

The Trail of the Chippeway Snowshoe

Written for The Western Home Monthly by H. Mortimer Batten.

"Because God of the white man's sun is just and powerful."



BABY COLEMAN.

Viol built up his strength.

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PETER Angus, the halfbreed, sat alone in his cabin that December evening, when suddenly the door was softly opened and a woman entered. She was an Indian woman. She had slipped her moccasins from her snowshoes on gaining the door, and now stood using them for support. There was fear in her eyes, and Peter saw that she was infinitely weary. He motioned her to a seat by the stove. Then, as she sat there, he quietly prepared food and placed it beside her. No word had passed between them as yet.

"You have come far, little sister?" asked Peter at length.

She nodded gravely. "Far and fast," she answered quietly. She looked at him keenly, then she rose and flung out her hands. "Peter Angus," she cried, "you are now of the white man's world. You have been away to the white man's city and learnt those things which the Indian cannot understand. A great wisdom is yours, Peter Angus, for you possess both the knowledge of the white race and of the red, and my people tell me that you are a friend to the Indian in need. Is this so?"

Her eyes were on his face again, but Peter did not look away. His handsome face was grave with enquiry.

"What is your name, little sister?" he asked.

"Moniave,"
"Well, Moniave," pursued the halfbreed, "you know my name. You called me by it at our meeting. Where and when have you heard that name?"

The woman looked away. "At Moose Factory, at the Hudson Bay, at Fort William—yes, at every fort and trading post I have visited from Ungava to the prairie. You are widely known, Peter Angus, as a brave man and a great traveller.

"And have you heard anything bad of that name?" enquired Peter. His eyes were upon her, but she looked away. Peter rose, and his fist crashed down on the bench. "Have you ever heard of an Indian who came to my door for help and did not get it? No, never! Moniave, I may belong now to the white race. I may wear white man's clothing and eat white man's food, but in my soul there still lives the spirit of the Indian. At times it calls me away into the woods to hunt the caribou, and for many moons I live like a wolf, sleeping where the nights find me.

"Moniave," and Peter sat back again, "eat, child, while I tell you. My mother was of your people. Very beautiful she was, and in my boyhood I loved her. My father was of the white race. He became a mighty trader, all powerful in the land of the whites. He had many dog teams and many Indians, and his sleds were adorned with golden bells. To my mother he was all gentleness and truth, and when she died she said to me: 'Peter, I have tasted the fruits of the white man's world and found them very sweet. I have learnt many things that my sisters of the teepees cannot understand, for the red race cannot comprehend the ways of the white, nor the white the ways of the red. But you, who are both red and white, can understand both. Between the two races there lies a mighty river, but you, Peter, are a bridge across that river. You span it from bank to bank; your feet are upon the shore on either side, and many may come to know the country which lies in the territory of the other so long as that bridge stands firm. See to it, Peter,' she told me, 'that the spring-time floods do not shake the foundations of that bridge, so that it can never break loose from one shore to the other. Let it stand between the two nations, so that each can come to know the other's land, for none can cross by a bridge that belongs to one shore only.'"

Peter looked into the woman's face. "Do you understand, Moniave?" he asked.

"A little," she answered. "She meant that, just as a bridge spans a creek, so you are to span the stream that lies between the white race and the red, that each may pass to the land of the other."

"It is so," said Peter.

The woman rose. "But I do not wish to pass into the lands of the whites," she cried savagely. "There are many things I do not understand, Peter Angus. Everywhere the white man goes sorrow and loss and sickness befalls the Indians. It creeps from teepee to teepee like underground fire, and there is no fighting it, yet the white man himself is all powerful. If I eat poison I die; if my dog eats the same poison, he, too, dies, yet there is a poison on which the white man would seem to flourish though to the Indian it means death. How can these things be, Peter Angus?"

"Little sister, it cannot be otherwise. The Indian has known only the life of the woods, and when, with the coming of the white man, he tries to live as the white man lives, the great cough gets him. But there will come a day when the Indian is used to the white man's ways, and he will then be a thousand times happier and stronger than he is to-day."

