ISHI, THE LAST YAHII INDIAN

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I often feel that it is hard to tell the story of Ishi in such a way as to convince people of its reality. He has been described as the last survivor of a tribe that remained in the Stone Age until the twentieth century. I should like to tell enough of the history of his little group to explain how it was possible for them to remain "primitive." In spite of the fact that in 1910 he was still living in the age of stone, he was himself a rare character, with a mind of unusual calibre.

First of all I should like to tell you something about his tribe. It is the old story of an Indian people being crowded by the whites. In this case, however, the Indians most concerned were already a small group surrounded by enemies when the whites came into the country. They called themselves simply Yahi (people) as Indian tribes mostly do, and this has come to be used as their tribal name. The Yahi were not numerically as strong as the surrounding peoples, and had for some generations been driven to follow a prowling life. They frequented a very wild area along Mill and Deer Creeks, east of the Sacramento River in northern California. Their fastnesses lay in the hills just to the east of the great level stretches of the Sacramento Valley. The country here is an old lava formation and is accordingly a region of cliffs and wild gorges, with numerous dusky glens and dusker caves, the canyon floors and slopes of the hills overgrown with a perfect tangle of scrub.

In this wild region the Yahi roved about safe from intrusion, and lived securely in their own empire except for the fact that at infrequent intervals snow and heavy weather brought them to the verge of starvation. Under such circumstances they were forced to pay flying visits to the sunny lands of their richer neighbors in the valley. The memory of old scores still unsettled on each side always made these trips an occasion for violence. Long before the coming of the whites the Yahi had learned one principle very thoroughly. It was, in plain language, this: "When outnumbered, scoot for Deer Creek." Consequently, when the white invasion began, the Yahi escaped the fate of the other Indian tribes. The Valley Indians became hangers-on of civilization and lost in some cases even the memory of their
old life. The Yahi followed their time-honored rule and took refuge in their foothill fastnesses. As the Indian tribes of the valley were replaced by white settlers, the Yahi transferred to the white "valley people" the bitter hostility they had already learned to feel. So they remained a "wild" tribe.

The history of this wild tribe has in it a good deal of the pathetic. The whites were not satisfied to let them alone. It grew to be the custom to blame every miscarriage of plans to the presence of these "wild" Indians. If sheep strayed or were eaten by pumas, the settlers preferred in most cases to believe that the Indians had made way with them. If provisions were taken from outlying camps, Indians could always be conjured up to take the blame. Even if freshets drowned the onion-patches, or if potato-bugs got away with the "spuds," it was felt in some dim way that Indians were probably at the bottom of it. In more tragic cases, where murders were committed in out-of-the-way places, nothing could convince the settlers of the Indians' innocence. By 1860 there came to be a sort of war between the whites and the Indians, in which most of the aggression was on the part of the whites. The rest is a story I almost hate to tell.

The men into whose hands fell the adjusting of relations between the whites and the Yahi Indians showed at times a ferocity that is almost incredible. It was of course unavoidable that there should be friction. In a general way, and sentiment aside, the old Indian way of life had in every case to be done away with. When Columbus landed on San Salvador, there was only one Indian to each twenty-four square miles of North America (speaking in general averages). The outlook for humanity as a whole demanded that this Indian population be displaced and crowded together. It was inevitable that intensive farming should replace the hap-hazard husbandry and roving hunting habits of the Indians. The pity was that this "displacing" was never done systematically, nor was it ever done by the recognized agents of government. Recognized government took a hand in every case only after the displacing had already been made an accomplished fact by traders and trappers along the frontier. The "frontiersman" is not quite so romantic and Homeric a figure as the novelists would make us believe. The truth is that he is always irresponsible, usually indifferent, frequently ignorant, and in some cases thoroughly brutalized. I might cite three or four instances in connection with the Yahi.

