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*North American Indian
Fairy Tales*

R. C. Armour

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NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN
FAIRY TALES

FOLKLORE AND
LEGENDS

ILLUSTRATED BY
R. C. ARMOUR



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1905

THE MAN-FISH.

A VERY great while ago the ancestors of the Shawanos nation lived on the other side of the Great Lake, half-way between the rising sun and the evening star. It was a land of deep snows and much frost, of winds which whistled in the clear, cold nights, and storms which travelled from seas no eyes could reach. Sometimes the sun ceased to shine for moons together, and then he was continually before their eyes for as many more. In the season of cold the waters were all locked up, and the snows overtopped the ridge of the cabins. Then he shone out so fiercely that men fell stricken by his fierce rays, and were numbered with the snow that had melted and run to the embrace of the rivers. It was not like the beautiful lands—the lands blessed with soft suns and ever-green vales—in which the Shawanos now dwell, yet it was well stocked with deer, and the waters with fat seals and great fish, which were caught just when the people pleased to go after them. Still, the nation were discontented, and wished to leave their barren and inhospitable shores. The priests had told them of a beautiful

world beyond the Great Salt Lake, from which the glorious sun never disappeared for a longer time than the duration of a child's sleep, where snowshoes were never wanted—a land clothed with perpetual verdure, and bright with never-failing gladness. The Shawanos listened to these tales till they came to loathe their own simple comforts; all they talked of, all they appeared to think of, was the land of the happy hunting-grounds.

Once upon a time the people were much terrified at seeing a strange creature, much resembling a man, riding along the waves of the lake on the borders of which they dwelt. He had on his head long green hair; his face was shaped like that of a porpoise, and he had a beard of the colour of ooze.

If the people were frightened at seeing a man who could live in the water like a fish or a duck, how much more were they frightened when they saw that from his breast down he was actually fish, or rather two fishes, for each of his legs was a whole and distinct fish. When they heard him speak distinctly in their own language, and when he sang songs sweeter than the music of birds in spring, or the whispers of love from the lips of a beautiful maiden, they thought it a being from the Land of Shades—a spirit from the happy fishing-grounds beyond the lake of storms.

He would sit for a long time, his fish-legs coiled up under him, singing to the wondering ears of the Indians upon the shore the pleasures he experienced, and the beautiful and strange things he saw in the

depths of the ocean, always closing his strange stories with these words, shouted at the top of his voice—

“Follow me, and see what I will show you.”

Every day, when the waves were still and the winds had gone to their resting-place in the depths of the earth, the monster was sure to be seen near the shore where the Shawanos dwelt. For a great many suns they dared not venture upon the water in quest of food, doing nothing but wander along the beach, watching the strange creature as he played his antics upon the surface of the waves, listening to his songs and to his invitation—

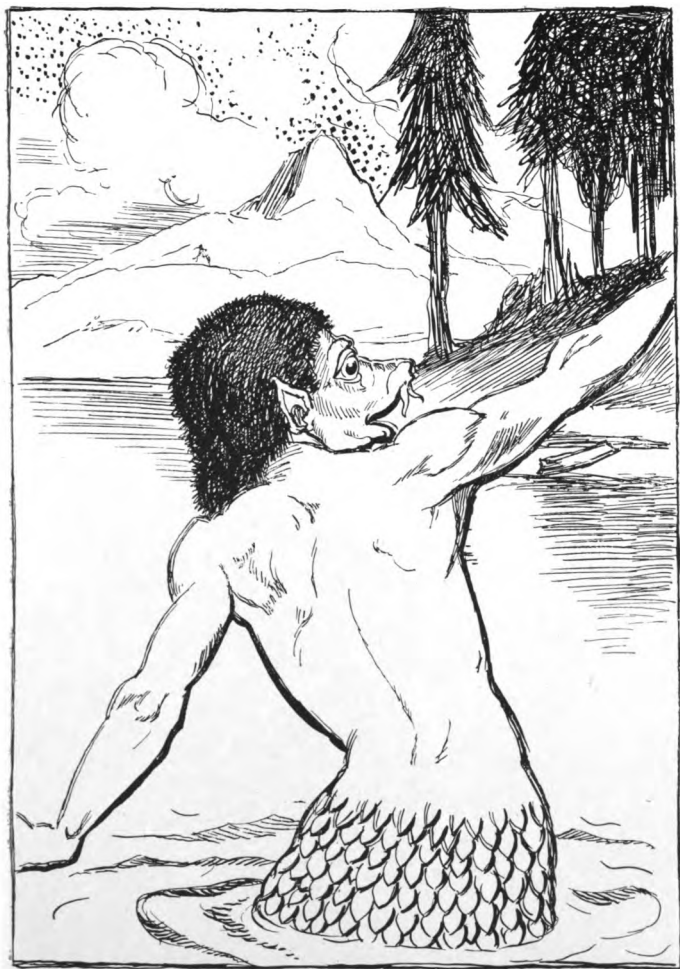
“Follow me, and see what I will show you.”

