

# Indian Traditions.

[Continued from last No.]

After the great feast of all the beasts of the forest and fowls of the air, on the king of fishes, and each one had taken the portion of fat assigned to himself and all his species for all time, Nanebozhoo announced to the assembled multitude that there would be a great dance; so forming a circle around him, they were prepared, when he took his great medicine drum, the sound of which would be heard at a distance of ten day's journey. He beat his drum and sang his medicine song, while all the assembled animals kept time to the tune, moving around him. Nanebozhoo gave strict orders that all should close their eyes during the performance; the penalty for disobedience to this order would be red, or blood-shot eyes, to the transgressor and all his species, for all generations. After his great exertions, feeling hungry, he thought it a good time to secure a feast for himself, so repeating his injunction for all to keep their eyes closed, he selected the fattest of the geese as they passed by him; it was but the work of a moment to wring off their heads and lay them in a heap. As he secured each fat goose, he would beat his drum and sing with increased energy. At length the little duck the Indians call Shingebis, and by some among us, the diver, ventured to open his eyes sufficiently to see what Nanebozhoo was doing; he saw him in the act of wringing off a goose's head, and immediately gave the alarm. "Nanebozhoo Kenesegemon; Nanebozhoo is killing us." At this, each one took the alarm, and they all scattered in every direction. Nanebozhoo was angry at the duck, and so rose up and took chase with all his might, and just as the Shingebis was diving under the water, he gave him a kick and broke his back. This, they say, is the reason why this duck has red eyes, and from the middle of the back to the tail the back is bent downwards, as though its back was broken.—Nanebozhoo now made a large log heap and prepared his geese for cooking. After the fire has burned down he made a place in the embers and placing all his geese in it, covered them up, and as he was weary with his great exertions he gave orders to a sentinel to watch, and lay down to sleep. He had but just fallen into a dose when he heard the squeaking noise of his sentinel warning him that his enemies, the Winnebagoes, were coming. They were *nunnetoos*, or had supernatural power, as well as himself, and knowing that Nanebozhoo was notified of their approach, they put back before he could see them. Here they waited in their canoes, behind a point of land, until Nanebozhoo was again asleep, when they commenced their approach. Again Nanebozhoo was warned by his sentinel that the Winnebagoes were coming, but on arousing himself he saw nothing, and lay down again. This was repeated several times, until at length he suspected his sentinel of raising a false alarm; so when again notified of the approach of his enemies to steal his geese, he applied an opprobrious epithet to his sentinel, and slept on. This time he had a good long nap and arose refreshed, and made preparations for a grand repast on his fat geese, which he supposed were now nicely cooked. On opening the embers, what was his mortification to find they had indeed all been carried off by his enemies, the Winnebagoes. To be revenged on himself for being thus duped he made a large fire of green brush, and standing over it with one foot on each side of the heap, he allowed himself to be all burned. The green brush snapped and hissed, and so did his own flesh, while he mimicked them both. He was now revenged on himself for being duped by his enemies. He

now started on a journey over all the mountainous and rocky regions of the earth, and whenever he found a mountain side of bare rock, especially of granite, he would sit down and slide down, as boys slide down hill on their hands and sleighs, leaving the burnt flesh and skin adhering to the rock all along. Thus he journeyed all over the rocky regions and sliding down them. From this, the Indians say, comes what is called by the French, *tripe de roche*, or tripe of the rock. This is a dark moss adhering to the rock, and is sometimes eaten by the Indians. It has a pungent taste, and will sustain life for a time.

At one time I was passing down the Nelson River, between Lake Winnipeg and Hudson Bay, with two Indians as voyagers. We passed a mountain of granite that was very rough and broken, sloping down to the river at an angle of 15 degrees. I saw the bare, bleak rock covered with this moss, and recollecting the tradition, I said, "Wonder if it did not hurt Nanebozhoo to slide down such a rough place." It was some minutes before they could resume their paddles, for laughter. It would almost seem they had been thinking the same thing themselves. After Nanebozhoo had planted moss on all the rocks, he found himself somewhat sore, but determined to turn everything to account in the affairs of the world he had made, he commenced another journey over the earth. This time it was not the mountainous regions he sought, but the rivers, especially the smaller streams and brooks. He walked over them all, through their entire lengths, but with one foot on one side of the stream, and the other on the opposite side. Being sore, he was compelled to walk with his feet wide apart. In this way the small trash came in contact with his bleeding limbs, and became colored with blood. This, they say, is the cause why red willows are found along the banks of small streams or brooks.

