ELLIS WILLIAM HODGSON

WAYSIDE WEEDS

William Ellis
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William Hodgson Ellis
Wayside Weeds

Little White Crow
(A LEGEND OF ST. ANNE)

Part I

Little White Crow was an Algonkin,
And he lived on the Isle of Chips;
His legs were long, and his flanks were thin,
He had high cheek-bones, and a strong square chin,
Jet black was his hair, dark red was his skin,
And white were his teeth, when a joyful grin
At the sound of the war-whoop's hideous din

Parted his silent lips.
Three eagles' feathers adorned his head,
Well greased was his snaky hair;
His face was daubed with black and with red,
No trousers he wore, but fringed leggings instead,
And moccasins 'broidered with quills for thread.
Very proud was his look, very stately his tread,

And of this he was fully aware.

Little White Crow had a sharp *couteau*,
A carbine, and powder and shot:
And the scalps of the braves whom he'd sent below
Hung at his girdle, a goodly row.
He'd a med'cine bag where he was wont to stow
Charms against famine and fever and foe:
And over his shoulders he used to throw
A beaver-skin robe on occasions of show:
Oh, a very fine fellow was Little White Crow!
If you're curious to learn why they christened him so
The Indian Department might possibly know
Ask Deputy Minister Scott.

Father Le Cocq was a priest from Quebec,
Rather spindle of shank, rather scraggy of neck;
He'd a stoop in the shoulder, was yellow of skin,
With closely cut hair, and a smooth shaven chin,
He had very black eyes, and a rather red nose;
Wore shoes with steel buckles and very square toes,
A big shovel hat, a black cassock and bands,
And a rosary seldom was out of his hands.

But Loyola never, and nowhere than he
Had a loyaller or a more staunch devotee;
And none carried further the Jesuit virtue,
Viz.: – "Do as you're bid, and don't cry if it hurt you!"
Though gentle by nature and fond of his ease,

He would work like a slave his Superior to please;
He would shrink from no danger, pain, toil or disgrace,
Or would swear wrong was right until black in the face!
As wise as a serpent, as firm as a rock,
Yet as meek as a dove was good Father Le Cocq.

With bell, book and candle the priest had been sent
To Ottawa's banks, with the pious intent
To find, if he could, after diligent search,
A few stray, red sheep for the fold of the church;
And there in a cabin of poles and of bark,
He sang hymns and said masses from daylight to dark.
It happened one day that good Father Le Cocq
Had been visiting some of the lambs of his flock,
And homeward returning, his pious task done,
Was paddling along at the set of the sun.
Now a man may be virtuous, learned, austere,
In religion devout, and in morals severe,
Yet, – true as it's strange, and sad as it's true, —
Not able to manage a birch bark canoe!
So now, – at the paddle by no means a dab, —
He caught what is vulgarly known as a "crab":
His balance he lost, the canoe was upset,
And Father Le Cocq tumbled into the wet!
Poor Father Le Cocq! any chance looker-on
Would have fancied for certain, his usefulness gone.
And, indeed, the priest's chance was uncommonly slim,
The current ran fast, not a stroke could he swim,
And he thought all was over in this world for him.

But, thanks to St. Francis, St. Anne, St. Ignatius,
Or some saintly personage equally gracious,
It happened that not fifty paces below,
Behind a big boulder sat Little White Crow.
He was fishing for trout, and I wish I could catch,
In these days of saw-mills another such batch!
The rock, as I've said, hid the priest from his view,
But he heard a great splash, and he saw a canoe
Float down bottom upwards, while close behind that
Swam jauntily after, – a big shovel hat.
No moment to ponder paused Little White Crow:
He sprang from the bank like a shaft from a bow;
He could swim like a mallard and dive like a loon,
But he reached the poor priest not a moment too soon;
Caught hold of his cassock and collared him fast,
Just while he was sinking the third time and last;
Then reaching the shore, dragged the poor Father out,
As you'd land a remarkably overgrown trout!

It's needless to mention that Little White Crow
Did not know, and could not be expected to know,
Doctor Marshall Hall's method, so justly renowned,
For restoring to life the apparently drowned;
But he worked in his own way with such a good will,
He rubbed and he chafed with such zeal and such skill
That the priest after heaving some very deep sighs,
First yawned, and then groaned, and then opened his eyes.
Little Crow's simple means as completely succeeded,
As ever the treatment of any M.D. did.

(Where credit is due I'm determined to give it)
And the priest before long was as right as a trivet.

"My friend and preserver, you very well know,"
Thus the Father the red-skin addressed,
"That of gold and of silver I've none to bestow,
In return for the life that to you I must owe";
(Here he drew a silk bag from his breast) —
"But one precious treasure I beg you'll accept."
(And here, overcome by emotion, he wept.)
Then he took a small object from out of the bag,
Which he carefully wiped with a small piece of rag.
A moment he tenderly gazed on it, – then
He kissed it with fervour again and again,
One last lingering look of affection, – and so
He handed it over to Little White Crow.

With stately politeness the Indian received
The treasure so prized, and at once he perceived,
(With some disappointment, to tell you the truth,)
A badly decayed, rather large, double tooth!

