Handsome Lake (Ganio`dai`io`), *Code* (c. 1799)

*Handsome Lake was a Seneca leader and prophet who flourished at the turn of the nineteenth century. After bouts with alcoholism and serious illness, he began receiving visions about signs of the end of the world, including the extent to which Natives should or should not adapt European Christian ways. While incorporating some Christian beliefs and practices, he called for a return to a hybridized nativism. A portion of his visions, a version of an origin myth mingled with Christian elements, demonstrates the distinction that, for Handsome Lake, should exist between Europeans and Native peoples: each had different origins and “geniuses,” and so should follow different spiritual paths.*

How the White Race Came to America and Why the Gaiwiio' Became a Necessity

Now this happened a long time ago and across the great salt sea, . . . that stretches east. There is, so it seems, a world there and soil like ours. There in the great queen's country where swarmed many people--so many that they crowded upon one another and had no place for hunting--there lived a great queen. Among her servants was a young preacher of the queen's religion, so, it is said.

Now this happened. The great queen requested the preacher to clean some old volumes which she had concealed in a hidden chest. So he obeyed and when he had cleaned the last book, which was at the bottom of the chest, he opened it and looked about and listened, for truly he had no right to read the book and wanted no one to detect him. He read. It was a great book and told him many things which he never knew before. Therefore he was greatly worried. He read of a great man who had been a prophet and the son of the Great Ruler. He had been born on the earth and
the white men to whom he preached killed him. Now moreover the prophet had promised to return and become the King. In three days he was to come and then in forty to start his kingdom. This did not happen as his followers had expected and so they despaired. Then said one chief follower, "Surely he will come again sometime, we must watch for him."

Then the young preacher became worried, for he had discovered that his god was not on earth to see. He was angry moreover, because his teachers had deceived him. So then he went to the chief of preachers and asked him how it was that he had deceived him. Then the chief preacher said, "Seek him out and you will find him, for indeed we think he does live on earth." Even so, his heart was angry but he resolved to seek.

On the morning of the next day he looked out from the opening of his room and saw out in the river a beautiful island and he marveled that he had never seen it before. He continued to gaze and as he did he saw among the trees a castle of gold and he travailed that he had not seen the castle of gold before. Then he said, "So beautiful a castle on so beautiful an isle must indeed be the abode of him whom I seek." Immediately he put on his clothes and went to the men who had taught him and they wondered and said, "Indeed it must be as you say." So then together they went to the river, and when they came to the shore they saw that it was spanned by a bridge of shining gold. Then one of the great preachers fell down and read from his book a long prayer, and arising he turned his back upon the island and fled, for he was afraid to meet the lord. Then with the young man the other crossed the bridge and he knelt on the grass and he cried loud and groaned his prayer, but when he arose to his feet he too fled and would not look again at the house -- the castle of gold.

Then was the young man disgusted, and boldly he strode toward the house to attend to the business which he had in mind. He did not cry or pray and neither did he fall to his knees, for he
was not afraid. He knocked at the door and a handsome smiling man welcomed him in and said, "Do not be afraid of me." Then the smiling man in the castle of gold said, "I have wanted a young man such as you for some time. You are wise and afraid of nobody. Those older men were fools and would not have listened to me (directly), though they might listen to someone whom I had instructed. Listen to me and most truly you shall be rich. Across the ocean that lies toward the sunset is another world and a great country and a people whom you have never seen. Those people are virtuous, they have no unnatural evil habits and they are honest. A great reward is yours if you will help me. Here are five things that men and women enjoy; take them to these people and make them as white men are. Then shall you be rich and powerful and you may become the chief of all great preachers here."

So then the young man took the bundle containing the five things and made the bargain. He left the island and looking back saw that the bridge had disappeared and before he had turned his head the castle had gone and then as he looked the island itself vanished.

Now then the young man wondered if indeed he had seen his lord for his mind had been so full of business that he had forgotten to ask. So he opened his bundle of five things and found a flask of rum, a pack of playing cards, a handful of coins, a violin and a decayed leg bone. Then he thought the things very strange and he wondered if indeed his lord would send such gifts to the people across the water of the salt lake; but he remembered his promise,

The young man looked about for a suitable man in whom to confide his secret and after some searching he found a man named Columbus and to him he confided the story. Then did Columbus secure some big canoes and raise up wings and he sailed away. He sailed many days and his warriors became angry and cried that the chief who led them was a deceiver. They planned to behead him but he heard of the plan and promised that on the next day he would
discover the new country. The next morning came and then did Columbus discover America. Then the boats turned back and reported their find to the whole world. Then did great ships come, a good many. Then did they bring many bundles of the five things and spread the gifts to all the men of the great earth island.

Then did the invisible man of the river island laugh and then did he say, "These cards will make them gamble away their wealth and idle their time; this money will make them dishonest and covetous and they will forget their old laws; this fiddle will make them dance with their arms about their wives and bring about a time of tattling and idle gossip; this rum will turn their minds to foolishness and they will barter their country for baubles; then will this secret poison eat the life from their blood and crumble their bones." So said the invisible man and he was Hanîsse'ono, the evil one.

Now all this was done, and when afterward he saw the havoc and the misery his work had done, he said, "I think I have made an enormous mistake, for I did not dream that these people would suffer so." Then did even the devil himself lament that his evil had been so great. So after the swarms of white men came and misery was thrust upon the Ongwe-oweh, the Creator was sorry for his own people whom he had molded from the soil of the earth of this Great Island, and he spoke to his four messengers, and many times they tried to tell right men the revelations of the Creator, but none would listen. Then they found our head man sick. Then they heard him speak to the sun and to the moon and they saw his sickness. Then they knew that he suffered because of the cunning evils that Hanîsse'ono had given the Ongwe-oweh. So then they knew that he was the one. He was the one who should bear and tell Gai'wiio`. But when Ganio`dai'io` spoke, the evil being ceased his lament and sought to obstruct Gai'wiio`, for he claimed to be master.
i Pronounced “guy-we-you,” meaning “the good message.”

ii I.e. “labored with himself.”

iii I.e. “real men,” or the Iroquois.