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The Legend of Moosehead Lake: Kineo [poem]

Milford Baker

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Profile of Kineo

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At Break of Dawn from Kineo Mountain

M. Baker
How beautiful the morning breaks
Upon the king of mountain-lakes;
The forests, far as eye can reach,
Stretch green and still from either beach,
And leagues away the waters gleam
Resplendent in the sunrise beam;
Yet feathery vapors, circling slow,
Wreathe the dark brow of Kineo.

The hermit mount, in sullen scorn,
Repels the rosy touch of morn,
As some remorseful, lonely heart,
From human pleasure set apart,
Shrinks even from the tender touch
Of pity, lest it yield too much:
So, speechless still to friend or foe,
Frowns the black cliff of Kineo.

Yet, as the whispering ripples break
From the still surface of the lake
On the repellent rocks, they seem
To murmur low, as in a dream;
The mountain’s name, and day by day
The listening breezes bear away
A memory of the long ago,—
A sad, wild tale of Kineo.
How many moons can no man say
O'er heaven's blue sea have sailed away
Since Kineo and his fleet canoe
First vanished from his kindred's view.
Hunter and warrior lithe and keen,
No brave on all the lake was seen
Whose wigwam could such trophies show
As the green roof of Kineo.

But, wrathful, jealous, quick to strife,
He lived a passioned-darkened life;
Even Maquaso, his Mother, fled
His baneful lodge in mortal dread.
Then, gathering round the midnight fire,
The old men spake with threatenings dire:
"Out from our councils he must go,
That demon haunted Kineo."
In sullen and remorseful mood,
He gave himself to solitude.
Up the wild rocks by night he bore
Of all he prized a stealthy store,—
Flint, arrows, knife, and birch. Who knows
But some dark lock or dead wild rose,
The phantom of an untold woe,
Shared the lone haunt of Kineo?

The mountain was his own; than he
None other dared its mystery.
None sought to meet the savage glare
Of the wild hunter in his lair.
But when far up the mountain-side
Each night a lurid flame they spied,
The watchful red-men muttered low,
“There hides our brother Kineo.”
Years passed. Among the storm-swept pines
From moon to moon he read the signs
Of blossom and decay. He knew
The eagle that familiar flew
About his path. The fearless bird
His melancholy accents heard,
But glen or shore no more might know
The swift, still step of Kineo.

Save once. His tribe in deadly fray
Had battled all the lowering day,
And many a brave Penobscot’s blood
Was mingling in the lake’s pure flood,
When, like a spectre, through the gloom,
With gleaming knife and eagle plume
And glance that burned with lurid glow,
Strode the bold form of Kineo.

A hush like death, and then a cry
Fierce and exultant pierced the sky;
They rallied round that fiery plume,
And smote the foe with hopeless doom,
But when the grateful warriors fain
Would seek his well-known face again,
Their gifts and homage to bestow,
Gone, like a mist, was Kineo.

They saw him not, but from that hour
They bowed before his wizard power;
His watch-fire grew to be a shrine
Half terrible and half divine.
None ever knew when death drew nigh,
When into darker mystery
Of cloud above or deep below
Stole the sad ghost of Kineo.
But, when his camp-fire burned no more,
The solitary mountain bore
His name; and when at times the sky
Grew dark, a long, despairing sigh
Down the gray precipices rolled,
And tempest terrible foretold.
The fishers feared the wind, and snow,
The lightning, less than Kineo.

Now beautiful the morning skies
Look on this forest paradise;
Fresh voices, loud and joyous, make
The echoes of the grand old lake:
But underneath that frowning height
The shadow and the spell of night
Come back; the oars fall still and slow,
The waves sigh, Peace to Kineo!
Evening at Kineo, Maine

M. Baker