

KENNEKUK, THE KICKAPOO PROPHET

GEORGE A. SCHULTZ

IF THEY thought about it at all, most Americans in the early 19th century, believed the Great Plains to be a most inhospitable region, probably much of it desert. The decision by the United States government in 1830 to remove the Eastern Indians beyond the borders of Missouri and the Arkansas territory focused attention on that part of the Plains and quickly dispelled the desert myth. The coming of the emigrant tribes generated a flurry of activity. Surveyors, agents, commissioners, soldiers, and missionaries crossed and recrossed what is now eastern Kansas and Oklahoma where a few years before the white man had cast only a passing shadow.

Of all those who came in the 1830's none achieved a quicker fame than an Indian prophet of the Kickapoo tribe by the name of Kennekuk. Kennekuk brought with him an interesting amalgam of Indian and Christian religious precepts and at the height of his career claimed about 400 Kickapoo and 100 Pottawatomie followers. Travelers and missionaries beat a path to the Kickapoo reservation west of Fort Leavenworth to see this "Indian Mahomet." Travelers came out of curiosity, missionaries to entice Kennekuk into their fold and, they hoped, add his converts to their meager rolls. More often than not, Kennekuk used the missionaries to his own advantage. One "lady preacher" came away a believer, convinced that the prophet received audible messages from heaven.

According to Kickapoo traditions Kennekuk was born near the present site of Danville, Ill., probably in the late 1790's. In his early years he was commonly known as the "Drunkard's Son."¹ As his religious system evolved, Kennekuk added and discarded various concepts and beliefs, but one principle remained constant—total abstinence from the white man's

liquor. It can be inferred perhaps that this was a reaction to traumatic childhood experiences.

Kennekuk in developing his religion displayed an adaptability that had long been characteristic of the Indians. Before the coming of the white man the Indian developed forms of religion to fit his changing needs. Then came successive waves of European migration and upheaval. Established ceremonies no longer provided an order for the Indian's world. In these circumstances prophets arose who offered quick solutions. Some like Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee prophet, advocated a return to old ways, a sloughing off of everything that had been taken on from the white man. Others like Kennekuk, Handsome Lake, and Wowada combined old Indian customs with Christian ethical ideas in varying degrees with the hope of reestablishing clan and family controls. Kennekuk worked out a religion with a greater Christian content than most.

Although Kennekuk was accused of having stolen most of his ideas from the Methodists, there is a stronger strain of Roman Catholicism in his system, probably a result of earlier contacts with Roman Catholic traders and trappers. But there is also evidence that he was influenced by the teachings of Indian spiritual leaders such as the Shawnee and Delaware prophets who preached to the Kickapoos in their day. It is known that Kennekuk became a convert to Methodism in the early 1820's. He was apparently too old for the usual mission school education, hence he remained essentially illiterate. Somehow he secured a license to preach in the Methodist Church and this seems to have launched him on his religious career.²

Kennekuk had achieved a position of prominence with the "Timber" band of Kickapoos before he became a preacher. He was a signator

1. Milo Custer, "Kannekuk or Keeanakuk, the Kickapoo Prophet," *Journal of the Illinois Historical Society*, Springfield, v. 11 (April, 1918), p. 48.

2. Jerome C. Berryman, "A Circuit Rider's Frontier Experiences," *Kansas Historical Collections*, v. 16 (1923-1925), p. 216; Wade Crawford Barclay, *Early American Methodism, 1769-1884* (2 vols., New York, 1960), v. 2, pp. 168, 183.

of one of two treaties by which the Kickapoos, in 1819, ceded their lands in Illinois and Indiana for a new reserve on the Osage river in Missouri.³ Most of the Kickapoos were eager to escape the influx of white settlement and moved shortly thereafter, but two bands held on, Kennekuk's and one led by Masheena. The two bands were completely dissimilar. Masheena's followers were diehard fanatics who subsisted largely on banditry.⁴ Kennekuk's band incorporated those Kickapoos who since the War of 1812 had displayed a willingness to come to terms with the white man and give up hunting and war for agriculture. His band was further enlarged by religious converts including some Pottawatomies who moved in with the Kickapoos and intermarried with them. By 1830 Kennekuk had collected over 300 tribesmen. Whatever their motives for joining the band, they were clearly out of the mainstream of Kickapoo tradition which based status on scalps and war. Of all Algonquin tribes, the Kickapoos had been most hostile to any authority the French, British, or Americans tried to impose.⁵