The longer he stayed the less they feared him. They became used to him, and in time looked upon him as a spirit who was not made for harm, nor wished to injure the poor Indian. Then they grew hungry, and their wives and little ones cried for food, and, as hunger banishes all fear, in a few days three canoes with many men and warriors ventured off to the rocks in quest of fish.

When they reached the fishing-place, they heard as before the voice shouting—

“Follow me, and see what I will show you.”

Presently the man-fish appeared, sitting on the water, with his legs folded under him, and his arms crossed on his breast, as they had usually seen him. There he sat, eying them attentively. When they failed to draw in the fish they had hooked, he would make the water shake and the deep echo with shouts



FOLLOW ME, AND SEE WHAT I WILL SHOW YOU.

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of laughter, and would clap his hands with great noise, and cry—

“Ha, ha! there he fooled you.”

When a fish was caught he was very angry. When the fishers had tried long and patiently, and taken little, and the sun was just hiding itself behind the dark clouds which skirted the region of warm winds, the strange creature cried out still stronger than before—

“Follow me, and see what I will show you.”

Kiskapocoke, who was the head man of the tribe, asked him what he wanted, but he would make no other answer than—

“Follow me.”

“Do you think,” said Kiskapocoke, “I would be such a fool as to go I don’t know with whom, and I don’t know where?”

“See what I will show you,” cried the man-fish.

“Can you show us anything better than we have yonder?” asked the warrior.

“I will show you,” replied the monster, “a land where there is a herd of deer for every one that skips over your hills, where there are vast droves of creatures larger than your sea-elephants, where there is no cold to freeze you, where the sun is always soft and smiling, where the trees are always in bloom.”

The people began to be terrified, and wished themselves on land, but the moment they tried to paddle towards the shore, some invisible hand would seize their canoes and draw them back, so that an hour’s labour did not enable them to gain the length

of their boat in the direction of their homes. At last Kiskapocoke said to his companions—

“What shall we do?”

“Follow me,” said the fish.

Then Kiskapocoke said to his companions—

“Let us follow him, and see what will come of it.”

So they followed him,—he swimming and they paddling, until night came. Then a great wind and deep darkness prevailed, and the Great Serpent commenced hissing in the depths of the ocean. The people were terribly frightened, and did not think to live till another sun, but the man-fish kept close to the boats, and bade them not be afraid, for nothing should hurt them.

When morning came, nothing could be seen of the shore they had left. The winds still raged, the seas were very high, and the waters ran into their canoes like melted snows over the brows of the mountains, but the man-fish handed them large shells, with which they baled the water out. As they had brought neither food nor water with them, they had become both hungry and thirsty. Kiskapocoke told the strange creature they wanted to eat and drink, and that he must supply them with what they required.

“Very well,” said the man-fish, and, disappearing in the depths of the water, he soon reappeared, bringing with him a bag of parched corn and a shell full of sweet water.

For two moons and a half the fishermen followed the man-fish, till at last one morning their guide exclaimed—

“Look there!”

Upon that they looked in the direction he pointed out to them and saw land, high land, covered with great trees, and glittering as the sand of the Spirit's Island. Behind the shore rose tall mountains, from the tops of which issued great flames, which shot up into the sky, as the forks of the lightning cleave the clouds in the hot moon. The waters of the Great Salt Lake broke in small waves upon its shores, which were covered with sporting seals and wild ducks pluming themselves in the beams of the warm and gentle sun. Upon the shore stood a great many strange people, but when they saw the strangers step upon the land and the man-fish, they fled to the woods like startled deer, and were no more seen.

When the warriors were safely landed, the man-fish told them to let the canoe go; “for,” said he, “you will never need it more.” They had travelled but a little way into the woods when he bade them stay where they were, while he told the spirit of the land that the strangers he had promised were come, and with that he descended into a deep cave near at hand. He soon returned, accompanied by a creature as strange in appearance as himself. His legs and feet were those of a man. He had leggings and moccasins like an Indian's, tightly laced and beautifully decorated with wampum, but his head was like a goat's. He talked like a man, and his language was one well understood by the strangers.

“I will lead you,” he said, “to a beautiful land,

to a most beautiful land, men from the clime of snows. There you will find all the joys an Indian covets."

For many moons the Shawanos travelled under the guidance of the man-goat, into whose hands the man-fish had put them, when he retraced his steps to the Great Lake. They came at length to the land which the Shawanos now occupy. They found it as the strange spirits had described it. They married the daughters of the land, and their numbers increased till they were so many that no one could count them. They grew strong, swift, and valiant in war, keen and patient in the chase. They overcame all the tribes eastward of the River of Rivers, and south to the shore of the Great Lake.