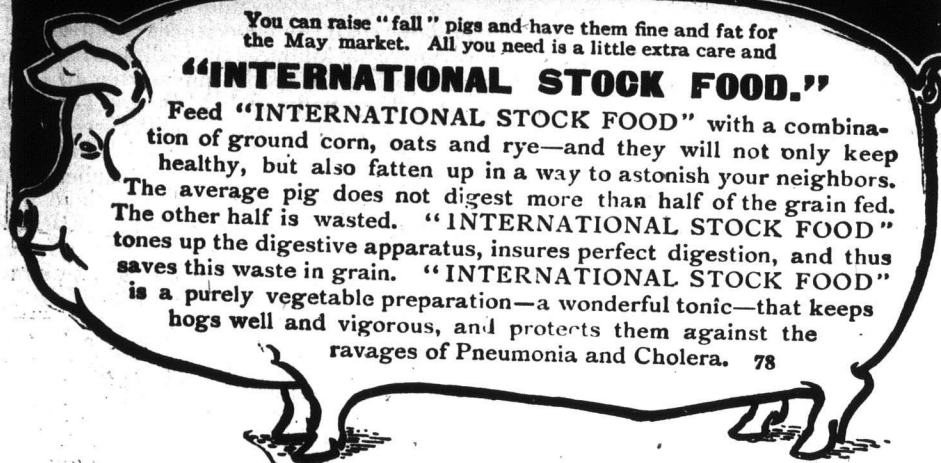




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His Even Chance

Written for the Western Home Monthly. By Irene Keane
University of Alberta

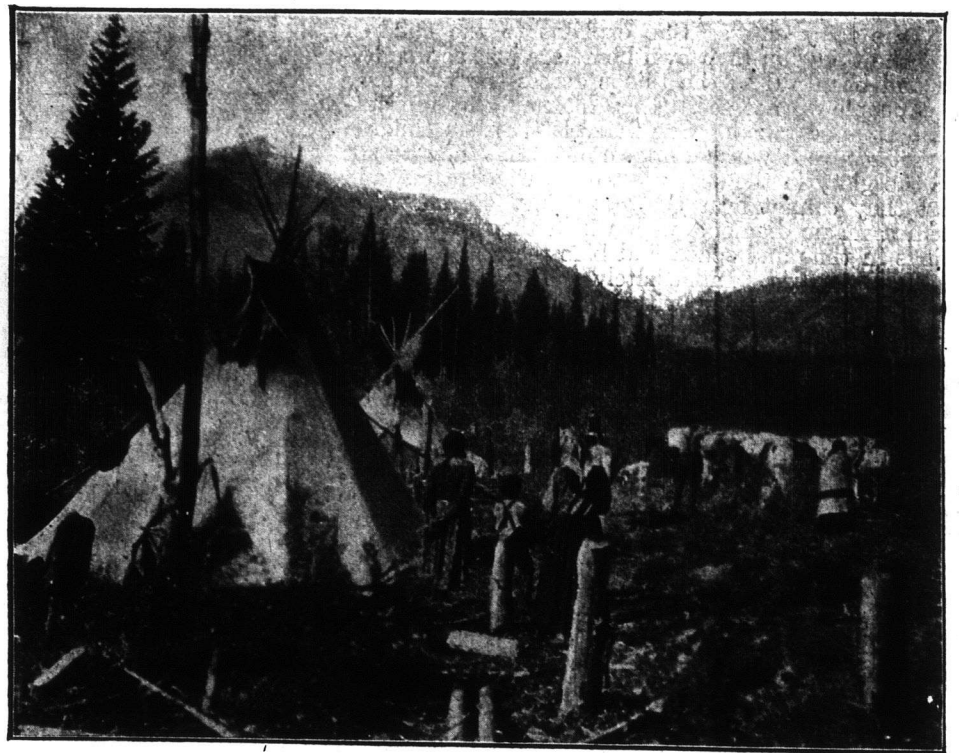
IN missionary work among the Indians of North America, it is a well-known fact that one of the most difficult things to banish out of the hearts of those who are influenced by the Gospel is the spirit of revenge which they harbor against all who have done them any real or imaginary injury.

