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The White Stag Chase

A LEGEND OF THE OTTAWAS

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THE
WHITE STONE CANOE,

A LEGEND OF THE OTTAWAS.

BY
JAMES D. EDGAR.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY W. D. BLATCHLY.

TORONTO:
THE TORONTO NEWS COMPANY.
1885.

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The works of Schoolcraft contain many beautiful Indian Legends, some of which, Longfellow tells us, he wove into his Song of Hiawatha. "The White Stone Canoe" is one which he did not so immortalize, though it possesses great interest, and is rich in poetry, and curious traditions. He made use of one of its incidents, however, where Chibiabos

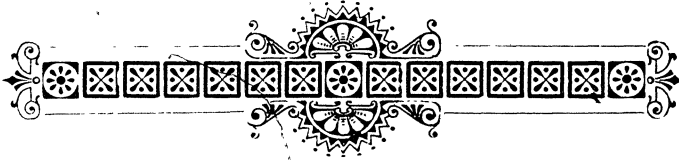
*"In the Stone Canoe was carried
To the Islands of the Blessed,
To the land of Ghosts and Shadows."*

In my treatment of the story I have naturally fallen into the simple metre, which the great American poet adopted as most suitable for Songs of the Forest, and Tales of the Wigwam.

J. D. E.



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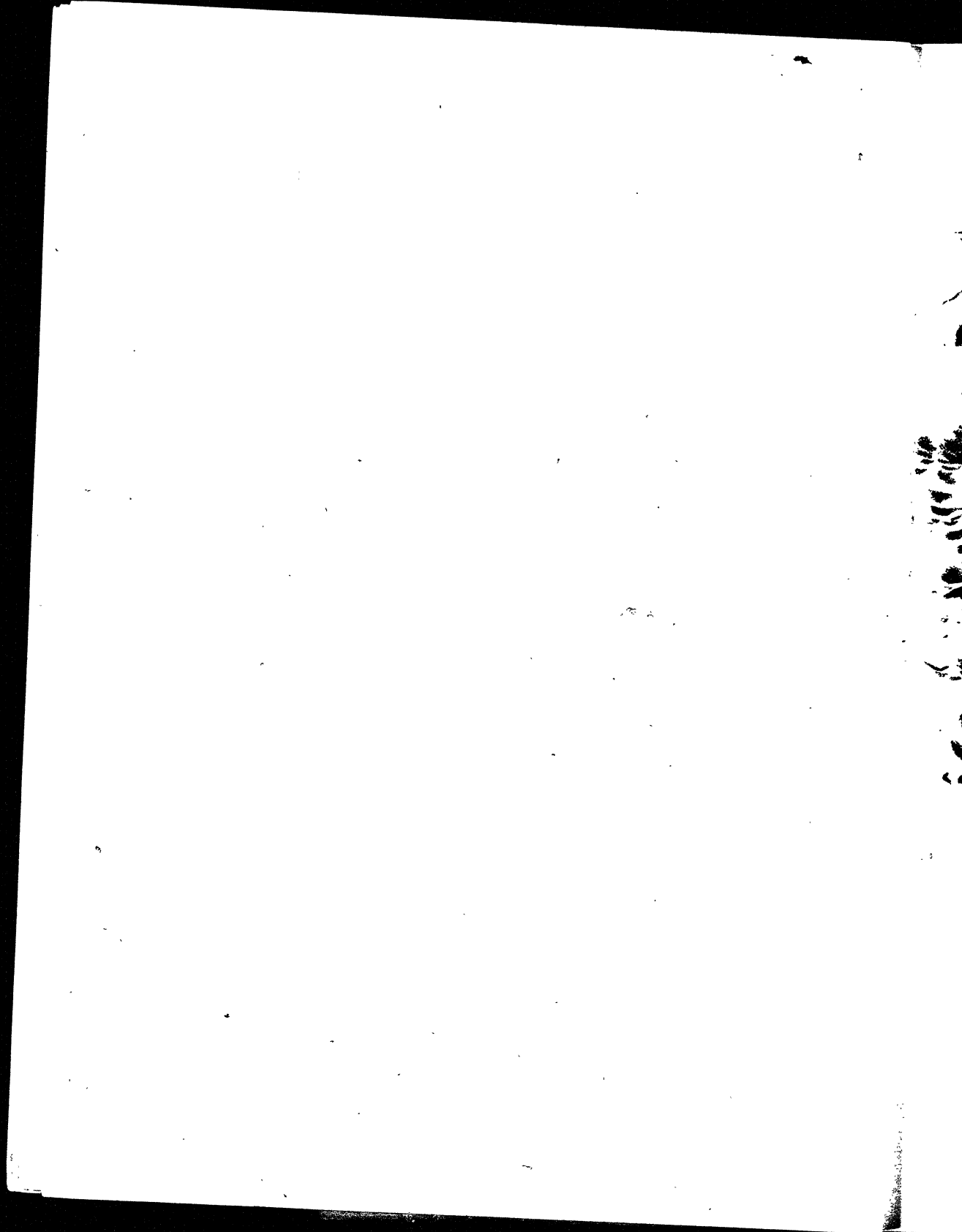


THE WHITE STONE CANOE.

A LEGEND OF THE OTTAWAS.

DARK and solemn stand the pine trees,
And the hemlock casts its shadows,
Where the forest spreads unbroken
From the Great Lake of the Hurons,
To the Lakes of many Islands,
To the waters of Muskoka.

All the voices of the woodland,
All the music of the waters,
Every whisper of the breezes,





