went inside. She set down her burdens. Hiram locked the door and seized a hammer, a small track walker's maul with a short handle. Then he went after her. "You did not want to come back," he said, and he accused her of having had illicit relations with Jonas Titus. He was jealous of his neighbor, Jonas. She cried, "No,"

¹² To appreciate the setting the reader must understand the fascination which the railroads hold for the New York Indians. Wherever tracks cross the reserves, the maintenance crew is apt to be composed of Indians. They take to this work with enthusiasm, although they may speak little English besides the railroad jargon; and the central factor in the modern life of Coldspring is certainly the Erie Railroad complex: the dinner pail, overalls, caps, gloves, and the worn circle in the pants pocket indicating the presence or absence of the snuff habit. To the rest of the community the trains have brought, with railroad watches, a sense of time, and the tracks serve as a berrying ground, a highway up and down the river, and a sure but dangerous way home on foggy Saturday nights. It is impossible to tell what proportion of the frequent deaths during 50 years to Indian trespassers have been accidents to homeward-bound travelers, deliberate murders, or suicides.

¹³ This narrative has the ring of truth. The facts and causes of marital rupture and the attempts of the relatives to mend it agree point for point with cases of brittle monogamy which I have observed since 1933 on the Seneca Reservations. No sooner does the wife seek sanctuary in her clansman's house, because her husband has beaten her or jealousy has induced a quarrel, than he is there the following morning teasing her to return. Unless one of the mates absconds "to play house" with another lover, a few days of isolation serve to draw the breach together until the next incident arises.

saying that she had had nothing to do with Jonas, but he refused to believe her. He struck her on the head, and in his fury hit her again and again until her skull was completely crushed. [A Coldspring informant states that he also cut her throat with a butcher's knife.]

Then he opened the door and set out on the run through Coldspring settlement toward the 'nip and O' tracks [N. Y. P. & O. R. R., which has since become the Erie]. A west-bound freight train was coming down the valley, and he made for it. The train beat him to the crossing, but he cast himself under the wheels. I remember the details of this case because Phoebe Cooper was of my wife's relations.¹⁴ [Peter Doctor.]

Case 7.—Sam Parker, who hanged himself, *circa* 1875.

"Sam Parker of Tonawanda Reservation hung himself because he thought he had killed two people." Peter Doctor remembers the event clearly as happening either in 1874 or 1875, as he was in district school on Sundown Road at the time.

Sam Parker, Peter supposes, was a full-blood, and he was around 50 years old but still active; he was still playing lacrosse and engaging in other equally violent exercise. He came of a remarkable family, being the son of Levi Parker, who was related to General Ely Parker, and his was the only suicide in that family known to my informant.

Sam Parker stole a horse belonging to his sister, Clara Parker, and he sold it somewhere off the reservation. His sister persisted in her search and finally traced it. A man from Tuscarora stayed here at the time, and Sam's sister acted as his interpreter as they searched together from farm to farm among the whites. The Tuscarora finally located the horse, and the sheriff returned it to its original owner because it was stolen property. The man who had purchased the horse described the seller and thief as Sam Parker, her own brother.

When Sam knew he had been discovered he went after his gun.

The tragedy below happened before the West Shore Railroad went through in 1882. Peter does not remember the sequence, but he thinks that the shooting at the sister came first, and then Sam went after the Tuscarora.

The first shooting occurred toward the east end of the reserve at William Charles' house. Clara Parker, the sister, lived there; she was the present William Charles' aunt and Charlie Moses' mother. When Clara's mother and brother saw Sam approaching carrying the revolver, they hid Clara in the bedroom. He entered, and not seeing her, suggested she might be hiding in the bedroom. They attempted to block the door, but he shot through the wooden panels. Clara [who Peter says had a bad temper anyway, and adds that she was probably angry] screamed from within the bedroom, and Sam fled supposing that he had killed her.

Next he went to the house where he knew the Tuscarora man was staying. This was at Seavor Blackchief's at the time when the old people were still living. (Seaver's mother's brother had migrated to Tuscarora [where he had married], and a while afterward he returned. Therefore the Tuscarora man was staying

¹⁴ I gathered from Peter Doctor that the couple made such a din that the close neighbors were attracted to hear the shouted accusations and denials and that they saw part of the struggle. Much of the tale seems to have been reconstructed after the crime, and the years have not cramped Peter's skill as a narrator, although I have never had cause to doubt his veracity.

with them.) Sam went to the house inquiring for the Tuscarora who was upstairs. As the Tuscarora emerged at the head of the stairs, Sam shot from where he was standing near the door. And again, thinking that he had hit him, he fled.

Sam's mother and sister and wife came running after him, but he went into the brush to the south of the present railroad track near McRae Skye's place. Before they overtook him he had shinned up a leaning tree of nearly 2 feet in diameter. He was sitting on a limb with a rope tied around his neck and was busy tying the free end around the limb when the women came up. They told him he must not take his life, but he jumped anyway in full conviction that he had killed two people. He never hit either of them.

We school children heard of the tragedy and the school teacher let us off to go over and see him.

It is possible that the motive in Sam's suicide was shame at having been caught in a theft rather than fear of revenge or prosecution.

Case 8.—Jealous husband hangs himself after ambushing wife and lover.

Peter Doctor remembered one other case which occurred at Cataraugus Reservation about 1890. A jealous husband lay in ambush at the hill leading out of Gowanda. His wife must pass that way returning home in her lover's wagon. He shot at her as the horses slowly climbed the hill, and thinking that he had killed his wife, he hung himself shortly afterward.

Case 8a.—Sometime during the spring of 1939 while I was writing this paper, one of the Sachem chiefs whom I had known during my stay at Tonawanda hanged himself in his attic. I did not know him very well. During the time of our acquaintance he was frequently drunk and he kept pretty much to himself. A rather fine speaker and an exceptional singer, he seldom appeared to discharge his duties at the longhouse festivals, and he did not fraternize with the mutual aid singers' society with whom I used to meet at Jesse Cornplanter's. He did belong to another group of singers, but they seldom made public appearances at the longhouse dances. He had attended Carlisle Indian School where he had run the 100 yards in 10 seconds, and he had played considerable baseball after returning to the reservation. He lived in a little log cabin with a wife, who occasionally got herself very drunk, and they had several small children.

A competent social worker, who knew him better than I did, had seen him intoxicated several times, and each time he had a crying jag. He wept a good deal begging her not to take him home, until she had straightened matters with this wife. The social worker had his confidence for he would regain control of his emotions when she agreed to intercede for him. It is perplexing just why he worried about his wife's reactions since she was so given to drinking herself.

It is reported that several times when he was drunk he had threatened to hang himself. It probably got to be an old story, and no one took him seriously. He used his own attic for the occasion. He had been working regularly at the Tonawanda Community House [which was then being built by Indian labor under

WPA], until shortly before [his suicide]. He seemed to be in no difficulties previously or [at the time of his demise]. [H. A. Wayne, correspondence, 1939.]

He had an Indian funeral of the longhouse variety and his clansmen held the regular feast to thank the participants 10 days after.

This is the only case that can be definitely attributed to a disorganized personality that developed out of the conditions that produced the break down of a culture. His death may be attributed to the introduction of liquor among the Senecas. In turn, the frustrations that young partly educated Indians experience in trying to adjust themselves to a changing life are, I think, responsible for the excessive drinking among them.

Case 9.—Katherine K. who shot herself in revolt to parental discipline, 1932.¹⁵

Katherine K., a Seneca Indian girl of about 15 years, shot herself with a .45 caliber automatic pistol in 1932. Katherine was in the first year of high school, and her degree of Indian blood is uncertain, but her family is an old one on the Cattaraugus Reservation.

The cause seems to have been discontent with parental discipline. Her mother objected to Katherine's running around like other Indian girls of her age, who with the break down of the old maternal discipline run about at will. On the occasion of the tragedy the family had gone to a lacrosse game in Buffalo, and they had left Katherine home to take care of six small children. (Perhaps I should explain that the indoor lacrosse games at Broadway auditorium attract large audiences from the reservations to the city whither the Senecas flock to see their young men bruise one another and to visit with relatives and friends. The young people have a chance to meet each other and to escape in the slums of the city the scrutiny of their neighbors at home. The consequences are sometimes disastrous from the viewpoint of conscientious parents, of which there are still a few among the Indians.) Thus the parents had indulged themselves in a pleasure they denied their daughter. The next morning a neighbor discovered footprints in the snow leading to a lonely shanty where he discovered her body.

MISCELLANEOUS MODERN TYPES

Case 10.—A Tuscarora Maid of the Mists, *circa* 1890.

About 1890, a Tuscarora girl cast herself into the rapids above Niagara Falls because her parents refused to sanction her love affair. Clearly this type of suicide parallels the "Maid of the Mists" episode in Seneca folklore.¹⁶

¹⁵ Information on this case also was obtained from Miss Helen A. Wayne, Supervisor of Indian Welfare, New York State Department of Social Welfare, Buffalo.

¹⁶ The Seneca girl, who has become impregnated by a snake, is so ashamed that she stands a canoe through the Niagara rapids above the Falls, but as she goes over the brink she is saved by Hinon, the thunderer, who lives in the cave of the Winds beneath the Falls. Later he delivers her of serpents, and finally she returns home. (See Hinon Saves a Woman from Suicide, in Curtin and Hewitt, 1918, pp. 228-229.) I have another version of the same tale from Cornplanter.

This Tuscarora girl was Ike Patterson's daughter, and she was probably 12 years old the last time I saw her when her father brought her to a Baptist convention here at Tonawanda. She would be nearly 60 were she living today [1935]. She promised to be a pretty girl. [Peter Doctor.]

It is difficult to tell her degree of Indian blood because the Tuscaroras have incorporated so many white prisoners during their wanderings and there have been so many intermarriages with white soldiers from Fort Niagara that none of them are full-blood Indians.

The girl grew up and met a white man at Niagara Falls, and she fell in love with him. The old Indian people, both her parents and her father in particular, resented the union and they broke it up. The girl decided that if she could not have the white man she would have no one. She went to Niagara Falls and waded into the rapids above the falls. [Peter Doctor.]

Case 11.—Dennison M.'s two unsuccessful threats.

Dennison M. is a Seneca male of 33 years (1935), nearly a full-blood ($\frac{7}{8}$), who lives when at home with his aged mother in the longhouse district of Tonawanda Reservation. He is the greatest wanderer of three vagrant brothers, and when at home he shares a workshop in the barn with his half brother Cephas. He spends long hours by himself carving, and fashioning archery tackle. Frequently, he destroys what he makes, feeling, perhaps with the true sense of an artist, that the creation is no longer to his liking. (I asked him why he destroyed his crafts, and he replied that he was sick of them.) He seldom goes out when at home, and I have never seen him with the other reservation youths at the dances and singing society meetings. Nevertheless, he is a famous dancer and showman, however reticent he may be about performing at home. On one of his excursions he bought a bicycle in Atlantic City and rode it all the way to Florida and the Gulf coast, making his living en route by staging a dancing and fancy-roping act on street corners. His misanthropic temperament emerges at home where, his brother says, he sometimes hides upstairs and refuses to come down when visitors call, in which situation they tell the visitor they do not know Dennison's whereabouts. At other times the family come down in the morning to find Dennison suddenly home from a trip, and a few days later he is off again before dawn without saying farewell. He is apt to turn up unexpectedly in distant places; in California to pose for some sculptor, at the Art Students League in New York, or at a cabaret in some other city, but all of his jobs end on pay day in a prolonged inebriation.

When Dennison gets drunk, according to Cephas, he frequently mentions killing himself. One night, when Cephas was fed up with his odd brother's repetition of this old theme of killing himself, he handed him a rifle, saying, "Why don't you do it and have it over with?" Dennison accepted the rifle and went outside. He has not mentioned suicide to Cephas since.

Another time he was arrested in Niagara Falls when he was drunk. One of the Park Police patrolmen saw him staggering in the direction of the Falls and set after him. Dennison walked away through the park toward the Falls. The officer told him to halt, and asked him where he was going, and Dennison replied that he was going to kill himself. Naturally, the patrolman, thinking the lad was about to jump over the falls, arrested him.

Case 12.—A mother and daughter who wanted to die, 1935.

