

1086



WITCHCRAFT SENTENCE OF THE BELLE OF THE ONONDAGAS



SUSPECTED After the Illness of Her Husband, a Carlisle Football Star, She Was Convicted at the Weird "Sick Feast" and Has Lived Since an Outcast, Failing in Health and Broken Hearted



Isaac Lyons, Indian Right Guard

(Copyright, 1911, by The New York Herald Co. All rights reserved.)

DO you believe in witches? One reads of the burning of the witches at Salem and wonders if historians were accurate in the portrayal of the shameful events that transpired in the early Massachusetts colony.

English history, particularly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is replete with blood curdling tales of the hundreds of innocent women and girls who were burned at the stake because the English judges, with their limited knowledge of the world, look not without interest, but with considerable scepticism, upon the weird creatures of Shakespeare's imagination as they stalk about the cauldron rasping out their fiendish

"Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble."

All these things you will say are ancient history, even if they are founded more or less directly upon fact, and you rather doubt that, too. To the average mind they are merely relics of a forgotten age. In a measure that is true, but there is being enacted to-day within a stone's throw of the city of Syracuse, with its unexcelled educational and religious institutions, a tragedy equal to the most revolting of Cotton Mather's days.

In a little cabin, partly secluded by an overhanging bank of trees and shrubbery, nearly a mile from the centre of population of the reservation of the Onondaga nation of the Iroquois Indians, there sits Lillian Bigknife, alone, save for a pet dog and her mother and grandmother, who visit her occasionally.

Once the most popular and most beautiful woman on the reservation, all her friends have turned their backs upon her. Her clear, bronze skin has been stamped with a thousand tiny wrinkles, for just as the streams wear their miniature canyons down the hillside, so worry and grief have furrowed her brow.

Driven almost to desperation by the taunts of her former friends and even her relatives, the Belle of the Onondagas, accused of being a witch, in that she had brought upon her husband, Isaac Lyons, the famous Carlisle football player, the illness which now keeps him confined to the Hospital of the Good Shepherd, in Syracuse, is rapidly losing her beauty, her wealth and her influence among her tribesfolk.

Indian cunning has not been content, however, to rest upon the pointed finger and the leering grin as a punishment for her witchery; they have inveigled her into drinking poisonous fluids and eating tainted food.

"She shall die before her husband does," they said when she was pronounced a witch, and every man, woman and child on the reservation is bound by the customs of thousands of years to hasten, each in his own way, her death.

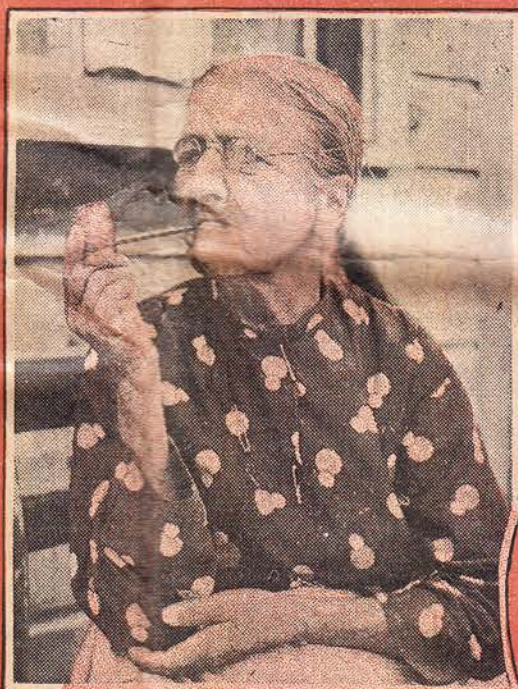
On one side there is the influence of the Church, schools, books and the example of their white neighbors, but on the other hand there is the superstition of ages, the impregnable belief in the supernatural, which is the one great, undiminished heritage of the red man.

Long before the white man ever set foot on American soil the Indians held their "sick feasts" and their "dead feasts." A hundred years of Christianity and modernism has only succeeded in removing the outward appearance of barbarism. Under the well tailored clothes of the modern Indian, the same old superstitions still throbs the heart of the savage, and it needs only the madening, diabolical shriek of the "false face medicine man" to brush aside the newly acquired, superficial culture and leave him as he was in the days of Hiawatha, an easy prey for everything and anything that smacked of the supernatural.

Two years ago Isaac Lyons returned from Carlisle. Standing well over six feet in his moccasined feet, broad of shoulder and spare of limb, he was a physique of which he had every reason to be proud. Compared with his neighbors, he was wealthy. The brother of Jesse Lyons, one of the chiefs of the Onondagas, he was a man of influence in the tribe. At Carlisle he had won honors in scholarship and athletics. For two years he played guard on the famous eleven that defeated the college teams of the country.