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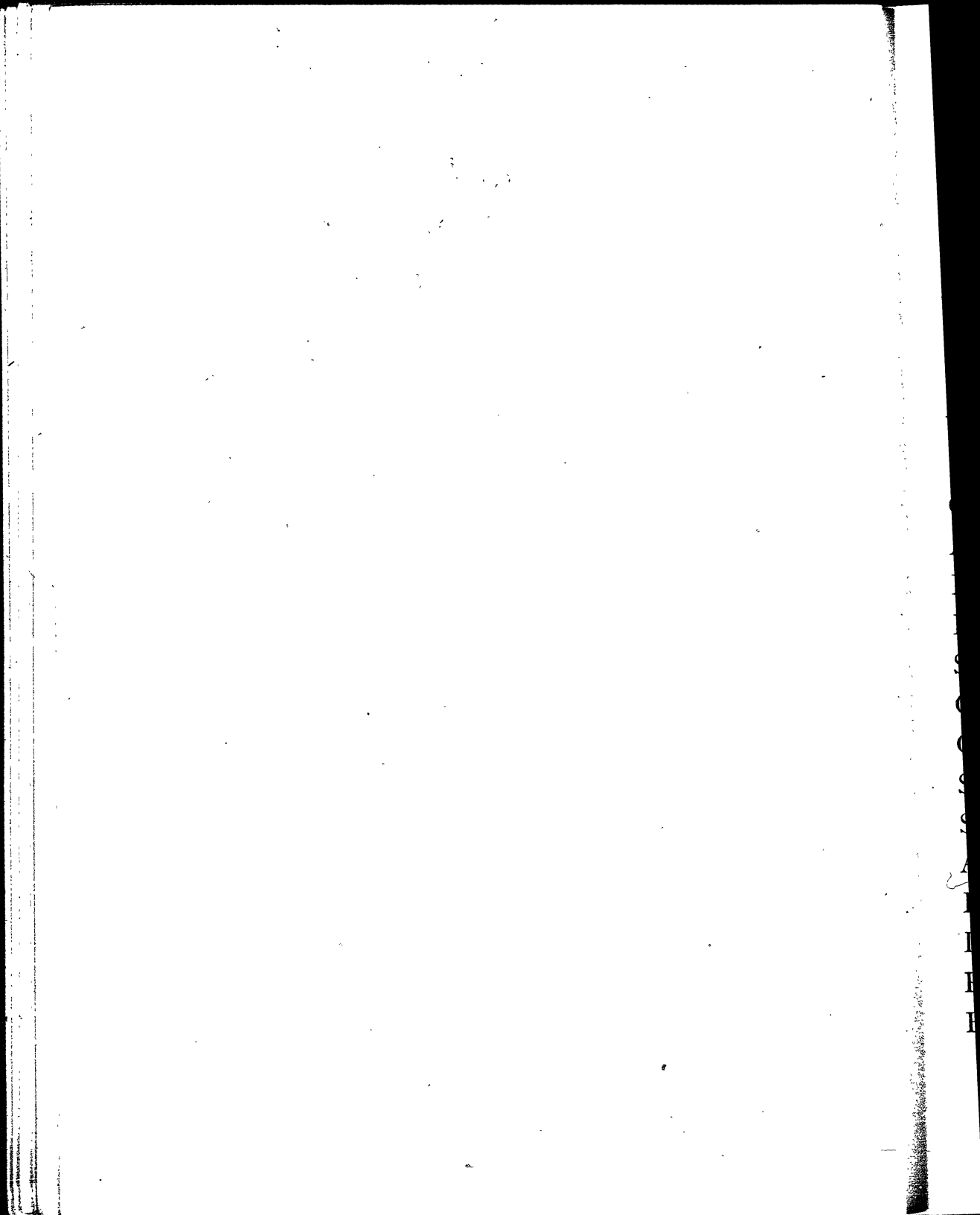
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Stirred the blood of young Abeka,
When he wandered with his Wabose,
Through the shadows of that forest,
In the fulness of the summer,
Breathing words of love and gladness.

O the dreary days of autumn,
When he watched her sinking, dying,
Flushed with fever like the maple,
Shaken like the leaves of aspen.
Ere the early snows of winter
Spread their mantle o'er the forest,
She had passed to the Hereafter.
Kindly hands of women bore her
To her distant place of burial,
Where the tall and stately pine trees
Tower above the birch and basswood.

There Abeka often lingered,
Catching echoes from the branches



Of his sighing and his moaning,
When the North winds played upon them.

Through the gloom of frozen forests,
When the snow lay on the branches,
Bending down the longest branches
Of the hemlock and the cedar,
All alone Abeka wandered,
For his heart was dead within him.
Lonely were his midnight watchings,
Startled by the night owl's screeching,
Or the shrill and dismal music
Of the wolfish pack approaching.
Sometimes silent hours of moonlight
Shed their magic o'er the forest,
And the rabbit, the Wabasso—
Little white one, like the maiden—
Leaped along its beaten pathways,
Paused, and full of timid wonder,
Fixed its two soft eyes upon him.





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In the lodges of his people,
Never had been seen a Pale-Face ;
Never yet had come a Black Robe
Bearing Cross of mystic meaning.
Only vague and blind traditions,
Only secrets of magicians,
Empty songs and incantations,
Taught him of the world of spirits,
Of the land of the Hereafter.

Though he well had loved the war-path,
And was proud of skill in hunting,
Bow and arrows lay neglected,
In those heavy days of anguish.
But one thought was ever with him,
But one wild desire possessed him ;
For the old men often told him,
That by fasting and by dreaming,
By forsaking all his kindred,
By forgetting all his prowess,

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He might find the hidden pathway
To the land of Souls and Shadows.
This one purpose fired his fancy ;
Daily fasts and nightly vigils
Gave him weird and mystic visions,
Filling all his mind with wonder,
Hope and wonder, strangely blended.

Rising with the sun one morning,
Followed by his faithful deer-hound,
Over frozen lakes and rivers,
Over swamps and over mountains,
Guided by the old traditions,
With light feet he started Southward.
Though the air were thick with snow-flakes,
Though the sun and stars were hidden,
Yet he never was mistaken,
Never took the wrong direction,
For the topmost boughs of hemlock,
Bent before the fierce North-west wind,

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Pointed with unerring finger,
To the South-east always pointed.

Snowshoes, made with thongs of deer skin,
Tightly stretched on frames of hardwood,
Bore him lightly over snowdrifts,
Marking all his path behind him ;
Till the sunshine, growing stronger,
Melted every trace of winter.
And he heard the sweet birds singing,
Saw the fragrant blossoms bursting,
And the tender leaflets shewing
Tips of green on all the branches.
Now Abeka's footsteps quickened,
For he saw a well worn pathway
Through a grove of giant pine trees—
Just as promised by traditions,
Old traditions of his people,
Coming from the distant ages,

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When the souls of the departed
Held communion still with mortals.

Silently he followed onward,
Through the melancholy pine trees,
With their sad and solemn swaying,
And their sighing in the South wind.
Save the sighing of the pine trees,
All was perfect stillness round him.
Many times he saw a White Dove
Flitting through the deepest shadows,
Noiseless as the sailing cloudlet,
Shining out against the darkness,
Whiter than the snows of winter.

Soon he found the path ascending,
Till he reached a lofty terrace,
Near the summit of a mountain.
What is this he now encounters !
What strange vision so appals him !





W.D.B.

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Once before, when wounded, bleeding,
Tortured by his cruel foemen,
While they sang the death-song o'er him,
He had seen the dreadful Paw-guk,
Waiting for him in the darkness—
Now again he sees him waiting.

Clad in robes of blackest sable,
At a wigwam's open doorway,
Stood a form of giant stature ;
Hoary locks in snowy whiteness
Floated, cloudlike, down his shoulders ;
Fiercely burned his fiery eyeballs,
Piercing through Abeka's bosom,
Reading every thought within him.

