

The Red Man Lives

by
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Too often, one must conclude, the magic is missing from our lives. Or rather the will for magic. And the consequences of the lack are pitiable. For example, the red man—his history, his myth, his truth—is *fait accompli*: the red man is a fact. And yet, if we will, he is magic.

What, when, where, how, why: one must concern himself, for these things, with the findings of the ethnologist, the historian, the anthropologist—their findings are solid and substantial all. They teach us about the Indian. But there is the bird's call vibrant in a summer field, the bawl of the calf across the desolate, winter Kansas air; there are seasons and the raptures of human response to each; and in the great continuum of human existence, there are not only the humdrum now and the fearsome prospect of a utilitarian future, but there is the vast expanse of romance parading out behind us—our past and our wellsprings—with which we are united in blood and idea, an area of intellection which we must of need cherish in great love. In this area of magic and our better selves lives the red man.

There are, for example, tepees and tomanawks. Peace pipes and wampum. Council Grove, Medicine Lodge, Waconda Springs, Injun Country, Cherokee Strip. *Wakanda* and Calumet. Comanche, Cherokee, Chippewa, Fox, Kansa, Kickapoo, Pottawatomie, Pawnee, Wichita, Sac, Fox, Osage, and Wyandotte. These certainly all are magic names and mysterious symbols out of the past which tempt the magic in ourselves into being. They are studded in the Kansas firmament. They are fact and fiction. And they are the true value, by virtue of their duality, which transcends the importance of one or the other.

The heart of this number of the quarterly should illustrate some of this. No attempt has been made, in the inclusions, to explore any particular aspect of the Indians who lived at one time or another within the boundaries of Kansas. Rather it is hoped that what is included will titillate, somehow, each reader.

Partly the aim is to give evidence of the continuing influence of Rousseau's concept of the "noble savage," which concept was magnified by his fellow country man, Chateaubriand, and perpetuated by America's Fenimore Cooper. Over against the selections exemplifying this concept are those which, perhaps, must be termed more realistic and, hence, contradictory to the former. But as an entity, or as a final, unified comment on the red man, this number purports to show the Indian humorous, noble, tragic, and human.

For most of the material here presented, reliance has been made on the dissertation, *Strange Tales From Kansas*, by Dr. Mary Frances White, a member of the English Department of Kansas State College, Manhattan, Kansas. In an admirable work of research, Miss White has collocated many of the facets of Kansas history and culture. Drawing primarily on early newspapers of the state, her study is extremely valuable in establishing both the tones and undertones of the Kansas past.

In addition to the selections from Miss White, the reader will find Winfield Freeman's "The Battle of the Arickaree" and L. G. Turner's "Uncle Tom's Indian Raid." The former, in his article, finds the Indian a grim and serious antagonist, whereas Turner lets good nature creep through to show the comic aspects of a fundamentally harrowing experience. From the dissertation of Miss White, with its naturally wider scope, come "The Avenger of Blood," a study of the stern moral code amongst the Indians, with a Council Grove locale; and "O-le-sho-mi," characterized as a bit of "traditional literature of the Indian tribes" which shows that such literature treats of "the same attributes of human nature that may be found in the legendary love stories of all nations—heroism, endurance, purity, gallantry, hope, love."

But the generous sampling Miss White provides is not all serious. Following are several examples.

THE BLENDED WHISKEY

The Indians imitated the habits of the white man, often with ludicrous results. The story is told of an Indian who went to Westport one cold winter day and got very drunk. On his way home he was so overcome that he lay down and was frozen to death. Imitating the white man, the Indians decided to hold an inquest over the dead body. This was the verdict reached after a long pow-wow: "The deceased came to his death by mixing too much water in his whiskey, which froze in him and killed him."¹

THE LOST WIGWAM

Another time an Indian who had strayed from camp found that he was lost when he tried to return to it. He looked about and then exclaimed, "Injun lost!" Then he recovered himself and, realizing that he should not acknowledge such shortsightedness, exclaimed, "No, Injun not lost—wigwam lost—(striking his breast), Injun here!"²

And finally there is an item, which characterizes what apparently was a current view of the red man in the East of the times.

THE NOBLE RED MAN

He was a Kansas man and he was in Boston for the first time, where he was introduced to Miss Dundine, who said to him:

"Oh, Mr. Granger, have you ever seen any of those dear delightful Indians in the west?"

"Injuns? You bet; last fellow I saw 'fore I left was a red-skinned Cherokee."

"How entrancing! And did he have any scalps with him?"

"One. He wore it on his head. It was his own."

"And was he in his war paint, and did he have a name like Rolling Thunder or White Wind?"

"No, I guess he hadn't any war paint on himself, but he was layin' some on the town, and his name wasn't Rollin' Thunder; we always called him Jim Smith."

"But was he a real Indian?"

"Pure quill; guess none of 'em more so."

"But he was surely on the war path, wasn't he? Methinks I see him now, standing on the brow of a mighty hill; his eagle eye glances athwart the peaceful valley below, where his fathers slumber; and a strange, fierce sadness sweeps over his dusky face, and he kneels down and makes this fearful vow: 'Great Chieftain, Manitou of the Cherokees, hear me---'"

"No, miss, you're away off. Jim Smith wasn't that kind of man. Last time I saw of him he was hangin' around Johnson's drug store, tryin' to work them for a snifter at the jug behind the prescription case."³

Now certainly these kinds of anecdotes tend to dispel the rampant and non-historical rumors about the red man. But in so doing they also place him in a broader frame of reference.

For finally, one must learn from this, most significantly, that we humans all have somehow an identity and that one of our individual functions—who knows if it be not the most important of all—is to extend ourselves, to cast out our intellectual predilections and circumspections, void and nullify our inherited delimitations, simply by recourse to hard sweat and imagination. In short, not only must we seek out things and persons that are magic, but also the magic of things and persons. It is by remembering where we have been that we know where we are going. And the distillation of our past is magic and romance. Of this the red man is a persistent symbol.