LILLIAN BIGKNIFE



One of the Aged Women of the Tribe



Rev. Louis Bruce

morning his condition was much worse. His fever was high and a heavy, dull pain had settled in his chest.

Trial of the "Witch."

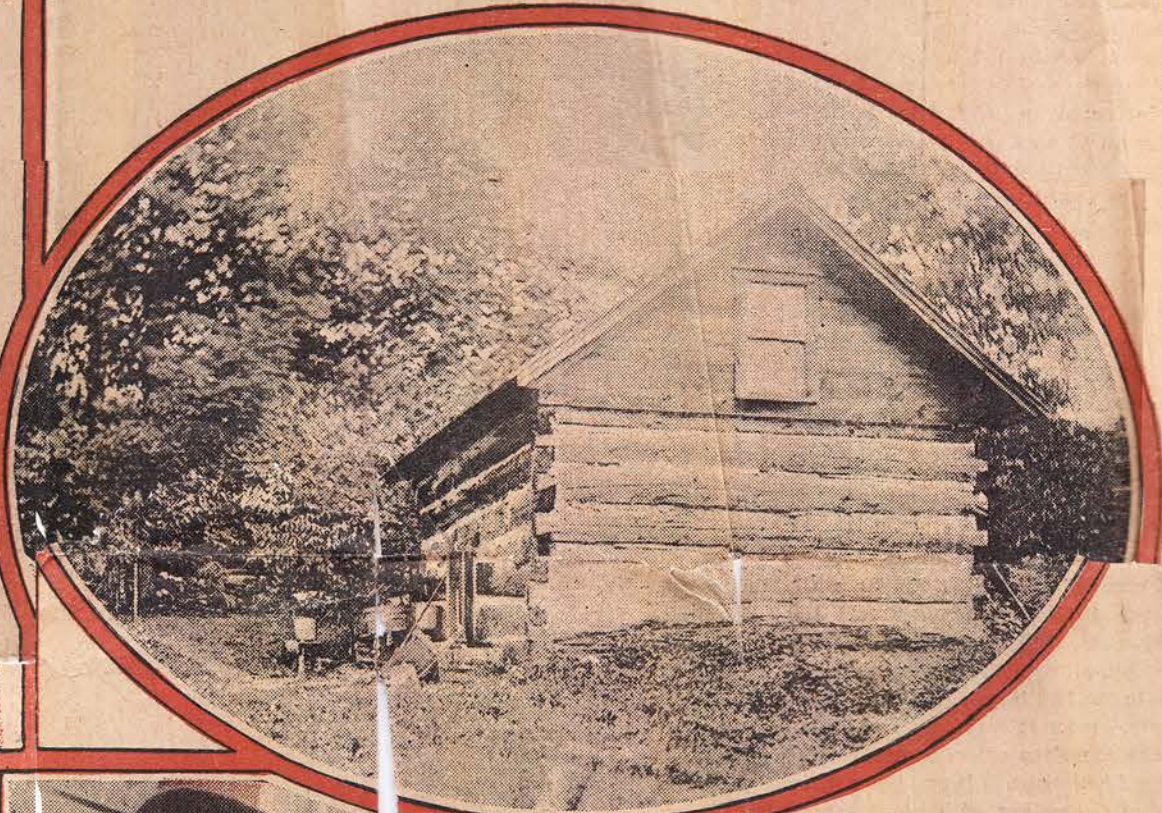
Dr. S. Ellis Crane, of East Onondaga, the official Indian physician, was summoned, but before he arrived it was arranged to hold a "sick feast." It has never been discovered who suggested it, and the names of the men and women actively engaged in the performance of the barbarian rite have never been disclosed. Realizing that the punishment meted out to the tale bearer is a terrible one, the few Indians who are in possession of the facts have maintained an impenetrable silence.

There is but little doubt in the minds of the officials who have investigated the case that Enoch Scenandoah, one of the most famous medicine men in the East, was in charge of the ceremonies. The Rev. Louis Bruce, pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Mission at the reservation, has conducted a personal investigation, and he is certain that Scenandoah officiated.

body from side to side slowly, the meter of his prayer. As he progressed his voice was raised and the assistants began to sing time with the motion. Soon the monotone was raised to a more casual pause, during which the medicine man, the rocking in the bowl a light powder consisting of various herbs and roots thoroughly dried and pulverized. No secret was made of the fact that the powder was poison.

As the substance was sprinkled over the water the moaning began anew and with added vigor. Soon there was another pause while one of the assistants poured into the bowl the contents of a vial which she had secreted about her person. This, too, was accompanied by a prayer. There were several such pauses, during each of which something was added to the mixture. The doleful wailing, with now and then an ear splitting shriek, continued for nearly an hour, until the medicine man held up his hand for silence.