Kennekuk achieved considerable notoriety among white settlers in Illinois. What they thought most remarkable was the temperance of his followers. This was not easily obtained but Kennekuk was prepared to use physical force. He and a few trusted colleagues patrolled the roads leading to their encampment. They searched the effects of fellow tribesmen returning from nearby towns and confiscated all liquor, pouring it on the ground before disbelieving eyes.⁶ Their curiosity aroused, some white residents in Danville asked to be allowed to listen to one of his sermons when he was camped in the vicinity. A local merchant, a former fur trader who could speak Kickapoo, acted as interpreter. He repeated each sentence while another resident wrote it down. The sermon was published and hence preserved for posterity. It has a lilting poetic quality with little specific Christian content and no reference to explicit Christian doctrines. It is a simple moralistic homily on good and evil in

which Kennekuk urged his listeners to follow the straight and narrow path and not the broad way of "professed drunkards, tattlers, liars and meddling bodies." The thrust of the message was the Great Father's love, a knowledge that all could have without benefit of books.⁷

At this juncture in his career Kennekuk gave every indication of being a solid Christian citizen. The Methodists were obviously satisfied and the Baptists were impressed especially when he sought the counsel of Isaac McCoy, a veteran Baptist missionary to the Pottawatomies.⁸ But it is also clear that Kennekuk was creating a new kind of religion based increasingly on direct special revelations from the Great Spirit. Fortunately, the Great Spirit revealed that he sided with Kennekuk in his determination to cling to aboriginal lands.

Kennekuk was a master at the art of delay and held out against removal for 14 years. William Clark, the superintendent of Indian affairs, became more and more frustrated in his attempts to remove the Kickapoo remnant from Illinois. Masheena's band no longer posed a problem. Some of Masheena's warriors thought that the band should support Black Hawk, a Sac chief, in his endeavors to recover tribal lands. Masheena was opposed so a large part of his band drifted away to Black Hawk's camps on the Rock river.⁹ Masheena joined Kennekuk, and became a convert to his religion, albeit a reluctant one at first.¹⁰ Removing Kennekuk's band was more complex. He had ingratiated himself with the white population in the immediate vicinity so there was not the usual pressure from that source. Year after year Clark reminded Kennekuk of the treaty obligations of 1819 which he never disputed, but somehow the time was never quite right. There were still many "drunkards and bad men" to be converted. He wanted all of his band to go and was afraid that some would stay behind unless the reformation was complete.¹¹ On the one hand Kennekuk kept reassuring Clark that he was doing all that was humanly possible to

7. Henry E. Hamilton, ed., *Incidents and Events in the Life of Gurdon S. Hubbard* (Chicago, 1888), pp. 164-168.

8. Isaac McCoy, *History of Baptist Indian Missions* (Washington, 1840), p. 456.

9. Gibson, *Kickapoos*, pp. 86-87.

10. Milo Custer, "Masheena," *Transactions of the Illinois Historical Society for the Year 1911* (Pub. No. 16), pp. 118-119.

11. "Copy of a Speech Delivered by Ka-a-no-kuk, the Kickapoo Prophet Gen. Clark, May 18, 1828," National Archives, Office of Indian Affairs, St. Louis Superintendency, "Letters Received," Microcopy 234, Roll 748.

3. Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties* (3 vols., Washington, 1913), v. 2, pp. 184-185.

4. John Tipton to Lewis Cass, October 31, 1823, *The John Tipton Papers*, comp. and ed. by Glen A. Blackburn, Nellie A. Robertson, and Dorothy Riker (3 vols., Indianapolis, 1942), v. 1, pp. 323-324.

5. A. M. Gibson, *The Kickapoos: Lords of the Middle Border* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), p. 88.