This case should be considered in connection with case 4 because it involves the same maternal family. It would appear that there is almost a strain of potential suicide in this family. Abbie Brooks remarked to the nurse that she did not want to live—"I want to die; I do not want to get well"—when the nurse urged her to seek medical treatment for a large goiter, but, of course, since Abbie is hostile to white medicine, her reply may carry that bias. Last winter Abbie's daughter Lucy died of a number of complicated disorders resulting from an abortion and virulent tuberculosis. During the time when Lucy might have been removed to the hospital with fair chances for recovery, she consistently refused to go, saying that she did not want to get well. She felt that she had been deserted by her lover. The child was unwanted. Her parents took the typical Seneca attitude of refusing to assume the responsibility for sending her. They left it with their daughter. I secured this information from a trusted neighbor whom I sent in to talk with the girl about going to the hospital, and this explanation was currently given about the long-house settlement. Her death temporarily cast a shadow over a number of suspects reputed to be the fathers of the unwanted child. Her case is no longer mentioned but it is not forgotten.¹⁷

EARLY CASES

Early travelers and missionaries to the Iroquoian Tribes recorded cases of suicide that fell under their observation which are markedly similar to the modern cases above. The early cases group themselves by method of commission into cases of suicide by taking poisonous roots (type A) and violent deaths by stabbing, shooting, and strangling (type B); and here too we find the love, revenge, and escape motives as operating causes. It appears then that here are the historical antecedents for the modern suicide patterns, and with this in mind, let us see how far back we can trace the methods and motives, proceeding upstream historically.

¹⁷ There have been recent cases of suicides following long illnesses. About 15 years ago, Jerry Pierce, of Irving on the Cattaraugus Reservation, following a long illness hanged himself (E. Pierce). My informant had a theory that hanging goes with melancholia and violent suicides with choleric temperament.

EARLY CASES OF ROOT POISONING: TYPE A

Speaking of *Cicuta* in his Medical Flora, Rafinesque (1828, vol. 1, p. 110) remarks of the Indians generally, though his observations were probably among the Delaware but may also include Iroquois, "The Indians when tired of life, are said to poison themselves with the roots of this plant [*Cicuta*] and the Purple Angelica, *Ax. atropurpurea*."

Case 13.—Two murderers forego self-shooting, but one finally takes *Cicuta*: Senecas of Genessee valley, 1817.

Mary Jemison, the white woman of the Genesee, relates graphically how her quarrelsome son John, a prominent herbalist, following a premonition of death, was murdered in 1817 by Jack and Doctor, two Squawky Hill Indians, with whom he drank too freely. John had previously murdered his two brothers, and his violent passing made all the more deep his mother's loss. She relates that after several weeks of lying in the woods, Doctor and Jack, hoping to compound their crime, sent the customary wampum to Mary, but she returned it, advising them to leave the country lest they be killed [by her clansmen]. Roundly condemned by Tallchief, a spokesman for their own relatives, to wander the woods forever persecuted by their victim's ghost and their own delusions, forbidden entrée to the spirit-world, and knowing that if they returned home they would be at the mercy of their victim's relatives, they were abandoned to consult their own feelings as to whether they preferred prolonged exile or giving themselves up.

As soon as they were alone, Jack said to Doctor, "I had rather die here, than leave my country and friends! Put the muzzle of your rifle into my mouth, and I will put the muzzle of mine into yours, and at a given signal we will discharge them, and rid ourselves at once of all the troubles under which we now labor, and satisfy the claims which justice holds against us."

Doctor heard the proposition, and after a moment's pause, made the following reply:—"I am as sensible as you can be of the unhappy situation in which we have placed ourselves. We are bad Indians. We have forfeited our lives, and must expect in some way to atone for our crime: but, because we are bad and miserable, shall we make ourselves worse? If we were now innocent, and in a calm reflecting moment should kill ourselves, that act would make us bad, and deprive us of our share of the good hunting in the land where our fathers have gone! What would Little Beard [a Chief who died in 1806] say to us on our arrival at his cabin? He would say, 'Bad Indians! Cowards! You were afraid to wait until we wanted your help! Go (Jogo) [djago'] to where snakes will lie in your path; where the panthers will starve you, by devouring the venison; and where you will be naked and suffer with the cold! Jogo, (go,) none but the brave and good Indians live here!' I cannot think of performing an act that will add to my wretchedness. It is hard enough for me to suffer here, and have good hunting hereafter—worse to lose the whole."

Upon this, Jack withdrew his proposal. They went on about 2 miles, and then turned about and came home. Guilty and uneasy, they lurked about Squawky Hill near a fortnight, and then went to Cattaraugus, and were gone 6 weeks. When they came back, Jack's wife earnestly requested him to remove his family

to Tonnewonta; but he remonstrated against her project, and utterly declined going. His wife and family, however, tired of the tumult by which they were surrounded, packed up their effects in spite of what he could say, and went off.

Jack deliberated a short time upon the proper course for himself to pursue, and finally, rather than leave his old home, he ate a large quantity of muskrat root, and died in 10 or 12 hours.¹⁸ His family being immediately notified of his death, returned to attend the burial, and is yet living at Squawky Hill.

Nothing was ever done with Doctor, who continued to live quietly at Squawky Hill till sometime in the year 1819, when he died of Consumption [sic].¹⁹ [Mary Jemison.]

Cicuta was also in current use at Onondaga, according to Pursh the botanist, who visited Onondaga Castle in the summer of 1807 during his botanical excursion through New York. He observed the plant growing there, and it is evident that several suicides had occurred within the memory of his informant. On July 18, in company with Captain Webster, Pursh set out to learn the names of some herbs in Onondaga which Webster claimed to know and promised to impart to him.

Pursh observes,

Cicuta maculata grows in great abundance throughout Onondaga: the Indians use it to poison themselves, when they have an inclination in going out of this world: it is a most powerful poison, as Capt. Webster tells me, who has seen the case on some Indians which had eaten the root, & was lost without being able to get anything as a remedy against it; it occasions Lockjaw & the patient is soon done. Elder bark or a Muskrat skin chopped fine, with the hair on is reckoned a remedy if soon applied to.²⁰

In several cases emetics seem to have been successful. Here there is a sympathetic association between the muskrat who likes the root and the use of its hide and hair in an emetic, as if to transfer the poison to the muskrat.

Mayapple poisonings.—The sources for the last three-quarters of the eighteenth century are disappointing where we expect them to be rich. Two able botanists, J. Bartram in 1743 and P. Kalm in 1748 and 1750, visited the Iroquois country, and neither mentions poisonous roots in use among the Indians (Bartram, 1895; Kalm, 1937); both neglect to mention the common mayapple, *Podophyllum peltatum* L., which grows widely from Virginia to Lake Ontario, and only Kalm recorded a variety of waterhemlock (*Cicuta ramis bulbiferus*) growing in the low-lying country west of Lake Champlain, but he does not connect the plant with the Indians. Curiously enough, however, the Moravian missionaries, Heckewelder and Zeisberger,

¹⁸ When I read this account to Henry Redeye of Allegany, he said this is the plant they call o'na'q's'e', which proved to be *Cicuta maculata* L. He also considered Seaver's inclusion of djageq, meaning "take courage!", a mistake; that go'ge' was probably what Mary said.

¹⁹ Seaver, 1932 edit., pp. 127-132; quotation, pp. 132-134.

²⁰ Pursh, 1869 (Beauchamp, ed., 1923, pp. 42-43).

Beauchamp notes (p. 66), . . . "the deadly *Cicuta maculata*, found then throughout Onondaga and still [1920] frequent on the Reservation. We yet hear of fatal results from chewing or eating the root. It is frequently mentioned in Seneca stories and distinguished as 'the root'." Beauchamp offers a list of Onondaga plant names from Albert Cusick (p. 75), "Muskrat Root or Water Hemlock.—O-nah-sun-a [o'ne'sā'na]."

cite some interesting mayapple suicides among the neighboring Delaware, but it is possible that these are Iroquois cases, for both men are writing general histories. Zeisberger traveled among the Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca Tribes, and there were Senecas living adjacent to the Moravian mission in Ohio where Heckewelder ministered following 1770. If these are Delaware cases, that tribe shared the Iroquois suicide complex, and they are pertinent to this paper.

Wild citrons (*Podophyllum peltatum* L.) or May Apples, grow on a stalk not over a foot high. The Indians enjoy eating the fruit, which has a sour but pleasant taste. The roots are a powerful poison which, who eats, dies in a few hours' time unless promptly given an emetic. [Zeisberger, 1910, p. 47.]

Zeisberger continues later—

In the use of poisonous roots the Indians are well versed, and there are many melancholy examples where they have by their use destroyed themselves or others. If a case of poisoning is taken in time, the effect of the poisonous root may be prevented by inducing vomiting. In case assistance is rendered too late, death follows, as a rule, in a few hours. There are poisonous roots that operate by slow degrees, in some cases illness may last a year or longer. [Zeisberger, 1910, p. 56.]

Case 14a.—There is a generalized case by Zeisberger, in connection with marital infidelity, and he probably refers to the same events as Heckewelder.

Not every Indian, however, is indifferent to the light behavior of his wife. Many a one takes her unfaithfulness so to heart that in the height of his despair he swallows a poisonous root, which generally causes death in two hours, unless an antidote be administered in good time; this is often done, the Indians knowing that the properties of certain herbs counteract each other and being able to judge from the effects, what poison has been taken. Women, also, have been known to destroy themselves on account of a husband's unfaithfulness. [Zeisberger, 1910, p. 83.]²¹

It is evident from this account that more than one poison was in use and that the practice was not confined to either sex.

Heckewelder is a little more specific, and all of his cases are men who took *Podophyllum*.

Suicide is not considered by the Indians either as an act of heroism or of cowardice, nor is it with them a subject of praise or blame. They view this desperate act as the consequence of mental derangement, and the person who destroys himself is to them an object of pity. Such cases do not frequently occur. Between the years 1771 and 1780, four Indians of my acquaintance took the root of the may-apple, which is commonly used on such occasions, in order to poison themselves, in which they all succeeded, except one. [See case 14b below.] Two of them were young men, who had been disappointed in love, the girls on whom they had fixed their choice, and to whom they were engaged, having changed their minds and married other lovers. . . . The two others were married men.

Heckewelder goes on to cite the cases of the two married men.

²¹ The same account appears almost verbatim in Loskiel, 1794, p. 58.

One . . . was a person of excellent character, respected and esteemed by all who knew him. He had a wife of whom he was very fond and two children, and they lived very happily together . . . half a mile from . . . where I resided. He often came to visit me, and he was of a most amiable disposition, I was pleased with his visits, and always gave him a hearty welcome. When I thought he was too long about coming, I went . . . to . . . his dwelling. Here I always found the family cheerful, sociable, and happy, until some time before the fatal catastrophe happened, when I observed that my friend's countenance bore the marks of deep melancholy . . . His wife had received the visits of another man; he foresaw that he would soon be obliged to separate from her, and he shuddered when he thought that he must also part from his two . . . children; . . . for it is the custom . . . when a divorce takes place . . ., the children remain with their mother, until they are of proper age to chose for themselves. One hope . . . remained. The sugar-making season was at hand, and they were shortly to remove to their sugar-camp, where he flattered himself his wife would not be followed by the disturber . . ., whose residence was about ten miles from thence. But this hope was of short duration. They had hardly been a fortnight in their new habitation, when, as he returned . . . from a morning's hunt, he found the unwelcome visitor . . ., in close conversation with his faithless wife. This . . . was more than he could bear; without saying a . . . word, he took . . . a large cake of his sugar, and . . . came to my house, . . . eight miles from his temporary residence. It was . . . a Sunday, . . . [10 a. m.], that he entered . . . with sorrow strongly . . . on his . . . countenance. As he came in he presented me with his cake of sugar, saying, "My friend! you have many a time served me with a good pipe of tobacco, and I have not yet done anything to please you. Take this as a reward for your goodness, . . . from me as your friend." He said no more, but giving me with both his hands a warm farewell squeeze, he . . . returned to the camp. At about two o'clock in the afternoon, a runner from thence passing through the town to notify his death to the village two miles farther, informed us of the shocking event. He had immediately on his return, remained a short time in the house, indulging in the last caress to his . . . children; then retiring to some distance, had eaten the fatal root, and before relief could be administered by some persons who had observed him staggering from the other side of the river, he was on the point of expiring, and all succours were vain. [Heckewelder, 1819, pp. 258-259.]

