

## OJIBWA FEATHER SYMBOLISM

W J MCGEE

Among the most trustworthy sources of information relating to the Ojibwa Indians are the writings of Kahkewaquonaby, better known as Reverend Peter Jones; these writings comprise some twenty-five titles noted in Pilling's Bibliography of the Algonquian Languages. According to his autobiography,<sup>1</sup> Kahkewaquonaby was born "at the Heights of Burlington bay, Canada West," January 1, 1802.<sup>2</sup> He died June 29, 1856. His grandfather migrated from Wales to New York prior to the Revolution; his father, Augustus Jones, studied land surveying in New York city, and during later life was employed as King's Deputy Provincial Surveyor in Upper Canada. His duties brought him in contact with the Algonquian tribes; and he learned their language and married, by native rites, Tuhbenahneequay, daughter of Wahbanosay, a chief of the Mississauga group of the Ojibwa tribe. Constantly engaged in surveys and attendant journeys, Surveyor Jones left his family with the tribe; and the mother long remained a pagan, while the children were taught to gain the approbation of the manitos and thereby to become successful hunters. In his youth Kahkewaquonaby blackened his face with charcoal and fasted "in order to obtain the aid of personal gods or familiar spirits," and attended the native feasts and dances; for more than fourteen years he "lived and wandered about with the Indians in the woods." In early childhood he was christened in accordance with the tribal custom, which he describes as follows:

When I was young a grand feast was made for the purpose of giving me an Indian name, and of dedicating me to the guardian care of some particular god, according to the Indian fashion. I was then named Kahkewaquonaby, which literally means "sacred waving feathers," and re-

<sup>1</sup> Life and Journals of Kah-ke-wa-quo-nä-by: (Rev. Peter Jones,) Wesleyan Missionary. Published under the direction of the Missionary Committee, Canada Conference. — Toronto: Published by Anson Green, at the Wesleyan Printing Establishment, King street east. 1860.

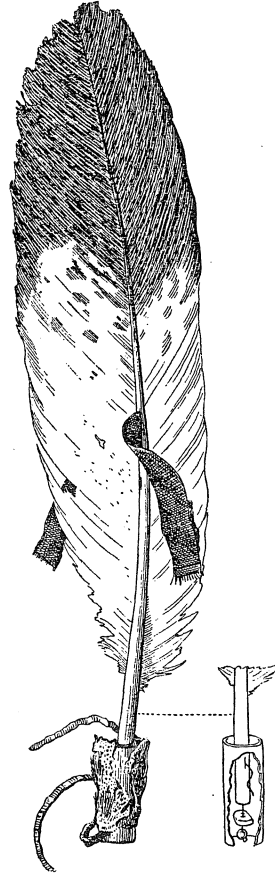
This work is exceedingly rare; it was not seen by Pilling, whose title contains two or three trifling typographic errors.

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fers to feathers plucked from the eagle, the sacred bird. By this name I was dedicated to the thunder god; the eagle being considered by the Indians the representative of the god of thunder. At this feast I was presented with a war club and a bunch of eagle's feathers, which I was to

keep as a memorial of my dedication, the club denoting the power, and the feathers the flight of the god of thunder. \* \* \*

My grandfather, Chief Wahbanosay, officiated at this feast, and gave me my name, which belongs to the Eagle Totem, clan or tribe, it being that to which my mother belonged.



Kahkewaquonaby had the misfortune to lose his plume for a time, as indicated in his autobiography; but it was subsequently recovered and passed into the custody of his seventh son, Kahkewaquonaby (Junior), or Peter Edmund Jones, M.D., of Hagersville, Ontario,<sup>1</sup> who inherited also the paternal suit of buckskin ornamented with porcupine quills and decorated with the eagle totem, as well as the war club and other paraphernalia. Dr Jones has preserved these articles as sacred heirlooms and priceless records of the past; and on coming to Washington recently he carried them with him, and has been photographed in the full regalia of his clan and tribe as handed down by his distinguished sire.

The titular plume and the feather head-dress are significant as representing a symbolism akin to that of various other aboriginal tribes, including the Ponka.<sup>2</sup> The feathers have suffered somewhat from handling and from the attacks of moths, but are otherwise in excellent condition, the plume being preserved in a carved wooden case made for the purpose.

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<sup>2</sup> *American Anthropologist*, vol. xi, 1898, page 156.

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