6. Custer, "Kennekuk," p. 49.



Kennekuk (ca. 1785-1853), the Kickapoo prophet who at the height of his career claimed about 400 Kickapoo and 100 Pottawatomie followers, preached an interesting amalgam of Indian and Christian religious precepts. Missionaries and others beat a path to the Kickapoo reservation west of Fort Leavenworth to see this "Indian Mahomet," the missionaries coming with the hope of enticing Kennekuk into their fold and thus adding his followers to their church rolls.

influence his tribesmen to move. On the other he argued against moving at all. The Great Father in Washington had long insisted that the white man's civilization was the only salvation for the Indians. Kennekuk's band had adopted this civilization, so why should they move.

The situation became embarrassing for Clark. His superiors in Washington demanded explanation for the delay.¹² The governor of Illinois was growing impatient and urged Clark to use force.¹³ Clark was convinced that peaceful coercion would work. As the pressure mounted Kennekuk was repeatedly called to St. Louis to explain the need for yet another extension. He tended to state his case at great length and usually Clark dismissed it as so

12. William Clark to Secretary of War James Barbour, St. Louis, November 15, 1827, *ibid.*

13. Ninian Edwards to Clark, Belleville, Ill., May 25 and June 10, 1828, *ibid.*

much wind. However, on one occasion he reported that Kennekuk made "a very sensible talk, touched as usual with the colours of his fancy, and mysteriously variegated by his divinity—the principal object of which was to obtain permission to remain at this present village until next spring. . . ."¹⁴

Kennekuk's speeches which were recorded in Clark's St. Louis office, reveal a blend of fancy and insight, shrewdness and naivete, bluntness and obsequiousness. They were more than delay tactics, for he genuinely believed that the future stability and unity of his band depended on a more thoroughgoing reformation. He was worried about adjustment to life on the prairies and what would happen when the annuities ran out. At the same time he was aware of the increasing difficulties in Illinois. Depredations against the life and property of his tribesmen were increasing. There could be no retaliation against the whites for he knew the consequences.¹⁵ He was able to place events in a larger perspective and analyze the forces affecting the lives of the Indians and present them succinctly in the form of a chart. Aside from rhetorical allusions such as passing through fire and water and breezy familiarity with the Great Spirit, his explanation indicated a clear realization of the limited possibilities of survival for his own band and Indians in general. Black clouds hung over the whole business pervaded by an apocalyptic sense of doom. His notions of divine stewardship were certainly more advanced than those of Clark.

. . . the Great Spirit has placed us all on this earth; he has given to our nation a piece of land. . . . We ought to live in peace and happiness among ourselves and with you. . . . The Great Spirit told me that no people owned the lands—that all was his, and not to forget to tell the white people that when we went into council.¹⁶

George Catlin, the famous artist of Indian life, visited Kennekuk's band in 1831 when they were camped at the south end of Lake Michigan and there painted a portrait of Kennekuk, Masheena, and several other members of the band. In his notes Catlin described Kennekuk as a shrewd and talented man. He heard an address that the prophet gave to his people assembled in the woods. Although he

14. Clark to Edwards, St. Louis, May 26, 1828, *ibid.*

15. "Ka-a-no-kuk Speech," May 18, 1828, *ibid.*

16. Quoted in James Mooney, "The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890," *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* (Washington, D.C., 1896), pp. 694-696.

could not understand the language Catlin was impressed with the natural ease with which Kennekuk spoke and the evident eloquence of the sermon. Kennekuk's religion had taken on a distinctive feature, an unorthodox Methodist device, the prayer stick. Catlin described the stick as an inch and a half in breadth on which were carved a number of characters resembling Chinese letters. As the followers placed their fingers on each character, much as Roman Catholics used prayer beads, they chanted or sang a sentence or two which the characters suggested. It took from 10 to 15 minutes to cover the stick. The prayers were carved and sold by the prophet himself, and since all followers were required to own a stick, Catlin assumed that he realized considerable revenue.¹⁷ Aside from this the sticks were obviously an ingenious device and a teaching aid for developing a common liturgy among an illiterate people. They were not entirely new. The Delaware prophet had used a similar tool and some northern tribes in earlier years used birchbark pictographs in their ceremonies.