14b.—Heckewelder's second case is

also that of a married man, but he had no children. He lived happily with his wife, until one day that she fell into a passion and made use to him of such abusive language as he could not endure. Too highminded to quarrel with a woman, he resolved to punish her by putting an end to his existence. Fortunately, he was seen in the first stages of his fits, and was brought into a house, where a strong emetic diluted in luke-warm water, . . . was forcibly poured down his throat. ([He] . . . had poisoned himself with the root of the May Apple (*Podophyllum peltatum*). It [the emetic] consisted of a piece of raccoon skin burned with the hair on and finely powdered, pounded dry beans and gunpowder. These three ingredients were mixed with water and poured down the patient's throat. This brought on a severe vomiting, the poisonous root was entirely discharged and the man cured.²² [Heckewelder, 1819, pp. 225-226.] He recovered after some time, but never was again the strong healthy man he had been before; his wife, however, took warning from this desperate act, and behaved better. [Ibid., p. 260.]

²² It is interesting to note that Abbie Gordon said they gave an emetic of boiled beans to her uncle Elijah Brooks, case 4, when he took *Cicuta*. Pursh describes a similar emetic among the Onondaga.

Case 15.—An Iroquois woman eats mayapple root to follow her deceased husband: Onondagas (?) at Fort Frontenac, 1684.

The Iroquois also did not entirely rely upon the poisonous water-hemlock. Zeisberger's remarks suggest that the Delaware used other roots besides mayapple, and for a time the Iroquois, according to Lahontan and others, were using mayapple. This especially baffles me because Seneca informants, save one, scout the idea that mayapple is poisonous. They regularly stew the roots for a physic, and all the data which Waugh and I have collected point to waterhemlock as the suicide root. Nevertheless, regardless of failing tradition, Lahontan describes a plant like mayapple, without giving its Onondaga or Huron name, and the Baron was markedly impressed by the constancy of the Iroquois woman who took this root to follow her deceased husband.

The Citrons of North-America are so call'd, only because their form resembles that of our Citron, Instead of a Rind, they have only a single skin. They grow upon a Plant that rises three Foot high, and do's not bear more than three or four at a time. This Fruit is as wholsom [sic] as its Root is dangerous; for the one is very Healthy, and the juice of the other is a mortal subtile Poyson. While I stay'd at Fort *Frontenac*, in the year 1684, I saw an *Iroquese* Woman take down this fatal Potion, with a design to follow her deceased Husband; after she had took leaves of her Friends, and sung the Death Song, with the formalities that are usual among these blind Wretches.²³ The Poison quickly worked the desir'd effect; for this widow, who in *Europe* would be justly look'd upon as a model of Constancy and Fidelity, had no sooner swallowed the murdering Juice, than she fell into two or three shivering Fits, and so expir'd. [Lahontan, 1703, vol. 1, pp. 250-251.]

Lahontan gives us the impression that among the Hurons (?) it was the regular sequence for spouse to follow spouse by suicide within a few months after the death of the first, and particularly when the survivor had dreamed more than once of the deceased mate. It is against just such contingencies that the society of Chanters for the Dead (hono'ghi'we') attempt to placate the restless soul, and free the mind of the survivor.

When the Husband of a Wife comes to dye, the Widowhood does not last above six Months; and if in that space of time the Widow or Widower dreams of their deceas'd Bedfellow, they Poyson themselves in cold Blood with all the contentment imaginable; and at the same time sing a sort of tune that one may safely say proceeds from the Heart. But if the surviving Party dreams but once of the Deceased, they say, that the Spirit of Dreams was not sure that the dead Person was uneasie [sic] in the Country of Souls, for asmuch as he only pass'd by without returning, and for that reason they think that they are not oblig'd to go keep him Company. [Lahontan, 1703, vol. 2, pp. 41-42.]

CICUTA POISONINGS, 1720-1672

Cicuta was taken as well during this same period, which Lahontan describes, but, unfortunately, none of the relations say that both

²³ The Personal chant (âdq'.wε') was sung to return thanks in religious festivals, to boast at war feasts and during torture, and as a finale at death.

waterhemlock and mayapple were in use at the same time, or they give a native term without describing the plant, or the reverse, or neither. We can compare their accounts and attempt to equate the native terms with modern survivals in the same or related languages, which has profited little, because of linguistic drift or change of terminology.

The accounts of specific *Cicuta* poisonings go back to 1672 for the Onondagas, and presumably the other Iroquois, and likely some of the earlier ambiguous accounts are of suicides by this root. The motives continue to be chagrin and revenge over reprimands or mistreatment.

Case 16.—A spiteful girl takes *Cicuta*: Lafitau, Iroquois, 1710–20.

Lafitau, of whom Parkman (1885, p. LIV) has said, "None of the old writers are so satisfactory," paints the Iroquois, to whom he ministered for a decade following 1710, as a thin-skinned lot, who as children had been left to develop bad habits on the pretext that they had not yet attained the age of reason, whose most serious punishment was to have water thrown in the face, and who were never struck. And among them it was not extraordinary to see them poison themselves with *Cicuta* over a moderately severe scolding, and thereby make away with themselves.

Les sauvages en general sont d'ailleurs si sensibles, que pour un reproche un peu trop amer, il n'est pas extraordinaire de les voir s'empoisonner avec la ciguë, & se défaire eux-mêmes. [Lafitau, 1724, vol. 1, p. 603.]

In another place, when writing of the unequal status of souls in the hereafter according to their manner of death, he cites a specific case which occurred in the experience of a brother missionary. He speaks of a young Iroquois(?) girl who wept bitterly over her sister, who was dying from a quantity of *Cicuta* which she had taken in a huff and to ensure her death refused any antidote, because neither bonds of blood or friendship could touch her, and because she knew that her sister's suicide would eternally separate them in the land of souls.

Ce país des Ames a aussi ses differens étages, & tous n'y sont pas également bien. C'est ce que conclut un de nos Missionnaires, de ce qu'il entendit dire à jeune Sauvagesse. Cette fille voyant sa soeur mourante, par la quantité de ciguë [*Cicuta*] qu'elle avoit prise dans un dépit, & déterminée à ne faire aucun remede pour se garantir de la mort, pleuroit à chaudes larmes, & s'eforçoit de la toucher par liens du sang, & de l'amitié qui les unissoit ensemble. Elle lui disoit sans cesse: c'en est donc fait, tu veux que nous ne nous retrouvions jamais plus, & que nous ne nous revoyions jamais? Le Missionnaire frappé de ces paroles, lui en demanda la raison. Il me semble, dit-il, que vous avez un país des Ames, où vous devez tous vous réunir à vos Ancêtres; pourquoi donc et-ce que tu parles ainsi à ta soeur? Il est vrai, reprit-elle, que nous allons tous au país des Ames; mes les méchants, & ceux en particulier, qui se sont détruits eux-mêmes par une mort violente, y portant la peine de leur crime; ils y sont séparés des autres, &

n'ont point de communication avec eux: c'est-là le sujet de mes peines. [Lafitau, vol. 1, p. 404.]

Case 17.—Girls scolded by mothers eat *Cicuta*: Onondaga, circa 1690.

Bacqueville de la Potherie, whose visit to the Iroquois, 1689–1701, preceded Lafitau's, describes the same methods of rearing children, and the danger that scolding might produce child suicides. Onondaga daughters who have been scolded by their mothers eat *Cicuta* to poison themselves, while youths kill themselves with gun or knife.

Les Filles d'Onnontaquez qui ont été reprises par leurs Meres, mangent de la Ciguë pour s'empoisonner, les enfans se tuënt avec leur fusil ou avec leur coüteau. [La Potherie, 1753, vol. 3, p. 16.]

Case 18.—Annoyed young woman takes poison: Seneca, 1672.

A generation earlier, the Jesuit Raffeix reported an isolated case from the Seneca mission.

"A young woman had poisoned herself, in consequence of serious annoyance that she had experienced."²⁴ The context conveys the impression that she was annoyed by unwelcome male aggressors.

Case 19.—Abandoned wife takes hemlock juice: Onondaga, 1672.

About the same year Lamberville writes in the Relation of 1672–73 of an Onondaga woman who took hemlock juice (waterhemlock) over the loss of her husband to a rival. Neither Lamberville's emetic brings up the poison, nor his persuasions convince her that she has sinned, and she dies asserting that the guilt is on her faithless husband.

Another took some Hemlock juice, because she could not bear to see herself abandoned by her husband, who married her rival. I am summoned in the capacity of a physician who has already succeeded in counteracting the effects of that poison. I make her take orvietan [a popular antidote of the period], and shortly afterward some theriac,—on condition that no one else shall give Her any other medicine, lest it should take away the strength of mine. But hardly have I left the Dwelling than a woman makes Her swallow more than a pint of Colored water. I ask the attendant whether she thought that it was good medicine; she says that she knew nothing about it, but that, as she had been requested to give a medicine, she prepared one as she was able . . . [The Iroquois have not forsaken this ancient duplicity in medicine, and no modern practitioner on the reservations knows at what point his perscriptions may be upset by an overdose of herbal medicine.] . . . I give an emetic . . . The poison has already penetrated into the intestines. [Here a shaman intervned and the Father made the mother understand that her daughter had sinned, which she agreed.] Meanwhile, the sick woman is frothing at the mouth; she utters loud cries and is seized with dreadful convulsions. . . . "I have not sinned," she says, "he who has abandoned me is The one who is Guilty."²⁵ [Lamberville in Thwaites, 1896–1901, vol. 57, pp. 165–169.]

²⁴ Dablon, 1672–74 (Thwaites, 1896–1901, vol. 58, p. 239).

²⁵ William Penn mentions a similar case among the Delaware without naming the herb. He writes in a letter dated 1683, that they (the Delaware) are great concealers of resentment, how "a King's [Chief's] daughter thinking herself slighted by her husband in suffering another woman to lie down between them, rose up, went out, plucked a root out of the ground, and ate it, upon which she immediately died;" her husband later made an offering to her relatives for atonement and liberty to marry again (Penn, 1683, p. 210).

Case 20.—More suicides of children and married women: Iroquois, 1656.

From the Relation of 1656–57, we have the earliest cases from the Iroquois proper, perhaps the source for Lafitau's interest in the sensitiveness of children, their horror of restraint, their predilection for revenge, and suicides by eating poisonous plants, of which he specifies *Cicuta*. Dablon writes of the Iroquois, while referring to the Onondaga nation whom he knew best,

There is nothing for which these people have a greater horror than restraint. The very children cannot endure it, and live as they please in the houses of their parents, without fear of reprimand or of chastisement. Not that they are not punished sometimes by having their lips and their tongues rubbed with a very bitter root [probably one of the Hellebores]; but this is seldom done for fear that vexation might lead the children to cause their own death by eating certain noxious plants, which they know to be poisonous. These are most often used by the married women, to revenge themselves of the ill treatment of their husbands by thus leaving them the reproach of their death. [Dablon in Thwaites, 1896–1901, vol. 43, p. 271.]

HURON CASES OF POISONING, PRIOR TO 1650

Prior to 1650, the Relations concern the missions to the Hurons among whom there are several parallel cases of suicides by eating poisonous roots. These cases may be the prototypes of the suicide patterns we have been discussing, which were probably also current among the Iroquois of the period. However, there is the possibility that the Hurons may have introduced the custom among the Senecas who incorporated part of them following 1648. Naturally the plant identifications are confused or lacking in this early period because the observers were confronted with the double problem of learning an Indian language and a New World flora.

Case 21.—Youth mysteriously poisons himself: Hurons, 1640.

Neither Chaumonot nor Lalement was able to discover the reason why a young Huron poisoned himself, as they say, with aconite, and it is equally baffling why he chose their cabin as his death spot unless he hoped that he might gain some special advantage in the hereafter through the magic of salvation. The poison is probably not aconite, which was introduced and naturalized in the northeast somewhat later;²⁶ and there is no record for native species as far north as Ontario (Gray, 1908, p. 407). Furthermore, the symptoms more nearly resemble those attending *Cicuta* poisoning (Muenscher, 1939, p. 173).

Some days ago [March 21, 1640], a young man from Saint François Xavier [west side of the Wye River, near Wyebridge, Ontario] entered our cabin early in the morning; he came with a firm step, and singing like those who go to war

²⁶ Aconite (*Aconitum napellus* L.) was introduced from Europe to the northeast (Muenscher, 1939, pp. 77–79). "None of this genus is weedy in Eastern North America" (Pammel, 1910–11, pt. 2, p. 449).