"In your estimation, I very much fear,"
Thus gravely the Father began,
"Devoid of all value my gift will appear;
But when you have heard me its worth will be clear:
'Tis a relic of Holy Saint Anne!
To tell half its virtues all night would require:
'Tis an excellent cure for the vapours;

’Twill heal any dropsy, no matter how dire,
Put out the last spark of Saint Anthony’s fire,
And stop all Saint Vitus’s capers!
The twinges of toothache, so hard to endure,
The quinsy, the gout and the spleen,
The scurvy, the jaundice, all these it will cure;
While to break up an ague you’ll find it more sure —
And a great deal more cheap, – than quinine.

“In short, there is nothing need cause you alarm
So long as this relic you wear;
You’ll find it indeed an infallible charm
Against every conceivable species of harm
To which poor humanity’s heir.”

He ceased, the red-skin gravely smiled,
And gravely shook his head,
And then the simple forest child
Addressed the priest in accents mild,
And this is what he said:

“My uncle thinks it’s easy to gull
Little White Crow, I ween;
Hollow and empty he deems his skull,
He fancies his wits are all gone dull, —
He’s wrong, – they’re *Al-gon-keen*!”

He grinned, and without any further delay
Put the tooth in his med’cine bag safely away,

And then with a gesture more free than polite,
Clapped the priest on the shoulder and wished him, “good night.”

Part II

A year and a day! A year and a day!
How the days and the weeks and the months roll away!
How little we know what of joy or of sorrow lies
Before us next year – but I’ve no time to moralize.
Well, a year and a day had elapsed as I’ve stated,
Since the incidents happened I lately related.
Little White Crow and a score of his friends
To further their own individual ends
(And those of their neighbours as well, I’ve no doubt),
Deep loaded with furs for Quebec had set out.

They’d been rather more lucky than usual, I think,
In hunting the beaver, the bear and the mink;
And their spoils at Quebec they intended to trade
For the goods of the French, which long habit had made
If not indispensable still very handy, —
Knives, gunpowder, kettles, beads, bullets and brandy.
To keep to my story: our friends on this day
Down the river were calmly pursuing their way,
When Little White Crow in the foremost canoe

Was startled to hear a wild hullabaloo.
He sprang to his feet, and he shaded his eyes,
Then cried in a voice of alarm and surprise —
(We all use strong words when things happen to plague us),
“Oh bother it! here are those bless’d Onondagas!”
He said; and with yells of defiance the crews
Paddled quickly ashore and pulled up their canoes.

Oh! pleasant it is through the forest to stray
In the gladsome month of June;
To list to the scream of the merry blue jay,
And the chirp of the squirrel so blithe and gay,
And the sigh of the soft south winds that play
In the top of the pine trees tall and grey
A sweet regretful tune.

And pleasant it is o’er a forest lake
Through the cool white mists to glide,
Ere the bright warm day is half awake,
When the trout the glassy surface break,
And the doe comes down her thirst to slake,
With her dappled fawn by her side.
Where the loon’s loud laugh rings wild and clear,
Where the black duck rears her brood;
Where the tall blue heron with mien austere,
Poised on one leg at the marge of the mere,
Muses in solitude.

Yes, sweet and fair are the forest glades,

Where the world's rude clamours cease;
Where no harsh, workaday sound invades
The Sabbath rest of the solemn shades;
A Paradise of peace!

But oh! it's a different thing when one knows,
That each bush is an ambush concealing one's foes;
When the sweet flowers are choked by the sulphurous breath
Of the musket whose mouth is the portal of death;
When instead of the song of the frolicsome bird,
Shots, shrieks, yells and curses alone can be heard;
Then the streamlet's sweet tinkle seems changed to a knell,
And the forest's deep gloom to the blackness of hell!

Little White Crow, at the close of the day,
With a handful of comrades was standing at bay;
Things had gone with them badly, they were but a score
And the enemy numbered a hundred or more.
Now flushed with success and of victory sure,
The Iroquois, thinking their triumph secure,
Were preparing to deal one last finishing blow
To annihilate utterly Little White Crow!
Poor Little White Crow! though a "fisher of men,"
He hardly looked like an apostle just then;
He'd been dodging all day behind rock, bush and tree,
A cunning old fox in a scrimmage was he.
But numbers will tell in the long run, and now,
With hate in his heart and revenge on his brow,
With his knife in his teeth and his gun in his hand,

As he urged on his comrades to make one last stand,
Though his bullets were spent and their arrows all gone —
He looked more like Old Nick, I'm afraid, than Saint John!

Little White Crow had poured into his gun
His last charge of powder, but bullets he'd none;
He searched in his shot pouch again and again,
He begged of his comrades, but begged all in vain;
Among the whole party in fact there was not
So much as one pellet of No. 6 shot.
He was just giving up the whole job in disgust
When his hand in his med'cine bag chancing to thrust,
As Fortune would have it his fingers he ran
Against the back tooth of the blessed Saint Anne!
Little White Crow gave a terrible shout,
The tooth in a trice from the bag he whipped out,
Dropped it into his musket, and yelling still louder,
He rammed it well home on the top of the powder.
But here come the foe! From rocks, bushes and trees
They start like a swarm of exasperate bees;
A capital simile that is in any case,
To describe an assault of Oneidas or Senecas:
And one, as it happens, remarkably apt in
This particular case, for the Iroquois Captain
Was a chief called Big Hornet, – a beggar to fight,
Who measured six feet and some inches in height.
'Twas he gave the signal to make the attack,
'Twas he led the rush of the bloodthirsty pack,
And 'twas he, as he charged in the front of the foe,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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