

# Legend of Cedar Isle

BY BENJAMIN W. NEVIS

Give ear to this tale of the Wabash —  
Of alluring Cedar Isle,<sup>1</sup>  
One Indian tryst-place upon which  
E'en Great Manitou did smile;  
For it was so wondrously wooded  
With the willow, plum, and pine  
That, lanterned with Luna's full glory,  
'Twas fit place for scenes *divine*.

The time of this Indian drama,  
Paleface sages now do know,  
Was war's weary pause in his drum-beats  
Near two hundred years ago:  
The Chickasaws stayed in their Southland,  
And the Sioux skulked farther west;—  
Both shunned this fair land of Miamis  
As would squaws a hornets' nest!

Proud Iroquois quailed, driven back dawnward  
By this same Miami band.  
Not yet had our fur-hungry white men  
Felt the spur of lust for land!  
Bad birds<sup>2</sup> were not whispering to young bloods  
To seek loot in border raids.  
But periods of peace woke *romance*, and  
Brought back joy to love-lorn maids!

The spring hunting-season was over,  
And Miami men came home  
To as royal and attractive a welcome  
As were those of ancient Rome.  
Obliging Sol yielded his kingdom  
To young love's returning moon,  
And left the air laden with fragrance  
As on west he marched toward June!

---

<sup>1</sup> Cedar Isle is located in the Wabash River nearly four miles above Logansport, and about ten miles below Peru. It is now used as the home of the Logansport Country Club. This poem has a rhythm which may be described as Algonquin. To get the right effect, it should be read with a soft accompaniment of Indian drums.

<sup>2</sup> *Bad Birds* is a name later given by peace-loving Indians to the British, whom they charged with inciting the younger warriors to make attacks on American settlements.

Now, in L'Anguille<sup>3</sup> dwelt scores of brave warriors,  
 And fair maidens many more;  
 But fairest of these, pretty Wild Rose,  
 Brought the others trouble sore!  
 She thrilled at the homage men paid her,—  
 Trampled hearts to show her power;  
 Yet, *trifling* with most, she loved truly  
 The renowned young chief named Flower!

Through thickets there crashed some deer, trembling  
 At first scent of *trouble*, nigh;  
 A buffalo's plunge stopped the frogs' and  
 Trilling toads' weird lullaby!  
 At howl of a *wolf* in the woodland  
 Even otters hushed their stir!  
 So all was quite still by the river  
 When our drama did occur.

While Wabash tiptoed through this silence  
 On that night so long ago,  
 The moon cast a *spell* o'er the valley  
 With her soothing, silver glow.  
 And oft on such nights, did young lovers  
 Point the prow of bark canoe  
 To high northeast banks of this island;  
 For these give the rarest view.

Our twain stole away from the village:  
 They did heed that call that comes  
 To long-parted lovers more clearly  
 Than the roll of Indian drums!—  
 The call to come out in the moonlight  
 And to view the moon's broad smile;—  
 The call of romance in the springtime,  
 And the lure of Cedar Isle!—

Calling youth from the campfires and cabins  
 And their stirring tales of war;  
 From powwows, songs, dances, and feasting,—  
 Olde Towne's charms on nights of yore!  
 Wild Rose rode dark trails one league southward

<sup>3</sup> Pronounced *Lon-gwee*. Olde Towne (or L'Anguille), which extended for three miles along a plum-tree-covered ridge overlooking Eel River (a tributary which enters the Wabash at Logansport), consisted of scores of rude cabins and huts constructed chiefly of logs, bark, branches, and brush or mats, rather than the commonly pictured wigwams (covered with skins) used by Indian tribes inhabiting the plains.

On a Spanish pony's back;  
Flower, too, reached the ford of the Wabash  
Through the dense-leafed forest black.