[Personal Chant (a'dq' wε')].²⁷ . . . he was already tormented by the violence of the posion when he entered our cabin.²⁸ Hardly is he seated when his heart fails him [Aconite and Hellebore act on the heart]; he falls to the gound and cannot rise again. We suppose that he is either acting the lunatic, or that he is one; we try to put him out; he gently begs us to wait [Lalement]. Having there succumbed, he flings himself to the ground, foaming, with all the signs of approaching death [Chaumonot]. His eyes roll in his head, the foam comes to his mouth; we know not what these symptoms mean. We ask him his name, where he is from and who are his relatives, that one may go and fetch them: to that he answers, but "Alas!" he added, "I shall be dead before they come; only give them that," he said, drawing from his tobacco pouch a piece of root [Lalement]. Being questioned . . . his only answer was to present the remainder of the root that he had eaten,—bidding to show it to his parents after his death . . . [Chaumonot]. We are ignorant of his meaning: nevertheless, one of our Fathers leaves in haste to go and fetch his relatives; hardly had he crossed half the width of the lake, on which the ice was still quite firm, when he met here and there some Savages who were fishing. He said to one who was nearest, that such a young man from the next village was very sick in our house, and at the same time hands him the piece of root. This man puts it to his lips [a common Iroquois method of identifying roots], and without making other answer to the Father, exclaims to his comrads: "Such a one is dead,—he has eaten aconite [sic]; let us go and get his body." They leave their fishing there, they run in haste; but . . . Father . . . tries to anticipate them, . . . [to] baptize . . . [the] man . . . [if] possible, . . . he had eaten posion . . . the sickman had told us that poison was causing his death; . . . We were completing the act of his salvation, when these barbarians arrived in a crowd, and put him on a hurdle [toboggan ?] to draw him over the ice of the lake, and convey him to his house; but alas ! he soon began to vomit blood, and suddenly died by the way. It all lasted not an hour. This happened on the 21st of March [1640], day of St. Benoist. [Lalement.]

Lalement questions whether they could have hit upon a more suitable name. One wonders whether his coming to their house was a protest against Christianity, or whether he believed that baptism might gain him some special advantage in the land of souls.

There remain three earlier cases of root poisonings among the Hurons. LeMercier, writing in LeJeune's Relation of 1637,²⁹ reports that two young men in 1637 (case 22) and 1636 (case 23) poisoned themselves by eating a root, spelled variously Ondachienroa (1636) and Andachienrra (1637); and Brébeuf refers to a poisoning in 1635, the earliest recorded case of suicide in the Relations,³⁰ without specifying the plant.

Case 22.—Young man poisons himself at Ossassané: Huron, April 15, 1637.

On the 15th, we learned that a young man had poisoned himself at *Ossassané*; and in reference to this some Savages told us that one of the principal reasons why they showed so much indulgence towards their children, was that when the children saw themselves treated by their parents with some severity, they usually resorted to extreme measures and hanged themselves, or ate of a certain root that they call *Andachienrra*, which is a very quick poison. [LeMercier, 1637.]

²⁷ Lalement, 1640 (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 19, pp. 171-175).

²⁸ Chaumonot to . . . P. Nappi, 1640 (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 18, pp. 27-29).

²⁹ LeMercier, 1637 (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 14, p. 37 and vol. 13, p. 27).

³⁰ Brébeuf, 1635 (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 8, p. 121).

Case 23.—Chiefting sends daughter after the root: Hurons of Ihonatiria, 1636.

Writing in the same Relation (LeJeune's Relation of 1637), LeMercier describes the death of Saronhes, Louis de Sainte-Foi, the principal native convert of the Huron town Ihonatiria, who had been markedly unfaithful to them by gambling on an island near Kebec.

We did not see anything of him, and the first news we heard was that he was sick, and almost at the same time we learned of his death . . . some persons told us that he had not died a natural death, but the grief that he had felt for the loss of his son had so plunged him into despair that he himself had shortened his days. This is the way they say it occurred: One day, when he found himself alone in his cabin with one of his little daughters, he sent her to get a certain root that they call *Ondachienroa*, which is a quick poison. This child went for it very innocently, supposing that her father wanted to make some medicine, as he had shown some slight indisposition. She brought him some, but not enough to suit him, and she returned for it the second time. He ate his fill of it; a high fever attacked him, and carried him off in a little while. But his relatives do not admit that he died in this way. [LeMercier, in Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 13, p. 27.]

It is apparent that the good Father was a bit piqued because of the unchristian manner of his death.

Case 24.—Wife taken away (death?), young man poisons himself: Hurons, 1635.

Brébeuf implies that there was no distinction made in the hereafter between the souls of suicides and the ordinary dead, and cites the evidence that no distinction is made at burial, and that no punishment awaits the wicked in the hereafter. Referring to their myths, he says,

. . . they make no mention either of punishment or reward, in the place to which the souls go after death. And so they do not make any distinction between the good and the bad, the virtuous and the vicious; and they honor equally the interment of both, *even as we have seen in the case of a young man who had poisoned himself from the grief he felt because his wife had been taken away from him.*³¹

THE IDENTITY OF THE POISON

It is my conviction, after an analysis of the sources and the linguistic terms, that the suicide root referred to in these cases is waterhemlock, *Cicuta maculata* L., rather than mayapple, *Podophyllum peltatum* L. Let us first consider the evidence from the sources. Heretofore, the root has been accepted as mayapple on the following grounds. In case 23 to which LeMercier was not an eyewitness, there is the implication that the root might have been brewed into a medicine which was taken internally. Mayapple is a powerful physic, as we shall see; but this evidence has not been presented by others. Thwaites, the editor of the Jesuit Relations

³¹ Brébeuf in LeJeune's Relation, 1635 (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 8, p. 121). Italics mine.

(1896-1901, vol. 13, p. 270), in a note on LeMercier's account of 1636 (case 23), connects Ondachienroa with mayapple on the basis of Sagard's *Voyage to the Hurons* (p. 268), and Laverdière's footnote to Champlain's clear description of mayapple in 1615.³² Laverdière (and Biggar) cites Brunet, the Quebec botanist of the nineteenth century, as authority for saying,

The fruit of this plant (*Podophyllum pellatum* L.) which one calls "citronier," in the country, is good to eat; but the root is a violent poison which the savages made use of sometimes when they could not outlive their sorrow. [Trans.]³³

However, Champlain does not give the Huron name of the plant, and he does not connect it with suicide. Sagard (1865, vol. 1, p. 187) writes of Indian medicine and health in his *Voyage* (written, 1632) and in his *Histoire* written in 1636 (1866, vol. 3, pp. 603-607), referring to several roots. The first, Oscar, has properties of bloodroot or sassafras, but phonetically, *oska· resembles Seneca, 'oska'·'a, or hellebore, *Veratrum viride* Ait. The third, which he calls Ooxrat, *o·ksra', has all the smarting properties of, and probably is, the hellebore, and his comparison of the root to a "peeled chestnut" (*chastaigne pèllée*), or a "cabbage stalk" (*naveau*), fits the dried root of hellebore, which is still popular among the Iroquois as a snuff for catarrh. Wrong (1939, p. 195) suggests sarsaparilla, *Aralia nudicaulis*, for Oscar, and Indian turnip, *Arisaema triphyllum*, for Ooxrat, but he agrees with me that ondachiera is waterhemlock, *Cicuta maculata* L. This is Sagard's second plant which he warns is very poisonous, and he warns that on no account should one eat any root which one does not know. He tells of the fright they experienced one day over a young Frenchman who had pulled it up in the woods. [Mayapple does grow in the shaded woods about villages.] He became seriously ill, and he was fortunately cured by an emetic composed of some tree bark that a Huron gave him. But Sagard does not describe the citron-like fruit of mayapple, nor does he say this root was used for suicides. A letter dated 1709, which C. M. Barbeau kindly excerpted for me from the Archives of the Seminary of Quebec (Archives du séminaire de Québec, Fonds Casgrain. "Lettres sur l'Amérique septentrionale" ou "Relations/ Par Lettres de/ l'Amérique septentrionale," Première lettre datée de 1709) reads, "Les hurons . . . s'empoisonnent avec racine de Cigüe ou de citronnier. . . . [The Hurons . . . poison themselves with the root of waterhemlock or of mayapple. . . .]. The sources, then, give both mayapple and waterhemlock.

The linguistic evidence favors waterhemlock. The modern Huron-Wyandot term for mayapple, uja'·rawi', "fruit in between," or "sour fruit on" (Barbeau), bears no resemblance to Ondachiera; uja'·rawi'

³² Champlain, 1615 (Laverdière ed., 1870, vol. 4, p. 31; and Biggar ed., 1929, vol. 3, pp. 50-51).

³³ Cited by Laverdière, 1870, vol. 4, p. 31, from l'Abbé O. Brunet, *Catalogue des Plantes Canadiennes dans l'herbier de l'Univ. Laval*, livr. 1, p. 15, Quebec, 1865. This catalog is not available in the library of the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture or the Library of Congress.

is rather related to Seneca, o'gwa'·'a, "round fruit on it" [hence, modern "orange"], Cayuga, o'gwa'·'; Onondaga, u'gwa'·'ā, "berries on" (Waugh); and the other modern term, "shade maker" [hence, modern "umbrella"] is also unrelated to ondachiera: Seneca, ade'·qnoshe', "it makes shade," Cayuga, u'tnoqsada'hkwa'; modern Onondaga, ona'hutsde' (Waugh), and Onondaga of 1650-1710, onehæensta' (*onα'hwensta'), "citron" (Shea, 1860, p. 33); Mohawk, onyhuste'·u'dera (Waugh), but even this last form hardly suggests ondachiera. All of these tribes know the cathartic property of the root, and prepare from it a physic by boiling, or roasting and then boiling, which likely reduces the percentage of podophyllin. Elijah David, a Tonawanda Seneca, advised Waugh to cut out the portion of the root where the rootlets branch as this contains the poison, and to use the rest of the root taken in spring before the plant flowers (Waugh, 1912, vol. 7, pp. 44-55). Some Senecas fear and dislike the plant (Fenton), other informants warn against overdoses of the powerful physic (Waugh and Fenton), and one foolhardy Cayuga recommended eating the roots raw (Waugh); and it is certain the mayapple has not been fashionable in recent suicide cases.

Huron, Ondachiera (Sagard, 1632), Ondachienroa, Andachienrra (LeMercier, 1637), rather resemble the modern terms for *Cicuta* in the various dialects: Mohawk, *ONASA·RA from Caughnawaga, o'nahseř, or o'nā'sāř (Waugh), and St. Regis-Mohawk, onahsq'·ra, "feather-white" (Fenton); Onondaga of New York, o'ne'sā'·na', Onondagas of Six Nations, Ontario, onashε'·ε' (Fenton); and Tuscarora, o'·nā-sēñ'·ā' (Hewitt) are derived from the old Onondaga, honachinra [*ONASĚ·RA'], *cigüe*, *Cicuta maculata* L. (French-Onondaga dictionary, Shea, 1860, p. 33). However, Cayuga, u'na'·sāā' (Waugh), onashε'·' (Fenton) and modern Seneca, o'no'·shε'·ε' or o'no'hshε'·ε', "odorous fleshy tuber," or "looks like onion" (Fenton), are more differentiated from the other dialects. The close resemblance between the seventeenth-century spelling of the Onondaga term, honachinra, for *Cicuta*, and the spelling of the Huron word, ondachiera, taken together with the modern Mohawk, onasa'·ra, clinches the matter because the resemblance is also clear between the seventeenth-century term, *onáhwensta', and the modern Onondaga term, onáhutsde', for mayapple. In the same way that Onondaga *ONASĚ·RA' has become o'ne'sā'·na', we would expect early Huron *ONDAŠĚ·RA', made up of *ONDAS- (or *ONAS-) meaning "plume" or "feather," plus *-SĚRA', meaning "whitish," as in the Mohawk, to become *O NA ŠĚ·RA' in modern Huron. This will have to await verification among the Wyandots of Oklahoma because the Hurons of Lorette, P. Q., no longer speak their language.

VIOLENT SUICIDES BY STABBING, SHOOTING, AND STRANGLING: TYPE B

From the seventeenth century also there are a series of suicides that resemble the type B modern cases where the escape motive in violent death predominates. Stabbing, shooting, and strangling appear to be as old as poisoning with the Iroquois, who resorted to the former methods under duress of torture and imprisonment pending certain torture, and less frequently under the unhurried circumstances of love affairs and chagrin following gambling losses, which usually led to poisoning.

Case 25.—One Iroquois prisoner stabs himself to avoid torture, but his companion braves the fire: Quebec, 1692.

