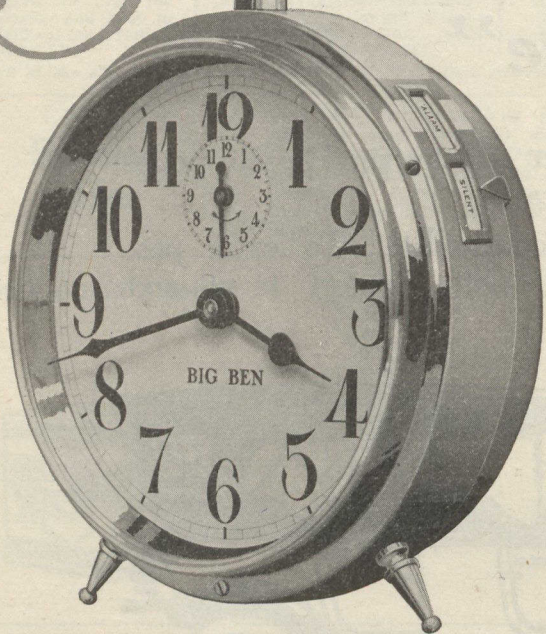


# Big Ben



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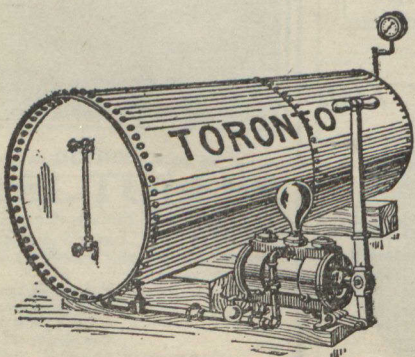
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known spoke so to a woman. The women of his race had learned to be content with few love-words.

That one Indian allowed her to follow him, to serve him with food, to keep the teepee fires burning, to wait for him, that was enough for any squaw.

If a child kept close to her skirts, or a small placid papoose swung against his cradle board from the low branch of a near-by tree, she was satisfied and did well.

No Indian wasted time talking to a woman. To tell her often she was beautiful and to be desired was but a loss of words, and words were precious. They were things not to be squandered, but to be stored up against the time of the councils of men.

This tall, tireless Englishman following in his snow-shoe trail, was a spend-thrift of words, the runner concluded. He undervalued them as the blue-jay or coyote their voices. The blue-jay who told all things to the woods-people, and the coyote who was the world's gossip.

So Oppapago trotted on and listened, casting now and then a side-long glance over his shoulder at the two, an unpleasant glance, in which there was nevertheless some blending of curiosity, with resentment.

Through his mind crept a faint envy of the man who could gain so much happiness from what appeared to be the very simplest and most usual things in life. To be travelling across the snow with a woman beside one, with many miles yet to go, and hard fare to stay one's appetite, what was there in all that to so stir the blood, and bring into a voice so many cadences?

Over the swart face, peck-marked and heavy, flitted an expression half of wonder, half of contempt.

He flicked the leader of his train with his dog-whip, and went on faster, to test the man who followed.

Wynn took the pace without comment, but Nance noted the extra speed, and her eyes grew troubled.

"Oppapago is making up time," she said. "It is not necessary, he will tire you out."

Wynn leaned down, smiling a little. "The silent smokey savage" is not friendly to me," he commented in a low voice, "But do not trouble; I believe I can keep any pace he sets.—If not—well then, I will have to reason with Oppapago."

"He would not reason," Nance answered dubiously; "But there is another way, Dick. . . . We must make him like us."

"Oh Oppapago!" she called after a moment.

The runner half halted and looked back.

"The furs have all shaken down and are uncomfortable," she said in Cree. "Would you be so kind as to put them in place? Only you can do it as it should be done, I know. I will run a little way, for I am tired of the low seat; but I will come back, for your dogs will have to carry me, Oppapago. No woman could go as fast as you do—and hardly any man."

The Indian grunted his reply. He had not known she understood or spoke his own tongue. With some awkwardness and more unwillingness he turned, helped her up, and gave his attention to the packs of fur.

Wynn applied himself to lighting his pipe. Into his eyes came a glimmer of amusement as Oppapago beat up the furs and made a better seat of them, for he knew perfectly how little the runner enjoyed rendering such service.

The dogs quarrelled a bit, as is their usual way of enjoying themselves during a rest. Nance ran down the trail and back again, a wild rose color in her face, her scarlet toque and sash vivid against the snow.

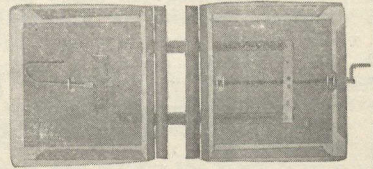
With a slow wave of his arm the Indian presently indicated that the sleigh was ready.

Nance held out her hand, as plainly expecting him to help her up and into the sleigh.

"You are very good, Oppapago!" She smiled. "I thank you greatly."

The runner folded the rugs about her, and for the first time really looked at her face. In the camps of his people he had never seen hair of a golden colour—or eyes of so strange a blue.

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