

PREFACE.

The aboriginal composition now presented to the public has some peculiar claims on the attention of scholars. As a record, if we accept the chronology of its custodians,—which there is no reason to question,—it carries back the authentic history of Northern America to a date anterior by fifty years to the arrival of Columbus. Further than this, the plain and credible tradition of the Iroquois, confirmed by much other evidence, links them with the still earlier Alligewi, or “Moundbuilders,” as conquerors with the conquered. Thus the annals of this portion of the continent need no longer begin with the landing of the first colonists, but can go back, like those of Mexico, Yucatan and Peru, to a storied past of singular interest.

The chief value of the Book of Rites, however, is ethnological, and is found in the light which it casts on the political and social life, as well as on the character and capacity of the people to whom it belongs. We see in them many of the traits which Tacitus discerned in our ancestors of the German forests, along with some qualities of a higher cast than any that he has delineated. The love of peace, the sentiment of human brotherhood, the strong social and domestic affections, the respect for law, and the reverence for ancestral greatness, which are apparent in this Indian record and in the historical events which illustrate it, will strike most readers as new and unexpected developments.