

REV. J. M. CORNELISON IS SUCCESSOR TO MARCUS WHITMAN IN LOCAL INDIAN MISSION FIELD

For 20 Years Faithful Worker on Reservation Has Striven to Convert Redmen to Paths of Christianity.

James M. Cornelison does not write on their people another white minister, set down the successor to Marcus Whitman, but successor to Marcus Whitman he is. Many others there are who have followed in the Christianizing work of Whitman among the American Indians, but Rev. James M. Cornelison alone can claim—if he will—the distinction of having carried on the labor among the very tribes to whom the life of the pioneer missionary was given. It is among the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of the Indians who murdered Whitman that Cornelison today is teaching and preaching.

During a long half-century following the Whitman tragedy in 1847, no Protestant minister whatever settled among the Umatillas, Walla Wallas or Cayuses, to continue the pioneer's task of telling them of the white man's Mantou. First of all at length to do so was James M. Cornelison, and he has been continuing his work among them for more than twenty years. And during this score of years he has brought to fruition the tree that sprang from the seed sown by the martyr of Wallatapu.

Though the hardships and dangers to which the early pathbreaker was exposed have been largely eliminated, the success which has attended the efforts of Cornelison in reclaiming the Indians to God-fearing citizenship has not been gained without its price. The task has demanded unflinching courage, infinite patience, unremitting toil, absolute faith and sacrifices few men would care to make. Cornelison's story is by no means drab or colorless. It contains chapters of human interest, climax, tense situations and dramatic moments.

It was on May 5, 1899, that James Cornelison, then a young graduate from Central University, Kentucky, and of San Francisco Theological Seminary, arrived at Tutuilla mission, fifty miles from the scene of the massacre and on the Umatilla reservation to which the three tribes had been confined more than twenty-five years.

Tutuilla "mission" was nothing but a shack where a little band of Indians, who had kept alive the embers of the faith of Whitman, met at intervals for worship. After the massacre H. H. Spaulding, coworker of the murdered missionary, had established a mission on the Nez Perce reservation at Lapwai, Idaho. Remembering the small group of faithful in eastern Oregon, from time to time he had sent to them members of their own race to encourage and assist them in their worship, and his practice had been followed by the McBeth sisters, who took charge of his mission when his earthly labors were finished. Thus the gospel introduced by the "good doctor" did not entirely perish.

When Cornelison arrived he found about two dozen men and women who still worshipped after the teaching of Whitman. One was an old wrinkled squaw called Sarah, the sole surviving pupil of the pioneer minister. She it was and her step-son, Philip Minthorn, known among the Indians as Kash-kash, who had asked the Presbyterian board of Home Missions to send a

Had Peo been born white and had he lived in a metropolitan city, he would doubtless have become a chief of political grafters. He made the best of his opportunities. He combined with a dominating personality a native shrewdness and a knowledge of the white man much superior to that of the average Indian. Twenty-five years before Cornelison came on the reservation the government had set aside 160 acres of rich wheat land for the support of a Presbyterian mission. It was on this land that the little group of Indian worshippers, with the help of the agent, had built their rude church. But of the quarter-section they used not more than an acre. The alert Peo saw an opportunity. He joined the little church and soon secured control of the land. For many years he rented it to white farmers and pocketed the revenue. Not only church land but the land of many of his tribesmen came under his control, and thus when the young missionary arrived he found the chieftain strongly entrenched and with the income of a prince.

His first act was to look up the legal status of the church land. Finding it sound, he demanded its control. When he announced his purpose to the members of his small congregation, they shook their heads. "Leave Peo alone," they urged. Peo came to the church meetings and openly denounced the missionary. He sent his agents to plant the seed of suspicion in the minds of the more suspicious of the red men. The Indian being by nature suspicious, the minister at first found little friendliness on the reservation save among the few faithful ones.

Then Peo tried intimidation. Kash-kash and others brought messages that, unless he left the reservation, his life would not be safe. "Peo had man," they told him. "Send men kill white preacher."

Cornelison smiled. "Tell them to come," he said. "Tell them I live in

my little tent house alone with my dog, and that the door is never locked."

But the chief was not yet done. He went to Pendleton and hired the best attorneys in that city to fight for him. They sent him formal notices, couched in platitudinous legal phraseology, to vacate the premises forthwith. But Cornelison knew the difference between a court injunction and a lawyer's bluff. He laughed.

In the end the minister won and began renting the land for the benefit of the church. When the Indians understood, Peo's prestige began to wane. Those who had long been under his dominance and whose lands had yielded him rich profits began to wonder why they could not rent their own lands and collect their own rents. In the end they did both.

Defeated and baffled, his princely income cut off and his power dwindling, Peo turned to the vice of the white man. Within a few years he had so completely debauched himself that none was so loath as to do him honor. One day, while crazed by the poison firewater of the bootlegger, he was arrested by the Pendleton police. When he was liberated his mind was no longer normal. Hopelessly demented, he was ordered committed to the federal hospital for the insane at Canton, North Dakota.

For eight years he stayed there. Gradually the rest, medical treatment and time restored to him in part his reason. But his physical health had been broken beyond repair by his excesses, and intelligence came back only to tell him that he soon must die. Knowing that the end was not far off, he pleaded for permission to return to Oregon to spend his last days with his people, and after many delays the permission was granted.

