

THE FLOOD MYTH OF THE CHIPPEWAS.

BY

ALBERT B. REAGAN.

Manabush is the erator god of the Chippewa Indians. Soon after his birth his parents were both killed by a clan of sealions. After their death he lived with his grandmother till he became of age. He then decided to go out and avenge the death of his parents. The sea monsters who had killed his parents lived on an island. This was first surrounded by water for a short distance. Then for a space of about a mile and a half there was a circular band-area of floating pitch-like ice across which a canoe could not venture without certainly getting stuck in the pitch and consequently being captured. But notwithstanding this apparently unsurmountable difficulty, Manabush was determined.

He told his grandmother his plans. She listened attentively to their narration, then sadly advised him not to undertake the hazardous task, though she wished to see the annihilation of the destructive sea beasts. In concluding she said, "It is no use for you to fight with the sealions of that island. Your canoe will get stuck in the pitch. Then the beasts will come out and devour you." But he was the more determined. He made a large canoe and covered it with tallow so it would float and go through the pitch. After it was completed, he made a strong bow and prepared plenty of arrows. He then launched his canoe and told his grandmother to go ahead of him with another canoe in a zigzag way up the channel a little distance at the start. (This custom of having the women proceed a war party for a little way when starting on a war expedition was long afterwards followed by the Chippewas in starting on the war path against the Sioux.) Then when everything was ready, he started out on his war enterprise.

After considerable labor in paddling and pushing his canoe through and over the pitch-like ice, he landed safely on the island in the night where he stayed till the break of day. Then at dawn he gave the warwhoop and ran for the house of the king, or chief sea monster. Upon hearing the warwhoop, the king jumped from his bed and got his bows and arrows; and the two powerful beings started to fight according as they were gifted by their superior givers. The battle was terrible. They fought continuously for two days without killing each other. Then they rested on their arms with the contest a draw.

But Manabush had advisers at hand. On the evening following the second day's battle, Batter, a bird of the blue jay family, accosted him and said: "You can not kill King Sealion by shooting him in the body, as his heart and vital parts are not there as in most beings." Then after a short pause, he continued: "I will tell you where they are if you will promise to give me some of the meat from his dead carcass."

With open mouth and wide eyes, Manabush listened to Batter's statement and advice till he had closed, then replied: "My brother, if you will tell me where King Sealion's heart is I will give you the meat you ask and make you king of the Blue Jays and all meat birds."

"In truth," spoke up Batter as he flew to a limb over Manabush so as to be heard more easily without talking loud enough to be heard by any one else, "this monster's heart is in his little toe. Aim for that next time you go to battle with him and you will succeed."

The morning of the third day Manabush again gave the warwhoop. Immediately King Sealion came out with his full equipment for battle. The fight was on. Manabush aimed for the little toe of his adversary. The arrow struck squarely and penetrated the vital regions. King Sealion keeled over and died there and then, seeing him fall, Manabush ran to him, took out his big knife and scalped him. He then sailed across the surf to where he had left his grandmother, singing his song of victory as he went, as the Indians have since sung when returning from a battle field.

When his grandmother heard him coming singing the victory song, she started out to meet him in her canoe. Meeting him, she took the scalp and went on ahead of him to shore. Landing, she called the village neighbors and all commenced to have the war dance around the scalp in the middle of the dance hall, as it has since been the custom of the Indians to dance the war dance down through the ages. Thus they danced till they had completed the orgie, after which they smoked the pipe of peace.

This dance lasted four days. Then Manabush bade his grandmother good-bye and started west over the earth in quest of other "hurtful" beasts. After four days of journeying he met four wolves, one of which was a chief. These accompanied him for four days in his passing westward. As he thus journeyed with them, he noticed every evening when they camped for the night that they would pile sticks in a heap and King Wolf would jump over the pile four times, after which the wood would catch fire without the aid of a fire-starter. By watching them, he also learned the art. On they traveled. As they thus journeyed, young wolves followed along behind and chased down the moose and deer and killed them as needed. Then they would dress and cook some and all would eat to their satisfaction. So all had a pleasurable time.

After journeying four days with the wolf pack, he chose for his companion one of the young wolves whom he called his nephew. Leaving the rest behind, he then traveled on in his western travels. The evening of the first day after they had parted company with the other wolves they came upon the track of a moose which it was decided his nephew should chase on the following morning. That night Manabush had an unfavorable dream. The next morning as a consequence of the forboding evil foreshadowed in it, he cautioned his comrade to be careful. "The dream was about chasing this moose," he said. "It was a bad dream about you in this chase." He continued: "In chasing this moose you are to track, whenever you come to a little stream always cut a tree down and walk across it. Don't jump over the stream. Be careful."

