

# **LEGENDS OF THE NORTHWEST**

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Legends of the Northwest by H. L. Gordon

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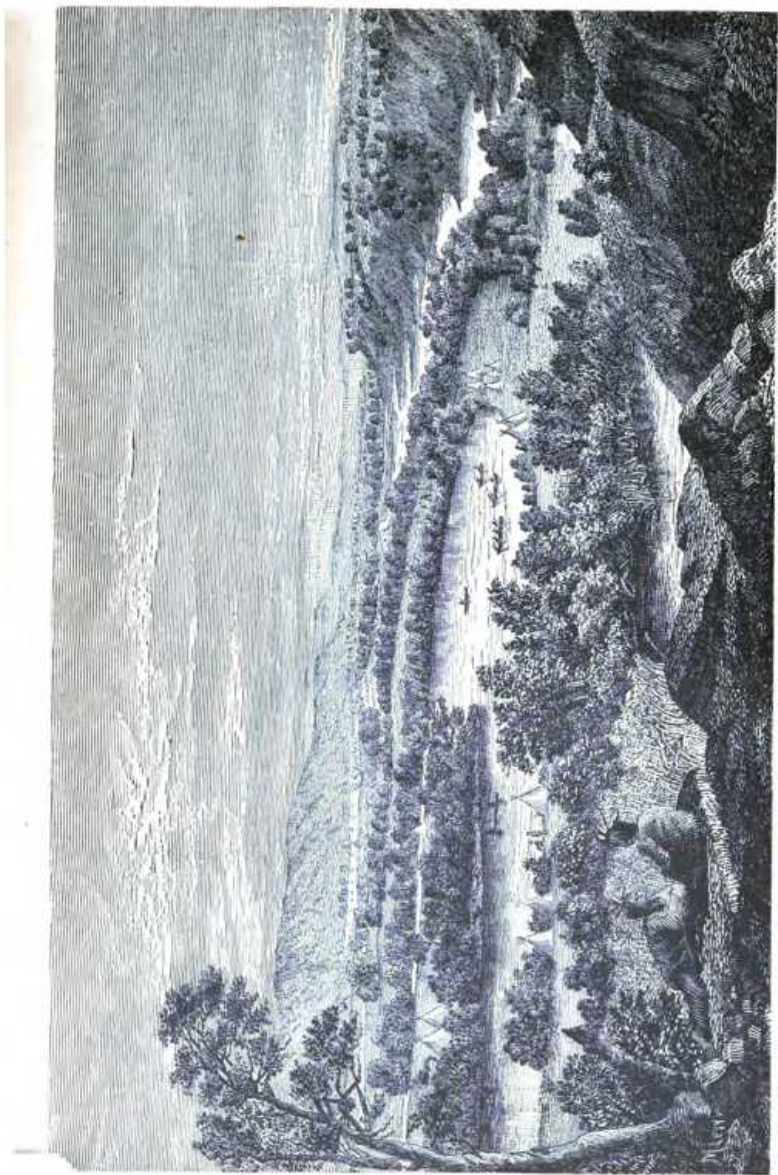
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**H. L. GORDON**

**LEGENDS OF  
THE NORTHWEST**





VIEW AT THE "MEETING-OF-WATERS."

(THE MOUTH OF THE MINNESOTA RIVER.)

LEGENDS OF THE NORTHWEST.

BY

H. L. GORDON,

*Author of "Pauline."*

CONTAINING

PRELUDE—THE MISSISSIPPI.

THE FEAST OF THE VIRGINS,  
A LEGEND OF THE DAKOTAS.

WINONA,  
A LEGEND OF THE DAKOTAS.

THE LEGEND OF THE FALLS,  
A LEGEND OF THE DAKOTAS.

THE SEA GULL,  
THE OJIBWA LEGEND OF THE PICTURED ROCKS OF LAKE SUPERIOR.

MINNETONKA.

ST. PAUL, MINN.  
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## PREFACE.

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I have for several years devoted many of my leisure hours to the study of the language, history, traditions, customs and superstitions of the Dakotas. These Indians are now commonly called the "Sioux"—a name given them by the early French traders and *voyageurs*. "Dakota," signifies *alliance* or *confederation*. Many separate bands, all having a common origin and speaking a common tongue, were united under this name. See "*Tah-Koo Wah-Kan*," or "*The Gospel Among the Dakotas*," by Stephen R. Riggs, pp. 1 to 6 inc.

They were, but yesterday, the occupants and owners of the fair forests and fertile prairies of Minnesota,—a brave, hospitable and generous people,—barbarians, indeed, but noble in their barbarism. They may be fitly called the Iroquois of the West. In form and features, in language and traditions, they are distinct from all other Indian tribes. When first visited by white men, and for many years afterwards, the Falls of St. Anthony (by them called the Ha-Ha) was the center of their country. They cultivated tobacco, and hunted the elk, the beaver and the bison. They were open-hearted, truthful and brave. In their wars with other tribes they seldom slew women or children, and rarely sacrificed the lives of their prisoners.

For many years their chiefs and head men successfully resisted the attempts to introduce spirituous liquors among them. More than a century ago an English trader was killed at Mendota, because he persisted, after repeated warnings by the chiefs, in dealing out *mini wakan* (Devil-water) to the Dakota braves.