Throwing into his voice all the dramatic force at his command—and these Indian medicine men are wonderful elocutionists if nothing else—he turned to the first person on his left and asked:—



Log Cabin Where "Sick Feast" Was Held

"What do you see in the vessel?"

The same question was put to each person in the room, and the answer was always the same:—

"I see 'hundatna' (witch)."

"What part of the witch do you see?" was asked of each one, and each answered:—

"The face and hair."

There was a moment's pause.

"Whose face is it?" asked Scenandoah, pointing to the bowl.

Solemnly each one pronounced the name of Lillian Bigknife, wife of Isaac Lyons.

With a parting word to the invalid, who was too ill to be aroused even by the conduct of the medicine man, the company left the house, taking with them the brass vessel and the fluid.

In the brief hour that had elapsed Lillian Bigknife had been accused, tried and convicted of being a witch. No opportunity was given her to appear in her own behalf, because the Indian says that there can be no miscarriage of justice at a medicine feast.

By that ceremony, which to the alien eye could not but appear farcical, the fate of Lillian Bigknife was sealed. No punishment could be too cruel now, no treatment too severe.

"Her husband will look upon her grave," they said, and then turned about to make good the prediction.

The moment the medicine man left the house the persecution of Lillian Bigknife had begun. As soon as Dr. Crane examined the young athlete he ordered him removed to the hospital. His ailment was diagnosed as typhoid-pneumonia, aggravated by intestinal disorders.

He was discharged from the hospital about two weeks ago and went directly to the home of his brother, Emmett, at the Reservation. He was not entirely recovered. Chief Harry Jacobs, a prominent man in Onondaga, averred that Lillian Bigknife was at the trolley line station when her husband arrived but that he paid no attention to her whatever and got into the carriage with his brother and drove away. But some friends of the unfortunate Indian beauty believe that he will be eventually restored to health and that all will be well with him and Lillian.

It needed no formal announcement or special meeting at the council house to inform the reservation that Lillian Bigknife was a "witch." The whispered word, the sly look, the covert glance as the young woman passed were sufficient.

Within an hour a hundred young men and women who before had been all too glad to offer her their hand in cordial welcome, had turned their backs upon her. Her neighbors, who before had been frequent callers at her little cabin, dropped their eyes and averted their heads as she passed. Even her cousins looked at her with eyes that said all too plainly, "You have visited the cave of the witches in

But little has ever been written about the history and origin of the "sick feast." When the nature of the malady with which a person affected is known the medicine man and his attendants, all attired in the "ga gun sa," or masks, go to the room of the sick man, and after a generous feast is served they endeavor by their chanting and praying to drive away the particular witch that brought about the illness.

The masks are of grotesque shape and painted to resemble the principals in the Indian fairy stories. It is thought that these masks and the prayers drive away the witches. There are never any serious consequences to the "sick feast" when the disease is recognized, but when, as in the case of Isaac Lyons, the medicine men are unable to account for any of the symptoms and the malady does not come under their limited category of ailments, it is necessary to ferret out and name the particular witch responsible for the illness.

When Scenandoah and his assistants held the "sick feast" in Isaac Lyons' room a large brass bowl was placed upon the floor. Seated about it were the practitioners.

Holding up his hand in a gesture that brought silence, which was broken only by the intermittent moaning of the invalid, the medicine man began slowly to chant a monotonous strain. As he sang he rocked his

(CONTINUED ON PAGE TEN.)

COVER

*Readmitted**1086*

NAME.

TRIBE.

PARENT OR GUARDIAN.

DATE ENROLLED.

TERM.

AGE.

HOME ADDRESS.

DATE OF RECORD

ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT.

INDUSTRIAL DEPARTMENT.

DORMITORY.

OUTING

SPECIAL REMARKS.

ROOM
NO.

Scholarship

Conduct.

Shop.

Ability.

Conduct

Room
No.

Neatness

Conduct.

Ability.

Conduct.

*Jan. '09**Home*

[illegible]

Months in school before Carlisle,

Grade entered at Carlisle, *Special*

Grade at date of Discharge,

Trade or Industry,

Church, *Methodist*

Miles to sch.

Special

Trade or Industry.

Methodist

miles to sch.

[illegible]

Church,

CARLISLE INDIAN INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL.
DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL RECORD OF STUDENT.

[illegible]

Months in school before Carlisle.

Grade entered at Carlisle,

Grade at date of Discharge,.....

Trade or Industry,

Church.

1086

BRIEF.

APPLICATION OF

FOR THE ENROLLMENT OF

Isaac Lyon

IN THE INDIAN SCHOOL AT

CARLISLE, PENNSYLVANIA

NAME OF AGENCY FROM WHICH PUPIL CAME:

Date of enrollment, *Sept. 2*, 190*7*

Term of enrollment, *Three* (*3*) years.