By the 1830's, Kennekuk was ready to face removal as inevitable. It was now no longer a matter of taking up residence in the Osage river reserve. The white inhabitants of Missouri had decided that their state was not a happy hunting ground for Indians. At Castor Hill, just outside of St. Louis, the Kickapoos in 1832 surrendered their Missouri lands for a new reserve beyond the Missouri river near Fort Leavenworth. Kennekuk was on hand to sign the treaty. One of the provisions obligated the government to build him a church. The signators for Chief Kishko's band were the lone representatives of the Missouri Kickapoos.¹⁸ The others had become dissatisfied with the Osage river reserve and moved further south, some as far as the Rio Grande.

Kishko and Kennekuk established two separate communities in the new reservation. Kishko's band lived by hunting and trade and were contemptuous of Kennekuk's followers who quickly settled down to an agricultural existence and a friendly attitude toward the United States government. The treaty of Castor Hill provided special benefits for agricultural pursuits. Kennekuk's band became the chief



This disciple of the prophet is holding a prayer stick, distinctive feature of Kennekuk's religion. George Catlin, famous artist of Indian life who painted this picture, described the prayer stick which was carved with a number of characters resembling Chinese letters. As the followers placed their fingers on the characters, much as Roman Catholics use prayer beads, they chanted or sang a sentence or two which the characters suggested.

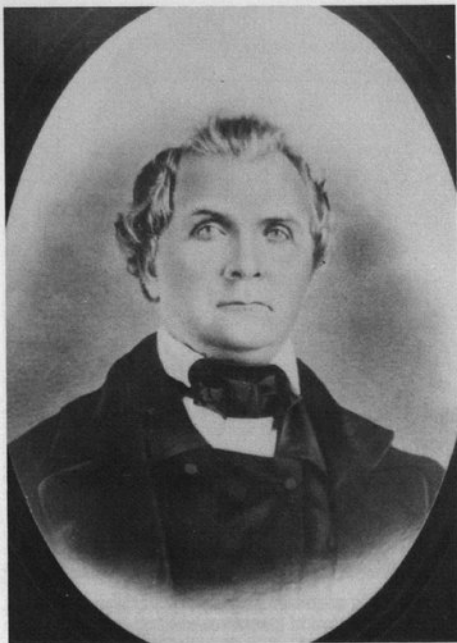
benefactor. The regular annuities were paid on a per capita basis and so the southern Kickapoos came to the Leavenworth reserve to collect. Their visits resulted in drinking, gambling, brawling, and horse stealing and Kennekuk's village was inevitably the target.¹⁹ Kennekuk asked the commandant at Fort Leavenworth to intervene but when help was slow in coming, Kennekuk charged that the nonconformist bands were reviving the war dance. This immediately alarmed the military and brought prompt investigations.²⁰ Nonpartisan Kickapoo residents of the reservation resented this interference. Already disgruntled with conditions in their new reserve many drifted south to join the bands there. This left

19. *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1859* (Washington, D.C.), p. 145.

20. Capt. Matthew Duncan to Gen. H. Atkinson, Fort Leavenworth, June 14, 1836, National Archives, Office of Indian Affairs, Fort Leavenworth Agency, "Letters Received," Microcopy 234, Roll 300.

17. George Catlin, *Letters and Notes of the Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indians* (2 vols., first issued in 1831, Minneapolis, 1965), v. 2, pp. 98-99.

18. Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, v. 2, pp. 365-367.



Thomas Johnson (1802-1865), superintendent of the Methodist missions in the Indian territory, was impressed by the multiple talents of the prophet, particularly his ability to speak six languages. He gave Kennekuk a license to preach and placed him on a salary schedule.

Kennekuk in a position of dominance and he came to be recognized as the chief spokesman for the tribe.²¹

Kennekuk's followers quickly became the pets of government officials and were held up as an example for all tribes. By 1838 the agent at Fort Leavenworth reported that the prophet's band was well settled.