It is impossible for anyone who has not lived among the Indians to understand thoroughly the isolation and care which fall to the women who have spent some of their best years in striving to elevate the Indian race. Their nervous system, even if naturally very strong, gradually becomes weakened by the successive frights to which they are exposed. The missionary enjoys relief through change of occupation, but the wife has the continued monotony and isolation from her own kind. Many a sleepless night is spent by the Mission House mother, anxiously awaiting the return of the Missionary through a blinding snow-storm, or watching over a sick child, fighting with only Faith on her side, for the little life which lies precariously in the balance for want of proper food or medi-

sun was creeping over the tops of the nearby mountains, slanting along the pine ridges, and warming up the ground along the muskeg, melting the frost and flooding the valley with a pale yellow radiance. The Nehiyowuk (Exact People), whom some call Crees, had an encampment in this valley, the teepees and tents pitched right in the centre of the forest area. Here many trees had been seared by lightning, and clearing was not difficult. Evidently the people had come under the influence of the Whites, for only the elders wore native costume, the others having adopted civilized attire.

Young and old were gathered near the front of the encampment, for a stranger had appeared. In sign language he asked the path over the mountains. He was told, and started on at once. The people watched till the forest had hidden him from view, wondering greatly the while at the circumstances of his leading such a great number of pack-ponies, and of being unaccompanied.

The Cree language is very deliberate, and there was no evidence of haste as



Young and old were gathered near the front of the encampment, for a stranger had appeared.

cal attention. Often, for days at a time, her housework is neglected to talk with the native women and straighten out their domestic tangles. In the long run, the memories of these women are precious to the dwellers of the lodges; but only consecrated zeal and self-sacrifice of the very highest order can carry them through the nervous strain of life in a mission when the Indians are aroused, sullen and vengeful. One of them, for instance, awoken from sleep to hear the dull thud of something thrown against the door; it may only be the flung block in the hands of some young brave, emboldened by too much fire-water; but all the tales she has ever heard or read of Indian raids recur to her, and every sound for the rest of the night is tragic in its effect.

The Great White Silence of the North envelops in its mystery the causes of many feuds, of many dark deeds, and covers over the sites of many a camp where the War Dance has been danced and plans laid for the extermination of the white race.

Often a lone white woman has stood at the door of the Mission, seen the war party approach, and by her bold front apparently turned their course of action; but the Forest and the Silence alone could tell the real story. It is only once in a long time that the inside account of these potential uprisings come to us, so that we see from the standpoint of the two races.

One morning late in the spring, the

the tribe dispersed, talking all the while of this strange "eye-new" who travelled alone.

Through the day that followed, a sinister shadow came over them; night came on hours ere its time; the Wise Men of the tribe predicted some great insult or desecration, and counselled the breaking of camp.

Their advice was taken, and in a very short time the camp was a thing of the past, and the children of the wilderness took the trail over the mountains which led to the open country; for this tribe belonged to that branch known as the Plain Crees, and they disliked the forest with its boding sense of mystery. They wanted to get back to the wide, boundless spaces, of the prairie, their home.

On the fourth day, the mountains behind and to the north, they entered the Sacred Land. Here it was that the last great battle had been fought; and the treaties which bound both their hereditary enemies, the Blackfeet, and themselves to the British Crown in consideration of certain tribal arrangements and certain moneys to be paid annually by the Crown to the tribe, had been signed with great ceremonial.

Here also were the graves of the great warriors of the Cree tribes, fenced by the British Government. It was the invariable custom for the tribes, when passing through the territory of the Sacred Land, to pause respectfully at the graves, with heads uncovered,