

## HOME CIRCLE

## THE LOON; AN OJIBBEWAY LEGEND.

Travelling correspondents' letters, immigration pamphlets, and tourists' books, have already given the world so much information about the North-West, that the task would be almost an impossible one, to write anything new of the present condition this country.

I will leave the beaten track, and wander away into the trackless recesses of the wilds, where only the Indian, the hunter and the prospector break the serenity of nature.

The sun was setting, burnishing the already autumn tinted foliage with a richer hue, as my canoe sped like a gull across the calm waters of an island-dotted lake. Long vistas stretched between the islands on every side. Away to the west the sky and water met in a rich ocean of flame, and golden, blue, and purple islands with fretted tops lined the narrowing avenues up to the sun.

In the deep crescent of an island bay nestled an Indian dwelling, a ha-ban-dooan, towards which our canoe sped swiftly, propelled by its cedar wings. My guide and I were welcomed by the words "Bo-jhou! bo-jhou! bo-jhou!" from half a dozen dusky forms that came down to the shore to meet us, and by the yelping of numberless fox-like curs that kept at a respectful distance from our paddles.

That night while reclining on a rush matting, smoking a pipe of peace, and surrounded by dusky faces illumined by the fitful glare of the camp fire, an old chieftain, or medicine-man, related the following legend of Nana-bo-jhou and the Loon of which I give a free translation in my own words. As the education of many of your readers has been, I fear, sadly neglected in the original language of their own land, it may be well to explain that a sha-ban-dooan is a large, long wigwam with an entrance at each end; also, that Nana-bo-jhou was a great mythological chief, a sort of Hiawatha of the North.

Nana-bo-jhou,

If the story be true

That is told of this wonderful Indian chief,  
Was a brave in the far misty days of the past,  
Whose toils and adventures would stagger belief,  
If told by an ordinary lawyer or thief;  
But nevertheless they are true, and, in brief,

The labours of Hercules quite overcast,  
And high on the list of canonized saints  
In the Indian calendar, Nana-bo-jhou  
Is found all decked out in his blue-so paints;  
In fact, he's quite near to the Great Manitou.

His wonderful scrapes

And his terrible doings,

His agile escapes

And his fortunate wooings,

His walking and talkings

(He was great in orations,

Just as great on the "stump" as on other occasions),  
And, better than all, his transmigrations,  
Would fill an octavo, and then not the half  
Would be found, though got up at \$2.50 in calf.

He could turn himself into whatever he chose—  
A chief or a squaw, a fox or a mink,  
And did he live now, I undoubtedly think  
His genius for turning would place him with those  
Who are tee-total talkers, but tipplers in drink.  
It was late in the fall—I can't tell just the year,  
But so far in the past that it does not appear

An adjunct essential,

Or the least consequential

To the truth of the tale—but I think it was near  
The time when Confucius, that son of the Sun,  
Singed the hair off his head with a pin-wheel, in fun—  
But let the date pass: the locality, late in  
The untracked North-West, is known as Keewatin;  
Or, as Norquay and Miller still better may know it,  
The land that was lately awarded to Mowat.

It was late in the day, and far down in the west  
The sun was just sinking beneath the calm breast  
Of a rock-bordered lake, where stood Nana-bo-jhou  
Thinking what in the deuce he was going to do;  
For he had not touched food since that morning at two.

He was just on the point

Of dissolving a joint,

And changing himself to the form of a deer,  
So that grasses and weeds  
Would suffice for his needs.

When a musical sound struck the drum of his ear.  
As a matter of fact 'twas not musical, though  
To his ear at the time it was touchingly so;  
Just the same as dry tread and cold water are sweet  
To a man who for days has had nothing to eat.  
The sound that he heard was the cry of a goose.  
In less time than I tell it, the joint that was loose  
Was back in its place, and in one moment more  
He'd a sha-ban-dooan built, with rush-mats on the  
And then in a jiff.

Or in anything else that will signify hurry,  
But without the least effort or bother or flurry,  
He was changed to goose, and was quietly standing  
On a rock, like a man with a "bus" at a landing,  
Who cries through his nose, with a sink and a swell,  
"This way for the bus to the City Ho-tel!"

So stood the brave Nana-bo-jhou on the rock;  
With one eye on the lake, and one on the flock.

Then, lifting his head,  
With well-feigned surprise,  
He hurriedly said,  
"Hello! bless my eyes!"

Or words that a gander would use in that wise,  
"Who o'er would have dreamt to meet with friends here?  
Slacken sail and come down, if you'll join in my cheer;  
I'm always delighted to meet friends by chance.  
What say you, sweet geese, to a supper and dance?"

His tones were so pure in the language in use,  
That they took him at once for a blue-blooded goose;  
So that without further parley they stopped in their travel,  
And with friendly *bon jours*, flopped right-down on the gravel.

'Twas but for a moment that Nana-bo-jhou  
Seemed buried in thought—geese are n't wont so to do—  
Which the same might have caused a suspicion or two;  
But, without a demur, they agreed when he stated  
That the dance should come first, while for supper they waited.

I may mention just here, there is matter for doubt—  
For tradition, you know, batters legends about,  
And leaves the odd bits with historical tinkers,  
Who go by the name of original thinkers;  
Who, finding the pieces are not quite entire,  
Call the story a lie and the teller a liar.  
Who would shave all the past of its beautiful mystery,  
And present to our gaze a vile, bald-headed history.  
There is matter for doubt, or at least for conjecture—  
Some scholars assert there's a theme for a lecture.  
I was told 't was a dance, which for me was enough,  
Though some others maintain it was blind-geese a-buff.  
Whichever it was, at least this much is true,  
The geese were blindfolded by Nana-bo-jhou,  
And arranged in a line at the sha-ban-dooan door,  
Where the dance was to be on the rush-matted floor.

