



IN the bush up in the Peace River country he was known as "Old Lonely." Not many people even in Peace River Crossing knew more than that. A few knew that his first name was Gabe. Somebody asked him one time if that stood for Gabriel. He studied his questioner a moment as though he thought there was a hidden meaning to the inquiry.

"No," he said quietly at last, "it don't stand for nothin'. Thet's jest my name — Gabe."

He was one of the old-timers. Nobody remembers any more who most of the others were. They were just prospectors and traders and trappers, just vagabonds whose outstanding characteristic was curiosity — curiosity about what lay over the next sky line, about the way Chinook sneaked in through the hills unexpectedly on wild winter nights, about beaver dams and northern lights and trees and creeks and living things. They were strange men, all of them — restless, forever wandering. But

not one was stranger than Old Lonely. "He's a deep one," people used to say.

He was deep in a way, but he changed considerably after he took those two little Cree girls in to raise. Nothing much more than babies they were, and he a man well past middle life — a big-boned, big-voiced man made almost fierce looking by his shock of unkempt hair and his dark eyes peering above a regular briar patch of whiskers. But those babies tamed him.

He even got so he tried to sing to them. His voice wasn't suited to that. It had the deep pitch of a rock slide. But the noises he made seemed to be just what the Cree girls wanted, because as soon as he had tucked them in their hammocks and started swinging and singing, they closed their eyes happily and went right to sleep.

They always slept, each tied in a hammock. There wasn't room for them to sleep any other way. What with Lonely's own log bunk and the stove and table and chair and bench, he would have had to put an extension on the cabin if he hadn't fixed things as he did. He made the hammocks out of strips of buckskin and slung them across opposite corners. He tied another buckskin thong to each for a jerk-line. And when the girls were tucked in, he drew his chair over, lit his pipe, took hold of the lines, and started pulling.

There hadn't been any obligation on him to take the children. They belonged to a Cree girl he had known since she was a baby. Ada Beaver-tail they called her when she was a youngster and Ada Beaver-tail they called her till she died; her marriage never made any difference. She married a worthless trader who left her when she became too sick to make moccasins.

Old Lonely heard about her condition and had a load of stuff sent up from the Crossing. He even managed to get a woman to visit her. But the woman had her own home to take care of and wouldn't stay; and Ada wouldn't leave. So the burden fell naturally on Lonely since nobody else wanted it.

For two months he went to Ada's cabin every day — and right at the time of year when the first frosts had knocked out the mosquitoes and flies and no-see-ums and left life worth living back in the hills. That was probably the first autumn in forty years he hadn't spent alone in the bush, slashing blazed trails along the trap lines he planned to follow that winter, or puttering around log cabins and lean-to's. Now and then he looked up as

ducks and geese and swans and cranes winged their way overhead, looked up and studied the great V's or waving lines till they passed from sight; but he never let Ada know they reminded him of anything.

The only thing he could do at first toward helping Ada with the children was to watch them when she sent them outside to play. He could cook and get wood and water, but with babies he was helpless. Now and then he uttered a gruff command to come into the house when Ada wanted them. The first few times he did so, they watched him intently a moment as if expecting him to attack, then scampered for the door as fast as they could go. After their first fears had gone, they allowed him to hold the big tin dipper to their lips when they wanted a drink. But that was as far as they or Old Lonely went in their friendship until that morning when Ada couldn't get out of bed.

Lonely had been spending the days with Ada and the nights in his own cabin, walking the five miles back and forth. That morning when he arrived, Ada lay in bed, while the girls were running barefooted around the cabin, clad only in their undershirts.

Ada tried to smile. "Old Man," she said in Cree, "I am not very strong."

Lonely wanted to say something but nothing occurred to him. He nodded his head in agreement and ran his fingers like a curry-comb through his beard. The girls were sprawled right at his feet. He looked down at them. They were gazing up as though half afraid.

"Hello," he finally boomed at them. He spoke also in Cree. They knew nothing but their mother's tongue. The sound of his own voice reassured him. He reached down quickly and put an arm around each girl, and carried them kicking and scratching to the bed. Ada smiled. She made a motion as though to reach up to them. Lonely sensed her desire and leaned over and held the girls down to her. The youngsters forgot their fears of him and ran their stubby brown fingers through their mother's hair. Ada tried to imprison the four hands between her own, but she failed. She whispered little words of endearment and the girls replied with chuckles and exclamations as they slipped their hands out of her grasp. Finally Ada sank back exhausted, and Lonely straightened up.

