

The Story of Parsons Motanic

An Indian Athlete and Farmer Who Once Wrestled With Frank Gotch.

(As written for Sunset-The Pacific Monthly by Merle R. Chessman)

It's a long step from barbarism to civilization, from paganism to Christianity, but in a little less than ten years the step has been made by Parsons Motanic, Cayuse Indian of the Umatilla reservation.

Ten years ago he was a savage so far as morals, religion and habits were concerned, the only part of civilization which he had absorbed being the vices of the white man. Today he is a successful and respected farmer, tilling his own soil and riding in his own six-cylinder automobile, and he is more. He is one of the foremost religious workers among the three tribes on the reservation.

Motanic's life history has been a remarkable and interesting one. In his younger days he was an Indian Hercules, one of the greatest natural athletes the west has produced. Before the influence of the missionary had touched him and when the fire of youth was in his blood, he was the leader among the wilder element of the young manhood of the Cayuses, Umatillas and Walla Wallas. None there was could stand before him in a wrestling match, his fleetness of foot and his strength of arm became traditional and he had no peer among his companions in riding bareback the wild cutan of the plains or in executing the wild steps of the Indian waltz with barbaric grace. He owned several of the fastest race horses on the reservation and was a reckless gambler. He drank the "firewater" of the white man and, altogether, was a wild, dissolute, roisterous but nevertheless handsome and romantic young brave.

In those days he was the idol of the younger Indians of both sexes and it was a matter of course when he married after the tribal way Alice Pat-awa, the belle of the reservation. But Alice was as fickle as he and in a few years, Motanic cast her off and took another wife. This fact would not be material in his life-story were it not for the fact that she was one of the instruments of his redemption.

Some few years before a young seminary graduate, Rev. J. M. Correllson, had come among the Indians and had opened a mission. Through patient efforts he built up a small congregation and Motanic's wife became one of his converts. From time to time he accompanied her to church but seemingly was not impressed until one Sunday, following a protracted debate, he came and received some kind of a moral kick from the sermon. When the invitation to join was extended, he surprised even the young missionary himself by arising and renouncing his old ways. "I have been a bad man," he said in his own language. "In all kinds of wickedness, drinking, racing, gambling, make it as bad as you can, I have surpassed my friends in it all. But now I will join with the Christian people. I will save my money and work for my family."

In his resolution he was never shaken. His old friends, red and white, laughed at his conversion and ridiculed him for it. But their taunts never affected him. With naive simplicity and sincerity he would answer them: "I come to Jesus." Since that time, nearly ten years ago, he has become one of the leading religious workers on the reservation. He has held nearly all of the offices in the church and is now the president of



the temperance society among the red people. In his native tongue he is a gifted orator and not only is in demand as a speaker at all Indian campmeetings on his own reservation but twice a year is called to the Nez Perce reservation in Idaho to assist in spreading the gospel among that tribe.

Last year, during the state-wide prohibition campaign, he was called upon to address a mixed audience of Indians and whites. In broken English he gave his indictment against firewater. "When I was young man," he said, "I had race horses. I want em run fast, I feed em whiskey. They beat all other horses and I win em much money. Bime by whiskey burn up their insides and I lose em horses and money and both. Whiskey will kill em horse, kill em man. Whiskey no good."

So much for the religious and moral transformation of the man. Industrially his change was as complete. Where before he rented his allotment of rich wheat land and squandered the money in riotous living, he now and has since his conversion, farmed his own land. He absorbed the methods of the white man easily, lived frugally and soon had a bank account. Two years ago he purchased a combined harvester and now operates that machine himself. Last spring he bought a six-cylinder Hudson automobile, and, riding to and from the city in it or about his ranch, he offers a strange contrast to the Motanic of ten years ago dashing about on his Indian cayuse, a contrast that would have awed his ancestors.

Motanic is not old now nor is he young. He has probably lived through forty winters but, beyond a slight tendency toward corpulence, he is as fine a specimen of physical manhood as in his younger days. Firm hands, still full strange tales of his peerless strength and agility and even Frank Gotch, retired champion of all wrestlers, will testify to these powers. For Gotch met Motanic on the mat and tested his muscles.

It was in 1911 when Gotch was traveling with Jeffries and his all-star troupe by way of advertising the "come-back" bout of the former champion pugilist. They came to Pendleton and, as was his custom, Gotch issued his open challenge. Motanic's friends induced him to accept

through the Indian refused until his missionary told him it would not be a sin.

The Pendleton theater was crowded and, when Motanic appeared on the stage, he was received with wild acclaim. He answered with one of his old time warwhoops. Gotch followed and on his face was the amused, good natured smile of a man confident of his ability. The word was given and Motanic rushed at the big Iowa farmer. With one swift, powerful and dexterous move he tripped the champion off his feet and hurled him sprawling on the mat.