Fear, at first, had made him speechless,
Hope soon filled his heart with boldness,
And, in words of power and passion,
He began to tell his story.

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Scarce ten rapid words were spoken
When the other interrupted :—

“ Cease your idle talk of these things,
“ For I know your thoughts and actions,
“ Know your passion and your sorrow ;
“ I have helped you on this journey,
“ I am here to bid you welcome.
“ She, whom you are seeking after,
“ Rested with me, way worn, weary,
“ Rested for her journey onward.
“ Enter now into my wigwam,
“ I will answer your enquiries,
“ Give you guidance for the future.”

Kindly, then, he led Abeka,
Seated him on couch of bearskin,
Answered all his eager questions,
Told him when his Wabose passed there,
How she urgently entreated

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That she might return to wander
Through the forests near Abeka,
With the birds to warble to him,
With the winds to breathe upon him ;
Sometimes, in his dreams, to tell him
All the love she lavished on him.
Sadly had she learned the lessons
Of her altered state and nature,
Of her future life and duties.
But one answer she had offered
To all words of hope and promise—
“ Happiness comes not without him,
“ Joy is only in his presence,
“ I will wait till he comes for me—
“ Send and tell him I am waiting.”

Then the Master of the Wigwam,
Taking pity on her sorrow,
Called his messenger, the White Dove,
Told her—if she found Abeka

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Bearing equal love for Wabose,
From the land of snows to bring him.

Thus Abeka learned the secret
Of those weird and mystic visions,
That had filled his mind with wonder—
Hope and wonder, strangely blended.
And he heard, with deep emotion,
Why the White Dove hovered round him,
In his fasts and in his vigils,
Stirred his thoughts, and shaped his fancies,
Till she led him through the forest,
Toward the land of Souls and Shadows.
These things all were told Abeka
By the Master of the Wigwam.

Then he took Abeka with him,
Out again, and pointing Southward,
“Yonder lake,” he said, “divides you
“From the land of Souls and Shadows.

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“ Standing here you see its borders,
“ You may view its plains of verdure,
“ And the sparkling of its waters,
“ And the purple of its mountains.
“ But you cannot take your body ;
“ Leave it with your bow and arrows,
“ Leave it with your dog and knapsack ;
“ On returning you shall find them.”

Quick compliance made Abeka,
And upon a couch of bearskin
Left his body, still and lifeless,
Guarded by his faithful deer-hound.

Thrilling with a sense of freedom,
Bounding forward like a red deer,
Sweeping onward like an eagle,
Like an arrow flew Abeka.

Forests, rivers, glens and mountains,
All were there ; but greater beauty
Clothed the face of hill and valley,

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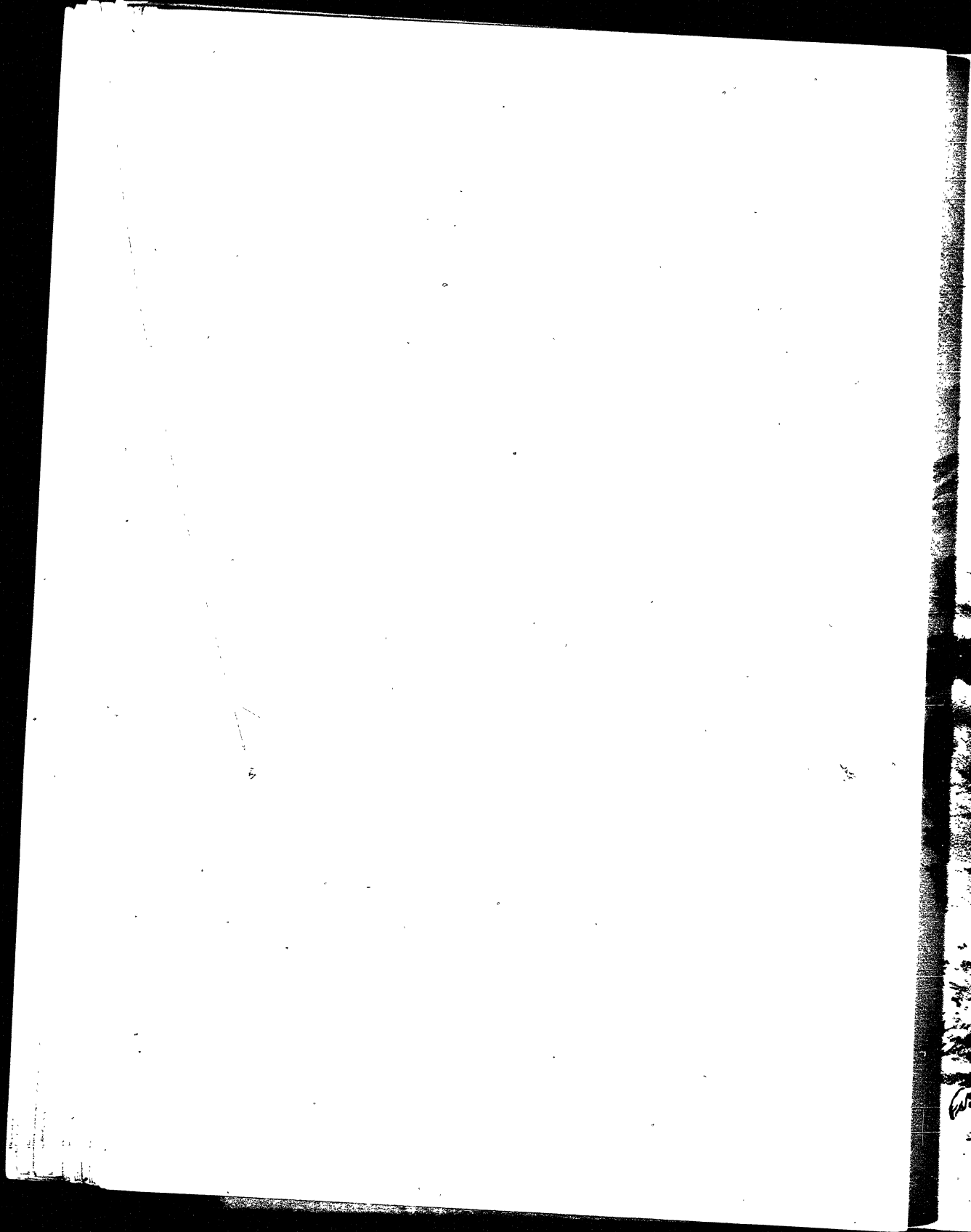
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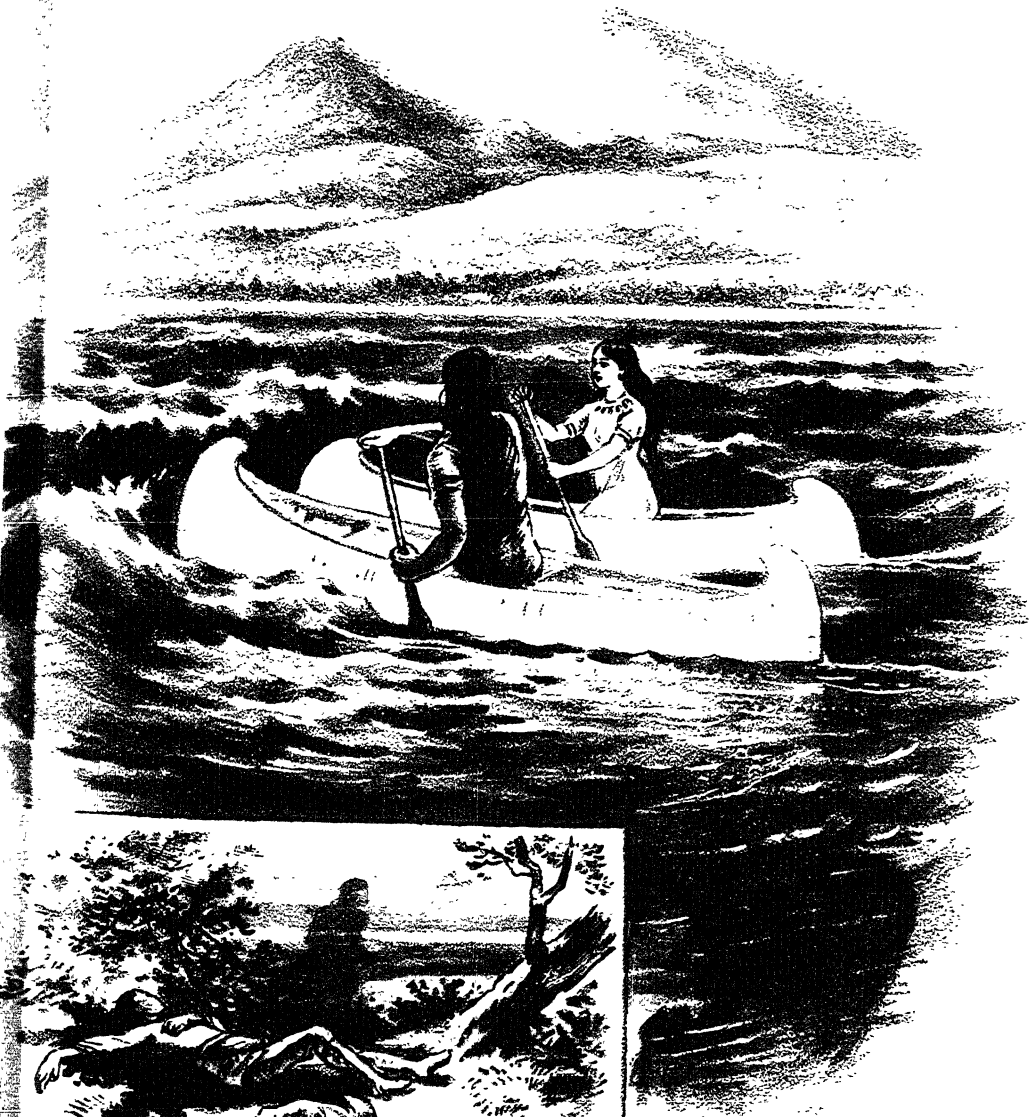
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Brighter blossoms decked the woodland,
Birds he saw of rarest plumage,
All the beasts had lost their shyness—
Timid fawns seemed not to fear him.