... it is astonishing to see what progress they have made in agricultural pursuits since they arrived here considering they were never known to labour before, and that too without oxen or wagons to haul a house log or rail . . . farms they have made in this way the most of them by packing the rails on their shoulders, they have sold . . . corn to the officers and others at Fort Leavenworth the two last years.²²

Religion continued to be the integrating force in Kennekuk's band. As it evolved this

religion became more authoritarian, more centered on the revelations of Kennekuk, the prophet, and less recognizably Christian. But when first getting established Kennekuk saw some advantage in courting the Christian missionaries and playing off one against the other.

The consolidation of emigrant and indigenous tribes in the relatively small area now known as Indian territory provided as favorable a circumstance as missionaries to the Indian had known. Results had long been meager. The thought of adding Kennekuk's disciples to their denominational rolls was an exciting prospect. Isaac McCoy, advocate of removal, influential with government, had laid out the Kickapoo reservation. He assumed he was on the ground floor and had a missionary ready. Roman Catholic missionaries thought they had the edge. McCoy, when he first became acquainted with Kennekuk, believed him more Catholic than anything else.²³ Father Benedict Roux visited Kennekuk's village in the early months of settlement. He was received as "an angel sent from heaven." The prophet was absent, but subsequently sent his regrets. Roux regarded this as "almost a profession of faith." He thought that the religious exercises were a "perfect image of that of the Christians of the primitive church." Kennekuk had two sons who were favorably inclined to religion. Roux hoped to make arrangements to have at least one enter the priesthood. The Catholic missionary was confident that "mighty conquests for religion" would soon ensue.²⁴ It turned out that neither the Catholics nor the Baptists were given the advantage. Kennekuk, mindful perhaps of his earlier associations with the Methodists, chose to resume that role.

Thomas Johnson, superintendent of the Methodist missions in the Indian territory was impressed by the multiple talents of the prophet, particularly his ability to speak six languages.²⁵ He received him as a local preacher, gave him a license to preach and placed him on a salary schedule. Jerome Berryman was sent to organize the Kickapoo mission. In short order he baptized about 400 Kickapoos including Kennekuk. It seems

23. McCoy, *Baptist Missions*, p. 457.

24. Gilbert J. Garraghan, *Catholic Beginnings in Kansas City Missouri* (Chicago, 1920), pp. 49-54.

21. Gibson, *Kickapoos*, p. 117.

22. Richard Cummins to Clark, Fort Leavenworth, January 31, 1838, National Archives, Office of Indian Affairs, Fort Leavenworth Agency, "Letters Received," Microcopy 234, Roll 301.

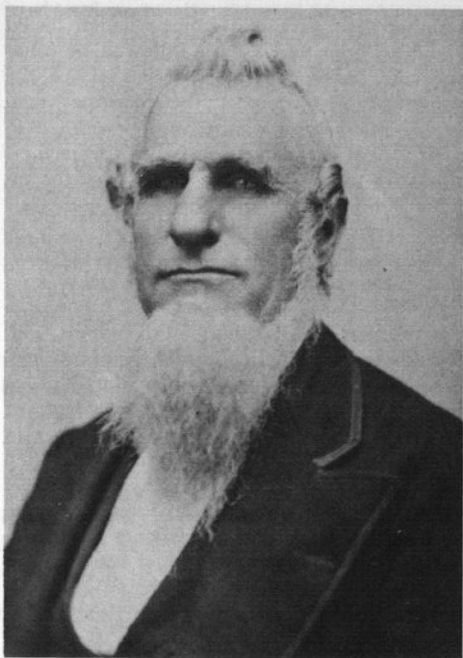
25. "Minutes of the Quarterly Conference of the Indian Mission District," Ms book at the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

strange that Kennekuk submitted to this rite since he was already a licensed preacher. What is more unusual is that he was accepted at all in view of some of his peculiar "modes of worship." Berryman reported that flagellation was now a regular part of Kennekuk's religious practices, although he noted graciously that the participants "were all perfectly trained, and certainly they gave strong evidence of sincerity." Men, women, and children who violated the prophet's rules came forward in public meetings of worship to receive lashes on their bare backs until the blood ran freely. Many had visible scars caused by former flagellations.²⁶

