



# *Passaconaway's Ride to Heaven*

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North American

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The personality of Passaconaway, the powerful chief and prophet, is involved in doubt, but there can be no misprision of his wisdom. By some historians he has been made one with St. Aspenquid, the earliest of native missionaries among the Indians, who, after his conversion by French Jesuits, travelled from Maine to the Pacific, preaching to sixty-six tribes, healing the sick and working miracles, returning to die at the age of ninety-four. He was buried on the top of Agamenticus, Maine, where his manes were pacified with offerings of three thousand slain animals, and where his tombstone stood for a century after, bearing the legend, "Present, useful; absent, wanted; living, desired; dying, lamented."

By others Passaconaway is regarded as a different person. The Child of the Bear—to English his name—was the chief of the Merrimacs and a convert of the apostle Eliot. Natives and colonists alike admired him for his eloquence, his bravery, and his virtue. Before his conversion he was a reputed wizard who sought by magic arts to repel the invasion of his woods and mountains by the white men, invoking the spirits of nature against them from the topmost peak of the Agiochooks, and his native followers declared that in pursuance of this intent he made water burn, rocks move, trees dance, and transformed himself into a mass of flame.

Such was his power over the forces of the earth that he could burn a tree in winter and from its ashes bring

green leaves; he made dead wood blossom and a farmer's flail to bud, while a snake's skin he could cause to run. At the age of one hundred and twenty he retired from his tribe and lived in a lonely wigwam among the Pennacooks. One winter night the howling of wolves was heard, and a pack came dashing through the village harnessed by threes to a sledge of hickory saplings that bore a tall throne spread with furs. The wolves paused at Passaconaway's door. The old chief came forth, climbed upon the sledge, and was borne away with a triumphal apostrophe that sounded above the yelping and snarling of his train.

Across Winnepesaukee's frozen surface they sped like the wind, and the belated hunter shrank aside as he saw the giant towering against the northern lights and heard his death-song echo from the cliffs. Through pathless woods, across ravines, the wolves sped on, with never slackened speed, into the mazes of the Agiochooks to that highest peak we now call Washington. Up its steep wilderness of snow the ride went furiously; the summit was neared, the sledge burst into flame, still there was no pause; the height was gained, the wolves went howling into darkness, but the car, wrapped in sheaves of fire, shot like a meteor toward the sky and was lost amid the stars of the winter night. So passed the Indian king to heaven.

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