As the sun shines through the water,
As the sea gull sails the storm wind,
As the moonbeams pierce the forest,
So Abeka smoothly glided,
Like a shadow among shadows,
Onward through the trees and branches.

Thus, for half a day he journeyed,
And the landscape grew more varied—
Richer in its changing beauty,
Fairer than his brightest visions.
Then he saw the shining water
Of a broad lake spread before him.
Bending branches fringed the margin
Casting shadows on the pebbles ;





W.A.B.

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Swans and wild fowl sailed upon it,
Rising, falling, with the billows,
While, below them, golden fishes
Swam and glistened in the sunlight.

In the distance rose an Island—
Clad with verdure all its mountains,
Bright with blossom all its valleys.
Floating on the crystal waters,
A canoe of dazzling whiteness,
Fashioned out of purest White Stone,
Waited, ready for Abeka.
Stepping lightly in the centre,
Scarcely had he touched a paddle,
When he turned and saw beside him,
His dear Wabose, his long lost one,
With her own canoe and paddle,
White and shining like the other.

She restrained his strong emotion
By her smiles and warning gestures.

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Shining from her lovely features
Glowed a radiancy of beauty,
Pure and gentle as the moonlight,
Clear and sparkling as the starlight.
By her loving smile he knew her,
By her eyes that oft had spoken
More than falt'ring tongue could tell him.
Then she, pointing towards the Island,
Signed to him to hasten thither.
Imitating all his motions,
By his side she paddled onward
Out upon the limpid waters.

Soon the waves rose up before them,
Curling, dark and fierce, upon them,
Threat'ning both canoes with danger.
As the white canoes approached it,
Every billow seemed to vanish,
Fading as they glided through it,
Melting like the mist of morning.

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For the Master of Life remembered
That their lives had both been blameless.
He had helped the old and feeble,
Many times he shared their burdens,
Fed them through the dreary winters,
Giving from his corn and venison—
Fruits of hunting and of labour—
She had cared for little children,
Tenderly had loved the orphans,
Nursed the wounds of stricken warriors,
And had often wept and pleaded,
Begging mercy for the captives
That they might be spared from torture.

But the sights of that strange voyage,
Filled the lovers' hearts with sorrow.
Fathoms deep, beneath the water,
Strewn upon the sandy reaches,
Scattered o'er the rocky ledges,
Lay the forms of those who perished
On their passage towards the Island.

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All around them in the waters,
Old and young were struggling, sinking,
Men and maidens without number,
Of all nations, tribes and kindreds.
Ancient chiefs and famous warriors,
Came with shouts of hope and triumph,
Dashed their paddles through the surges,
Laughing at the foaming billows.
Vain were all their fierce exertions,
Useless all their foolish shouting ;
No one listened to their clamour,
None applauded at their boasting.
Slowly each canoe was filling,
Sinking lower, sinking surely,
Unless hidden hands of Spirits
Smoothed its pathway through the waters.
Guardian Spirits these, who follow
Each of us from days of childhood,
Ready always with assistance,
Anxious always to befriend us.