As per arrangement, the nephew started out on the chase, Manabush following his tracks. Soon he came to a little stream over which he fell a tree as he had been instructed. He then crossed it safely. After a while he came to another very small stream which he thought he would jump, as if

seemed too small to take time to cut a tree down on which to cross. Furthermore, he could see the moose only just a little farther on, staggering with fatigue, and, by crossing immediately, he could soon overtake it. He could even taste fresh meat, he imagined, the moose being so sure his. As he jumped, the stream instantly swelled its dimensions to a raging torrent and swept him away with it. It had been caused to become a large river by the great Snake God who lived near a sand point that projected into the lake a little way off from the outlet of the river. This snake god's home was on an island just beyond the sand point. Here he lived in company with many other snakes and other animals that live in the water. Here they had their lodges, as did the bear family. These snakes and beasts were the great evil enemies of our race. Here to this island the wolf was taken prisoner. There he was killed and skinned and his hide was used to cover the door-way of the principal lodge of the place where the greater part of the snakes went in and out in their strollings about.

Following along behind, Manabush tracked his nephew to this second stream, now a big river, and found that his tracks ended there. At once he knew he had disobeyed his orders of the morning when he had told him to cut a tree across every stream he came to. He had cut one tree down and had crossed the stream there safely. Now he had disobeyed orders and had tried to jump the stream, but was taken by the current. And the stream getting larger and swifter as it passed out toward the lake, took him out with it to the residence of King Snake. There this snake and his companions had killed him and took his hide for a door-cover for the snakes' passage-way. Finding that the tracks ended at the stream-crossing and that he had undoubtedly been swept out into the lake, Manabush started down its winding course, hoping against hope that he might find him stranded and yet alive, or might be lucky enough to find his body, if dead. He had luck in obtaining desired information, but not his comrade's body.

As he neared the stream's mouth, he saw a bird looking down into the water. He slipped slowly up to it and made a grab for its head. Unluckily, however, he just missed his hold and ruffled up the feathers on the back of its head and neck. The bird was Kingfisher. The top bunch of feathers on his head Manabush made by this stroke, by grabbing him by the head and slipping his hold. Escaping, the bird flew away a short distance and lit. Then looking back and seeing Manabush, he said: "I would have told you where your nephew has gone had you not grabbed me as you did." Manabush, however, was equal to the occasion, for he knew the weak points in the make-up of the lives of all living things. So he said to him: "Come over and tell me and I will make you a pretty bird." In consequence of this promise, he flew near and told him that his nephew had been killed by King Snake who lived near the sand point. He told him further that the snakes and bears and other water beasts come out on the sand point to sun themselves about noon each nice day and the King Snake would be the last one to come on shore. Manabush thanked him for the information and then "fixed him up" and made him a pretty bird by rubbing his breast with white clay and painting his body black-blue.

Having completed his talking with Kingfisher, he started for the sand point mentioned, after he had made a strong bow and had prepared bull-rush tops for arrows. When he got near the sand beach he said to himself: "I will be a tree-stub". And on reaching the place he turned into a stub of a poplar tree. Then after while as the sun ascended the heavens, the snakes came out to sun themselves on the sand as they were wont to do. The white bears came last, followed by King Snake. The others had noticed nothing; but King Snake at once noticed the tree-stub. "What is it?" he asked. On scanning it further, he exclaimed: "I believe that is Manabush standing there!" He then turned to one of the chief snakes and said: "Go to yonder stub. Climb it. Then coil around it and squeeze it hard." This snake chief did as he was bidden. He coiled himself around it and squeezed; but Manabush never moved. After this snake had tried his crushing powers for a considerable time, he gave it up and went back to where King Snake was, saying: "That can't be Manabush." King Snake, however, was not satisfied. He turned to a white bear and commanded him, also, to examine the supposed stub, saying: "You go and climb on that stub to its very top. Then climb down so as to scratch it as you descend." The bear did as he was told. Manabush nearly yelled, but never moved. Going back to his master, the bear said: "That can't be Manabush." Being satisfied, King Snake immediately came ashore and stretched himself on the sand in the sun.

After all the reptiles were fast asleep, Manabush turned to be a man again. He then took out his bow and arrows and went near King Snake and shot him in the body, but without injuring him in the least. He then remembered what Kingfisher had told him, that to injure King Snake he must shoot his shadow. So with the second shot he aimed at the beast's shadow, and instantly the reptile stretched out and gasped in awful pain. Seeing this, Manabush started back to get a few logs together to make a raft, for Kingfisher had told him that if he wounded King Snake, he would flood the world to the top of the trees in revenge. Then the water would go down again. But if he killed him, he would destroy the whole world in a mighty flood. The waters had already begun to rise. So he got on the raft he had succeeded in making and floated about as he watched the water rise until the trees all disappeared. Then the water went down again.

