

THE WOODEN INDIAN

BY STANLEY VESTAL

OF ALL the racial groups which go to make up the polyglot population of the United States, none has suffered so much from misunderstanding and misrepresentation as that of the American Indians. The vulgar errors with regard to poor Lo are legion. The European settlers from the beginning failed to see him as he is—a man of like passions with themselves. Fear, hatred, distrust, intolerance, contempt, ignorance and self-interest have combined to make a caricature as unreal and ridiculous as the wooden Indian of the old cigar-store. The sentimentalists, on the other hand, have flown quite as far from the truth. The Red Devil of the dime novel is no more false than the Red Brother of the missionary meeting, and Hiawatha is worse than either. Longfellow, Ned Buntline, and the missionaries, indeed, have made a pretty mess of it. Among them they have made the public believe that the Indian is somehow connected with the Boy Scouts! Publishers who will print any kind of book about any other kind of American still maintain that a book about Indians is, necessarily, a juvenile!

It is time this misconception dissolved. The purpose of this article is to refute some of the more glaring errors. It will be convenient to consider them in relation to a single group, the Plains Indians, because, owing to the fact that they have been conquered since the development of ethnology as a science, more is known about them. However, all that applies to the Plains tribes will generally be found to be true of the Indians native to other parts of the continent. All the red men are of one blood.

The tribal differences among them are far less important than they at first appear.

Anyone who makes a hobby of Indians will meet with an unfailing reaction the moment his pet subject comes to the surface. "Oh, yes. The Indian. That dirty, lazy, treacherous, vanishing nomad! That child of nature, so stoical, ferocious, immoral! That magic healer, whose women do all the work! Isn't it too bad that Uncle Sam and the missions have not been able to civilise him? He always goes back to the blanket, doesn't he?" Well, let us rehearse some of these ideas, and see what is in them.

That the Indian is stoical, a marvel of self-control. It is true, of course, that the Indian has steady nerves and makes no unnecessary motions. Most outdoor men are like that. It is true that the Indian is complacent and can be very dignified on occasion. So can the village lodge-brother. But it is not true that he is stoical: he is merely shy. In the presence of strangers, he is on guard, silent, sober. But win his confidence, and you will find that there never was a merrier, more joke-loving man than the Indian. Left to himself, a redskin will laugh five times to a white man's once. He is jolly and happy-go-lucky, with a decided taste for horseplay. Nor is he stable in sudden danger. History is filled with accounts of stampedes of frightened Indians, who ran and left everything behind them on a mere suspicion of unexpected danger. Consider how constantly the Indian used surprise attacks in his wars. Why? Because he found a surprise attack irresistible against other Indians. No doubt self-control was

held a virtue among the Indians; people always talk about the virtues they find it hard to practise. And it is true that the Indian bore torture with what looked like fortitude; certainly I have no intention of impugning his courage. But catch and torture any wild thing; it will not cry out. Neither did the Indian.

That he enslaved his women and made them do all the work. This ancient lie still thrives in spite of facts under the nose of everyone in the Indian country. It was comforting to the white farmer whose wife was going insane from loneliness, drudgery, monotony. Today, of course, the Indian man's profession is gone: no more war, no more hunting. All he can do is to look after his ponies or his Cadillac. His wife, on the other hand, still finds some of the domestic work of her grandmother to do: she cooks, makes clothes, feeds the baby. But as compared with their ancestors, both of them are idlers. The Indian's fathers hunted, starved, fought, made incredible marches; his wife's mothers dressed skins, made innumerable pairs of moccasins, cut up beeves, jerked meat, built lodges, packed the mules when camp moved, carried wood and water, gathered roots. Today the Indian woman lives in idleness, and has, in fact, more leisure than her white sister, owing to her simpler scale of living. The hardships of the hunter and warrior were very great in the old days, and the mortality of the men so high that polygamy was common. The women greatly outnumbered them. Then the man walked ahead carrying his weapons and nothing else—because he was on guard; his was the dangerous post. The woman, useless in a fight, followed, carrying the luggage. Neither would have found a shift of duties satisfactory.