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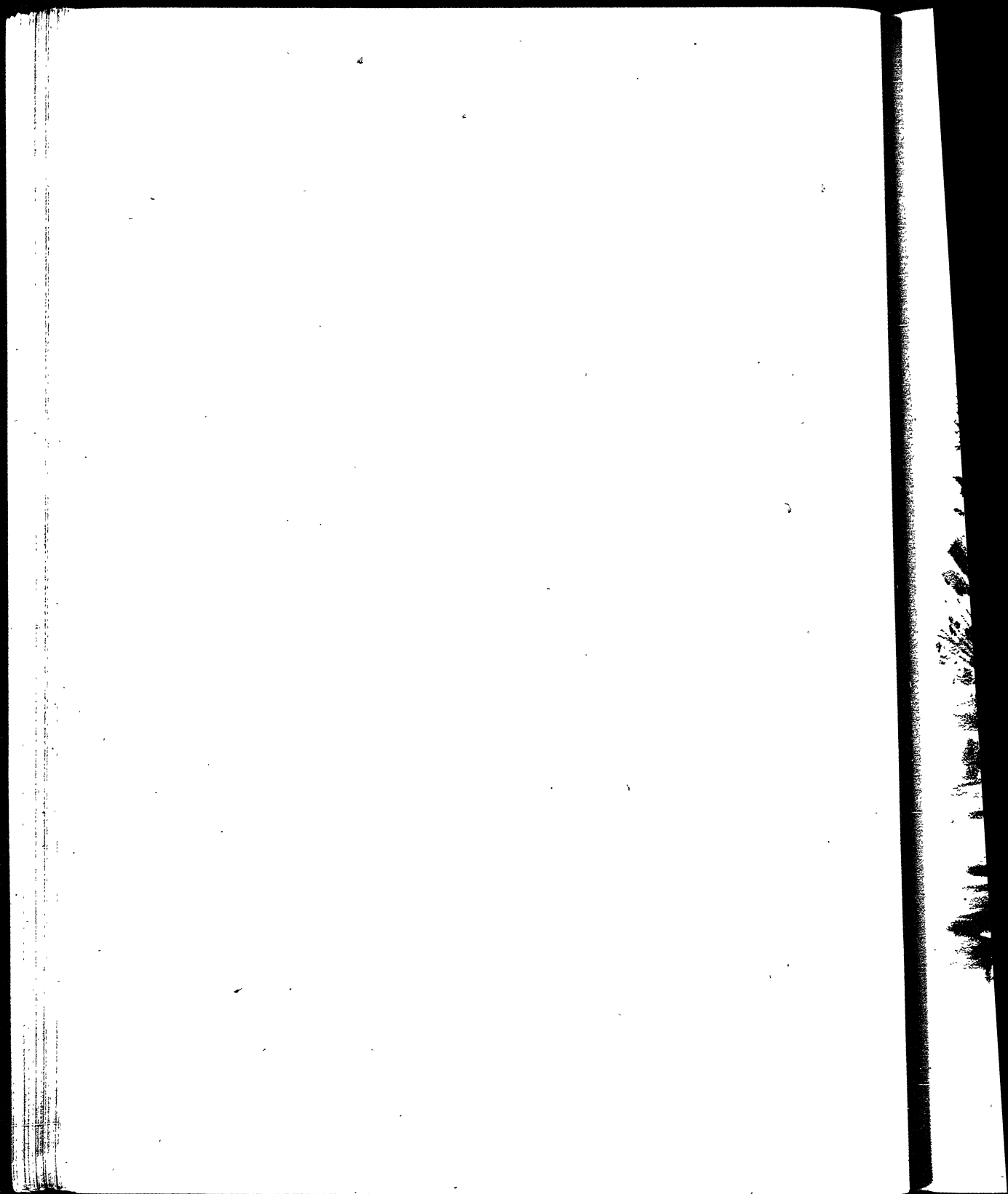
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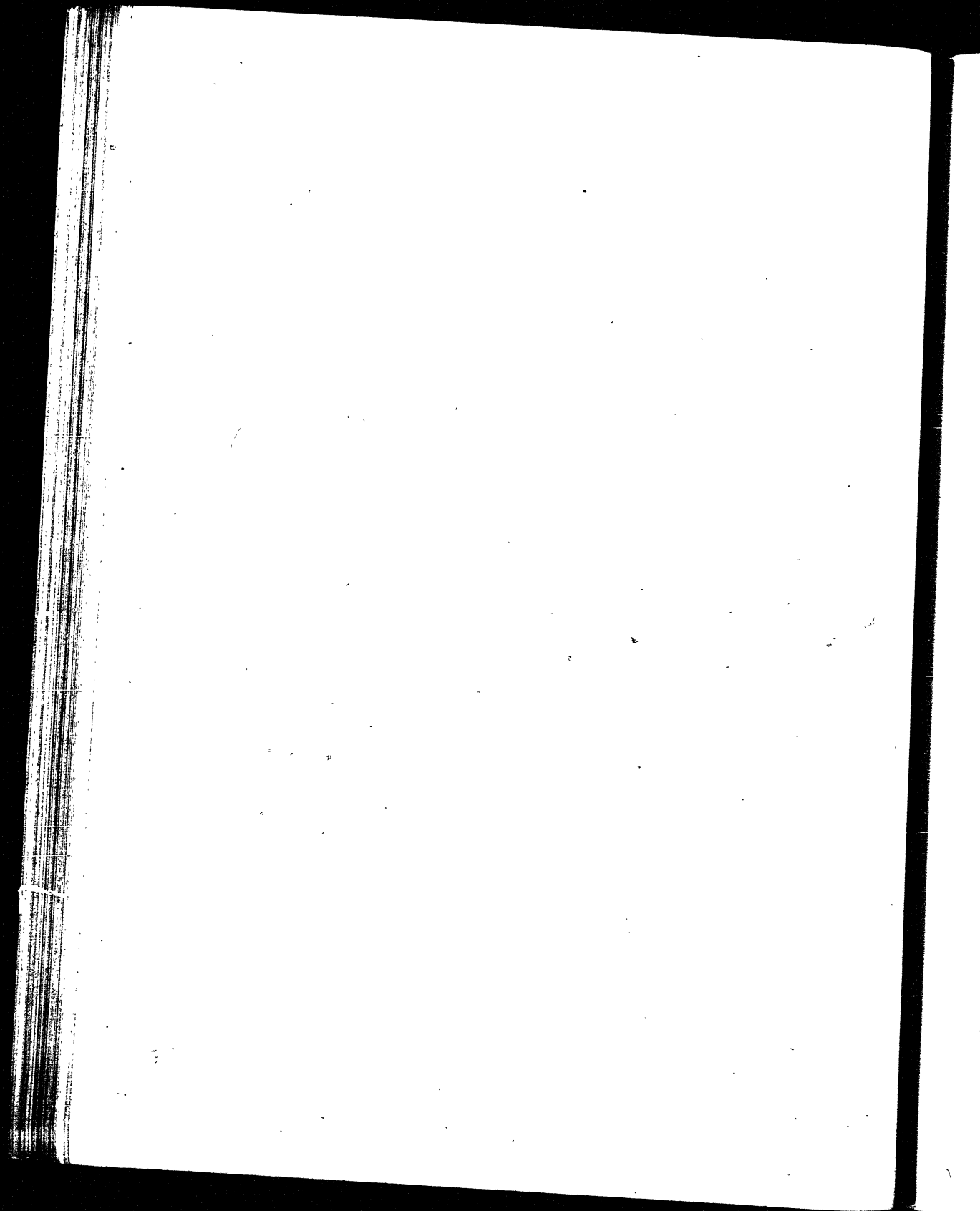
But their power to help is measured
By the love we bear our fellows,
By the kindness of our actions,
And our sympathy for sorrow.