Nanebozhoo, however, was not through with his war on the serpent race. One day in his rambles he came to a sandy beach, sheltered by high mountains on each side of the river. At this place there was an eddy in the river, and the water was very black and deep, just such a place as the serpent race delighted to haunt.—To this sheltered and sunny sandy beach the serpents would come to sun themselves. Nanebozhoo had observed them, time after time, basking in the sun in this place, and then taking a nap. He went and planted himself near this place, but assumed the form of an old rotten birch stub, the wood having partly decayed within, while the bark was still entire. In time the serpents of monstrous size came out of their haunts in the dark deep waters and commenced frisking in the sun. One of the younger ones remarked, "Tuhyah, I did not see that old birch stub when we were here last time; perhaps it is Nanebozhoo." One of the older ones replied, "That is not strange to see old stumps and logs like that, for there is always plenty of drift wood floating down the stream, if, however, it should be Nanebozhoo, I will give him such a squeeze that he will never come back again." So he coiled his enormous body round the supposed old rotten birch stub, and squeezed with all his might. Nanebozhoo endured it without flinching, but the pressure was so great that he was on the point of giving vent to his agony; but just as he thought he could endure no more, the serpent slackened the folds of his body, saying, "That is not Nanebozhoo, for I know his strength, and had it been he I would have crushed him." He allowed the serpents to frisk and bask as much as they would, and then take their nap. When he saw them all wrapped in profound slumber he assumed his proper form, and taking his weapons, gave his enemies some mortal thrusts, while they made for their hiding

place with all their might, he hurling on their rear, dealing his blows hard and fast; among the rest the old king of serpents himself received a fearful wound.

One day while rambling about to see what he could do against his great enemy, he found the old serpent's mother in the form of an old squaw. She was wandering about in search of medicine for her son, and weeping bitterly that Nanebozhoo had wounded him. He accosted her and asked her the cause of her grief. She replied, "Tuhyah, perhaps you are Nanebozhoo himself," drawing back from him. "I, Nanebozhoo," said he, "do you think I look like him? But, grandmother, what are you crying for?" "Why Nanebozhoo has wounded my son, and I am afraid he will die, so I am in search of medicine to cure him." "Grandmother," said he, "show me what kind of medicine you are collecting." In time he won her confidence, and she showed him all the medicines she used. "Now," said he, "teach me the song that goes with the medicine,"—for the Indian believes that the medicine, however good, will be entirely ineffectual without the song and incantations. Finally the old woman told him everything he wished to know. He then killed her, and arrayed himself in her skin and habiliments, and went to the wigwam of the king of serpents, crying and sobbing in true old woman style. He entered the wigwam, chanting in doleful strains, "Nanebozhoo has killed my son." But the old woman's skin was not quite large enough to cover all his person, the toes of one foot protruded out. One of the young serpent brood observing this, remarked, "See there, see his toes; that is Nanebozhoo." He seized the young serpent for an imprudent little boy.—"Get out of the wigwam, you naughty boy, don't you know that I am almost dead myself, sorrowing for my son; I hurt my toe in search of medicine." He now imitated the old woman, singing and sobbing, while preparing the medicines. The king of serpents lay on his couch, from the wound he had received, entirely unconscious. Watching his opportunity, Nanebozhoo burst the old woman's skin, seized his warrior's spear and gave the king of serpents a mortal thrust, and then started for the mountains with all his might, the whole brood of serpents after him. As he sped on his way, over hill and plain, the whole internal throng, heaving in his rear, he came to the side of the mountain and found a badger sitting at the mouth of his hole. "In, in, quickly," said Nanebozhoo. After they were both snugly within the hole, he ordered the badger to fill up the hole behind, to keep the serpents from following him. So they had done this when the whole serpent race, hissing with rage, came to the badger's hole and finding he had really gone in, they were now sure of their prey, so they formed a cordon around the hole, their eyes fixed intently on the place, saying, "Now we have him; he can never escape." But Nanebozhoo ordered the badger to dig on, which he did, till finally he dug entirely through the mountain. As he came out on the other side he gave the badger a kick, which killed him, saying, "Get out, you dirty creature." He now made the circuit of the mountain, and came upon his enemies in the rear, all intent on guarding the entrance to his hiding place ready to kill him whenever he should attempt to come out. The now full upon them, deprived as they were of their king, and put them to a perpetual rout, and so the war against the serpents was ended.

I have often thought whether it could be possible that some tradition, much obscured, of the redemption of our world, could have floated across Asia and into America, in this form. War with the evil power, assuming our nature, represented by the old woman's skin, burning the hole, by the old king, hurt, and death, the last, through which is finally triumph, being itself destroyed.

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