When the man was at home, every consideration was shown him by the women, simply because he was a warrior, because he was in constant danger. During the Great War nobody thought it shameful that our women went out of their way to make the soldiers happy. Such a condi-

tion is unusual for us, but war was the normal condition among the Indians in the old days. The young men were soldiers for life, and their chance of survival to old age was much smaller than the modern dough-boy's. The consideration shown them was not servility. I once asked an Indian woman why she went to so much trouble to embroider a buckskin shirt for her husband. She answered, proudly, "To show my great love." This attitude of women towards their men is traditional in the Indian village.

It must always be remembered that the woman owned the lodge and everything in it except her husband's weapons. Even his clothes were her own handiwork, and therefore her property, if she chose to enforce her claim to them. I once bought a pair of moccasins from a Cheyenne woman in Oklahoma. Her husband, a strapping fellow twice her weight, sat in the lodge, and objected plaintively when she ordered him to remove his shoes so that I could have them. But his appeals were disregarded; he might have been a child, for all the heed she paid him. He took them off, smiling sheepishly, and sat there barefoot while the old lady pocketed the money and I stuck the moccasins in my saddle-bags. The lodge was bare, and I feel quite sure the warrior had no other footgear. It was early Spring, and quite cool weather. The man did not seem to feel anything but chagrin. I weakened, but the old lady would not let me go without the moccasins. I had to stick by my bargain.

Kit Carson had the reputation of being a he-man and an Indian fighter. Yet tradition among the Indians tells how his Cheyenne wife threw him out of their lodge and went off with an Indian lover. Hayden relates an instance of a hen-pecked Cheyenne husband who was frequently thrown out in this way. When asked why he did not beat his woman he replied that he loved her and did not wish to, and that "if I had to punish my wife every time she misbehaved, I would have to stand with my whip in hand all the time, and could

never use my gun."¹ This poor chap never dared go home without game on his shoulder.

No doubt many Indians did beat their wives in the old times: no doubt some of the women liked it. But the fact is that the Indian woman is often a very jealous mate. I know of an Osage husband who was practically held prisoner by his bride for as much as three weeks at a time, because she thought that if he went to the store for a tin of tobacco he would be "looking at the other girls." He dared not leave the house, though he had given her no cause for jealousy. When twitted about it, he merely grinned and shook his head.

That the Indian brings up his children sternly, toughening them by making them undergo hardship. This is all wrong. The fact is, no Indian ever strikes a child. Such a thing is held to be disgraceful, and very likely might result in a separation of the parents. Discipline, other than advice offered for the child's best interests, there is none. The Indian mother does not say, "Do right, or the Devil will get you." She says, "If you do thus-and-so, it will be to your advantage." There is no threatening, no bargaining. The child makes up its own mind. On the other hand, there is any amount of love and affection. His children are an Indian's passion.

How can people brought up so be stoical, self-controlled, stern? How can girls spoiled like that become the slaves of their husbands? How can boys so undisciplined be expected to plod for years through a monotony of uninteresting drudgery? Like the ancient Teutons of Caesar's day, they do nothing but what they wish to do. Love and loyalty will steel them to astonishing efforts. But they cannot endure control from without. History is full of instances of Indians, rendered desperate by a little official pressure, who ran amuck and defied hopeless odds. They are all arrant individualists.

¹ Hayden: "Contributions to the Ethnography and Philology of the Indian Tribes of the Missouri Valley," Philadelphia, 1862.