They took cached canoes to the tryst-place,  
And there met, and stood on high:  
Two motionless forms cast a shadow,—  
Silhouettes against the sky!  
Moonlit waters caressed Cedar Island.  
Wild-plum blooms bent low to kiss.  
Warm winds breathed a prayer o'er the lovers  
And their dreams of future bliss.

But DOOMED were such dreams and this tableau:  
There was *murder* muttering near!  
A rival in ambush stood cursing,—  
And they too bewitched to hear!  
His bowstring this villain pulled grimly,  
And the arrow carried true:  
Her lover fell dead at her feet, as —  
Startled, she a step withdrew.

When this fiend — a Miami called Hailstone —  
Saw Chief Flower was really slain,  
His blood-curdling yell stirred shocked echoes;  
But black hate still stirred his brain!  
With whoops he from hiding dashed forward  
Hot to SCALP the chief renowned,  
And thus bar that brave soul FOREVER  
From the Happy Hunting Ground!

When moonbeams revealed Hailstone's scalp knife  
In the hand that would assail,  
A horrified moon hid her features  
With a dark, enshrouding veil.  
The girl then found grief giving way to  
Dread of this worse threatened woe,  
And kneeled in tense prayer before him  
Ere he sprang to scalp his foe:

"Good Manitou! God of Miamis!  
Hearken to a maiden's prayer!  
O guard my dear lover's poor body,  
For quite helpless it lies there!"

Then quick did the god of Miamis  
 Act upon this young squaw's plea:  
 He whispered strange words to the river,  
 And the wind, and earth — all three!

These elements, rousing, responded —  
 With a ROAR that split the sod.  
 To Him of the Indians "Good Manitou,"  
 That Great Spirit we call "God."  
 Steep shores cracked and split all asunder  
 In reply to His command; —  
 Both rivals rolled down to the river  
 With crashed rock, torn turf, and sand!

Wild Rose had leaped back from the bluff which  
 At her feet now fell so sheer;—  
 A feeling of *awe* had come o'er her,  
 Which helped shield her heart from fear.  
 The waters boiled but a few moments;—  
 Again *silence* reigned supreme!  
 Rock Cliff loomed — a *limestone memorial*  
 To those buried in the stream!

Consolement the Wabash then murmured  
 To the maiden thus bereaved;  
 The willow trees wept, in deep sorrow,  
 While the girl — still kneeling — grieved.  
 But tenderly, Manitou *touched* her  
 When wild turks hailed newborn day;—  
 And, lifted, she rose from the greensward  
 Strangely thrilled, and turned away.

Soon after she rose, the isle's cedars  
 Stole away<sup>4</sup> and ceased to mourn;  
 For she rose to the exquisite glory  
 Of a soul that is reborn:  
 Wild Rose, deeply moved by the happenings,  
 Her dear friends and home *resigned*,  
 Devoting her whole life thenceforward  
 To the service of mankind.

North trails she trod first to the Great Lakes,  
 A French priest her tale to tell;

---

<sup>4</sup> There are no longer any cedar groves, or even isolated cedar trees, on this wooded island. The willows and plum trees have likewise vanished.

And learned healing secrets from him and  
Each old Indian sage, as well.  
*Three score years*, she then traveled this country  
And blessed many a tribe and town  
By ministering unto their needy  
As the nurse of first renown!

Thus dawned that old Indian preachment,  
Handed down from age to age  
Till even our "Big Knives"<sup>5</sup> have given it  
In their paleface books a page:  
"Ofttimes the quite frivolous and care-free  
When once *felled* by fate's harsh rod,—  
Recovering, rise up to true *greatness*  
At the lifting touch of God."<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> The name *Big Knives* was often given to the American colonists (and in time to all citizens of the United States), because of the swords formerly conspicuously carried by their troops in time of war.

<sup>6</sup> The author wishes to make grateful acknowledgements to Dr. Charles E. Slocum, Mr. Frank Swigart, Dr. Harlow Lindley, and Dr. J. Z. Powell.