

The Winning of the West

by URQUHART ADAMS

A NEW motion picture, "How the West Was Won," is very epical, but does not touch on information of the type received from an Ottawa correspondent. A Mrs. Worthington, well versed in Indian customs and habits of thought, was called on to testify at a Parliamentary committee hearing. She told how the North American Indians welcomed the Whites as potential friends and allies, and offered them an equal share in the right to use land they occupied under a form of tribal tenure—such as the right to hunt, fish, plant a garden or build a house on any vacant parcel.

The White Man, then, would ask that the permission be set down in a formal treaty and the Indian would oblige. The "Paleface" would accept the treaty, probably with expressions of gratitude, and then, after his numbers were sufficiently reinforced by new arrivals from the East, he would bring out his copy of the treaty and tell the Indians to begone, since they

had, by deed of gift, forfeited all claim to the area. The Indians having no conception of private property in land, would be confused and bewildered at this new turn of events. They were unable, and in fact never permitted, to explain that they had not intended to give up their own rights. If they had been astute enough to hire a competent lawyer to argue their case, he would have pointed out that a contract, to be valid, must indicate a meeting of minds. The "treaties" were not valid contracts because the Indians meant one thing while the Whites meant, or said they meant, something else.

No doubt the Whites, who were superior in numbers and fire power, would have taken the land anyway. But the Winning of the West would have been more difficult if they had not relied on treachery. This story indicates that Henry George was right when he said that all land titles rest on either force or fraud. The Indians were victims of both.

As we celebrate Independence Day we might give a thought to our oldest and most neglected "race problem." The Indians, who were here first, have made an invaluable contribution, and provide us with a sterling example. A California group recently started a drive to help Indians in Santa Domingo, New Mexico, because their food seemed unpalatable and hard to chew. The surprised Indians, however, promptly sent back, the way they came, truck loads and plane loads of charity offerings.

Their cordial response was, for the first time, to issue an invitation to

white people to be present for their festive dances, to see how happy, healthy and industrious Indians are. "There is a difference between being poor and being in want and distress," said the tribal leader, an army veteran. "Nobody here is starving. All we want is to be left alone, we don't want charity from anyone." Their livelihood comes from farming on 2384 acres of the total 66,081 acres on the reservation, also from tending the cattle, bartering silver and turquoise jewelry, and the tourist trade. They are happy in their way of life—how many of us can say the same?