The woman pondered it, then she said: "And there is the white man's law. Once these woods were ours, and we were free to come and go whence and whither we chose. Now if a man raises his hand against us we must not strike back, or we offend against this law. Peter Angus, how are we to understand?"

"Understanding will come," replied the halfbreed. "And believe me, Moniave, the white man's law is all just and all powerful. I who have seen the railways and the great ships on the seas, I who stands as a bridge between the white race and the red, know that the white

man's law is good. It is stronger than the wind and mightier than the snows, and the Indian who desires to be happy must learn the white man's law. If then one of your people has sinned against it, go back and tell your tribe just how he sinned and how he was punished, that no other will do the same. And tell your tribe that Peter Angus says that the white man's law is good."

Again the woman pondered. "Then there is the white man's God," she pursued. "We worship the things we see and understand. We pray to the sun to shine, and when it shines the flowers bloom. When our enemies are on the trail we pray to the Snow Moon, and lo, the snow comes and hides our tracks. The white man worships neither sun nor moon, yet for him the flowers grow and the birds sing, and the Chinook wind bears him homewards."

"Moniave, the white man's God is all powerful," Peter Angus told her. "It is He who bids the sun to shine and the snow moon to send her storms. The sun and the moon and the stars, and the very earth, are but atoms of powder in His hand, and the power of the white man is not in the man himself, but in the God he worships. The white man is all powerful because his God is the right God. I who am a brave man, I who have travelled far and learnt much wisdom, know that this is so, and I know that the God of the white man's sun loves the Indians as I myself love them. I have spoken."

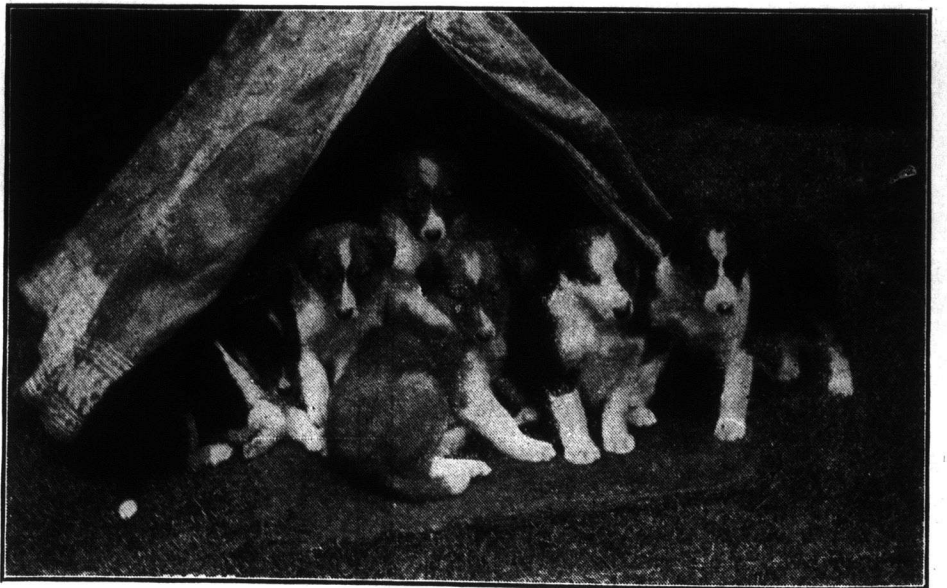
The woman sat silent for a long time. "If that God is all powerful," she said at length, "if He loves the Indians with such great love, it cannot be that an Indian will suffer wrongly at the hands of the whites?"

"If he is a good Indian," replied the halfbreed, "I believe that the white man's God will protect him."

The woman rose. Her dark eyes flashed fire. "He is a good Indian," she answered. "For ten snows have I shared his teepee, yet never once has he beaten me nor driven me out. He is my husband."

Peter Angus looked at her keenly.

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