

Tom Kindness, One of the Last of the Mohegans (c. 1905)

The following article, which was found in an old scrapbook, appears to have been printed in an out-of-town newspaper. Although the article is undated, extrinsic evidence suggests that it was published c. 1905.

Mrs. Ada M. Peck of Waterville, cooperating with the Oneida County Home Bureau in securing data for the historic pageant to be presented at county fair, Rome, August 29, 30 and 31st, retells the story of Tom Kindness, one of the last of the Mohegans, as follows:

"Tom Kindness was one of the last of the Mohegans and lived in the Brotherhood reservation, where his prepossessing manner and quick wit as a lad attracted the attention of a wealthy white resident of the vicinity, who persuaded the chief to let him take him into his family with a view to educating him and settling him upon his majority. Tom was unusually quick at his books, active at work, or play, apt at repartee and everybody's favorite, and, withal, quite a dandy. The worthy gentleman whose protegee he was, quite boasted of his ready adaptation to civilized customs and his liking for church-going. But the oracle of the neighborhood laughed incredulously, 'You only think he's tamed,' he said, and sure enough, after a while, the old leaven began to work. Tom would go for a half-day's fishing bringing home his spoils - then for a day's hunting, and later, for two or three days' camping at the reservation, and, finally, upon being remonstrated with, left the home of his adoption and joined his dusky brethren. Meantime, the vast timber land was being cleared, the foot of civilization had reached Brothertown, and finding the red man an obstacle in her path moved him on to Green Bay. Tom was then middle aged and clung to the scenes of his youth rather than follow the fortunes of the Six Nations to the north; beginning a vagrant life, going from house to house, working a little now and then at making and mending baskets and putting rush bottoms in chairs, spending, unfortunately, the small sums thus earned in drink. Vestiges of his early training always remained, but while he was effusively polite, laughably so, he quite as often delighted to shock and tease.

" 'How will you take your tea, Tom?' asked the hired girl.

" 'Kindly serve it stark naked, madam, if you please,' Tom would answer with a bow and a flourish, while the girl would bridle and blush and set the immodest beverage down with a jerk. But when the wags tried to get the better of Tom they found themselves at fault. One time in particular, they met with discomfiture. It was when Tom - who when in a state of semi-intoxication imagined himself an animal - pranced up in front of the village harness shop.

" 'Tom thinks he's a horse today. Let's have some fun with him,' said the loungers. Tom whinneyed and pawed while they proceeded to harness him, meaning to drive him up and down the sidewalk. They had hung two fine strings of bells around his neck and were about to put on a headstall, when he slipped out of the door, pranced gaily down the street, and before they could overtake him ran to a neighboring settlement, where he sold the bells and spent the money for liquour, leaving the would-be wags to divide the loss among them.

Objectionable as Tom's habits were, he was yet an object for pity and sympathy - poor, old, without

kindred, almost the last of his tribe and an alien in the beautiful, fertile country where the Brothertown Indians once had happy homes. In these later days the children of the family would gather around him while he related marvelous hunting tales and fashioned them hickory bows of wonderful strength and pliability, and feather-trimmed arrows that always hit the mark. The attitude of respect which the youngsters bore toward him was a mystery to their elders until one of them indignantly explained - 'Why, Tom isn't living with us, we're living with him.' 'These,' declared the boy, pointing to the magnificent forests and fields of waving grain, 'was his and his'n till we stole 'em.'

Nor had the good seed sown in his early life fallen upon entirely barren soil, for it was found that Tom cherished the little Bible 'Miss Lydia' had given him, and bore a fragrant memory of grandmother's earnest exhortations and beautiful prayers. And when he passed over to the happy hunting grounds, where we trust he found no reservation, there were not wanting kind offices to sooth his last hours or kind hand to make him ready for the journey. The boys treasured in after-years the bows and arrows he made them and taught the next generation the wood-craft he had taught them - just how to set a mink trap, how to climb a bee-tree and train a fox hound."

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