John Dunbar and Samuel Allis, Presbyterian missionaries to the Pawnees, visited the Kickapoo reserve in the summer of 1834. They noted that Fridays were now set aside as whipping days, although several men with rods circulated during regular worship services to keep order among the children and dogs. But the accumulated sins and misdemeanors of the week were confessed on Fridays. Flogging was administered on the spot. Parents did not punish their children but trusted these duties to the regulators. Dunbar thought that this practice might well be emulated in white society where too many parents neglected their duties in this respect.²⁷

McCoy, in his observations of Kennekuk's religious exercises, reported that the penitents, having received their punishment, would shake hands with the "executioners," thank them for the favor done, and express relief that a heavy burden had been lifted. The prophet himself erred at times, but to lessen the mortification of publically humbling himself it was decreed that all were really backsliders and so a general whipping was in order. McCoy did not detect any sense of expiation for sins in the flagellations, but thought they were designed primarily to regulate behavior and maintain discipline.²⁸

In the same context McCoy elaborated on the use of the prayer sticks. There were five carved characters in the wood; the first represented the heart; the second affections and flesh; the third life; the fourth names, the fifth kindred. Wor-



Jerome C. Berryman (1810-1906), a Methodist missionary to the Indians, was sent to organize the Kickapoo mission and in short order baptized about 400 of the tribe including Kennekuk. Later, however, when the prophet had his own church buildings, he excluded the Methodists.

shippers went over the characters with their fingers from bottom to top chanting prayers suggested by the engravings in a sing-song, unison, fashion.²⁹ Allis noted that the whole procedure was repeated several times, each series suggesting different stages in life. The arrival in heaven was indicated by the figure of a horn at the top of the prayer stick.³⁰

Allis and Dunbar described other aspects of Kennekuk's religious system. On Sunday mornings criers passed through the villages calling the people to prayer. Three or four principal men began the service at 11 a.m. by repeating prayers from their sticks. As the worshippers gathered they passed before the men, shook their hands and proceeded to blankets spread out on the ground. The

26. Berryman, "Circuit Rider," p. 216.

27. "Letters Concerning the Presbyterian Mission in the Pawnee Country," *Kansas Historical Collections*, v. 14 (1915-1918), pp. 586-587; "Extracts From the Journal of Mr. Dunbar," *The Missionary Herald*, Boston, v. 26 (September, 1835), pp. 343-344.

28. Isaac McCoy, *The Annual Register of Indian Affairs Within the Indian Territory* (Shawnee Baptist Mission House, 1836), pp. 32-33.

29. *Ibid.*; McCoy, *Baptist Missions*, pp. 457-458.

30. Samuel Allis, "Forty Years Among the Indians," *Transactions and Reports of the Nebraska Historical Society*, v. 2 (1887), pp. 133-166.

prophet then gave a discourse which lasted about an hour and a half, followed by other speakers. At the conclusion of the service, the congregation filed past the principal men again, shook their hands, and proceeded to their lodges while reciting prayers from their sticks. In the evening they came back for another similar meeting. There were numerous other services during the week.³¹

McCoy, hypercritical of anything not Baptist, in the end concluded that Kennekuk's religion was less Christian than ideas inherent in the religion of "common wild Indians," although he grudgingly admired his encouragement of sobriety and hard work.³² For all of his preaching and ceremonies Allis wondered whether the prophet's "heart" was really changed.³³ Nonmissionary visitors were much less critical.

Charles August Murray, an English tourist, was "astonished" at the excellence of Kennekuk's doctrine and soundness of his religious views. They were not entirely enlightened, however, for he noted that women during their menstrual periods were excluded from religious exercises. Worship services were now held in a "temple" of reeds. On one particular Sunday, the preacher of the day was an obviously well-trained Kennekuk disciple who had "a voice capable of much modulation and variety of tone; he spoke without the slightest hesitation." The sermon, parts of it recorded by Murray through the aid of an interpreter, had its flights of eloquence. "Look up at the heavens, look around you at the earth fertile with fruit, and the animals given for our use." Murray left the service with "strong emotions of interest and compassion."³⁴