That the Indian is improvident. This charge, in so far as it has a basis in fact, needs explanation. True enough, the Indian takes little thought for the morrow. All hunters are like that, because meat will not keep. Eat and be merry, and tomorrow you will be strong and kill again. But now that hunting is ended, people argue that the Indian should be industrious. If he is not, there must be some cause for his choice. The Indian, in fact, has two good reasons for his indolence—beside the pleasure he gets from idleness. First, he is a communist, who shares and expects to share the prosperity of all his tribe. If each of us had a thousand relatives willing to help take care of us, how many of us would work as hard as we do now? And the Indian has Uncle Sam behind his relatives. "Uncle Sam will take care of us," and Uncle Sam does. For Uncle Sam owes large sums to most of the tribes, and the income from those funds provides enough to keep the wolf from the door. Add to these facts a complete lack of desire for the white man's way of life, and it is hardly surprising that the Indian is indolent. If he does accumulate, he is either eaten out of house and home by his relatives, or some white man swindles him, or the whole tribe ostracises him as an unsocial, stingy person. And when the tribe casts him out, the genuine Indian has nowhere to go.

That Indians are dirty. Certainly, some tribes of blanket Indians wear dirty clothing and have vermin. But the better tribes are very clean. They bathe daily, and their bodies are cleaner than those of the white men who live about them, on the average, for the Indian's favorite bath is the sweat-bath, in which he is almost literally boiled. Perhaps you may find lice in his hair, but you will not find dandruff—and one is as filthy as the other. No one ever saw a bald-headed Indian. His teeth, his hair, his skin will compare favorably with those of most users of toilet soaps and dental creams. Even his clothing will compare very well with that of the average motor-camper in his country. Send a white woman into the

wilds for a month, and it will be found that the squaw looks better and is cleaner and neater.

That Indians are a vanishing race. The census gives the lie to this. Some tribes were decimated by the plagues which followed the Great War. Some are losing ground rapidly owing to tuberculosis, measles, and venereal disease. But the number of persons having Indian blood steadily increases. In a recent novel the Navajo were represented, pathetically, as a vanishing tribe. As a matter of fact, if I were to select a tribe which illustrates most completely the success of the Indian in competition with the whites, the Navajo would be my choice. They are numerous, they are rich, they are industrious, and self-supporting, and they are gaining in numbers and wealth. Vanishing, indeed!

That the Indian has such an inadequate language that he is forced to employ signs and gestures. The sign language, as a matter of fact, grew up on the plains to facilitate intercourse between tribes speaking different languages, precisely *because* those languages were difficult to master. Anyone who will consult the Handbook of American Indian Languages issued by the Bureau of American Ethnology will at once reject this absurd theory. Indian languages are very rich, in fact. The Arapaho tongue has baffled the best efforts of our linguists; no white man has ever mastered its complexities. The Rev. Rodolphe Petter, whose Grammar and Dictionary of the Cheyenne tongue is one of the monuments of American scholarship, was compelled to use that language exclusively in his home for eighteen years in order to achieve a command of it. Some Indian languages are easier to learn than others. But the sign language is child's play compared to any existing Indian tongue.

That the Indian was a nomad. If the man who goes to the Adirondacks in Summer and to Florida in Winter is a nomad, then the Plains Indian was a nomad too. His movements were as regular, his objectives as definite as the white man's. In Spring

he went to the buffalo range. In Autumn he returned home to harvest his crop of corn or tobacco. In Winter he went on the hunt again—a jaunt of three or four hundred miles—only to return in Spring and put in his crops. At a certain season he went to the mountains to get tepee poles; at another season to the trading-post for supplies. When wild fruits or roots were ripe, he visited the places where they grew. Until the buffalo began to vanish, he was always on schedule time, always at the expected place. Nomads have no country. The Plains Indians fought valiantly to hold theirs.

That the Indian lived in a wilderness. This is the wild conceit of the European, who imagines that until he sees a place it has not been discovered. The trails of the pioneers were laid precisely in the Indians' tracks, and many a modern railroad was once a warpath or hunting trail. Even our cities commonly stand where the Indian preferred to camp. No white man was ever a pathfinder on this continent; the roads were ancient when Columbus landed here. No doubt the first Tibetan to tread the Lincoln Highway will be hailed as a great discoverer when he gets back to Lhasa. But the people who use the Lincoln Highway daily will only laugh. So the Indian laughs when you talk about his wilderness. It was simply his familiar home country.