On this passage to the Island
There were some canoes of White Stone
Bearing only little children—
Happy, smiling little children—
And the waters never harmed them,
As they glided gently onwards,
To the Island of the Blessed.

• Suddenly, as in a moment,
After passing through all dangers,
On the shore the two companions
Found themselves in safety landed.
Hand in hand they went together,
Over flowery fields they wandered,
Through the glades of leaf and blossom,

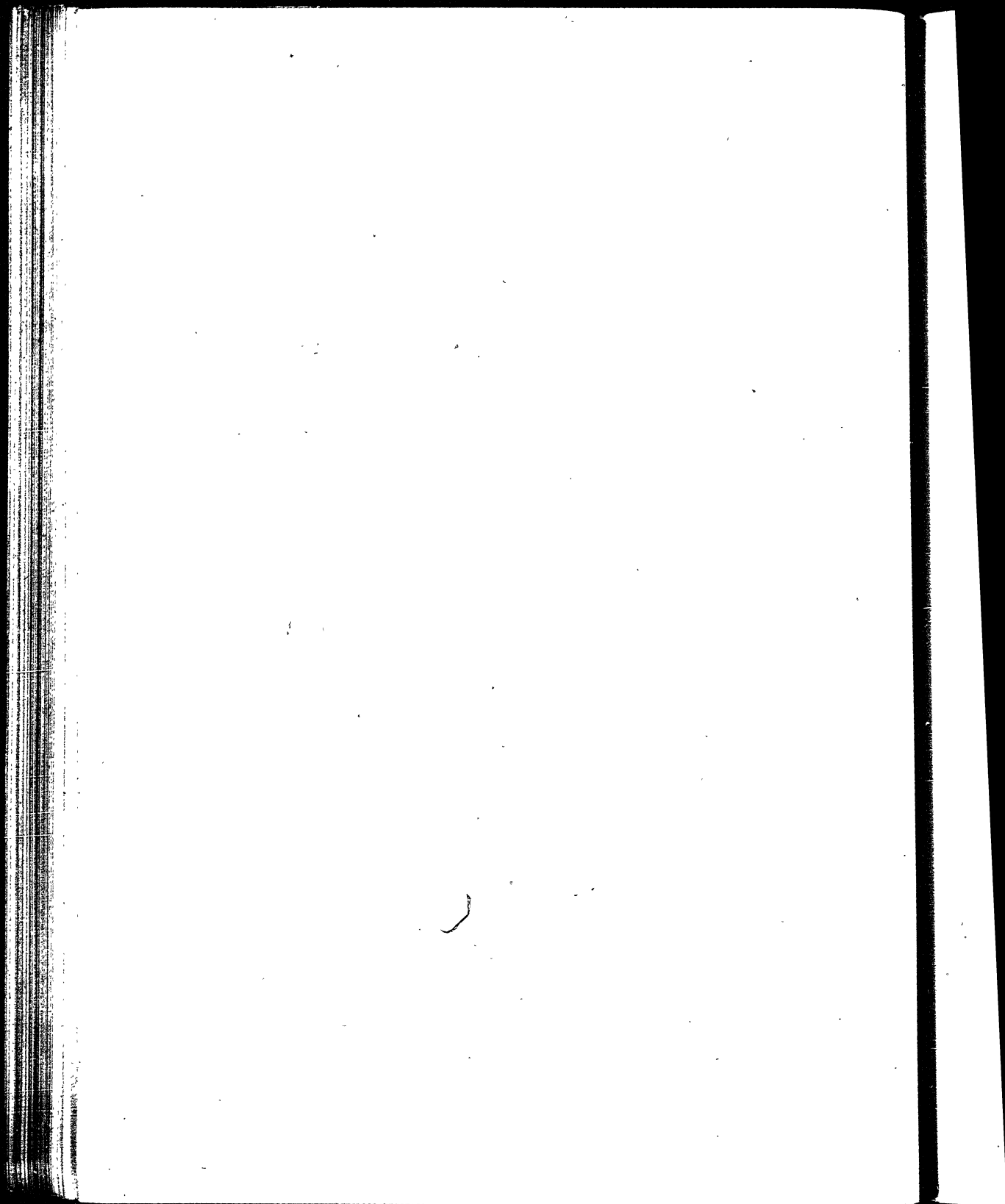






Where the waterfalls made music,
Where the streamlet softly murmured
Sending to the birds above it,
Songs to match their sweetest singing.
All the fragrance of the woodland,
All the beauties of the forest,
All its charms and all its secrets,
Filled their hearts with joy unspoken.
Cold and famine came not near them,
For the balmy air sustained them,
And they quaffed the spicy Southwind.

There, on couch of moss reclining,
Long they watched the Souls and Shadows,
Thronging past in countless numbers,
Turning gentle eyes upon them,
Wearing each a smile of gladness,
Giving looks of love and welcome.
All remembrance of the sorrows,
Of the troubles and the sadness.



In the old life of the mortals,
Had been swept from out their mem'ries
By the fierce and stormy waters.
And no voice of lamentation,
And no words of pain or anguish,
And no bitter cry of parting,
Broke the peaceful stillness round them.

When the actions in the old life
Had been cruel, false, and selfish,
And the beating of the storm waves
Could not wash away their traces
From the memories of the Shadows,
These could never reach the Island,
But, forlorn, forsaken beings;
To and fro they ever drifted,
With the currents and the tempests,
Till, at last, they sank to silence,
In the sleep that is eternal.

