

CORN "MEDICINES."

When all is ready for planting, the corn is soaked in a decoction made of certain herbal ingredients. The moisture causes the corn to germinate slightly, though the utility of the added materials is not so evident. There is possibly some connexion with sympathetic magic, the other plants contributing their vitality, or otherwise assisting and protecting the corn. Regarding what appeared to be the oldest or, at any rate, the most important of these preparations, it was stated by a Cayuga informant¹ that it prevented the worms and birds from bothering. A sort of halo was also said to be sometimes seen around the plants.

A reference to corn medicines is found in the Code of Handsome Lake, the Iroquois prophet, as translated by A. C. Parker: "Now it is understood that Dio'he'kq̄ (the corn, bean and squash spirits), have a secret medicine, o'saga'ndā and o'dr'sdani. So soak your seed corn in these two medicines before you plant your fields. The medicines grow on the flat lands near streams."²

The medicine referred to consists, according to Grand River informants, of the submerged rootstocks of *Phragmites communis*, a tall, reed-like grass growing in marshes; and *Hystrix patula*, or bottle-brush grass, also growing in low land. The former is called by Brant County Onondaga u'sa'gā'āda'; the latter, gusdisda"nū'. According to Chief Gibson's directions,

¹ Chief David Jack, a Brant County Cayuga.

² Parker, A. C., *The Code of Handsome Lake*, N. Y. State Mus. Bulletin, 163, p. 54.

A story which may or may not account for the origin of "corn medicine" was given by John Echo (On.). This was to the effect that the Allegheny Iroquois once gathered up food and other material for a celebration of the before-planting or yundago-wi"sa' ceremony. They also obtained a lot of whiskey, with which they put in a prolonged spree. This lasted so long that a month elapsed before they thought of planting their corn. In the fall when the frosts came the corn was still immature, so that they lost the whole crop. A voice—that of Hawāni'yu'—was heard. It said: "It is your own fault. You did wrong." He then went to one family which lived away by itself and had taken no part in the spree and told the members that the only way to escape permanent retribution for their foolishness was to use corn medicine. Skaniadai'iyu' afterward confirmed this.