

No:ia from Deyohahá:ge! In each monthly newsletter, Deyohahá:ge will feature an item from our archive. For January 2018, we share a story from a collection we received from the American Philosophical Society.

“Story #112 as told by Abram Charles (Cayuga Chief, 1863) recorded at Grand River Reserve in August, 1918 by Frederick Wilkerson Waugh in Notebook 8, p. 33 (opposite).”

Title: How Corn Was Obtained

There was (once) a virgin man (*huya'dawa'di'*) who was always generous with his neighbors in the matter of game division. As a hunter he was both industrious and lucky.

He was a middle-aged man and was one of four brothers, so that his parents thought it was time he married. In fact, they spoke to him about it once in a while; but he would always tell them that he could get along very well by himself.

One night they heard him talking, which surprised them greatly, not having seen any one come in. The talking continued for some time and at last they saw a middle-aged woman with a single cob of corn.

In the morning the woman made some soup from this, and some bread, too, although the cob seemed no smaller than before. The old man and his wife were very much pleased with what the woman had prepared, as it was better than meat alone.

They now had corn to plant and gave some to their neighbors, who were delighted. A single stalk of corn, in fact now sometimes bore as many as three ears, so that there was an abundance of the grain.

Some years later one of the virgin man's brothers returned from the hunt very hungry. A small cake, made of some left-over batter, had been placed under the ashes and was nicely cooked when he came in. “This is all I have ready,” said the woman when the brother asked for food.

“The rest is not cooked yet.” The man picked the cake up. “I don't like that kind,” he said, at the same time performing a rather rude or vulgar action to show his contempt of such food.

The woman began to weep and paid no more attention to the meal she was preparing. She was still weeping, in fact, when her husband returned. She didn't answer at first, when asked what was the matter, but presently said, “Your brother has gone too far. He has acted insultingly; so I shall leave and take with me what I brought. This will be unfortunate for the people and I am sorry. My mother sent me here, but I shall have to go. When any of the people come, hereafter, to ask for help, tell them you can do nothing. If the children come, tell them you will try to help them; then you must follow me. You will find my track and will come after awhile to a corn-path in which you will find some women who will say, ‘You've arrived at last; Did the children send you?’ Pay no attention to them, but journey on and you will come to another corn-path – a good one– with a shanty in the middle. That will be where I live and you will find me there.”

The people had laid aside what they thought was enough corn for the winter, but when the woman left she warned them she was going to take it with her; so the strings of corn suspended in the houses began to dry up and the grains to drop off. The same with the beans stored in the bark boxes. The boxes burst and the beans ran out.

In the morning, when the people were ready to prepare corn soup, they found only the cobs left, so they all began to weep, as there was now nothing to eat.

The virgin man made no answer when the people came to beg for corn. A girl came weeping and asking for help, but the man remained silent. Presently some little children entered crying. The man stood up now and said, "I shall try to help you."

He set out and followed the woman's track. In time he came to a corn-patch where he saw some nice-looking women, as he had been told. He went on, however, and came to another corn-patch with a shanty in the middle. He halted and presently a woman came out. Sure enough; It was his wife. "I'm glad you've come," she said. "I saw it all. The children are in trouble."

The man stayed for several nights. She had set before him some good corn bread and soup. It was the first time he had eaten in quite a while, as he had been thinking and grieving over his wife's departure.

The latter now prepared some corn for her husband to take with him, shaking it so as to make it smaller for carrying. "Don't take a rest on the way;" she said, " but try to reach home and leave the corn inside. "

The man took the corn. It was heavy and he was nearly exhausted when he reached his people. The corn became a great heap when he cast it from his shoulders.

The head man called a council of the people who were still left. Quite a number had died, but the rest gave thanks for the corn which had been sent. They shared it up equally, giving some of the ears to each family, and a planting was then made to get more corn.

The man who had been disrespectful to the corn bread had died before his brother returned.

The woman told her husband, before his departure that she was the corn and that she had been sent to them by her mother. She also warned him that no one should do as his brother had done. ¹ "Your people will yet prosper," she said, "if they do as I say. "

The Deyohahá:ge Indigenous Knowledge Centre is located at Six Nations Polytechnic, 2160 Fourth Line, Ohsweken, Ontario. For further information or to comment on this story, please contact us via the SNP CONTACT FORM on our website.

¹) A prohibition against wind-breaking at meal-time is still current.