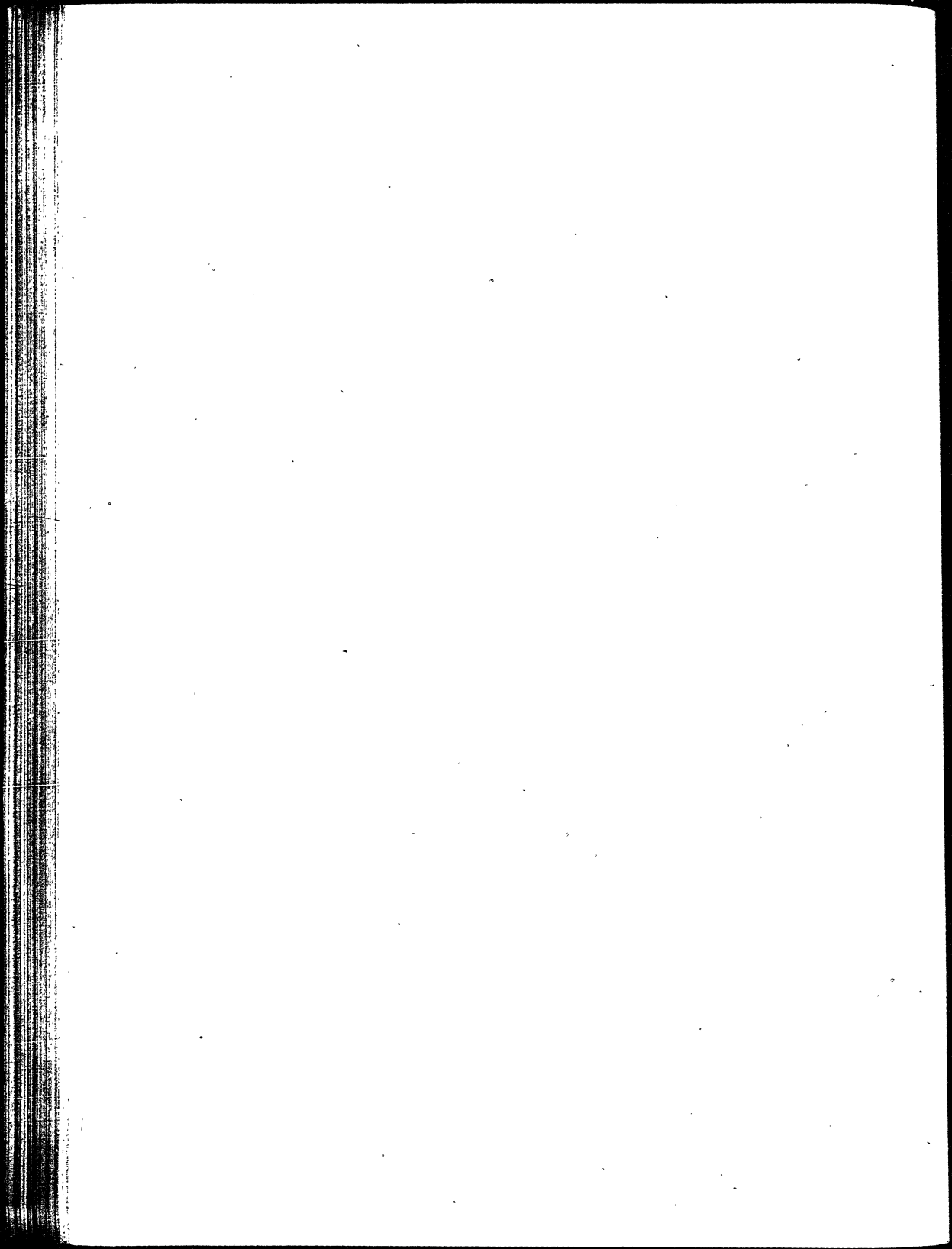
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While Abeka mused and pondered
On the mystery of his new life,
Came a voice of softest cadence,
Floating on the gentle breezes,
Floating like a cloud in summer.
Though the accents thrilled Abeka,
And he knew their fullest meaning,
Yet the words were not a language
Spoken by the Earthly nations.

All around they felt a Presence,
In the shadows It was near them,
In the sunlight It was with them,
But their eyes could not behold It.

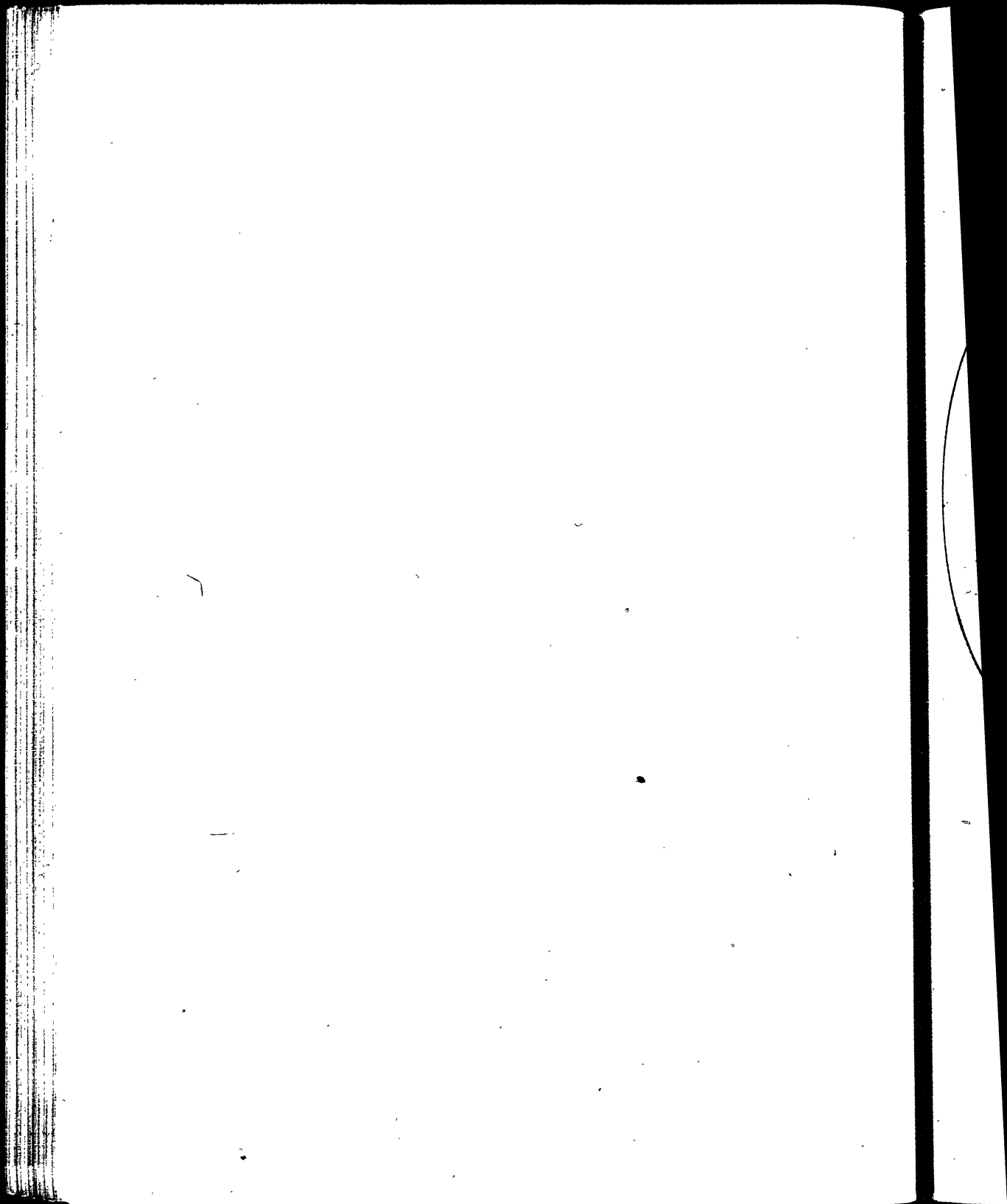
As the mother stills her infant,
By her sweet but wordless singing ;
As the wild bird sounds her warning
To the timid brood around her,
So the Voice that reached Abeka



