The Wendigo (World Cultural Heritage Library)



FRONTIERSMEN are not, as a rule, apt to be very superstitious. They lead lives too hard and practical, and have too little imagination in things spiritual supernatural. I have heard but few ghost stories while living on the frontier, and these few were of a perfectly commonplace and conventional type.But I once listened to a goblin story which rather impressed me. It was told by a grizzled, weather-beaten old mountain hunter. named Bauman, who was born and had passed all his life on the frontier. He must have believed what he said, for he could hardly repress a shudder at certain points of the tale; but he was of German ancestry, and in childhood had doubtless been saturated with all kinds of ghost and goblin lore, so that many fearsome superstitions were latent in his mind; besides, he knew well the stories told by the Indian medicine men in their winter camps, of the snow-walkers, and the spectres, and the formless evil beings that haunt the forest depths, and dog and waylay the lonely wanderer who after nightfall passes through regions where lurk....When the event occurred, Bauman was still a young man, and was trapping with a partner among the mountains dividing the forks of Salmon from the head of Wisdom River. Not having had much luck he and his partner determined to go up into a particularly wild and lonely pass through which ran a small stream said to contain many Beaver. The pass had an evil reputation, because the year before a solitary hunter who had wandered into it was there slain, seemingly by a wild beast, the half-eaten remains being afterwards found by some mining prospectors who had passed his camp only the night before. The memory of this event, however, weighed very lightly with the two trappers, who were as adventurous and hardy as others of their kind. They took their two lean mountain Ponies to the foot of the

pass, where they left them in an open Beaver meadow, the rocky timberclad ground being from thence onwards impracticable for Horses. They then struck out on foot through the vast, gloomy forest, and in about four hours, reached a little open glade where they concluded to camp, as signs of game were plenty. There was still an hour or two of daylight left; and after building brush lean-to and throwing down and opening their packs, they started up stream. The country was very dense and hard to travel through, as there was much down timber, although here and there the sombre woodland was broken by small glades of mountain grass.At dusk, they again reached camp. The glade in which it was pitched was not many yards wide, the tall, close-set pines and firs rising round it like a wall. On one side, was a little stream, beyond which rose the steep with mountain-slopes, covered the unbroken growth of the evergreen forest. They were surprised to find that during their short absence, something, apparently a Bear, had visited camp, and had rummaged about among their things, scattering the contents of their packs, and in sheer wantonness destroying their lean-to. The footprints of the beast were quite plain but at first they paid no particular heed to them, busying themselves with rebuilding the lean-to, laying out their beds and stores, and lighting the fire. While Bauman making ready supper, it being already dark, his companion began to examine the tracks more closely, and soon took a brand from the fire to follow them up, where the intruder had walked along a game trail after leaving the camp. When the brand flickered out, he returned and took another, repeating his inspection of the footprints very closely. Coming back to the fire, he stood by it a minute or two, peering out into the darkness, and suddenly remarked: Bauman, that Bear has been walking on two legs. Bauman laughed at this, but his partner insisted that he was right; and upon again examining the tracks with a torch, they certainly did seem to be made by but two

paws, or feet. However, it was too dark to make sure.

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