



JOHANN GEORG KOHL, 1854

KITCHI-GAMI

Life Among The Lake Superior Ojibway

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the forest, had heard a little snapping shot, only explicable by the fact that a hunting pigmy had just passed close by him. These dwarfs, too, have delicate little canoes like the Indians, and glide over the lakes and rivers. Some Indians have so sharp a sight that they can distinctly see them moving along in the reeds and narrow channels between the broad leaves of the water-plants.

I wish I could have learned more about these interesting little people, or spirits; but I thought I had better at least mention them at the end of a chapter which will not produce very agreeable sensations among my readers.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OLD AURORA—THE LONG-KNIVES—THE SILVER AGE—THE GOLDEN ERA—A LAMENT FOR OLD TIMES—THE STATE OF NATURE—ARRIVAL OF THE FRENCH—THE YAGANASH—THE YANKERS—HARD TIMES—FIRE-WATER—DYING OUT OF THE GAME—THE CHIEF SHINGUKONGSE—HIS BIRTH AND PARENTAGE—HIS GREAT DREAM—THE RISING SUN—VISITS HIS FATHER—BECOMES A GREAT BRAVE—CAPTURE OF FORT MACKINAW—IS APPOINTED TO A CHIEF—LOVE OF THE ENGLISH—IS A GREAT MYSTERY MAN—PIECE OF SUPERSTITION—THIRTY THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR MEDICINE—TURNS CHRISTIAN—HIS DEATH.

“ Ah !” old Aurora, La Rose’s mother, said to me, with a sigh, this morning, when I called once again to listen to her stories—“ ah !” she said, “ my head has grown quite weak lately. I have lost my memory. The Ojibbeways have all lost their memory. The Americans have made them weak. Our people do not talk so much about their own affairs now as they used to do. They no longer feel the same pleasure in telling the old stories, and they are being forgotten, and the traditions and fables rooted out. You often ask after them, but you seldom find any one who can give you the right answer. Our nation is fallen; and this came quite suddenly, since the Kitchinokomans, or ‘ Long-knives,’ entered our country.”

Lake Superior and the Ojibbeway tribes around it have already been under three European masters:

first, under the French; then under the Britons; and, lastly, under the Long-knives, which is the Indian name for the Americans of the United States. I frequently heard it asserted here that the people and country were tolerably free and independent under the French and British, but suddenly fell, and are rapidly proceeding to ruin, since the Americans have taken them, and they already call the recently expired period of British dominion "the good old times." The time of the French, or Wemitiogoshis, as the Ojibbeways call them, was naturally still older and better. It was what we may call a silver age; and, of course, the time when there were no pale faces—the primitive times, when the Indians lived entirely alone—was the golden era.

My old lady talked to me about these old times in broken Canadian-French, after her fashion. I was much inclined to give her characteristic speech just as she held it, and in her broken Indian-French. But I fear lest the reader may hardly understand it, and so many explanatory remarks would be requisite. Hence I will translate it as carefully as I can, now and then quoting her own words:

"Beng! à cette heure!"* she began, when I asked her about the old times; "à cette heure c'est longtemps. C'était du vieux temps dont je te parle, beng beng vieux" (at this moment it is very long since. It is from the old times of which I am speaking to thee, very, very old), "when there were no white men at all in the country. Then the Indians were much

* The Canadians always say, instead of "à présent," "à cette heure," and pronounce it exactly "asteur." Their "bien" sounds like "beng," and when they wish to strengthen it, they repeat it several times, after the fashion of Indians and children, thus: "Beng beng vieux," or "tres vieux."

better than at this hour. They were healthier and stronger, et beng plus forts pour la médecine. (This Indian idea may be translated into European as "stronger in their faith, more pious and religious.")

"They lived long and became very old. Beng rarement que se meurt un sauvage. They could all fast much longer.* They ate nothing at all for ten days and longer. Hence they had better dreams.† They dreamed of none but good and excellent things, of hero deeds and the chase, of bears, and stags, and caribos, and other great and grand hunting animals, and when he had dreamed, the Indian knew exactly where these animals could be found. He made no mistake. Il alla tout droit. Il tua, quoiqu'il avait ni poudre ni fusil. Now their dreams are weak. They often make a mistake, and even if they have dreamed well, they do not know how to find the animals at the right place.

"It is true all the beasts were more numerous then. All the forests were filled with them. Ça et là et partout. Bears and deer, stags and foxes, caribos and beavers. All the rivers were full, full of fishes. And the Indians had great power over them. C'est vrai ils n'avaient pas le bon pouvoir. Ils n'étaient pas Créquins (Christians), mais, au reste, ils vivaient comme des rois. All they wanted they could make for themselves. They made axes and arrows of sharp stones; knives and lances of bones, et ils tuèrent pour leur nourriture et vêtement les animaux tout roide.

* The reader will have had several opportunities through the course of this work to see that the power of abstaining long from food is the sign of a good and brave man.

† "Dreams" is always employed for thoughts, determination, and plans of life.