By the redman's rules of wrestling, a wrestler thrown from his feet is defeated and, instead of following his advantage, Motanic regarded his fallen adversary with a look of triumph in his eye. His feat was received with a tumult of applause and Gotch's mettle was aroused. He rushed the Indian who, knowing nothing of catch-as-catch-can methods, was soon powerless in the grip of a hammerlock.

Motanic is the answer to the question, Can the Indian become a good citizen? He might also be called an answer to the question, Does religion pay? Though his transformation is the most notable testimonial to the effect of civilizing, Christianizing agencies at work among the Indians on the Umatilla reservation because of the clamor which surrounded his earlier life, it is only one of a number of conspicuous instances that prove that the native American can be educated away from tribal traditions and can be reclaimed to productive and constructive citizenship.

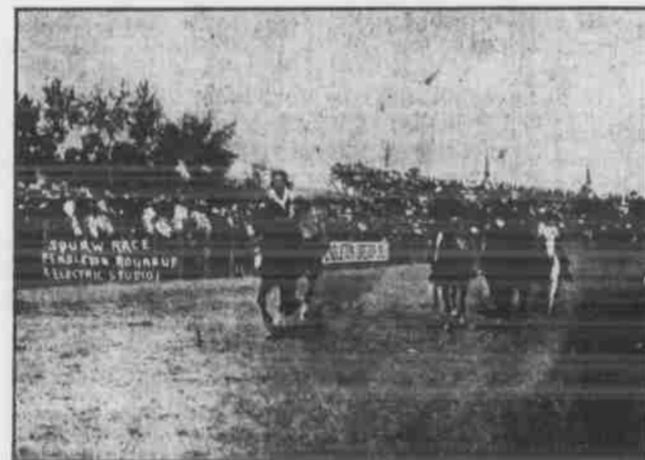
Thrilling Events

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ed into one of the judge's horses and scraped the rider out of the saddle. The colored boy was the last to ride and he drew the showiest buckler

Hotfoot reared straight on his hind legs time and again but the colored boy only showed his teeth and yelled. His ride was the most spectacular and the crowd gave him a tremendous ovation.

There have been many other moments of past Round-Ups that have impressed themselves on my memory, but the foregoing stand out pre-eminent.



An Indian Chief's Farewell Speech

You have taken me prisoner, with all my warriors. I am much grieved, for I expected, if I did not defeat you, to hold out much longer and give you more trouble before I surrendered. I tried hard to bring you into ambush, but your last general understood Indian fighting. I determined to rush on you and fight you face to face. I fought hard. But your guns were well aimed. The bullets flew like birds in the air, and whizzed by our ears like the wind through the trees in winter.

My warriors fell around me; it began to look dismal. I saw my evil day at hand. The sun rose dim on us in the morning, and at night it sank in a dark cloud and looked like a ball of fire. That was the last sun that shone on Black Hawk. His heart is dead, and no longer beats quick in his bosom. He is now a prisoner to the white men; they will do with him as they wish. But he can stand torture, and is not afraid of death. He is no coward. Black Hawk is an Indian.

He has done nothing for which an Indian ought to be ashamed. He has fought his countrymen against white men who came, year after year, to cheat them and take away their land. You know the cause of our making war. It is known to all white men. They ought to be ashamed of it. The white men despise the Indians, and

drive them from their homes. They smile in the face of the poor Indian to cheat him; they shake him by the hand to gain his confidence, to make him drink, and to deceive him. We told them to let us alone and keep away from us, and they called themselves among us like a snake. They poisoned us by their touch.

We called a great council and built a large fire. The spirit of our fathers arose and spoke to us to avenge our wrongs or die. We set up the war-whoop and dug up the tomahawk; our knives were ready and the heart of Black Hawk swelled high in his bosom when he led his warriors to battle. He is satisfied. He will go to the world of spirits contented. He has done his duty. His father will meet him there and commend him.

Black Hawk is a true Indian and disdain to cry like a woman. He feels for his wife, his children and his friends. But he does not care for himself. He cares for the nation and the Indians. They will suffer. He laments their fate.

Farewell, my nation! Black Hawk tried to save you and avenge your wrongs. He drank the blood of some of the whites. He has been taken a prisoner, and his plans are stopped. He can do no more! He is near his end. His sun is setting, and he will rise no more. Farewell to Black Hawk.

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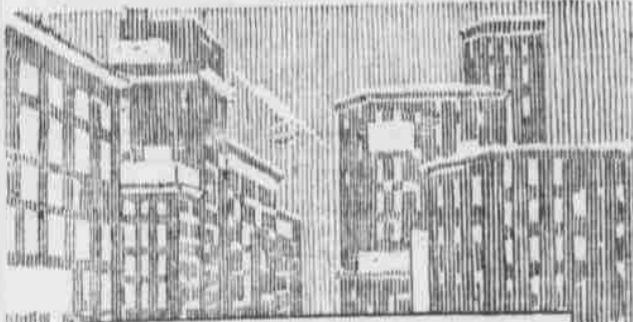
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