John Treat Irving, nephew of the American novelist, Washington Irving, visited Kennekuk shortly after the Kickapoos moved West. He described him as a "tall bony Indian with a keen black eye, and a face beaming with intelligence." The prophet, in his conversations with Irving, would speak only through an interpreter, an idiosyncrasy of the moment apparently, for others thought him fluent in English. It was Irving who gave an account of Miss Livermore, a female preacher who came

to the Kickapoo reservation and decided that Kennekuk received direct communications from God. She also claimed this gift and it was revealed to her that the Kickapoos would be transferred directly to heaven "before September 4." Understandably she wanted to be included and was therefore determined to get settled on Kickapoo soil before then. Government officials at Fort Leavenworth were not sure what to do with the lady. They did not want Indians to believe that God communicated in audible voice, for wars had been caused by such people. And if any tribesmen believed they would be carried to heaven directly there would be no need to lay in provisions for the winter. On the other hand the superintendent of Indian affairs had certified her as a missionary and teacher.³⁵ There is no evidence that Miss Livermore had any impact on Kennekuk or his followers.

Whatever his reasons for becoming a Methodist or making overtures to the Roman Catholics, there is nothing to suggest that Kennekuk, at this point in his career, was influenced by any missionaries. When the government finally fulfilled its treaty obligations to build Kennekuk a permanent church, the Methodists found themselves excluded. Berryman had held his own services on Sunday afternoons in a schoolhouse. Kennekuk sometimes participated, but few Kickapoos attended. Since Kennekuk was after all a Methodist preacher and since there was now a church building, Berryman assumed he would be allowed to use it. The prophet firmly but gently put him off insisting that his followers were not yet ready for his ministrations. Berryman soon concluded that the time would never come and that Kennekuk's Methodist affirmations had been a blind.³⁶

Roman Catholic missionaries were equally disillusioned with Kennekuk and if anything more bitter. They established a Kickapoo mission but he "palsied all exertions of four missionaries." They now condemned him for lording it over the Indians and denounced them for standing "open mouthed before this charlatan." His prayer sticks were chips of wood inscribed with outlandish characters. Father Nicholas Point visited the Kickapoo

31. "Presbyterian Mission," pp. 586, 693.

32. McCoy, *Annual Register*, p. 33; *Baptist Missions*, p. 458.

33. "Presbyterian Mission," p. 695.

34. Charles A. Murray, *Travels in North America, During the Years 1834, 1835, and 1836* (2 vols., London, 1839), v. 2, p. 78.

35. John Treat Irving, *Indian Sketches Taken During an Expedition to the Pawnee Tribes* (ed. by John F. McDermott, Norman, 1955), pp. xxvii, xxviii, 41.

36. Berryman, "Circuit Rider," pp. 216-217.

mission after it had been in operation for five years and never found more than one at mass. And yet in a conversation with Father Charles van Quickenborne Kennekuk seemed to have genuine misgivings about the direction of his religion and for the moment thought that his followers might be better off in the Catholic Church.³⁷

Despite such self-doubts, Kennekuk increasingly inserted himself into his religion. He began preaching a theology of two ways. He was the Son of God in the flesh sent to the red men as Jesus had been sent to the white men before him. He now taught his disciples that the punishment they received from whippings was an atonement for their sins, and that the blood shed was expiatory in its effects.³⁸ He claimed that he had raised a woman and a child from the dead, although when pressed admitted that they might have been only near death when he breathed on them.³⁹ Latter day disciples told of his prophecies of a day when the Kickapoos would return to their ancestral lands in Illinois. There they would discover a history of himself, which would make him known to all the world. But before that very hard times would come to his followers and they would be greatly reduced in numbers.⁴⁰ Judging from his own energetic proselytizing efforts he was not about to allow this to happen in his own lifetime.