The news spread over the reservation that Peo was coming back and that his daughter, Jennie van Pelt, would bring him to the Tutuilla church on the next Sunday, so that he might meet some of his people. The Sunday came and with it a congregation that packed the little church to the doors. The aged chieftain did not arrive until late. When the door opened finally and his son-in-law appeared leading the old man, the interest and curiosity of his people overcame their native stoicism. Every head turned to catch a first glimpse of the returned chieftain. What they saw made more than one Indian display an emotion unusual in the race.

This was not the Peo they had known. There was no longer the erect, tall body and imperious face of a born leader. A bent, emaciated, almost tottering form; his face, once a study in bronze, now paled under the long indoor confinement; the black locks thin and gray, one once-flashing eye was blind and the other saw only indistinctly. The Peo who came back was a shell of the powerful sagamore, a wreck of manhood.

With bowed head Peo listened to the gospel preached in his own language by the missionary. At the end of the minister's appeal Peo rose and faced the congregation. All eyes centered upon him as he began to speak. Finally he paused as he turned toward the pulpit where Mr. Cornelison was still standing. His long arm stretched dramatically until the bony, shaking forefinger pointed straight at the man whom he had once fought so relentlessly. Raising his voice to its full power he said, speaking in English, "What that man say is good, and sank to his seat exhausted."

It was the minister's hour of victory and it was with an emotion too deep for words that he received the tribute from his once bitter foe, a tribute that went far toward making easy the task which the old chief had once made so hard. Peo died a year later—died worshipping the same Master from whom the missionary received his inspiration.

When Cornelison first took up his work he lived in a tent but in 1901 he built a manse and the following year a new church. Other buildings sprang up, and the Tutuilla mission of today, modern in every respect, stands as a monument to his work.

The little congregation has grown to many hundreds. Some of his converts have been backsliders and some have given only half-hearted support to the church, but the spiritual and moral redemption of others has been lasting, and in these and the children who are being brought up in the faith the hope for the future lies.

While he has been preaching to them the gospel of Jesus Christ, he has been making productive citizens of them, too. He has taught them the curse of whisky and of immorality, he has guided them from lives of sloth and indolence to lives of thrift and industry, he has helped them to understand the complexities of modern business, and he has impressed upon them the value of common honesty and kindred virtues. From a purely dollar-and-cents viewpoint his labor has paid, for he has helped them to become economic producers and he has taught them also to pay their debts until the credit of a "Cornelison Indian" is recognized as of first rating.

No story of the life of Mr. Cornelison would be complete without some mention of Parsons Motanic, for that Indian today exemplifies most perfectly the achievements of the missionary.

Twenty years ago Motanic was the wildest and best known young Indian on the reservation. His Herculean strength, his skill as a wrestler, his speed as a racer, his grace as a dancer, his recklessness as a gambler and the handsomeness of his person won him a leadership among the youth of the tribes that made him a notable figure. But there came a Sunday when Motanic received a moral blow from one of the minister's sermons. He joined the church and within a few years became the foremost of the workers in it. A natural orator in his native tongue, he became a speaker at all meetings of the temperance and other church societies and was often called to other reservations to assist in services. He took up the white man's burden of tilling the soil and has prospered so well that now he has abandoned the spotted cuttan of his forefathers for six-cylinder auto of the modern paleface. And his naive, simple explanation of his great transformation is this: "I come to Jesus."



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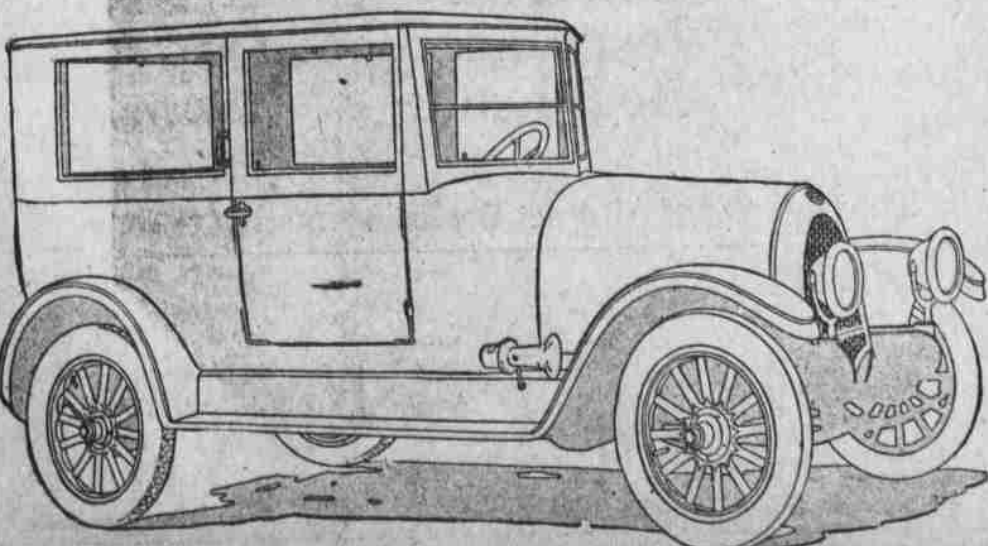
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