

The Heathen.

Cy Warman.

"The 'eathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone."—*Kipling*.

"WHY are you not a Christian, Pere?" asked John de Sault of his wife's father.

"Why?" echoed the Indian, and he almost smiled. Then his bronzed face hardened. He leaned forward and snorted like a bull moose. The corners of his mouth twitched; his small dark eyes gleamed with something of the old light that burned there half a century ago. Now in a low, hushed voice he went on, interrogating the interrogator:

"Am I mistrusted? Does the factor send you, or the bishop, or is it that bore of a mission man, who sends you to speak with me?"

"Nobody sent me, Pere. I just wanted to know."

"Who hunts when the hunters fail, when Gitche robes the wilderness in a robe of spotless white, when the land lies hushed and not a sound disturbs the stillness of this solitude—who goes for the game then, and whose god goes with him?"

"You, mon Pere, and with you Wes-a-ka-chack."

"Am I not trusted at every post on the Peace, and welcome in every lodge from the pass, where it pierces the heart of the Rockies, to the coast where the mighty Mackenzie sobs herself to sleep on the broad bosom of the deep? Who was sent with the Great Mother's message to Sir Donald, when the breeds uprose on the Saskatchewan?"

"You bore the despatches, Pere."

"Who ferries the factor's daughter over the wide river, when the ice goes out?"

"You, mon Pere."

"Has old Charley ever failed the white

man—the Christian—when he was in sore distress?"

"Never."

"Then why the devil should I become a Christian?"

De Sault said nothing, for he knew of a truth that the Pere was the most valued and trusted Indian in the Hudson's Bay employ. Presently the aged Indian touched De Sault, and said:

"Listen, boy. One long hard winter came here once—many, many snows since. The river froze so deep that we were unable to thread the tackle under the ice. All our frozen fish we had eaten, and when Christmas came—the time when the white man is wont to make merry with his God—we were starving. The hunters had been out a week, when the factor called in, saying, 'Go hunt, for the hunters are lost.'

"At dawn I set out, and slept in the snow that night. All the following day I followed the dim, blurred trail of the hunters, but failed to find them.

"In the twilight of the third day, I came upon a Cree woman making blood soup. She said the men were only a short way ahead. I pushed on, and when they heard me coming they hid the little meat they had, guessing that I would be half starved. When I made myself known they gave me what they had, but I ate only enough to stay my hunger and make me strong to follow the other hunters, for they were split up into three parties.

"All that night I tramped and by the close of the next day had the whole hunting party rounded up, with a pitiful total of half a Caribou for the post and and its people.

"When we got back—on the first day of the New Year—the post, the mission, the Indians and all were preparing to leave. They concluded to take chances on the ice, and over half a thousand