That the Indian is a lonely, unsocial creature. On the contrary, only imminent starvation could force the old-time Indians to break up their big camps and scatter on the hunt. They hated living alone. As soon as the hunt was over, they gathered in large numbers and enjoyed themselves. No people are fonder of dancing, racing, gambling, gossip, ceremonies and social life. Whenever possible they go visiting, and commonly the agencies are deserted all Summer long. They gather in large camps, and when the ponies have eaten all the grass there, the whole party—guests and hosts—move on to some other rendezvous. Their lives consist entirely of visits, week-ends, house-parties (without the house).

Their neglect of business today is largely due to the new conditions which enable them to indulge their social instincts to the full. Again and again I have heard old Indians sneer at the stingy white man who for a little money is willing to live like a turtle all by himself in a box.

That the Indian knows all about wild life. The Indian knew only about the life that concerned him, the life of the game animals he hunted. Otherwise he was rather ignorant of nature. A Cheyenne forty years old and a man of importance in his tribe once confided to me that a white man had been trying to make a fool of him by telling him that caterpillars turned into butterflies! He was too smart to swallow a lie like that! But you could not lead him astray with regard to the habits of deer or buffalo.

That the Indian has the secret of herbs and marvellous cures. This is, unhappily, false. The Indian pharmacopœia contains no drugs unknown to science, and its range is very narrow. There is, besides, a deal of hocus-pocus mixed in it. All its marvellous cures are faith cures.

That the Indian cults are very ancient. Except for the use of the pipe (the Indian's burnt offering), all his cults are really new. A new religion has to make good or be thrown overboard. That keeps him busy chucking them away. For the Indian is too practical, too much an opportunist, to be conservative. He expects religion to pay its way. Very few Indian ceremonies or medicine bundles can be traced back of the first visits of the white men to the Plains in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. The Peyote cult has developed within living memory.

That the Indian is cruel and hard-hearted. If your neighbors had burned your wife at the stake and made a collection of the hands of your babies, you too would perhaps develop a streak of ferocity in war. There is every evidence of just such cruelty among white people when circumstances urge it. Read in Davy Crockett's savage autobiography about the atrocities he committed

upon helpless Indians. Read of the massacres of Blackfoot and Cheyenne and Sioux by white troops, when women and children were butchered and scalped by men in uniform. It is very likely that more Indians were scalped by white men than whites by Indians. Several of the States offered bounties for Indian hair. Where war is brought home to the noncombatant, it is always a ferocious thing, because it becomes a personal, family matter. The Indian need offer no apology for the old bloody days. The pot can hardly call the kettle black.

My friend, John H. Seger, tells a story of an Indian warrior, just back from the war-path, who was asked to hold down a friend while the agency dentist worked on him. The warrior tried to help, but at last ran out of the room, tears running down his cheeks. He could not bear to look on while the man in the chair was suffering. I think this a fairly typical instance of the Indian's "delight" in torture. Or would you say it was treachery, or perhaps cowardice?

That the Indian is treacherous, dishonest, a liar. No one who knows the history of treaties made with the red man will be very bold on this point. The white men have lied so often and so consistently that most of the story runs counter to the charge. The main difficulty here has been the barrier of language, which made understanding difficult. It is hard to make an Indian declare himself, to get him to make a positive statement. Ask him the most trivial question, and he will qualify his answer with a "maybe so." With Indians, lying is *actually* disgraceful, not merely technically so, as with civilised men. Once lie to an Indian, and he will never trust you again. And any statement not literally true is a lie to the blanket Indian. He knows nothing of conveying impressions. It must be strictly true. Maintaining a reputation for honesty in the Indian country is no simple matter. The Indian's treachery, so-called, is merely his habit of doing as the spirit moves him to do. He changes with his moods, and unless he has

made a positive promise, he may not turn up at the expected time. His promises, however, he will keep rather better than most people. And his loyalty in friendship is attested by everyone who has ever made friends with him. But he is easily talked into things which he votes against as soon as he is out of earshot of the talker. No agreement with Indians should be considered quite valid unless they have been allowed time to think it over and discuss it among themselves.