Following a year of severe raids on the French settlements in the St. Lawrence valley, Governor Frontenac ordered burned two prisoners of the Five Nations, who had been taken early in the year when their party was defeated beyond Montreal; he hoped that their torture would serve as an example to ward off future Iroquois raiders on Quebec towns. Frontenac refused the pleas of his lady and the Jesuits who hastened to prepare the prisoners for death with Baptism. However, the haughty Iroquois dismissed the good Fathers, and prepared in their own way by singing the Death Song.³⁴ The one who stabs himself to escape certain torture is roundly condemned by his comrade as a "Coward, a Scandal to the Five Nations" (Colden) while he fulfills the role of the brave Iroquois warrior and faces death by torture unflinchingly.

Some charitable Person having thrown a Knife to them in Prison, he who had the least Courage of the two, thrust it into his Breast, and died of the Wound immediately. Some young *Hurons of Lorette*, aged between fourteen and fifteen years, came to seize the other, and carry him away to the *Diamant Cape*, where notice was given to prepare a great pile of Wood. He ran to Death with a greater unconcernedness, than *Socrates* would have done, if he had been in his case. During the time of Execution he sung continually; "That he was a Warriour, brave and undaunted; that the most cruel kind of Death could not shock his Courage, that no Torments could extort from him any Cries, that his Companion was a Coward for having killed himself through the fear of Torment; and lastly, that if he was burnt, he had this Comfort, that he had treated many *French and Hurons* after the same manner." [Lahontan, 1703, vol. 1, p. 178.]

Case 26.—Unsuccessful attempts of Miami captive to swallow stones and hang himself: Onondaga, 1682.

This case is of interest only because it occurred at Onondaga and it illustrates the way traits spread from the Central Algonkians to the Iroquois. Here we have a Miami captive bound for certain torture at Onondaga who twice attempted to swallow stones during the journey, and thereby rob his captors of the honor of bringing him in

³⁴ Lahontan, letter dated Oct. 25, 1692 (1703 vol. 1, pp. 177-179.) It appears that Colden (1902, vol. 1, p. 171) copied Lahontan.

alive, a device which might readily occur to some Onondaga in future similar circumstances.

When the warriors perceived [his fright on approaching Onondaga village], fearing that the apprehension of death might lead him to swallow some stones,—as He had already twice done,—in order to kill himself, and that they would not have the honor of bringing him in alive, They promptly made him march in their midst, always singing his Doleful air, his face being painted red.³⁵

That same night, seated high in an Onondaga house, he attempted to draw himself down on the rope that bound him by the neck to a house post, but the rope broke.

Case 27.—Two mistreated old men: Onondaga, 1682.

Two old men were potential suicides this same year at Onondaga, Lamberville reports, because they were mistreated by their cabin mates. One old chief mourned the loss of his wife, and the other had served too long as a butt for the village drunkards. The first hanged himself, and the other was found dead.

Case 27a.—An old man hangs himself to join his deceased spouse.

An old Captain who still retained his rank among the leading men of the Village . . . God had, 2 years before taken away . . . his wife; Father Bruyas . . . had baptized her. [Persecuted by slaves of other nations adopted in place of deceased sisters who lived in the same cabin] He took the resolution to rejoin her as soon as possible; He frequently went to visit her grave, two leagues from here [at the site of the old village]. Two years . . . [he considered] causing his own death, that he might the sooner go to heaven to see his own wife again. He had a swollen Cheek, which they persuaded him was the effect of the pretended sorceries of certain half sorcerers or jugglers of the country. [Some Iroquois still believe that sorcerers can project disease objects into the body causing inflamed swellings.] This, Added to the bad treatment that the women of his cabin made him endure, induced him to put an end to his troubles by death. He asked me, on one occasion, whether Christians who were tired of life were not permitted to strangle themselves, so that they might the sooner go to the land of the blessed souls. [This may have been an Onondaga tabu against spouse suicides which he hoped to escape in the new Christianity.] I [attempted to turn] him from so detestable a purpose, but He always thought that he could abandon life, which he looked upon as something of which He could dispose; and on the very next night He hanged himself, at the same Spot where he usually slept. The women who had been the cause of his vexation were Awakened by some noise that he made, and Immediately hastened to the miserable man; but it was too late, for, after they had untied the rope, He expired in Their hands. The Whole village was horrified at this act. [Lamberville in Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 62, pp. 61-65.]

Case 27b.—Another old man found dead.

A poor blind Old man, nearly a hundred years old, who had formerly been baptized by Father Bruyas, . . . repelled by his relatives, and continually exposed to the fury of the drunkards,— Weary of his misery, and knowing not where to take refuge . . . or procure food, was found dead. There are various opinions regarding him. [It was not clear whether his case was a suicide.] [Lamberville in Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 63, p. 65.]

³⁵ Lamberville, letter dated August 25, 1682 (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 62, pp. 85-87, 91).

Case 28.—Convert remembers Jesuit teaching and throws away knife: Huron, 1659.

Lalement tells of a third Huron who had miraculously escaped the flames at Onondaga. A friendly Huron, who had been previously adopted there, slipped a knife to his tribesman on the way to the village. Lalement takes particular delight in reporting this unusual case of fidelity to his teachings on the part of his pupil who prayed during the torture instead of singing the customary Death Song.³⁶

At sight of Onondaga . . . I resolved to cut my throat in order to escape by a sudden death—and one, that was very gentle, in my opinion—the thousand deaths that I had before my eyes. I had the knife in my hand, and was already to deal the blow, when I recalled what the Fathers had told me in times past—that we are not the masters of our lives, that it is for God alone to lengthen or curtail our days, and that I could not employ this violence without committing a great sin. After this thought, which from the first made me waver a little in my resolve, I offered myself to god, . . . to free myself from temptation, which was a very strong one, I cast my knife far away from me, and bravely took up my march toward all the people awaiting me. [Lalement *in* Thwaites, 1896–1901, vol. 46, p. 41.]

Case 29.—Onondaga hostage cuts his throat when Mohawks overtake and massacre a Huron peace delegation: Huron country, 1648.

Paul Raguenu writes from the Huron country in 1648 that an Onondaga ambassador, who had remained a hostage in the Huron village, killed himself when the Hurons learned that a party of Mohawks overtook and killed the Huron ambassadors returning from a good will mission to Onondaga. Hewitt (1928, p. 457) holds that this individual held the title of Skanawati, fire keeper of the federal council.

At the beginning of the month of April, Scandaouati, the Onnontaeronnon Ambassador who had remained here as a hostage, disappeared, and our Hurons thought he had escaped; but after some days his Corpse was found in the middle of the wood, not far from the Village where he had resided. The poor man had killed himself by cutting his throat with a knife, after having prepared a sort of bed of fir-branches, on which he was found stretched out. [Raguenu *in* Thwaites, 1896–1901, vol. 33, p. 125.]

It is difficult to decide whether his motive was shame of the great dishonor the Mohawk allies had done the League, or fear of the almost certain revenge torture which his Huron bonders would seek, or whether the motive was vanity, as Wisse (1933, p. 172) suggests.

Case 30.—Onondaga captive dives into Huron kettle to avoid torture: Huron country, 1647.

Early the previous year (1647), the Hurons had repulsed the Onondaga invaders, who were not always individually capable of taking the tortures which they sadistically practised on their enemies. The Hurons overtook and defeated an invading Onondaga war

³⁶ Lalement, Relation of 1659–60 (Thwaites, 1896–1901, vol. 46, pp. 37–39).

party, killing the leader and taking prisoners who, excepting Annen-raes, they burned.

. . . one of those who was destined to the flames, seized with a horror of the cruelties that awaited him cast himself headlong into a great kettle of boiling water, to shorten his tortures with his life. [Raguenau, 1648 (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 33; p. 117).]

Unless Raguenau refers to a trade kettle, the feat gives us a gage of the enormity of this Huron cooking pot.

Case 31.—Three Algonkin women escape Iroquois torture and kill themselves, 1647-42.

These cases are taken together because they occurred under similar conditions to three women taken from the Algonkin Tribe to Onondaga for torture or adoption; they stand in marked contrast to the usual Iroquois women's suicides by poisoning.

a. The first woman failed twice to hang herself, and finally made her way to Quebec where she describes her awful experience (1646) to Father Lalement. She escaped from torture in an [Onondaga] Iroquois village and fled to the woods. Hiding daily at the wood's edge in constant fear of apprehension, she soon despaired of stealing enough corn for a 2 months' journey to Quebec, and decided to kill herself rather than be tortured.

Having said her prayer, she fastens her belt to a tree, up which she climbs; she makes at the other end a running knot, which she slips about her neck, and throws herself down. The weight of her body broke the cord without doing her great injury; she mends it, tries it, and then climbs up again; but God willed that it should break for the second time. She, much astonished, begins to say . . . perhaps God does not wish me to die.³⁷

b. Another woman, more hostile to the faith, succeeded; although advised by other women of the band not to carry out her evil intention,

. . . she heeded not this counsel. Laying hands on her child, she murdered it, and threw it at the feet of the Hiroquois; then, having slipped her head into a halter, she pulled with one hand to strangle herself, and with the other she cut her throat with a knife. [Lalement *in* Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol 30, pp. 275-277.]

c. A third Algonkin mother tried to drown herself after her child was burned. She was one of three Algonkin mothers taken in an evening raid in the fall of 1641 when the Iroquois wiped out a whole settlement above Montreal. A woman who subsequently escaped related to Father Buteux, whose account Vimont includes in the Relation of 1642 (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 22, p. 257, *et passim*), these harrowing events. The next morning the Iroquois roasted the crying children and boiled them in a kettle and ate them before their imploring mothers.

"When the dismal band reached the great falls of the chaudiere—this is a river which falls into the River of the three meadows, above

³⁷ Lalement, Relation of 1647 (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 30, pp. 263-265).

Montreal" (Vimont)—this captive woman cast herself into an unfrozen section of the rapids, preferring to perish in the water rather than die by fire; but the Iroquois, running up to a spot where the rapids cast her up, succeeded in snatching and beheading and then scalping her before she managed to drown.

Case 32.—Young woman urged to marry attempts hanging: Algonkin, 1640.

We include another non-Iroquois case because it illustrates how Algonkin women employed hanging to escape male aggression where Iroquois women poisoned themselves. (See case 18.) Paul LeJeune writes of an Algonkin girl who tried to hang herself at Sillery near Quebec, 1640,

A young woman, finding herself urged to marry a man whom she did not love, became so enraged, without showing any outward indications of it, that she tried to hang herself. People ran to her at once; they found her half dead; they cut the noose, and carried her, entirely unconscious to her cabin. A Christian . . . informed us . . . We asked her if she was not afraid of being damned. "I was not thinking of that . . . but only of freeing myself from the annoyance of that man."³⁸

Case 33.—Iroquois prisoner attempts strangling to escape torture: Hurons, 1639.

Some Iroquois warriors also resorted to strangling to escape martyrdom; certainly, the following case shows that one attempted suicide as a welcome alternative to the idealized pattern of death by fire.

Lallement writes from the Huron country in LeJeune's Relation of 1639 (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 17, p. 99) how on January 2, 1639, they almost lost the soul of an Iroquois prisoner who tried to choke himself on his last and fatal night 24 hours after they baptized him. They finally got him to accuse himself and ask pardon. "Having done this, he was granted absolution; and 2 hours later he was boiling in a kettle."

Case 34.—Chief's son loses at gambling and hangs himself: Hurons, 1639.

The Jesuits considered gambling a disruptive force in Huron society, and they describe both the Huron and Iroquois as greatly addicted to the evil pleasure which produced a harvest of assaults and murders, depending, probably, upon how individuals took their losses. Brébeuf writes to his superior at Quebec how the loss of the family wampum drove one melancholy lad to hang himself rather than face his relatives.

On the fourteenth of April [1636], the son of Chief Aenons, after having lost at the game of straws a Beaver robe and a collar of four hundred Porcelain beads, had such a fear of meeting his relatives that, not daring to enter the cabin, he became desperate, and hanged himself to a tree. He had a very melancholy

³⁸ LeJeune, Relation of 1640 (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 18, pp. 163-165).

disposition. The first of the winter he was on the point of putting an end to himself, but a little girl caught him in the act. When asked what had led him to this wicked resolution, [he said] "I do not know . . . but someone within me seems always to be saying, 'Hang thyself, hang thyself.'" Gambling never leads to anything good; in fact, the savages themselves remark that it is almost the sole cause of assaults and murders.³⁹

Case 35.—The sick beg mercy death, 1636.

Suicides were rather frequent among the Hurons during the recurrent epidemics of smallpox which struck the Huron towns from 1635-37 (Parkman, 1885, p. 87). In the Relation of 1636 (LeJeune in Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 9, p. 117), we read that they "beg to be killed when very sick," and in 1640, a Huron man sick with smallpox had himself stabbed twice and then swallowed an awl (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 19, p. 171; vol. 18, p. 28).

