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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

THE HARMONY OF NATURE

By Sunshine Rider

(An Indian Legend)

It is a curious experience, this living out of doors. It draws us to the solitary places, where the hermits and mystics are broad and liberal in their beliefs concerning those things which are eternal. It holds us with a Power unknown to those lost in the whirl of the busy city.

The great freedom of the wilderness penetrates and pervades the faculties of us who love it and who rest close to its bosom. It fills us with a peace and love more real than any ever set forth in writing by man.

When the morning sunrise casts its glow over the water and over the land, and turns the sky into the ashes of roses, kind nature draws near and opens the doors of the soul and enters in. Liberality is imbreathed with the very air that sweeps the unfenced landscape.

The Redman, unspoiled by the trappings of elaborate civilization, was responsive to all of Nature's moods. For him there were many things in the great wood that furnished his music and his logic. He could hear the plaintive love song of the white-throated sparrow with understanding; he read in the alders and wild cherry trees with their filigree of delicate color over the stalwart evergreens, a message from the Great Spirit. He stood before the advancing dawn, facing the sun as it rose over the horizon and offered his unspoken orison. His soul met the coming day as he stood in the Great Silence alone.

To the Redman, Nature spoke in many voices; a whippoorwill calling from the treetops; the screams of the great owl which could be mistaken for the howl of a wolf. But even the most timid and delicate fawn was not frightened by the wild cries of the wood as it raised its head from the crested waves of the lake only when startled by the weird cry of a loon.

The Indian viewed the dogwood flaming in glorious rebellion against the pervading green of the forest, and watched its leaves turn to crimson

and purple dipped by the frosty dews of autumn. They fluttered and swayed like the rainbow's glowing arch above the mountain; to him it was sublime; he paused in the attitude of worship. He heard the cool breathing of the wet moss as the drenched fir trees released the raindrops. They fell in rhythm on the matted carpet of the rich earth. The sunlight flickered through the slanting shafts and lacy branches of the trees. Presently the music of the spheres set forth a melody on the wings of the wind and through the air the red and yellow leaves fluttered earthward like little flames of autumn breath blown by the Great Mystery.

The breathing of the pines was like a distant chime of bells as they swayed with the soft fragrant breeze; even softer than the waters of the still lake that reflected the slowly dying light of the stars as they withdrew before the rising dawn.

The Redman dwelt with nature and wove many a legend to explain or symbolize her changes. Typical is his explanation of why the pines, the hemlocks, the spruce, the firs, and cedars retain their somber green when the colorful fiesta of their brother trees is taking place.

In the long ago the Great Mystery dwelt upon the earth as a Mighty Chieftain. He ruled all things with kindness.

But there was an evil ruler also, who was called O-kee. He dwelt in the deep canyons and in the land of the unhappy spirits who were forced to serve him.

It is needless to say that he hated the Great Chieftain of the skies and constantly plotted to overthrow him and rule in his place.

The Redman says he was a hypocrite who spoils with a slick tongue in the presence of the Great Manitou.

The council fires are burning low. Arguments had ceased and the Great Mystery had planned to build a beautiful forest for peaceful and happy beings.

O-kee went home scorning the light of the moon and the proposed idea of all things good and beautiful. His wicked laugh caused the dark clouds to gather and the lightning to flash as the thunder roared, and often it was that where the Great Mystery planted happiness, flowers and plenty, there were tears, sorrows and thorns. The work of the

Great Mystery was good. The earth was a land of beautiful and happy spirits. There were flowing rivers and waterfalls, lofty mountains and everglades; beautiful birds and animals. But alas. He saved nothing to create mankind for whom the Paradise was created.

O-kee was at once by his side holding a handful of leaves. "Here is something with which you can make the human beings. The oak leaves will make them strong warriors and the maple leaves curl so gracefully upon the water that they would make gods of the sea and great fishermen. Our women can be made tall and graceful from the poplar leaves, and their hearts can be as warm as the sunshine or as cold as the winter snows.

The Great Spirit listened unsuspectingly to the Evil O-kee.

So he peopled the earth with the leaf men and leaf women, while the demon O-kee laughed triumphantly; for sure enough the people were as frail as withered leaves, and were never contented. They were frail in mind and body and their hearts changed with every gust of thought. They floundered about longing and whining, and they fell and died as the

passing of the autumn leaves only to wither and decay.

Presently the Great Mystery called upon his human creatures to offer a tribute of gratitude for his kindness to them. But alas, he found too many of them weak, wicked and ungrateful, and his heart was sad. He then turned to the trees and flowers. The dogwoods, the alders, the maples, the poplars, the blueberry bushes and the mountain flowers sent up their gratitude, for they owed all to the Sky Father. The earth had given them food, and the air had fed their leaves. They responded to the call of the Great Mystery and gave their leaves and perfume with grateful hearts.

But the Evil O-kee had poisoned the pines, the hemlocks, the spruce and fir and even the beautiful cedar. "Nay, nay," they cried. "We owe you nothing; therefore we do not shed one single needle, one single cone. We have battled the stormy weather and winds alone. We owe nothing to anyone." And they stood with their branches aloof from the plea of the Great Father. Meanwhile the leaves of the maple, dogwood, poplar and other forest trees were shed in golden glory. The scene was one of gorgeous color, like the forming of a great rainbow.

When the beauty of the sacrifice was seen by all, the pines and hemlocks and firs were sorry for their selfishness and cried out, "We, too, will give our needles and cones if you will let streaks of gold cross our branches and fall like gilded feathers to the earth."

But the Great Chieftain shook his head, and his voice was full of sorrow. "Too late, too late, ungrateful children," he said, "it is only the gift of a willing heart that enters the ears of your Sky Father."

And for all the ages past and all the ages to come, the haughty evergreens have not known the shining glory that their brother trees knew. And when the winds passed them by, they cried out from their dark green robes with a sigh, but their empty voices fall faint on the balmy air.

The Redman heard and knew this, for always, he recognized the Great Mystery in all creation and believed that he drew from its spiritual power. He saw no need for only the seventh day of worship, since to him all days belonged to the Great Spirit of the Universe.

The teachings of the vast wood are perpetual

to him. At night the full-orbed moon shines down through the pine-tops in long divergent bars, similar to those of the setting sun when it shines through the clouds upon a humid atmosphere, only the moonlight portrays its ghost shadows in black and white.

Our souls can wander at will, and hear the music from the chariots of the air, it is as we send our thoughts. The Great Mystery knoweth all. From the heights of the heavens blue, to the salt depths of the sea. To Him it is one celestial garden -- what can we know?



All of our people are poets, natural-born poets, gifted with wonderful imaginative powers and ability to express in sonorous musical phrases their impressions of life and nature. If they could be translated into English without losing their characteristic beauty and flavor, many of the Indian songs and poems would rank among the greatest productions of all time. They have a splendid dignity, gorgeous word-pictures, and reproduce with magic effect many phases of life in the forest -- the glint of the fading sunshine falling on the leaves, the faint stirring of the wind, the wherring of insects -- no detail is too small to escape their observation, and the most fleeting and evanescent impressions are caught and recorded in most exquisite language. The Indian talks in poetry; poetry is his vernacular -- not necessarily the stilted poetry of the books, but the free and untrammelled poetry of Nature, the poetry of the fields, the sky, the river, the sun and stars. In his own tongue it is not difficult for the Indian to compose -- he does it instinctively; but in attempting to write in English he is handicapped. Words seem hard, forms mechanical, and it is to these things that I attri-

bute the failure of the civilized Indian to win fame  
in poetry.

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