

The Great Flood and the Serpent Ne-naw-bo-zhoo*

CHIPPEWA

Now the cause of the great flood was this: The god of the deep¹ was exceedingly jealous about Ne-naw-bo-zhoo's hunting dog (the great black wolf) and therefore one day the god of the deep succeeded in alluring the black wolf to his confidence, when he called it and made a great feast with it and invited many guests, which were represented as sea-serpents, water-tigers, and every kind of monster of the deep, and they had a jolly feast. When Ne-naw-bo-zhoo found out what had become of his hunting dog, he was furiously enraged, and determined to kill his god of the deep.

There was a certain place where he [the great serpent] was accustomed to come on the shore with his hosts, particularly on very fine days, to sun themselves and enjoy the pleasure of being on dry land. Ne-naw-bo-zhoo knew this lovely spot very well. So right away he strung up his bow and trimmed his arrow nicely, and went there to watch, transforming himself into a black stump, near where these water gods usually lay down to enjoy themselves. And therefore, one very fine day the sea-serpent and water-tigers were very anxious to come on shore as usual and asked master to accompany them, but he replied: "I fear the great Ne-naw-bo-zhoo might be loking about there, and he will kill me because I have killed and eaten up his black wolf." But he at last told them to go on shore and examine the place and report if it was all clear; but they found nothing unusual about the place except the old black stump, which they never before observed to be there. Therefore, they went back to their master and reported that nothing was there to be afraid of except the old black stump which they never noticed before. "Go again," said their master "and closely examine the stump; peradventure, it was he transfigured into the shape of the stump." So again they came ashore and one of the water-tigers climbed upon it, inserting his long, sharp claws as he went

*Naw-bo-zhoo in Chippewa mythology is a trickster hero imbued with supernatural powers. The Great Serpent. The many lakes in the Chippewa homeland gave rise to a rich imagining of underwater creatures, such as submarine panthers and wolves, as well as serpents.

up, but he saw nothing strange. So, also the sea-serpent went up to it and coiled himself around the stump so tight that Ne-naw-bo-zhoo nearly screamed with pain. At last the serpent uncoiled himself and they went back to their master and reported to him that it was nothing but an old stump. So the god of the sea concluded to come ashore with all his hosts, slowly and cautiously looking in every direction as he was still afraid that Ne-naw-bo-zhoo might be lurking around there and watching. Soon they were dozing upon the hot sand of the beach, then Ne-naw-bo-zhoo unmasked himself and fixed one of his best arrows into his bow and shot the god of the deep right through the heart. Then all the hosts started to pursue the slayer of their master. Ne-naw-bo-zhoo fled for his life; but he was pursued by the host with a mountain of water. So when he could not find any more dry land to run to he commanded a great canoe to be formed in which he and the animals who were fleeing before the water, were saved. After they floated, Ne-naw-bo-zhoo wondered very much more how deep was the water. Therefore, he ordered one of the beavers to go down to the bottom of the deep and bring up some earth if he could, as evidence that he did go to the bottom. So the beaver obeyed, and he went down but the water was so deep the beaver died before he reached the bottom, and therefore, he came up and floated as a dead beaver. Ne-naw-bo-zhoo drew him up into his canoe and resuscitated the beaver by blowing into his nostrils.

So he waited a little while longer, and afterwards he ordered the muskrat to go down; but the muskrat did not like the idea, for he had seen the beaver coming up lifeless. So he had to flatter him a little in order to induce him to go down, by telling him, "Now, muskrat, I know that thou art one of the best divers of all the animal creation; will you please go down and ascertain the depth of the water, and bring up some earth in your little paw, if you can, with which I shall try to make another world? Now go my little brother" — the legend says that he called all the animal creation his little brothers — "for we cannot always live on the waters." At last the muskrat obeyed. He went down and descended clear to the bottom of the water, and grabbed the earth and returned. But it was so deep that before he reached the surface of the water he expired.

As Ne-naw-bo-zhoo drew him into his great canoe to resuscitate him, he observed the muskrat still grasping some thing in his little paws, and behold, it was a piece of earth. Then Ne-naw-bo-zhoo knew that the muskrat went clear to the bottom of the deep. He took this piece of earth and fixed it into a small parcel, and fastened it to the neck of the raven which was with him. Now, with this parcel, Ne-naw-bo-zhoo told the raven to fly to and fro over the face of the waters; then the waters began to recede very fast, and soon the earth came back to its natural shape.