Much like a frontier evangelist, Kennekuk preached to other tribes, particularly the Pottawatomies. Some Pottawatomie converts had come with him from Illinois. The new Pottawatomie followers joined them on the Kickapoo reservation. Kennekuk was determined that they should enjoy the same privileges as the Kickapoos. The Kickapoos and Pottawatomies signed an agreement in 1851 which allowed the sharing of annuities and spelt out arrangements for equal rights. The two groups intermarried and confused the bureaucrats who now worried about sorting them out for census purposes.⁴¹

Throughout the 1840's and on into the decade of the 1850's agents continued to heap encomiums on Kennekuk's disciples for their

hard work and well cultivated farms. Violence was not far from the surface, however. One of Kennekuk's sons was charged with the murder of a government blacksmith.⁴² Despite such incidents, the commissioner of Indian affairs reported in 1853, the year of the prophet's death, that the Kickapoos were the most advanced tribe in the Great Nemaha agency.⁴³

Kennekuk fell victim to one of the smallpox epidemics that periodically ravaged the Indian territory. Having claimed supernatural origins, true to form, his last prophecy predicted that in "three days he would rise again." Thirty or 40 of his infatuated followers stayed with the body to witness the great event until most of them fell victim to the disease.⁴⁴

The lines of succession are not clear. It appears that Kennekuk intended Wansuk, a Pottawatomie, to be his successor. Beginning in 1851, Wansuk, under the prophet's direction, had begun to reduce the doctrines of the church to writing.⁴⁵ Government officials looked to John Kennekuk, son of the prophet, as leader of the tribe. Early residents of Kansas assumed that the colorful Masheena was both chief and preacher. They related that his old belligerent nature reasserted itself at times. He got into a fight with a Delaware tribesman and killed him. His church sentenced him to 120 lashes. Some of the parishioners volunteered to take part of the punishment, and in the end he received only 20.⁴⁶

With the influx of settlers into the Kansas territory, the diminution of the Kickapoo reserve was inevitable. By a treaty in 1854, the Kickapoos retained but 150,000 acres of their initial 768,000 acre reserve.⁴⁷ The prophet's followers were consolidated in the village of Kennekuk. Unfortunately, the reserve was on the pathway of all major arteries to the west, stagecoach and railroad. Through it passed settlers, gold seekers, Mormons, and the rest. The town of Kennekuk became a pony express station.⁴⁸ What was left of the Kickapoo reserve excited the greed and rapacity of speculators,

42. Cummins to Maj. J. Pilcher, Fort Leavenworth, October, 1839, National Archives, Office of Indian Affairs, St. Louis Superintendency, "Letters Received," Microcopy 234, Roll 752.

43. *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1853*, p. 247.

44. *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1859*, p. 144; Mooney, "Ghost Dance," p. 700.

45. Custer, "Kannekuk," p. 53.

46. Custer, "Masheena," p. 119.

47. Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, v. 2, pp. 634-636.

48. John Rydjord, *Indian Place Names* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), p. 115.

37. Gilbert J. Carraghan, *The Jesuits of the Middle United States* (3 vols., New York, 1938), v. 1, pp. 388-389, 418-419.

38. Berryman, "Circuit Rider," p. 216.

39. Carraghan, *Jesuits*, v. 1, p. 389.

40. Custer, "Kannekuk," pp. 49-50.

41. *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1859*, p. 145; Gibson, *Kickapoos*, p. 118.

bankers, promoters, and politicians of various sorts. The Kickapoos became bitter and discouraged because of the constant misuse of their lands. Some members of the prophet's church defected and joined the militant Kickapoos in the south. The Kickapoo reserve was further reduced in 1862 to a miniscule six square miles.⁴⁹

One early 20th century Illinois genealogist set out to track down Kennekuk's living descendants. He located 10 in the Kickapoo res-

ervation in Brown county, Kansas. He also found a remnant of a church with 30 members. The services still included sermons, songs, and prayers by the prophet as recorded by Wansuk, but in abbreviated form. Prayer sticks were no longer used and no regulators with whips were in evidence. Not all of Kennekuk's family belonged to the church. Two grandsons had revived the ancient Kickapoo religion on the reserve,⁵⁰ a falling away, that the prophet, in his most dire predictions, did not foresee.

49. Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, v. 2, pp. 835-836.

50. Custer, "Kannekuk," p. 53.