When the girls were interrupted in their game with their

mother, they turned to him. One reached out a hand timidly to his whiskers. As her fingers touched the hair, she gave an exclamation and pulled her hand away. She tried it again. Then the other reached out. They chuckled. Emboldened, they reached out together and gave Lonely's whiskers a little tug. They laughed, squirming gleefully in his arms. Right then something in the old trapper melted. He drew the children to him more closely. They sensed the change. The two little black-haired heads settled down on Lonely's shoulders; they snuggled up against the grizzled neck, and the pudgy brown hands yanked at and explored the graying beard to their hearts' content.

From then on Lonely found plenty to do. No longer was it sufficient to call the children in from play or hold the big dipper while they drank. He was required to feed and clothe them, and nurse Ada as well. There have been nurses who looked better in the part. His shirt was always unbuttoned at the throat, disclosing hairy chest or red undershirt; and he used tobacco in both forms. But Ada never noticed those things. She gave silent thanks for "Old Man" — a Cree term she had applied to him laughingly years before. And Old Man for all his bulk continued day after day and night after night to move silently on moccasined feet around the rude cabin. Nor could a woman have been more gentle.

Ada's condition became so much worse that she couldn't lift her head from the pillow, and he knew the end was near. One morning she beckoned him to come close. He leaned down.

"Could you get Father Robillier?" she whispered.

"He will come," he promised at once.

That evening as soon as the children were in bed, he told Ada he was leaving and would return at daylight. It was forty-five miles to the Crossing. He knew he must get someone to go in his stead, so he went first to a breed's place twelve miles distant. But he found the cabin vacant. He went four miles further to the home of a settler, but that man too was absent. It was four miles to the next cabin and the night was far gone; but he hurried on. When he arrived, he found the man — a Cree — in bed. Lonely wasted no time. He ordered the man to go at once for the priest. Always morose and bad-tempered even with his own people, the Cree resented the trapper's manner of ordering him around. Lonely sensed his resentment and laid a hand on the Cree's shoulder; nor did the hand rest lightly.

"Before the sun rises twice the priest will be at Ada's cabin. He will be there or I shoot you like carcajou."

The Cree's fright was plain under his surly manner.

"To-morrow night the priest!" snapped Lonely. "Or you die! Understand?"

The Cree nodded. Lonely watched him wolf down a piece of bannock and a couple of chunks of cold deer meat which he fished with his fingers from a greasy pot. As the Cree started for the door, he reached for a rifle which lay on a table beside Lonely. Lonely dropped a hand on the gun.

"You don't need that. The feet move faster when you run empty-handed."

For a moment the Indian gazed level-eyed at Lonely. He had a thought of fighting it out. Lonely never moved. Then the Cree shifted his glance and went out the door. Lonely picked up the rifle and followed. He stood watching until the Indian's figure disappeared over the bare brow of a hill. Then he turned. A half-mile or so from the cabin he came to rock outcropping. He swung off the trail and followed the rocks back a little distance. He cached the rifle and retraced his steps. It was twenty miles to Ada's and dawn was less than three hours away. He forced himself on. He had a promise to keep. Most of the time he trotted like a man following dogs, and before the sun rose over the hills beyond the Smoky Hills he entered the cabin door.

"The priest will come," he said simply, in answer to the question in Ada's eyes.

She beckoned. He knelt at her side.

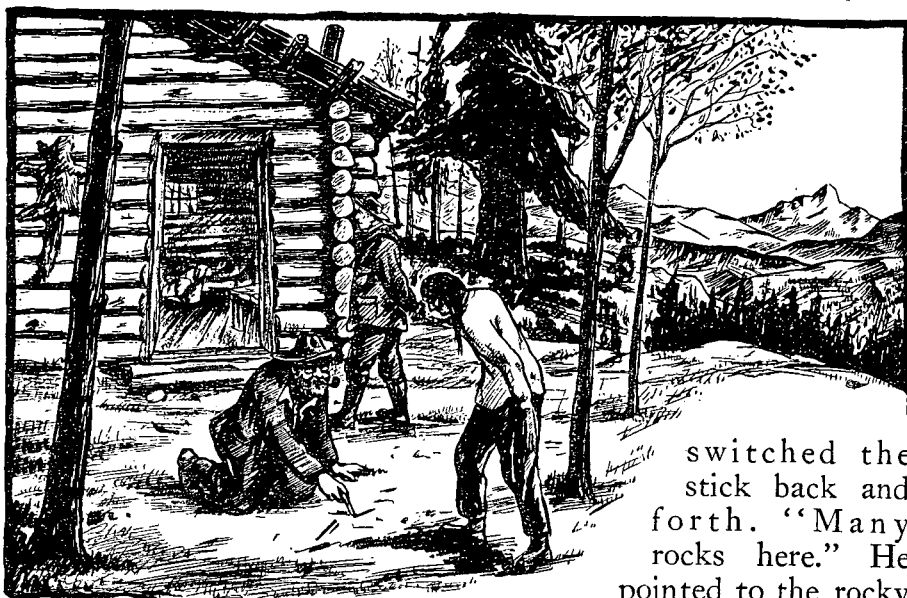
"Who brings him?"

