

The Translation of Pig-Eye

A tale of the plains
by John Innes



Before branching out into the various ramifications of this narrative, it may be as well to explain that the word "translation" as used in the heading is not intended to convey the meaning of "rendering a word into another language," but must be accepted in the sense of "conveying to a spirit land without death." This awful fate overtook Pig-Eye; and, as though to add horror to the proceedings, it proved to be the roaring devil of the white man that did the kidnapping, and not a respectable spirit such as the Indians were acquainted with.

Listen, then, to the tale of Pig-Eye.



Pig-Eye sat upon the crest of a long, low hill; near him his pony grazed in content. Pig-Eye was one of the Blackfeet nation. He had got his strange name through having had the misfortune to lose one of his optics in a little mix-up with a Cree warrior, the result being that while his right eye was remarkably fine, large and alert, the left was reduced to a mere slit, really resembling to a remarkable degree, that of a dead pig. In order to cover this defect Pig-Eye had cultivated his forelock in such a manner as to fall in a greasy black bang down over the injured organ. He was pock-marked, skinny and middle-aged—one of the intolerant sort. For whites he had no use, except to draw rations, treaty money; or borrow tobacco from when in destitute circumstances. His dress consisted of a buckskin shirt, fringed at shoulder and arm, and beaded down the front; blanket leggings, and red breech clout.

Pig-Eye's soul was disturbed within him. The sun shone gloriously and flooded the rolling plain with

warmth and light, but Pig-Eye heeded it not. He was one of the people, found everywhere, who know positively that it is the sun's business to shine between daylight and dark if there are no clouds about; therefore such trifles did not interest him. His one eye gazed steadily towards the northeast. It did not rest on the spot far down by the river and trees where the Indian village stood, the tepees clustering close together below the yellow cut bank. It did not rest upon the bands of ponies and cattle which grazed upon the prairie beyond. It looked away and away, over the rolling grass billows, till it found a long line of light soil stretching far east and west, like a thread; and, following it toward the east, located a faint blur on the horizon. This blur seemed to fascinate him. With much looking it became at times invisible, and he was obliged to rub his one eye and look again for a long while before he could find it; muttering fiercely the while. For hours he sat; then with a grunt of anger, arose, folded his blanket, threw it across his pony, mounted and rode down the long slope to the village.

Next day saw him again occupying his point of vantage, and with him were his two friends, Black-Pup and Spotted Mule. Together they decided to watch the blur upon the horizon. Day by day it waxed larger: it looked like smoke. At length, upon a noon when the air was dead and the heat oppressive the watching trio heard a distinct shriek. Another: then another "A-moon-e-u" (it is true) they said; and rising, packed their belongings, and rode far south on a visit to their cousins, the Piegiens.

It may be well to explain here what all the disturbance—as far as they were concerned—was about.

It had so happened, some few moons past, that Pig-Eye, Black Pup and Spotted Mule had ridden eastward and had found—many days' travel away from their own village—lodges of a strange shape, occupied by white men. These white men worked in a marvellous manner. They looked through things, and whacked stakes into the ground, in a long line, cutting off the tops of each stake at a place they had marked upon it. Pig-Eye and his chums watched in disdainful silence. At first they thought the white men were building a fence; but they soon saw that that could not be, because no rail was long enough to stretch from one stake to another. Therefore, they decided that the white men must be drunk (a condition to which all the white men they had ever seen—except the missionaries—were most partial) and their scorn grew apace. But what was their