EXPLANATION OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TABLE

COLUMN:

Case: Italic numerals in parentheses indicate frequencies known; with asterisk*, estimated frequencies; alone, data not included in cases.

Source: F, my own field notes; JR, Jesuit Relations.

Tribe: S, Seneca; M, Mohawk; Oa, Onondaga; Oe, Oneida; T, Tuscarora; D, Delaware; I, Iroquois; H, Huron; Mi, Miami; Mi/Oa, Miami at Onondaga; A, Algonkin.

Sex: M, male; F, female.

Age: ma, middle-age; yw, young woman; y, youth; m, adult man; ch, child; g, girl; ym, young man; om, old man.

Blood: fb, fullblood; mb, mixblood; fractions, degree of Indian blood where known.

x marks the incidence of the trait; in combination under certain columns it has the following specific meanings:

Revenge and mistreatment: xp, revenge directed at parents; xd, revenge of aged on descendants; xd followed by arabic numeral, incidence.

Sickness: xa, cause was old age.

Lover's leap: rr, railroad; mm, Maid of the Mist.

Reaction: st, a known strong reaction.

Under the general heading of *Methods*, xf indicates attempt at suicide and failure; xfx, first attempt at suicide followed by success.

³⁹ Brébeuf, in LeJeune's Relation of 1636 (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 10, p. 81):

15	LaHon., 1: 250, 2:41.....	1684	I, Oa?	F&TM	(?)	fb	xp	x					x	x			st
16	LaIt., I: 603, 404.....	1710-20	I	F	y	fb	xp						x	x			st
17	LaPob., 3: 16.....	1690	Oa	F	cb, g	fb	xp						x	x			st
18	JR., 58: 239.....	1672	S	F	yw	fb	x										st
19	JR., 57: 165.....	1672	Oa	F	w	fb	x										st
(1)	Penn., 210.....	1680	D	F	w	fb	x										st
20	JR., 43: 271.....	1656	Oa	F&M	w&cb	fb	x, xp										st
21	JR., 19: 173, 18: 27.....	1640	H	M	ym	fb						(?)	x	(?)			st
22	JR., 14: 37.....	1637	H	M	ym	fb	xp						x	x			st
23	JR., 13: 27.....	1636	H	M	ym	fb											st
24	JR., 8: 121.....	1635	H	M	ym	fb											st
25	LaHon., I: 178.....	1692	I	M	m	fb											st
26	JR., 62: 85.....	1682	MH/Oa	M	m	fb	x										st
27(?)	JR., 62: 69-65.....	1682	Oa	M	om	fb	xg2										st
28	JR., 46: 37-39.....	1659	H	M	ma	fb											st
29	JR., 33: 125.....	1648	Oa	M	ma	fb											st
30	JR., 33: 117.....	1647	Oa	M	m	fb											st
31a	JR., 30: 263.....	1647	A	F	w	fb											st
31b	JR., 30: 275.....	1647	A	F	w	fb											st
31c	JR., 22: 257.....	1642	A	F	w	fb											st
32	JR., 18: 163-165.....	1640	A	F	yw	fb	x										st
33	JR., 17: 99.....	1639	I	M	m	fb											st
34	JR., 10: 81.....	1639	H	M	y	fb											st
35(?)	JR., 9: 117, 164; 19: 171.....	1636-40	H	M&F	(?)	fb											st

(For explanation of abbreviations, see page 119.)

PART 3: ANALYSIS, DISTRIBUTIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

We have now presented the information extant concerning the known cases of Iroquois suicide, and we have also presented earlier cases from the other related Huron-Iroquois Tribes, and a few Delaware and Algonkin incidents that seemed pertinent to our problem. The task now remains to answer the questions we posed as the problem for this study. Fortunately, two other scholars have reviewed the evidence from the sources on the Eastern Woodlands, removing much of the onus from our task: Wisse has considered the data from the area as a unit in a survey of the Americas by culture-areas, part of his scholarly world survey of *Suicide and Fear of Death among Primitive Peoples* (Wisse, 1933, pp. 159-185); and Dr. Flannery has assembled the principal references to suicide by taking a poisonous root in her indispensable *Analysis of Coastal Algonquian Culture* (1939, pp. 132-133, 181), coming to the conclusion from its limited distribution that the custom was probably original with the Iroquois.

We shall postpone discussing attitudes toward suicide until after we have summarized our data on frequency, causes, and methods of commission. There are between 39 and 50 known Huron-Iroquois cases spread over a period of 300 years, dating from 1635-1935. As compared with the maximum of 20 instances in 16 cases going back to 1850 that I was able to recover during field work, the greater number of cases, 22, come from the middle years of the seventeenth century at the height of the Huron versus Iroquois war, when there were some 20,000 Hurons and 15,000 Iroquois (Hewitt, 1912); and there are enough cases sprinkled through the 1700's to bridge the intervening century, conveying the impression of continuity of custom. Our records show an average of a case every 9 years for the whole period: One every 4 to 5 years since 1855 among the 3,000 New York Senecas, but we have also recorded attempts and failures; it is likely that many more than seven escaped the notice of eighteenth century observers, although Heckewelder reports four cases in 10 years (1771-80) for the Delaware, which Wisse (1933, p. 160) regards as a considerable frequency; and we find one every 3 years for the seventeenth century, about equally divided between the Hurons and Iroquois. There has been no marked increase in frequency during the last decade; in fact, the highest frequency seems to have occurred between 1635 and 1650 when the 20,000 Hurons were feeling the impact of European civilization through the epidemics of smallpox carried by the French traders and the Christian teaching Jesuits, and the torture and persecution of the Iroquois who had received rum and guns from the Albany Dutch. This interpretation, if correct, would seem to bear out the theory of modern sociologists who derive from the conditions leading to mass suicides their concept of social disorganization. As

the recorded cases represent only a fraction of actual incidence, we cannot judge the actual frequency per 1,000 per year; we have only a clue to relative frequency from period to period.

Lacking a summary of Iroquois frequency, Wisse (1933, p. 161) assumes that the cases were relatively frequent on the grounds that the great variety of causes, discussed below, is proportional to frequency—as contrasted with but one Winnebago case—and he places the Iroquois, Hurons, and Delaware in column B (second rank) of his fourfold estimate of relative frequencies among primitive peoples, with the Onondagas in column C (Wisse, 1933, pp. 465, 467). Of greater significance, perhaps, would be a future study of the conditions leading to murder, rape, and incest, and the periodic changes in frequency of these counterpart crimes for which suicide might provide the escape.

Breaking the data down by tribes, among the Huron-Iroquois no one tribe has a monopoly of cases. For the periods for which there are data, they usually concern one tribe, and the frequencies by tribes from period to period are similar, excepting the modern Senecas who received intensive investigation, although we suspect that there were many more unrecorded cases among the Hurons about 1648 when the Five Iroquois nations combined to wipe them out. There are 7 plus Huron, 8 Onondaga, 4 generalized Iroquois, 1 Mohawk, and 16 Seneca cases.

Quantitatively, the Huron-Iroquois cases, excluding the four cases of Delaware men and four cases of Algonkin women, show no significant group differences between the sexes; whereas among the Algonkin and Saukteaux women's cases predominate; only men are reported from the Ottawa, and the other eastern woodland groups do not seem to be differentiated along sex lines (Wisse, 1933, pp. 188-182).

We do find interesting group differences between horizontal age grades. There are more than four references to children, whom observers categorize plurally without enumerating individual cases, but it is my impression that they were fewer than adult cases. There are 5 incidents of youths (male and female) and 10 of young men and women, 14 of men and women, and 10 of middle age, and 2 of old men. The toll fell heaviest on the younger men and middle-aged women; the former were liable to be warriors, gamblers, and drunkards, while the latter were liable to desertion and mistreatment, significantly enough about the time that they approached climacteric. Therefore, these female suicides might be interpreted as protests against recognizing the transition from the adult to old-age status when their lovers have given social recognition to their physiological passage.⁴⁰

Our data do not point to any significant relation between full-bloodedness and suicide rate. Rather, suicide rate does not appear

⁴⁰ This interpretation springs from reading Professor Linton's stimulating discussion of Status and Rôle in his *The Study of Man*. (See Linton, 1936, p. 119.)

to increase with dilution, although mixed-bloodedness and culture conflict paralleled each other in the recent Seneca cases. However, we have no accurate measure, including genealogies for the recent generations of Senecas, of the extent of intermarriage; but it is likely that prior to 1700 we are dealing with full-bloods. The Jesuit Relations would be apt to tell us if any of the subjects were children of French fathers. Nevertheless, the question of degree of blood can be a factor preventing full participation in tribal society and, therefore, lead to suicide, as in case 10 of the Tuscarora girl whose parents prevented her marrying a white man, and it is easy to conceive how attitudes toward the children of such a union would not be favorable; but, unfortunately, I have no case of a mix-blood suicide growing out of tribal persecution.

Iroquois suicides as failures in adaptation may be classified accordingly as they fulfill response, avoidance, or recognition-seeking motives.⁴¹ The love-motive, a response mechanism, figures in cases going back to 1635 either as jealousy, revenge of mistreatment, love of the dead, or escape from enforced marriage. Sometimes, several motives combine in a single case: Jealousy is combined with revenge of mistreatment in the type A cases of poisoning; women become jealous of a husband's new mistress and seek revenge through poisoning, as in cases 1, 2, 3, 3a, and 3b among the modern Senecas, and Mohawks, and cases 19 (1672) and 20 (1656) among the Onondagas. The same motive lies behind the suicides of four Delaware men (case 14) mentioned by Heckewelder, and one woman mentioned by Penn, 1680. Jealousy occurs 6 times, and spouse revenge 12 times, being the most frequent type of motive in our records. This is fundamentally an old pattern going as far back as there are records for women's suicides. However, we have no such cases among Huron women, but the love-motive arising out of jealousy and anxiety over betrayed love operates in women's suicides among the Central Algonkian Ojibwa, Sauk, and Ottawa (Wisse, p. 168).

Wisse suggests that the superior position of Iroquois women is a factor in the infrequency of love-motive suicides arising out of anger, jealousy, and anxiety. Actually, there are more cases than he suspected, and my informants have emphasized jealousy and anxiety as the love-motives behind suicides in revenge of mistreatment. The Seneca concept of romantic tragedy views suicide as the final instrument to which an Iroquois woman may resort to bring public opinion upon her errant lover. Thus suicide might be considered the counter-weight opposing desertion in the patterned equilibrium of marriage,

⁴¹ Wisse has grouped the causes of these suicides as: Desire to escape physical suffering, insult or injury, unfaithfulness of loved-ones, and out of love of another; but my own thinking has been largely influenced by W. I. Thomas' concept of the "Four Wishes" (new experience, response, recognition, and security) that lies behind his recent treatment of data from early societies in *Primitive Behavior*, (1937, see especially p. 358), and his earlier essay, *The Configurations of Personality* (1928, pp. 145-148).

focusing an adverse public opinion charged with potential blood revenge, society's unconscious device for administering justice, on the guilty husband.

The motive of revenge for mistreatment extends beyond love affairs to response situations between generations. As early as 1637 among the Hurons (case 22), there are child suicides revenging punishment or parental mistreatment. Children are seldom punished today, and we find the historical explanation of the customary parental attitude in the seventeenth century fear that they might kill themselves by taking a poisonous herb, usually *Cicuta*, or, less often, shoot or hang themselves. Then, the indulgent attitude of Iroquois parents toward their children, whom they seldom punish and then only to throw water in their faces, is the reciprocal of children's potential revenge seeking in the patterned relationship between the end-point statuses of parent and child. Wisse explains child suicides as due partly to fits of anger growing out of personality variables determined before birth. He would, I gather, attribute them to congenital factors (predispositions) plus culturally determined values such as revenge seeking, the result of an attitude of sensitivity to personal injury, a prime Iroquois value from early days forward according to Dablon, Lafitau, and my own field experience. (Wisse, 1933, pp. 171-172; Dablon, 1676, *in* Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 60, p. 287; and Lafitau, 1724, vol. 1, p. 603.)