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Spoke to him with fullest meaning.
“Go,” it said, “back to your people,
“Since your task is not accomplished.
“To your people I will send you,
“You shall be a chief among them,
“Ruling them with love and wisdom.
“For great purposes I made you—
“These, my messenger shall shew you
“When he gives you back your body,
“So that you may guide your people,
“So that you may lead them with you,
“Safely to the Happy Island.
“Go, but leave your Wabose with me ;
“She shall wait your second coming,
“Always young and always faithful,
“Young and fair as when I called her
“From the land of snows and forests.”

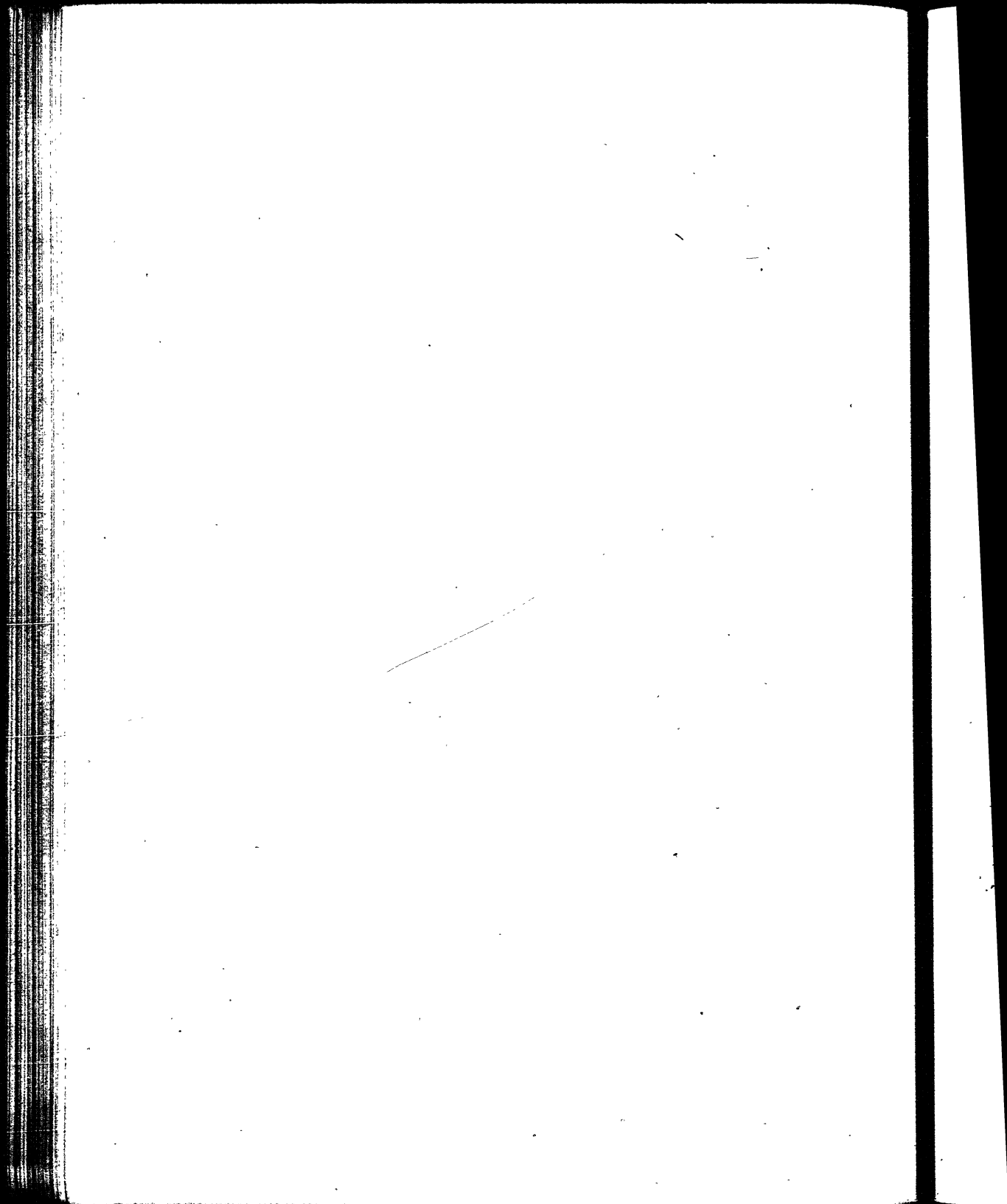
When, in after years, Abeka
Told the story of this journey





W.P.B.





To the listeners in his Wigwam,
Sometimes doubters were among them,
Who believed that in his fasting,
In his long and weary vigils,
He had seen a mystic vision,
And had never left his body,
Never crossed the stormy water,
Never seen again his Wabose.

But none ever dared to show him,
That they doubted what he told them :
For he faithfully believed it ;
And he ruled his people wisely,
So that he might take them with him,
When he next should cross the water,
In the bright canoe of White Stone,
To the Island of the Blessed.