

MEDICAL SURVEY OF NUTRITION AMONG THE NORTHERN
MANITOBA INDIANS

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ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF INDIAN LIFE

At the present time there are approximately 126,000 Indians in Canada whose health and welfare come under the jurisdiction of the Indian Affairs Branch of the Federal Department of Mines and Resources.* These people constitute no less than 1 per cent of the total population of Canada. This 1 per cent, however, presents a national problem in health and welfare out of all proportion to their numbers.

From the economic and occupational standpoints the Indian may be divided into four main groups. Even before the coming of the white man the Iroquois and associated tribes who lived in Ontario, Quebec and the adjacent areas of the United States were agriculturists to a degree. They lived in small villages and, in addition to hunting, grew corn. To-day descendants of these Indians are largely settled in the populated districts of Ontario and Quebec, and make an important contribution to the agricultural life of these provinces. One of these tribes has become famous as structural steel workers, namely the Caughnawagas. The second main group of Indians are the Plain Indians, descendants of the Blackfeet, Sioux, Assiniboine and Plain Cree tribes. These were the buffalo hunters. To-day they have become ranchers and raise horses and cattle. They do not show great interest in other agricultural pursuits and cannot be regarded as "tillers of the soil". It is even difficult to get them to raise dairy cattle, which observation is significant in view of their aboriginal habits of being meat eaters and hunters of buffalo. The third main group are the Coast Indians of British Columbia who were in the time of Captain Vancouver, and are to-day, fishermen. Their ability as fishermen is great. Unfortunately, before World War II their economic status was reduced by the unscrupulous encroachment of the Japanese. The fourth, and by far the largest group, occupies the hinterland of Canada. They are the descendants of many tribes, such as the Nascopies, Montaignais, Tête de Boules, Chippewas, Saulteaux, Swampy Crees, Chipewyans and Siccannies. These Indians, frequently referred to as "Bush Indians", constitute roughly one-half of the total Indian population and obtain their livelihood largely through hunting, trapping and fishing. The present investigation is limited to a study of a typical group of these Bush Indians.

There was a time when the Indian hunted for food. The skins and fur were used for clothing and covering for his wigwam. To-day, however, he hunts and traps primarily for fur which is traded for food, clothing, and other articles, the products of modern civilization. Frequently he does not buy intelligently and a considerable portion of his income may be squandered on such things as

*Since this report was written the Medical Service of the Indian Affairs Branch has been transferred from the Department of Mines and Resources and is now known as the "Indian Health Services, Department of National Health and Welfare".