

ARTIST INTERPRETS TRAGEDY OF RED MAN

Mr. J. H. Henderson showing Pictures of Blackfoot Indians at Arts and Crafts Rooms

The white men are few and far between who have experienced a single twinge of regret at the passing of the Red Man, or who see in the few remaining aged and real representative of a proud race anything more than shuffling, expressionless, not highly intelligent old natives.

Mr. J. H. Henderson, of Regina, a Scottish artist who is now in Victoria, the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Poole, Island Road, Oak Bay, has seen the Indian from quite another angle, as anyone who is interested can discover by visiting an exhibition of his paintings now on view at the Island Arts and Crafts room, Union Bank Building. Some day Canada and all Western civilization will appreciate the service Mr. Henderson has done in leaving to posterity such records as these of the Red Man. For they are history in its simplest and most comprehensible form. Studied year by year during weeks spent right among them on their reserves, the artist has painted these Blackfoot chiefs and braves with sympathetic pity and understanding, with realism and idealism. When one looks into these deeply-furrowed faces and the in-looking eyes brooding on the irretrievable past, one realizes that Mr. Henderson has caught and interpreted what the casual delineator overlooks, the intimate and profound tragedy which the Red Man himself is too proud as well as too inarticulate to tell about the calamity of half a century ago that deprived the race of its limitless domains, placed boundaries to its hunting grounds, and made women of its men.

There are only three Indian portraits in this little exhibition of seven pictures. But each is startling in its dramatic force. Each repeats, in the language of expression, the history of the tragedy of a people both spirited and heroic. One is a picture of "Weasel Calf," a Blackfoot chief, painted in full regalia, eagle feathers, coat of many colors, and all. In the name is probably traceable the old Indian custom of calling the child after the first object that passed the tepee after the babe's birth. "Weasel Calf" is here seen at the age of 78. His bearing is noble, and his eagle-like features carry an expression both mournful and cynical. "Many Shots" is the name of another of the subjects, a Blackfoot tribesman, with beaded buckskin coat. "Raw Eater," a gray haired ancient of the race, hugs himself in his blanket, but proudly, although his expression, behind its defiance and the high temper of his kind, has a touch of wistfulness.

Masterly Technique

The technique of the artist will bear studying. By making the backgrounds dark, the dark copper-colored skins have been thrown into bold relief. Although everything is in very low tones, there is abundance of color, sober yet brilliant. Masterly technique accounts for the fine modelling of the strongly-defined features. The interpretative quality is what defies analysis. It is the seer in the artist. These faces are all proud; they are also subtle. They are sorrowful, back-looking. ~~The rest of their faces,~~ these tragic figures yet have a touch of barbaric splendor and fire which has survived the elegant comforts which the White Face provided when he forbade the continuance of the pagan Sun Dance. "Weasel Calf," "Many Shots" and "Raw Eater" all bear the marks of this Sun Dance, the test of the real Brave. And although they are old men, feeble remnants of the great Huntsmen of the Plains, yet one can see that they would still have high animal courage to face pain. These paintings as epical portraits alone would surely create a sensation in any of the European galleries.

There are four other pictures. They are so entirely different in subject and treatment that one marvels that they come from the same hand. One is a portrait of a little girl. It is entitled, "Sunshine," quite aptly, for she has tumbled golden curls, a dimpling smile, and laughing eyes. The other canvases are landscapes. "Evening," "Close of Day" and "The Apple Valley," all delightful pastorals, peaceful poems, picturing in mellow harmonies some of the green coulees which are hidden away behind the rolling reaches of the Saskatchewan prairie. They suggest Corot or Constable, and show a delightful phase of the artist's genius.