"Johnny Black." He saw the hope die out in her eyes. He put a hand on top of one of hers where it lay white and frail. "He will bring him, Ada."

Something in his calm confidence reassured her and she smiled happily.

That night he slept fitfully on his blanket on the ground just outside the cabin door. An hour before dawn he heard a twig snap. A moment later the priest and Johnny Black emerged from the forest. Lonely greeted the priest. Then he turned to the Cree.

"Watch me," he commanded. He squatted and, picking up a stick, made a mark on the ground. "Your cabin." He traced a line. "The trail to Jackfish Lake." Another mark. "A rifle shot," he said, in explanation of the distance between the points. He



switched the stick back and forth. "Many rocks here." He pointed to the rocky ridge. "Your rifle

here." The Cree swung on his heel without a reply and disappeared in the forest.

Old Lonely rose and turned to the priest. "Ada is dying."

"Thank you for getting me," replied the priest kindly. Then he went in.

It was breaking day when the priest came out. He stood a moment in silence, gazing across the brooding forests to the far hills. "She is at peace with God," he said, more to himself than to the trapper. Lonely made no reply. The priest turned to him. "Go in to her. She asks for you."

Old Lonely knelt beside the bunk and took Ada's hands between his own. She turned her face slowly to him. She breathed a word. He knew the question she would ask.

"They are my babies," he replied.

There was the faintest pressure of her hands. No other words were spoken. And as the sun broke through the mists over the Smoky Hills, she died.

Father Robillier and Lonely buried her in the forest near the cabin. Then they gathered together the children's meager belongings. Lonely made a tump-line out of his belt. When it was adjusted, he called the girls to him. As he reached down to

(Continued on page 290)

GENIUS, TALENT, AND INTELLIGENCE

MARY AUSTIN

IN the beginning of the modern era man distinguished himself among the other animals by a capacity somewhat vaguely described as the sum of all his conscious ways of knowing, called intelligence. This intelligence was generally understood to be evolutionary in the human species, varying widely in individuals, among whom it occasionally attained to notable levels. Universally intelligence was believed to be educatable, or at least susceptible, through training, of increased availability, and quantitatively to constitute the chief distinction of peoples among themselves. Being considerably puffed up by his distinguishing gift, man has recently reluctantly admitted to his general concept of intelligence the possibility that it is not his sole possession but is to be found in rudimentary form among the lower animals.

Very much earlier in the history of his thinking about himself, when the other animals appeared more divine because altogether more mysterious, man thought rather poorly of his conscious processes. Were not most of the others better equipped with seeing, hearing, smelling, swiftness, and cunning? But he prided himself upon being able occasionally to accomplish what he had not been taught, or to act upon knowledge that he had not consciously acquired. In the earliest stage in which we know anything about him, man supposed this whisper at the threshold to be a communication from his totem animal, from which he always knew himself in some fashion descended. It whispered explanations to him of the otherwise inexplicable, or methods by which to make game more plentiful or his enemy more vulnerable.

A little later he was inclined to name the whisperer one of the shades of his ancestors, of whose lapse from conscious existence he was profoundly unconvinced. This seemed the more likely because the saving suggestions so often came to him in dreams or on first waking from sleep, during which he believed himself to have been in a spirit state. Still later, having arrived at the concept of imps, fairies, angels, guardian spirits, and devils, he laid on them the burden of all that came to him from sources having so little to do with conscious intellectuation that he was convinced they could only come from outside himself. Then came the clever Greeks and named the mysterious prompter "genius," which it