NAME OF COLLECTING AGENT:

Position,

APPLICATION FOR ENROLLMENT IN A NONRESERVATION SCHOOL

(For a child enrolled at an Agency.)

For and in consideration of the Government of the United States assuming the care, education, and maintenance in the United States Indian School at Carlisle, Pa.

of Isaac Lyon ; Male ; date of birth Mar 14, 1879 ;
(Name of child.) (Sex)
Onandaga
(Tribe.)

NAME OF FATHER. (Both Indian and English.)	Living or Dead	TRIBE	BAND	DEGREE OF INDIAN BLOOD.
<u>Bill Lyon</u>	<u>Dead</u>	<u>Onandaga</u>		<u>full</u>
NAME OF MOTHER.				
<u>Martha Lyon</u>	<u>Living</u>	<u>"</u>		<u>"</u>

I, Isaac Lyon, do hereby voluntarily consent and agree to
(Parent, guardian, or next of kin.)
 enrollment in said school for a period of three years, and also obligate myself to abide by all
(Not less than 3.)
 the rules and regulations for Indian schools.

The said child has been enrolled in the following schools:

NAME OF SCHOOL.	DATE OF ENROLLMENT.	DATE OF DISCHARGE.	CAUSE.	GRADE.
1. <u>Carlisle,</u>				
2.				
3.				
4.				

Isaac Lyon
(Parent, guardian, or next of kin.)

P. O. address:

Syracuse
N Y

Two witnesses:

George Thomas
Levi Hill

PHYSICIAN'S CERTIFICATE.

I hereby certify that I have this day carefully examined the above-named child herein proposed for transfer and find him to be in proper physical condition to attend school, and not afflicted with tuberculosis or any disease which would be a menace to the health of other pupils.

This 9 day of Oct., 1907

J. Shoemaker M.D.

Physician at Carlisle Ind. Sch. Agency.

CERTIFICATE OF AGENT OR BONDED SUPERINTENDENT.

I hereby certify that the statements made in the foregoing application and certificate, to the best of my knowledge and belief, are true; that the consent of _____
(Parent, guardian, or next of kin.)
was voluntary, and I recommend the transfer of the said child.

This _____ day of _____, 190 _____

Agent or Superintendent.

SPECIAL NOTE.

This form must be executed in duplicate when a child is transferred from a reservation to a nonreservation school. The Superintendent of the nonreservation school will retain the original for his files, and the duplicate shall be deposited in the Agency records. The agent will then send to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs his certificate as provided by law. All the blanks must be properly filled in every case.

NOTE

Age limits, fourteen to twenty years. Preferably fourteen to eighteen. Students must be at least one-fourth Indian, preferably full Indian. Special cases beyond the age limit will be given consideration. An industrial course only can be taken and the term reduced to three years, in exceptional cases.

INDORSEMENTS

The laws relating to the transfer of Indian children from reservations and schools are as follows:

That hereafter no Indian child shall be sent from any Indian reservation to a school beyond the State or Territory in which said reservation is situated without the voluntary consent of the father or mother of such child if either of them are living, and if neither of them are living without the voluntary consent of the next of kin of such child. Such consent shall be made before the agent of the reservation, and he shall send to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs his certificate that such consent has been voluntarily given before such child shall be removed from such reservation. And it shall be unlawful for any Indian agent or other employee of the Government to induce, or seek to induce, by withholding rations or by other improper means, the parents or next of kin of any Indian to consent to the removal of any Indian child beyond the limits of any reservation. (28 Stats., p. 906.)

Provided, That hereafter no Indian child shall be taken from any school in any State or Territory to a school in any other State against its will or without the written consent of its parents. (29 Stats., p. 348.)

The rules provide that—

A pupil who has been regularly enrolled in a nonreservation school must not be taken to any other nonreservation school without the consent of both Superintendents and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and Superintendents will be held to strict accountability for such pupils taken to their schools.

An Indian boy or girl 18 years old and over may, without the consent of parents or others, personally sign the application form on its being changed to suit the case.

This form is to be used only in transfers from reservations or Indian schools to nonreservation schools.

Isaac Lyon.

PRESENT NAME

1086

August 8, 1910.

Mr. Isaac Lyon
Syracuse, N. Y. RFD #5
Dear friend:-

Although I have been much pleased with the results of my efforts to learn what the graduates and ex-students of this school are doing at the present time, there are still quite a number about whom I have not heard.

I enclose herewith a list containing the names of the Onondago students who have at some time attended the Carlisle School. Please give me the information asked thereon and return the list in the enclosed envelope which requires no stamp.

I will appreciate a prompt reply from you.

Very truly yours

Superintendent.

NRD-Inc.

RECEIVED BY
UNITED STATES INDIAN SCHOOL
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