That children might grow up to mistreat their parents is another stock excuse the Senecas give for not disciplining their children. While it is suggestive that the number of cases where Iroquois adults have maltreated their aged parents is great enough to warrant investigation, we have only two suicides of old Onondaga men in revenge of abuse at the hands of their descendants (case 27, Onondaga, 1682). In one of these cases, the secondary cause was his love for his deceased wife. Here we have the converse of the patterned relationship between parent and child explained above because here the relative statuses have been advanced a generation and the mistreatment reversed. Suicide becomes an escape for the lower and upper generations from the abuse of the middle generation.

The Iroquois love their dead. Whether we read the Jesuit accounts describing the care which the Hurons lavished on their dead ancestors' bones before burying them in huge ossuaries at the Dead Feast, or observe the behavior of modern Senecas during the long wakes preceding burials, or listen to the funeral orator warn the mourners to bury their sorrows in the grave, or hear out the monotonous songs of the Chanters for the Dead, a ceremonial prophylaxis to remove thoughts of the dead from the minds of the living, we discover background materials lending symbolic meaning to early suicides following the death of a near relative. Our four cases come from the seventeenth century. Commencing with the earliest case in the Jesuit

Relations (case 24, Huron, 1635), a Huron kills himself over the death[?] of his wife, and the case of the melanchony young chief who took *Cicuta* over the death of his son (case 23), they end in 1684 with Lahontan's eulogy on the amazing constancy of Huron-Iroquois spouses (case 15). For some of them love of the dead may have been a principal cause, but whether they really thought they could follow the dead to the spirit world is irrelevant to the actual deed which was more likely motivated by a fixation on the dead, bolstered by the Iroquois belief in the compulsive power of the dead over the living. This is seen in a number of modern suicides where murder arising through jealousy suggests the sequence of self-destruction (cases: 5, 6, 7, 8, and 13). Perhaps the Iroquois feel the compulsion which the dead exercise over the living less than they did in the seventeenth century when Lahontan observed the unequivocal case of an Iroquois who killed herself to follow her husband (case 15); but Lahontan explains that this spouse sequence was not obligatory unless the soul manifested its uneasiness in the spirit land by causing the survivor to dream twice within 6 months, in which case the survivor sang the Death Song and went cheerfully. At the present time, the Society of the Chanters for the dead still operates to free the survivor's mind of any compulsion to follow the dead. Spouse suicides were a voluntary pattern condoned during the seventeenth century and successfully circumvented in the twentieth; and our records are incomplete for the eighteenth and nineteenth. Also we are unable to know how many men simply went to war and got themselves killed following the death of a near relative.⁴²

Suicides out of love for the dead are reported also from the Algonkin (case 31, *b* and *c*), Ojibwa, Ottawa, Pottawatomi, and Saulteaux (Wisse, 1933, pp. 166-167).

Suicides to escape enforced marriage are uncommon with the Iroquois, although they are reported from the Algonkin tribe (case 32) and possibly the Seneca (case 18, 1672). Among the Iroquois, the mothers arranged the marriages, divorce was easy, and remarriage regular. Probably, as Wisse suggests (1933, p. 170), the lack of such cases reflects the more favorable position of the Iroquois woman. Enforced marriages are certainly not consonant with a strong clan feeling which would resist aggression of outside males, and between clans the mothers attempt to build permanent bonds through effecting workable marriages. However, we have the one Tuscarora case where the family induced a suicide by preventing a desired marriage with an outlander, a white man (case 10). However, suicides to escape marriage were found among the Ojibwa (Catlin, 1841, vol. 2, p. 143) and Delaware (Schoolcraft, 1851-57, vol. 5,

⁴² I am indebted to Dr. Julian H. Steward for this observation.

p. 683); and the seemingly Algonkin lover's leap parallels the Maid of the Mist as a typical trait.

Avoidances, the second general class of causes or motives, embracing desires to escape martyrdom, punishment, or revenge, and suicides of the sick, raise a paradox. In the Eastern Woodlands, as on the Plains and in the Southeast, the regular pattern was for brave warriors to seek glory or death in warfare. This meant that regularly normal men died by torture without fear of death. Yet, the dishonor that attached to being taken captive and the love of freedom and dislike of restraint, that we have seen characterized Iroquois child rearing, led warriors, says Lahontan (1703, vol. 2, pp. 79-80), to kill themselves rather than be taken captive. For this reason, Wisse (1933, p. 161) holds that suicide to escape torture was a secondary motive. Yet some Iroquois individuals did not conform to the norms set for them by their culture and committed suicides to avoid painful deaths. Thus we have an alternative pattern for escaping the traditional definition of the situation—the ideal pattern. We have three cases of Iroquois men who killed themselves from fear of martyrdom: The Iroquois facing torture among the Hurons who attempted to choke himself (case 33, 1639), the Iroquois who dove into the Huron kettle of boiling water, 1647 (case 30), and the cowardly Iroquois who stabbed himself at Quebec, 1692 (case 25). All of these come from the 1600's; there are probably other later cases. We see a similar motive in the Miami who attempted to swallow stones (case 26) and later choke himself, the Algonkin women who drowned or attempted to hang themselves lest they be burnt (case 31), and the Pequots who in despair rushed into their burning houses to avoid capture (DeForest, 1851, p. 133). This type of suicide appears among Iroquois, Algonkians, and Sioux.

The recent type B suicides to escape the consequences of violent murders, either punishment or blood revenge, are the modern variants of the old seventeenth century pattern of avoiding martyrdom by suicide. Cases 6, 7, 8, and 13 all follow the desire to escape revenge, avoid capture, or efface loss of status.

Suicides of the sick parallel the former cases as efforts to avoid or foreshorten a painful death. Here come the many cases from the years of the Huron smallpox epidemics: The sick Huron who had himself stabbed twice, and then swallowed an awl (case 35); and related to these are the suicides of the aged (case 27). This type of suicide seems more common among the Algonkin, Ojibwa, Saukteaux, and Pottawatomi who lived closer to the border of starvation.

Suicides registering a feeling of lost status or recognition that involves the motives of shame and vanity, or a feeling of status or recognition never attained, as in the few cases of chronic misanthropes, are not many among the Iroquois. One might interpret the love-motive

suicides of women who have lost husbands as an expression of lost status, as in the case of the Seneca lover who lost his bride (case 4a). Shame is a motive in the case of the horse thief (case 7); the murderer of Mary Jemison's son (case 13); and in two early cases, the Onondaga ambassador (case 29), 1648, and the melancholy Huron who gambled away the family wampum (case 34). Vanity appears also in the latter cases. Melancholia induced by drunkenness operated in the recent case 8a of the Seneca sachem. Gamblers committed suicide in Connecticut (DeForest, pp. 16, 17), and melancholy seems to have been a cause with the Algonkin, while shame was a motive with the Ojibwa, Ottawa, and Delaware (Wisse, 1933, pp. 172-174). This type of suicide is hardly typical of the Iroquois, at least in the light of the present evidence.

Wisse (1933, pp. 174-175) has summarized the motives with some overlapping and has given their distribution by tribes. Taking his data together with ours, the following tribes furnish one or more illustrations of suicides recognizing lost status—wounded pride, injured honor, jealousy, and vanity (Wisse holds that loss of self-esteem leads to revenge suicides): Micmac, Ojibwa, Ottawa, Sauk, Delaware, Huron, and Iroquois (Mohawk, Onondaga, and Seneca), and Tutelo (Byrd). Avoidances of physical suffering—for reasons of age, sickness, fear of martyrdom or gruesome death, mauling, and hunger—occur among Algonkin, Miami, Pottawatomi, Ojibwa, Saulteaux, Shawnee, Pequots, Huron, and Iroquois (Onondaga and Seneca). Suicides in response to unfaithfulness of love mates (and here Wisse includes love of freedom and enforced marriages as sharing common nobility of feeling), are distributed among Algonkin, Ottawa, Ojibwa, Sauk, Winnebago, Delaware, Shawnee (Voegelin), Ontario [?], Huron, and Iroquois (Mohawk, Onondaga, Seneca, and Tuscarora). These distributions are too widespread to be diagnostic for our purposes. However, Wisse groups Saulteaux, Ojibwa, Ottawa, Huron, and Iroquois cases together in a fourth category because these neighboring tribes share suicides growing out of love for another. I would interpret this as a northern Great Lakes area type motive since two of our four Huron-Iroquois cases are from the seventeenth century Hurons, and we have only one definite Iroquois case, and the custom seems to have gone out of vogue 50 years after the Huron dispersal. It is consistently Iroquoian only inasmuch as it fits their emphasis that the love motive is the only legitimate reason for suicide. The more typically Iroquoian love suicides are those of women who poison themselves to revenge unfaithfulness, a pattern that is continuously distributed over a limited area south from the Iroquois proper among Iroquois (Mohawk, Oneida [?], Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora), Delaware, and Shawnee [?] (Voegelin).

Our cases are about equally divided between poisoning (type A) and violent methods (type B). Our data show 24 instances of poisoning: 10 men and 14 women. We are in doubt what poison 5 used, although 3 of these took herbs; 14, plus-or-minus 2, took *Cicuta*, which seems to have been the favorite with Iroquois women and a few men after 1672; and it was taken by Huron men as early as 1636, with the likelihood of contemporary use among the Iroquois; and 5 took mayapple, but 4 of these were Delaware men. Poisoning offered 14 to 10 odds for women over men, and odds were probably greater because women mentioned plurally are counted once. Byrd reports a Tutelo woman who ate trumpet plant root to protest a hanging (Byrd, 1929, pp. 310-312). Wisse and I are in agreement that poisoning was the most common method among the Huron, Iroquois, and Delaware. The difference in the Iroquois cases is that predominately women killed themselves in this way, and there are relatively few references to men. Lahontan suggests that surviving male spouses took poison, as did Mary Jemison's son's murderer (case 13).

Hanging or strangling is the next favorite method. Our data indicate 12 attempts and 5 failures, of which 3 are cases of Algonkin women (cases 31 a, b, and 32). The four recent Seneca hangings are males, two of whom avoided the consequences of violent crimes (cases 7 and 8); whereas a Miami attempted strangling at Onondaga, 1682 (case 26), and an Onondaga hanged himself to end old age (case 27) causing a stir that points to the rarity of these cases; and we have one isolated Huron case following gambling (case 34). Hanging was a favorite method with the Algonkin tribe and among the Micmacs of the Gaspé (Le Clercq, 1910, p. 247), along with drowning which was similarly uncommon among the Huron and Iroquois: The single Onondaga who plunged into a Huron kettle is hardly typical (case 30). However, three Onondagas and two Hurons facing torture attempted stabbing, one failing, and one Algonkin woman succeeded prior to 1690. After 1690 there are five attempts at shooting, including three failures. In the modern period, knife suicides gave way to gun suicides; perhaps the change was facilitated by the improvement of shorter firearms. These cases are more common later on the Plains. We have only one lover's leap, the Maid of the Mists (case 10), and one male who cast himself under a train (case 6).

"Suicide in any form [is] unknown among the far Northern Algonquians" (Flannery, 1939, p. 132).

If we look to the Southeast for the sources of Iroquois poisonings, we find only Byrd's report of the lone Tutelo King's daughter who ate the root of trumpet plant to protest a hanging and because she feared she might be mistreated as the last of her nation (Byrd, 1929, pp. 310-312). Olbrechts reports suicides as rare but not unknown among the Cherokee who, like their linguistic Iroquoian cousins, find

illness or incurable love troubles principal causes. A suicide causes a tremendous commotion, but there are no especial beliefs connected with the fate of the ghost. Olbrechts (1932, p. 144) could find only three cases, all men. Two shot themselves, and one strangled himself with a rope, while he was told that Cherokee women chewed and swallowed the roots of *Cicuta maculata* L. for 4 days consecutively to put an end to their conceptive abilities. I can well imagine, if there is anything to our Iroquois cases, that they might, as they allege, "become sterile forever" (Olbrechts, 1932, p. 117). Among the Alabama suicides were deprived of burial and thrown into the river; a suicide was considered a coward.⁴¹ Suicides were relatively uncommon among the Chickasaw, according to Cushman, and the rifle was the favorite instrument of death (Swanton, 1928 b, p. 232). The only thing that approaches our northern cases of root poisoning is the custom of lovelorn women drinking "bitter" cassava water in Guiana, and the reports that the natives committed suicide on a wholesale scale at the time of the Spanish conquest (Roth, 1924, p. 560).

Eating wild parsnip root, a species of *Cicuta*, was an accepted mode of committing suicide as far afield to the west as among the Atsugewi, Achomawa, and Surprise Valley Paiute of northeastern California (Voegelin, 1937, p. 456).