That the Indian is quarrelsome. Take any big gathering of Indians—even where liquor is available. There will be no crime, no strife, no disorder. The record of Indians for crime today would put to shame even a humdrum village in New England. The Indian code is brief and simple, but it is lived up to.

That Christianity and education have saved the Indian. The Indian, like other people, can only be saved by his own virtues, by what is Indian in him. They say he is not tenacious, not persistent, that he goes back to the blanket. But the missionaries make too much of what they have done for the Indian, though in certain respects they

have bettered his life. As an old Indian agent told me, "The Indians were better Christians than we are before the missionaries came. For the Indian did not lie or steal. He loved his Indian neighbor as himself. He took no thought for the morrow. He was reverent, kindly, generous, ready to give all he had to the poor. Why, in those days a chief had to put up with everything. He was supposed to be a father to his people, and could not resent a wrong, however great."

That the Indian is a strange and incomprehensible person, quite unlike other folks. No two Indians are alike, any more than two white men are. But, generally, I think we may sum up the whole matter by taking the word of a friend of mine, an old lady of pioneer stock and good education, whose first husband was an Indian fighter. After his death she married an Indian. Her daughters and grand-daughters are half Indian, and she has lived in the Indian country all her life. She says, "I can't see that Indians are any different from other folks, except that they are a little quick-tempered." I think we may accept her opinion as essentially sound.

THE RAILROADS AT BAY

BY CHARLES ANGOFF

IN 1920 the Interstate Commerce Commission set 5¾% as a fair return on railroad investments. In the six calendar years since that time the railroads of the country have failed to earn that return by more than a billion dollars. Their average profit in the years 1920-1926 was only a little over 3%, and there is little likelihood that it will turn out to have been much more for 1927, or that it will be much more for many years hereafter. This state of affairs is mainly due to the colossal and continuous reductions in passenger traffic suffered by practically all the roads. Since 1920, the year in which they handled the maximum number of passengers in their entire history, the number carried has declined from as little as 15% in the Great Lakes region to as much as 68% in the Southwest. The decline in the entire Eastern district since 1920 has been about 22%, in the Southern district about 42%, and in the Western district about 48%.

What this decline has meant to the roads may be seen by an examination of the figures recently presented by F. A. Wadleigh, passenger traffic manager of the Denver & Rio Grande Western before the Interstate Commerce Commission. He told the Commission that his road handled 987,959 passengers in Colorado in 1920, and only 459,627 in 1925. Its passenger revenues in Colorado in 1920 were \$3,146,000, and in 1925 only \$1,732,000. During the five years the population of the State increased by 72,000. He further informed the Commission that in Utah the Denver & Rio Grande Western carried 363,558 passengers in 1920 and only 142,712 in 1925. Its passenger revenues there in that period declined from

\$1,133,235 to \$614,427, while the population of the State increased by more than 39,000.

Most of the general decline in passenger traffic has been in the day-coach business, brought on mainly by the competition of private automobiles and public motor-buses. One railroad president recently said that because of the automobile 30,000 miles of track would soon have to be scrapped. His estimate was probably a conservative one, for the latest figures show that the motor-bus line mileage of the country is now 270,000 miles while that of the railroads is only a little over 250,000. This devastating competition is presenting a problem to the roads that is entirely new in their history. A half century ago it was they who were on the offensive and the other common carriers—for example, the river steamers and canal boats—that were on the defensive. Now matters have taken a turn, and the railroads themselves are fighting for life. But there is one saving fact in the situation, and that is that long distance travel has increased considerably all over the country, and is continuing to increase. In 1921 the railroads got about 31% of their passenger earnings from travelers in sleeping and parlor cars, and about 69% from travelers in coaches, including commutation passengers. But in 1926, they derived nearly 44% of their passenger revenue from travelers in sleeping and parlor cars, and about 56% from travelers in coaches.

It is largely by the stimulation of long distance travel that the railroads hope to win back that loss in passengers which they are suffering on their local business.