After it had got dry on the earth again, he went back to tell Chief Wolf what had happened. After narrating this to the wolf tribe, he went back to the lake where he had had the encounter with King Snake; he knew by the world's not being destroyed utterly that this snake had only been wounded. Consequently, he had it in his mind to make sure of his killing him, be the consequences what they would.

As he was walking along the shore of the lake on his return, he heard something rattling. Looking ahead, he saw a large frog-like, old lady of the bad-witch type jumping along. She had a rattle which she used in doctoring the sick. She also had a pack of basswood on her back.

"Hello, grandma," he shouted to her. "Where are you going?"

"I am going to King Snake's house to doctor him," answered the frog-lady.

"Why, what is the matter with King Snake, grandma?"

"One great god, Manabush, shot King Snake for revenge."

"Grandma, teach me your medicine," broke in Manabush. "I will pay you."

Tempted with the promised pay, the old medicine-frog-lady told him all about her doctoring and medicine songs. Then after he had learned all she could impart, he killed her and, skinning her, put the skin on himself. He then took the rattle and the pack of basswood bark and started for the village where King Snake lived. On the way he stopped where the old frog-lady had lived. There he made himself much at home and waited an invitation to doctor. The evening following his arrival, a messenger came to him saying: "Grandma, you are again requested to come and doctor King Snake."

"All right," answered Manabush.

Then imitating the old frog-lady, he started to finish his killing of King Snake. Moreover, realizing the dire results that would follow, he got a lot of trees together for a raft, as he journeyed toward that snake's house. Getting everything in readiness, he entered that reptile's yard. As he entered the door he noticed his nephew's skin hanging as a curtain to the doorway. The sight of it made him feel so badly that he almost cried. He entered the house, they, of course, supposing him to be the old-medicine-frog-lady. They had him enter the room where King Snake lay very weak and sick. On entering, he took his rattles and started to sing the medicine songs he had learned from the aged frog-lady. As he sung, he crawled nearer and nearer to King Snake's side. As he did so, he saw that the arrow he had shot at the previous time was still imbedded in the flesh with the broken end still sticking out. He waited. At the opportune moment he pushed the arrow completely in and instantly killed King Snake. He then immediately fled from the house, singing to cover his tracks and to prevent suspicion.

He knew the consequence of his act and made with all speed for his raft, and none too soon, for while he was still running the water reached knee deep in depth. The raft also began to float away just as he got on it. Soon then the whole world was submerged. In this catastrophe the animals commenced to swim around trying to get somewhere where they would be safe from the raging waters. Some succeeded in getting onto the raft; others hung to it. For four days they were floating as if it were in the middle of a great ocean; there was no land to be seen anywhere. The whole land surface of the earth had been swallowed up.

Manabush had forgotten to get a handful of dirt from mother earth before getting aboard his raft. So on this fourth day of tempestuous waters he called a council, saying: "We must do something. We can not stay here on this raft for all time. We must get some dirt."

In accordance with the decision of the council, Manabush chose Beaver, Otter, Loon, and Muskrat as divers to try their hands in getting some earth

from the bottom of the deep to start land again. Beaver went down first, but died before he reached the bottom of the waters. Otter dove likewise, but died and floated lifeless over the water. Then Loon went down but returned without anything. He had seen the bottom of the surging waters, but had lost his life just as he was nearing the green, carpeted land and trees. When he floated near the raft dead on his return, Manabush seized him. He then brought him back to life by blowing his breath in his face. Muskrat then started in his diving. For four days nothing was seen of him. Then he floated again on the water near the raft, dead and all doubled up. Manabush pulled him on board the raft and blowed breath into him again. Then he went to examining him to see what he had found. In his hands (front paws) he found a little dirt and sand, also some in his feet and mouth. A leaf and some seed were also found. Having obtained the coveted gifts of earth, he dried them in his hands and caused them to increase till he had a handful. The act of recreation of the world was then at hand.

Being all ready for the work before him, Manabush held his filled hand of dirt, sand, and seed up on a level with his face with palm up. At once he began to blow his breath strongly over the lump and blew particles off it around the raft. In this way he formed an island. Immediately, then, the animals left the raft and began to roam on the land surface; but he kept on blowing the particles from his hand out farther and farther, thus extending the land area. He kept up this blowing till the "land could be seen out of sight." He then sent a raven to fly around the land and see how big it was. This bird was gone four days, then returned. So Manabush said: "That's too small." He then blowed more and more. He then sent a dove to see how large the land surface had grown. This bird found it so large that it never came back. So Manabush was satisfied that the world was big enough. He then threw down the chunks of substance he still had in his hands and these are the mountains of the world. He then replanted the earth with moses, trees, herbs, and grasses, after which he departed for his home.

He now lives in the home of the Dawn and is the great king of all spirits.