

## Laddie Jr., Learning Ojibway Legends

Written for The Western Home Monthly By Bonnycastle Dale

**N**OW that we have leisure to resume our Natural History work I find it difficult to impress the lad with the true meaning in these wild tales and simple folk lore of these tribes—what are you going to do when, after much research, you tell the youngster, "under those 'serpent and turtle mounds' the Ojibways buried all the slain in the great battle for these fishing grounds of Rice Lake,"—and he looks at you with big, unbelieving eyes and says: "They must have worked harder with a shovel in those days than they do now. It would have taken a hundred men a week to dig all those trenches, perhaps the women of the tribe did it; but I'll bet it wasn't in

camp on an island in mid-lake, seven miles off, and the first time I walked down to the point to photograph the red-breasted Mergansers, off flapped the injured gull we had liberated at the other camp. So it was just as well we did not kill it in mercy; as it seemed to be improved as regards its short, flapping flights.

During our two weeks' work at the lower camp among the loons and ducks and muskrats and the spring migration I found it impossible to go on with the boys, regular lessons, especially as we had not brought his school books, so I undertook to try and teach him from some anthropological works that were there,

as well as from my note books on the same subject—the birds and animals and fishes in the Ojibway legends.

"There was a time when the native tribes of the Ojibway nation used to paddle all the way down from the great Clear Water (Superior) to this wild rice grown lake for their summer fishing and their fall shooting."

"How do you know?" questioned my young critic. I had not expected so direct a shot, as I was teaching him, you see, but I managed to explain that by letters written by the early French explorers, and by the Jesuit missionaries, and by word of mouth handed down in the tribes from father to son, a history of the native tribes of this part of North America is fairly well edited.

"But, however do they know just which way they came and went?" he insisted.

Now this was an easy one, and I answered it by digging zealously in the sand of the island's bank on which we were sunning. After a while I turned up a broken, pointed, greenish stone, a bit of rock not native to this part of the Province—a greenish jade. It had been pointed by great labour, using the chipping method—evidently it was the lower half of a stone axe or knife.

"Wherever the Mississaugas camped for any length of time we find stone relics—all the way down the chain of lakes we now call the Kewartha Lakes."

"Say! I'll bet you believe in the Thunder Bird!" he exclaimed.

"Now, don't get excited, Laddie. I've met the Thunder Bird in all the tribes' stories."

"Ah, yes, in the stories; you never found the nest of one," he laughed.

"No, dear boy, nor did anyone else,



The gull nips Laddie Jr.'s mitt.

maskinonge or wild duck season. Lookie!" and off he ran to catch an age, tired Blue-bill that fluttered along in the shallow shore water.

He brought the big, handsome drake to me, truly our hearts are sad at the economy of Nature. These beautiful wild ducks dying of old age all about us, with all the shining beauty of their spring plumage upon them, with their clear yellow eyes as bright as in time of full vigour. We admired it a while and paddled off down the Reservation. "Lookie!" he cried again. "Catch me that big glaucous winged gull till we see what is the matter with it." I turned the sixteen foot Rice Lake canoe (I have no retainer by the R. L. Canoe Co., but if you want a sure bottom under you, get a craft like ours; of double thickness of cedar boards, copper fastened and it will last more years than you or I are going to live). The bird flapped into a tiny sandy cove and we gently lifted it into the canoe—and it gently nipped Master Laddie's fat fingers. Some brute had shot the poor thing and had broken the small wing bone, enough to prevent it taking wing, but once in the air it could flutter some distance. We devoutly cursed the fool who made this bird suffer a whole winter long, as there is no spring shooting, not a shot is fired on



In flight, releasing the blue bill duck and the gull.

this lake. These imitation sportsmen come uninvited on our islands, use our points to decoy on, with never a "thank you," and deliberately break our good game laws. We decided amputation would not improve this case—we do cut off a lot of broken legs, trap broken in the spring trapping season, but if there is a chance for the wing we never amputate it. I snapped the boy with his poor pets and both flew off a short distance from his liberating hands. A very odd thing happened: after two week's work in the marshes and drowned lands of the Indian Reservation we moved out to our main



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