There is one other possible relationship with the southeastern custom of murder by administering poison which may have worked its way north to Virginia in the 1600's from the country of the Siouan peoples. The Chitimacha killed enemies by poisoning springs, as did the Indians of Virginia and Carolina, where it was not uncommon for a chief to make way with the heir to his position, if the latter did not please him, by administering a poisonous plant (Swanton, 1928 a, p. 697). However, there are no reports that individuals poisoned themselves, nor have I discovered instances of Iroquois poisoning their enemies.

We are left, then, with the conclusion that suicide by taking a poisonous root is an Iroquois culture trait that we have not succeeded in deriving from any other ethnic group outside of the area in which the Huron-Iroquois Tribes were living in the seventeenth century.

Let us turn to the first question concerning traditional attitudes toward suicide as a value. Modern Senecas consider it a deplorable act and convey the impression that formerly there were fewer cases, but they recall cases of women who poisoned themselves and men who sought violent deaths after murdering someone. Everyone reproaches the murderers but they condone those unsuccessful lovers who succumb to the compulsive attraction of taking waterhemlock. The rich lore surrounding this plant alone attests its long use; considering

⁴¹ Swanton, 1928, p. 397, citing Bossu, *Nouv. Voy.*, vol. 2, pp. 49-50.

cases going back to 1635, its use must be aboriginal. Nevertheless, we have information that suicides sometimes created strong public reaction. When women kill themselves society reacts hostilely by gossiping about the shameful behavior of the deserting lover and takes no action (case 1). While it may react strongly to suicides of murderers and thieves, it is comfortably relieved because it need not take action (cases 5, 6, and 13), and the ultimate suicide merely deepens the initial tragedy. Since Iroquois society values ties of consanguinity above conjugal links, grief attending spiteful child suicides was especially bitter (Lafitau, case 14); and likewise, when housemates and community drunks persecuted two old men to death in the same year (1682), Onondaga village expressed its horror to the relatives and the adopted cabin mates (case 27). One other warrior condemned his fellow's suicide as cowardice for not fulfilling the ideal pattern of stoically enduring martyrdom.

The individual himself manifested varying attitudes toward suicide. He might know all the traditional attitudes against the act, even having heard that it would exclude him from the land of souls, and yet perform the act in the traditional manner when circumstance demanded. Therefore, we cannot take too seriously the theory of a society whose tradition furnishes nicely patterned means for violating its values. Nevertheless, we may inquire whether the belief that souls of suicides are excluded from the land of the dead is aboriginal. Handsome Lake's followers believe the creator has allotted the days each shall live and that suicide will render their souls earth-bound. On the surface one might suspect that this is the mark of early Jesuit teaching, but while I do not deny Christian influence, I think that very likely part of the belief antedates missionary teaching. Cornplanter's version of Handsome Lake's Code devotes half its length to admonishing the people about values that were commonly disregarded in daily life during the prophet's time, 1735-1815, and the balance of the message describes his journey to the sky-world, a traditional type of visionary experience, during which he witnesses rewards reminiscent of the Book of Revelation, which his Philadelphia educated nephews read to him. But the code offers us negative evidence on suicide. The prophet inveighs against behavior that might furnish suicide motives—man deserts wife, man's jealousy of children, wife's mother slanders daughter's husband, wife beating, gossip wife was unfaithful during husband's hunt, polygamy, child punishment, drink, discrediting own child's legitimacy, and unkindness to aged—but he does not treat of suicide directly (Parker, 1913, pp. 30-35). In the later sections, he preaches the concept of allotted life, but does not describe suicides as being punished in the House of Torment (Parker, 1913, pp. 49, 57, 68-73, 107-109). Nevertheless, Edward Cornplanter, Parker's informant, told his son, my informant, that souls of suicides

remain earth-bound, and probably he sometimes included this warning when reciting the code. Mary Jemison narrates that Senecas living along the Genesee in 1817 believed that suicides deprived their souls of good hunting in the land of the dead and excluded themselves from entering cabins where the good and brave warriors dwell. Yet learning this doctrine did not prevent a murderer from ultimately taking *Cicuta* (case 13). The Delawares a generation earlier had no especial prejudices in the matter (case 14). Lafitau, with a century of Jesuit experience behind him, cites suicides that occurred despite the belief that they received differential treatment in afterlife according to manner of death, that souls of suicides were separated from the other souls and had no communication with them (case 16). This belief extends back to the early seventeenth century and can hardly be reconciled with the contemporary belief that surviving spouses could follow their love mates to the land of souls when summoned repeatedly through dreams. However, ethnology no longer tries to resolve all the conflicts in its data because ethnologists have demonstrated that societies often furnish mutually contradictory patterns for the individual to follow. Our own notions concerning the destiny of souls are almost as contradictory as those held by the seventeenth century Iroquois (Wolf, 1919, p. 44). We might expect more variation concerning knowledge of the supernatural than about elements more closely connected with the daily life of the people.

Charlevoix, contemporary of Lafitau, recorded the belief that souls of those who meet violent deaths have no commerce with the rest, that survivors burn or bury the bodies immediately and never lay them in the common burying ground, and allow them no share in the Feast of the Dead (Charlevoix, 1761, vol. 1, p. 192). Bressani's Huron Relation of 1653 was probably Charlevoix's source, for Bressani claims to have more than once seen those who die a violent death burned or buried immediately, and that not even those who freeze to death are removed for subsequent ossuary burial at—

the feast of the dead,—they believing without reason that the souls of those unhappy ones who died miserably either in war, etc. [which probably includes suicides and tortures], have no communication in the other life with the other souls.⁴⁴

Brébeuf, relating in 1636 what the Huron opinion is regarding the nature of the soul here and hereafter, corrects his statement of the previous year.⁴⁵ His 1635 information based on mythology made no mention of punishment or reward in the afterlife, and he concluded that they made no ethical judgments; and they made no distinctions in burying suicides as they had observed in the case of a young man who had poisoned himself to follow his recently deceased wife, a pat-

⁴⁴ Bressani, 1653 (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 39, p. 31).

⁴⁵ Brébeuf, 1635, 1636 (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 8, p. 121; vol. 10, p. 145) (case 24).

tern the Huron condoned in Lahontan's time (1692). But his later report describes souls migrating to a large village toward the setting sun, except souls of small children and weak-limbed aged who remain, unable to make the journey, about old villages to harmlessly bang cabin doors; and each nation has its particular village from which they exclude aliens.

The souls of those who died in war form a band by themselves; the others fear them, and do not permit them entry into their Village, any more than to the souls of those who have killed themselves. [Brébeuf *in* Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 10, p. 145.]

This leaves the souls of suicides without a destination, having no village of their own, a belief that persisted to Mary Jemison's time (1817) and until recently among the Senecas. Therefore, they must remain earth-bound. The Hurons were still living their aboriginal life despite the intermittent efforts of Recollects after 1615 and the sustained efforts of the Jesuits, 1626-50, following Brébeuf's advent among them; and their beliefs about the destiny of souls had been little affected by Christian teaching. The Hurons held two conflicting patterns of thought regarding souls of suicides—that spouse would follow spouse to the spirit world when summoned through dreams, which Huron culture valued above all other portents, and that souls of suicides remained earth-bound, excluded from towns of warriors and ordinary dead in the land of souls.⁴⁶

Catholic doctrine supplemented native beliefs, and the Jesuits sowed the doctrine of sin where natives lacked any especial beliefs about the fate of their souls following suicide. Further, baptism for remission of sins saved the souls of those who, having sinned, confessed and repented. This must have given some comfort to those who desperately poisoned themselves and had misgivings about the fate of their souls (case 21). The fathers used every opportunity to instruct the natives. When a Huron woman felt compassion for a Seneca whom they were torturing (1636) and asked LeMercier if there could be harm in his committing suicide—

The Father instructed them fully upon this point, and showed them that God alone was the master of our lives, and it was for him only to dispose of them; that those who poisoned themselves or made away with themselves by violence committed a grievous sin; and that Saouandanoncoua . . . would lose the fruit of his baptism, and would never go to Heaven, if he hastened by a single moment the hour of his death.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Hewitt came to a similar conclusion (1895, p. 1), but his published statement is ambiguous and misled Wisse (1933, p. 177), while his original manuscript (Misc. Notes relative to the state of the Soul after death, etc., Ms. No. 3638, Bur. Amer. Ethnol.) indicates that Brébeuf and Laftau, whom I have cited, and Sagard and LeJeune were his sources. Following Brébeuf, he states, the war dead as well as suicides "have separate villages, not being allowed to visit the others, since these fear them"; but in compacting Brébeuf, he misquotes him.

⁴⁷ LeMercier, 1637, *in* Thwaites, 1898-1901, vol. 13, p. 59.

This teaching, coming later the same year that Brébeuf wrote, probably consolidated the older Huron belief. It may also date the introduction of the concept that God is the master of lives, a function the Hurons had already ascribed to their cosmological heroes (Hewitt, 1912) which readily attached itself to existing Huron belief, for in 1659 a Huron about to cut his throat recalled the Catholic teaching that man does not control his life and threw away the knife (case 28). By 1677, Cholenec reports how various Mohawks, Onondagas, and Hurons near Montreal have learned in the church to overcome cultural hypersensitivity that formerly led to revenge seeking or suicide (Cholenec in Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 60, pp. 287-289). Jesuit influence supplied religious sanctions to suicides where they were lacking among the Algonkin, as among the Delaware; it clarified Huron-Iroquois thinking by buttressing the ideas of differential status in heaven and the Creator as the controller of life by teaching that God is the master of lives. This may have led to the concept of allotted life and suicide as a sinful act. At any rate, by 1700 spouse suicides had ceased and the frequency of other suicides was lessening.

Conclusions.—An ambivalent Huron-Iroquois attitude toward suicide as a value crystalized into open hostility under Christian teaching. A definite concept of allotted life and exclusion from the land of the dead resulted. The latter belief was aboriginal. Public opinion condemned as cowardice male suicides to avoid physical suffering, such as torture, but condoned cases of women who were mistreated by lovers. The greatest frequency came during the period immediately following white contact when conditions were ripe for social disorganization. We have not found a higher rate of mixblood suicides over fullbloods, nor any appreciable increase in recent years. The principal motive with women was revenge of mistreatment by husbands who deserted them at middle age; children resented restraint, and men sought to avoid physical suffering, either martyrdom or blood revenge; some cases involve loss of status. Poisoning was the favorite Huron-Iroquois method, and *Cicuta* has remained the suicide root during 300 years, with mayapple running a close second; women prefer poisoning and men are more apt to seek violent ends, such as strangling and stabbing, which gave way to shooting after firearms were introduced. Finally, the remarkable fact in Iroquois suicides is not the change that has followed the impact of European cultures but the stability of fundamental suicide patterns throughout the entire period of contact. The same motives, the same methods, and similar beliefs concerning the fate of souls prevail. Danger of capture and torture ceases with the wars, and blood revenge is giving way to white law enforcement on the reservation: The onus is shifted but throughout avoidance remains the dominating motive.

Cases in revenge of mistreatment continue to arise in love-response situations, child suicides are now infrequent, and spouse suicides disappeared by 1700. Pattern then serves as a cultural continuant for custom, antecedents have already defined the situation for the individual, and once a fundamental pattern becomes established it tends to persist despite substitutions within its framework. The unconscious nature of pattern and the illogical character of cultures are shown by the fact that social systems may offer the individual patterns as guides for his conduct that lead to the fulfillment of mutually opposite values.

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1. Jesse J. Cornplanter, Seneca, of the Tonawanda Reservation; author and informant on Seneca customs, wearing the white shirt and sash of a Long House Speaker and the whirling feather headdress of the Senecas. (From frontispiece to Cornplanter's "Legends of the Long House.")



2. Rev. Peter W. Doctor, ex-chief of the Tonawanda Band of Senecas, and one-time pastor of the Presbyterian Church; informant on suicide.



3. Abbie Brooks, Tonawanda Seneca, informant on the unsuccessful attempt of her father's brother.



1. Waterhemlock, *Cicuta maculata* L., "Whitefeather" to the Mohawks, "fatal root" in Iroquois suicides since 1623, growing in a wet pasture near Quaker Bridge, Allegany Reservation, N. Y.



2. Sarah Snow, Seneca herbalist of Quaker Bridge, Allegany Reservation. Her mother's mother took "the root."



1. Kate Debeau (D'Ailleboust), Mohawk herbalist and midwife of Caughnawaga, P. Q.; informant on cases of Mohawk suicide.



2. Simeon Gibson, principal informant on Cayuga-Onondaga dialects and customs at Six Nations Reserve, Ontario.