Now the form of the dance was quite simple; they merely  
Were to chase about in a circle as nearly  
As blindfold geese could, which really was queerly.  
There were laughable jumbles,  
And numerous stumbles,  
That ended, of course, in a series of tumbles;  
While each ridge-pole and rafter  
Echoed feminine laughter,  
And not a few masculine grumbles.

At the end of the sha-ban-dooan just next the door,  
Stood the host, while his eye scanned each gander and goose.

Hey! Presto!! he changed to a chieftain once more,  
With an appetite good for a whole roasted moose.  
He smiled as he looked at the flock at his feet,  
With a smile of deep meaning, though not at all sweet;  
'Twas half mingled with pity, at least so I'm told,  
And yet 'twas enough to make hot blood run cold;  
Just the same kind of smile, though girls say 'tis false,  
That the devil puts on when he's watching a waltz.

Yes, he smiled, and outstretching his hand caught the neck  
Of a matronly goose, then a second and third,  
And continued this practice without any check,  
Till the flock was depleted of many a bird.

With grim chuckles, and twists  
Of his muscular wrists,  
He had half a good meal lying dead just beside him,  
When the bandage fell loose  
From the eyes of a goose,  
And while twisting the neck of a gander she spied him.  
With a flutter and scream, like the rest of her sex,  
She cried, "Nana-bo-jhou is wringing your necks!"  
With heartrending screams for the dear dead departed,  
And lustier ones for the lives yet at stake,  
Yet with unbroken necks, though with grief broken-hearted,  
The sorry remainder fled over the lake.

Now can it be wondered, if, just at the moment  
When he thought all secure, yet lost one-half his meal,  
That, like something resembling a steam-ram, his toe went  
In the wake of the bird that made the first squeal.  
Yes, he struck it full with his moccasined toes,  
In that epicurean part of the bird  
That goes by the name of His Holiness' Nose.  
For a moment the fowl scarce knew what had occurred.

You may smile when I state  
That the force was so great  
That its body shot forward in front of its toes,  
While it barely escaped  
In this manner misshaped,  
And flopped off alone to lament o'er its woes.  
'Twas called "Cripple" at first  
Among geese, as they curd  
Their reckless adventure that mild afternoon;  
But when all its eggs  
Hatched out with the legs  
Near the tip of the tail, they re-christened it "Loon."

Now, in Europe and Asia, where fables are plenty,  
Each tale has a moral, and some of them twenty.  
But the Indian Brave doesn't care for such stuff;  
He laughs o'er the tale, and the tale is enough.  
He doesn't go in for the deep analytic,  
And discover what never was there, like the critic.  
No, he hunts 'neath the sun, and he sleeps 'neath the moon,  
And whenever he can, takes a shot at a Loon.

## MR. WISEMAN'S CONFESSION.

I always thought my wife a very careless little woman, and I used to tell her so. She was very good humoured, and did not mind; and on that day when she went to Rutherford to receive the little legacy her uncle left her, and had it paid over in crisp bank notes, which she put in her pocket-book, I said to her, as we went out:

"Now, Anna Maria, my dear, you'll put that in your pocket and have it picked, or you'll carry it in your hand and have it snatched away. So let me take charge of it; three thousand dollars is too big a sum to us, too valuable, to run any risks with."

"Well, yes, that's true, Solomon," said she. "So it is, but I've got the pocket-book in my bag and my bag on my arm, and I think it is very safe."

"So safe that some one may cut the strings," said I.

"So Anna Maria stopped and undid the bag and took out the pocket-book, which I put in the bottom of the inside pocket of my overcoat; and we walked on together arm-in-arm, and talked about the things we'd do with the money, until we got hungry, and I proposed lunch at Stuffem's before we took the cars for home. Anna Maria liked the idea, and we proceeded to carry it out.

That was a very good lunch, and well spread. Anna Maria took off her cloak, and I my overcoat, and we did justice to it. I paid, of course, out of my own purse for it, and put on my overcoat with a comfortable sigh. I helped Anna Maria on with hers, and we left the restaurant; but just outside Anna Maria cried, "Oh!" and dropped my arm and ran back.

She came out again in a moment smiling.

"What was the matter?" I asked. "Did you leave anything?"

She held up her handkerchief which she had in her hand, and answered:

"I've found it."

And I laughed.

"You see what a careless little soul you are," I said. "Not to be trusted at all."

She nodded.

"And you are so careful, Solomon," she said. Of course—of course," I said. "A man has so many things to think of he's obliged to be more business-like. I don't blame you, little woman. Don't think that."

And she giggled, she was so pleased.

That brought us to the station, where we took the cars, and I think I dozed a little on the way up.

Our own house seemed warm and cheerful after the long journey. A bit of supper awaited us, and all looked bright. Children in bed, and servant anxious to go. So we sent her away and sat down. I just threw back my overcoat.

"Before we do anything else I'll put the money in the safe," I said—"your money. Now don't take airs because you are wealthy."

With this jest I dived into my right-hand inner pocket. I never shall forget the dreadful cold chill that ran through me as I found it empty.

"Pshaw!" I said to myself. "What folly! It's the left pocket, of course."

I dipped into that. There was nothing there either.

Trembling and in a cold perspiration, I began to rummage every pocket in my coat. I tore it off. I shook it. I felt it. I felt my other pockets. I seized the lamp and rushed about the room searching the floor; then, with a groan, sank into a chair.

My wife ran towards me.

"What is the matter?" she cried. "Do tell me, Solomon!"