With open arms and generous hospitality they welcomed the first white men to their land; and were ever faithful in their friendship, till years of wrong and robbery, and want and insult, drove them to desperation and to war. They were barbarians, and their warfare was barbarous, but not more barbarous than the warfare of our Saxon and Celtic ancestors. They were ignorant and superstitious, but their condition closely resembled the condition of our British forefathers at the beginning of the Christian era. Macaulay says of Britain, "Her inhabitants, when first they became known to the Tyrian mariners, were little superior to the natives of the Sandwich Islands." And again, "While the German princes who reigned at Paris, Toledo, Arles and Ravenna listened with reverence to the instructions of Bishops, adored the relics of martyrs, and took part eagerly in disputes touching the Nicene theology, the rulers of Wessex and Mercia were still performing savage rites in the temples of Thor and Woden."

The day of the Dakotas is done. The degenerate remnants of that once powerful and warlike people still linger around the forts and agencies of the Northwest, or chase the caribou and the bison on the banks of the Saskatchewan, but the Dakotas of old are no more. The brilliant defeat of Custer, by Sitting Bull and his braves, was their last grand rally against the resistless march of the sons of the Saxons and the Celts. The plow-shares of a superior race are fast leveling the sacred mounds of their dead. But yesterday, the shores of our lakes, and our rivers, were dotted with their tepees. Their light canoes glided over our waters, and their hunters chased the deer and the buffalo on the sites of our cities. To-day, they are not. Let us do justice to their memory, for there was much that was noble in their natures.

In the following Dakota Legends I have endeavored to faithfully represent many of the customs and superstitions, and some of the traditions, of that people. I have taken very little "poetic license" with their traditions; none, whatever, with their customs and superstitions. In my studies for

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these Legends I have been greatly aided by Rev. S. R. Riggs, author of the Grammar and Dictionary of the Dakota language, "Tâh-Koo Wah-Kân," &c., and for many years a missionary among the Dakotas. He has patiently answered my numerous inquiries and given me valuable information. I am also indebted to Gen. H. H. Sibley, one of the earliest American traders among them, and to Rev. S. W. Pond, of Shakopee, one of the first Protestant missionaries to these people, and himself the author of poetical versions of some of their principal legends; to Mrs. Eastman's "Dacotah," and last, but not least, to the Rev. E. D. Neill, whose admirable "History of Minnesota" so fully and faithfully presents almost all that is known of the history, traditions, customs, manners and superstitions of the Dakotas.

In *Winona* I have "tried my hand" on Hexameter verse. With what success, I leave to those who are better able to judge than I. If I have failed, I have but added another failure to the numerous vain attempts to naturalize Hexameter verse in the English language.

The Earl of Derby, in the preface to his translation of the Iliad, calls it "That 'pestilent heresy' of the so-called English Hexameter; a metre wholly repugnant to the genius of our language; which can only be pressed into the service by a violation of every rule of prosody." Lord Kames, in his "Elements of Criticism," says, "Many attempts have been made to introduce Hexameter verse into the living languages, but without success. The English language, I am inclined to think, is not susceptible of this melody, and my reasons are these: First, the polysyllables in Latin and Greek are finely diversified by long and short syllables, a circumstance that qualifies them for the melody of Hexameter verse: ours are extremely ill qualified for that service, because they super-abound in short syllables. Secondly, the bulk of our monosyllables are arbitrary with regard to length, which is an unlucky circumstance in Hexameter.

\* \* \* In Latin and Greek Hexameter invariable sounds direct and ascertain the melody. English Hexameter would be destitute of

melody, unless by artful pronunciation; because of necessity the bulk of its sounds must be arbitrary. The pronunciation is easy in a simple movement of alternate long and short syllables; but would be perplexing and unpleasant in the diversified movement of Hexameter verse."

Beautiful as is the *Evangeline* of Longfellow, his Hexameter lines are sometimes hard to scan, and often grate harshly on the ear. He is frequently forced to divide a word by the central or pivotal pause of the line, and sometimes to make a pause in the sense where the rhythm forbids it. Take for example some of the opening lines of *Evangeline*:

"This is the forest prime|val. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,  
Bearded with moss, and in gar|ments green, indistinct in the twilight.  
Loud from its rocky cav|erns, the deep-voiced neighboring ocean  
Speaks, and in accents discon|solate answers the wail of the forest.  
Lay in the fruitful val|ley. Vast meadows stretched to the eastward."

Again, in order to comply with the Greek and Latin rule of beginning each line with a *long* syllable, he is compelled to emphasize words contrary to the sense. Examples:

*In* the Acadian land, on the shores of the Basin of Minas.  
*Somewhat* apart from the vil|lage, and nearer the Basin of Minas.  
*But* a celestial bright|ness—a more ethereal beauty.  
*And* the retreating sun the sign of the scorpion enters.  
*In*-doors, warmed by the wide-|mouthed fireplace idly the farmer,  
*Four* times the sun had ris|en and set; and now on the fifth day,

"Greek and Latin Hexameter lines, as to time, are all of the same length, being equivalent to the time taken in pronouncing twelve long syllables, or twenty-four short ones. An Hexameter line may consist of seventeen syllables, and when regular and not Spondiac, it never has fewer than thirteen: whence it follows that where the syllables are many, the plurality must be short; where few, the plurality must be long.

This line is susceptible of much variety as to the succession of long and short syllables. It is however subject to laws that confine its variety within certain limits. \* \* \*