A party of whites, in April 1871, pursued a band of Indians with dogs. They located them in a cave across a narrow gulch, and shot a number of them, finally entering the cave itself. Here they found a lot of dried meat, and some small children. The hero of the occasion, being a humane man, a person of fine sensibilities and delicacy of feeling, could not bear to kill these babies—
at any rate, not with the heavy 56-calibre Spencer rifle he was carrying. "It tore them up too bad." So he shot them with his 38-calibre Smith and Wesson revolver. The names of several men who were in this party are in my notes. The bodies later disappeared. Another informant, referring to an occasion some years later, told me of finding a cave with marks of occupation, ashes, and human teeth. From his description of the locality I gathered that he was describing the same cave. Apparently the survivors had returned and cremated the dead, according to their tribal custom.

In the fall of 1865 a party of whites looking for scalps (the whites did the scalping then in California, not the Indians) spied a party of Yahi encamped. There were men, women, children, babies, and dogs—a whole tribe, or what was left of one. Just before daybreak the whites separated into two parties and closed in on the Indians from two sides. The stage was set for one act in the drama of the Yahi tribe. When the firing began the startled Indians, avoiding one party, ran into the other. An informant of mine who visited the scene of the "skirmish" some time later counted forty-three skeletons. Only a few Indians escaped.

On good authority I can report the case of an old prospector-pioneer-miner-trapper of this region who had on his bed even in recent years a blanket lined with Indian scalps. These he had taken years before. He had never been a Government scout, soldier, or officer of the law. The Indians he had killed he had killed purely on his own account. No reckoning was at any time demanded of him.

It is important to note these facts, for they explain what would otherwise be almost incredible. By 1870 or soon after, the Yahi tribe...
had been reduced to a few individuals. They disappeared from sight, and for forty years we have practically no account of them. I say practically, for as a matter of fact they were seen on at least half a dozen occasions during this time. I might cite one or two. A good man and true, who is now well known to me, was deer-hunting as a lad, about twenty-five years ago, on Big Antelope Creek. The following curious incident happened. In working about a buckeye thicket, he heard noises. He sent his dog in to rout out whatever was in there. The dog came out frightened, so he went in himself. The plain fact was that he had run on to a party of the wild Indians, though all he could see at first were objects moving through the brush trying to get away from him. They finally began to shoot at him with bows. Three arrows were fired at him. One went through his hat-brim, grazing his face, and broke off on a boulder in front of him. He has the arrow yet, and showed it to me. In trying
to get away, they dropped among other things a complete arrow-making outfit. This outfit is now in our Museum. On other occasions they were more clearly seen, so that it is not true that they totally disappeared. It is a very curious fact that when individuals at rare intervals reported such incidents as the one I have mentioned it created no interest, for they were simply put down as liars. So the presence of "wild" Indians persisted through a long period as a sort of local tradition or myth. The incidents when they were seen were not even reported in the papers.

It seems almost impossible that in a thickly-settled region like California, this group could go on living their own primitive life. Yet they did so. It is perfectly certain that they had nothing to do with the whites directly. They carried on an independent existence. They profited, however, by picking up certain property around abandoned camps, as they naturally would. Thus they got bits of metal which they used for tools, and some cloth. They also preferred to make arrow-points out of bottle-glass, rather than out of the native obsidian rock. They hunted with the bow and arrow, for two reasons. In the first place they did not understand fire-arms, and seemingly never had had any in their possession. In the second place the bow was silent. In the river they speared fish in the primitive way, smoking it over a fire and storing it away for winter. I have seen the framework of the brush hut they used for this purpose. In the summer they slipped out of their retreat, and went to the eastward as far as Mount Lassen and on its upper slopes they hunted in peace until the snow drove them down. We know this peak now as California's only active volcano but in those days it was silent and still. Most of their time they spent in Deer Creek canyon, within a few miles of the valley, in the midst of its thickest jungles of scrub oak and brush. Here they fished and hunted, gathered acorns and seeds, and managed an independent existence. That they were not discovered is due to their experience with the whites, and to the fact that there were only a few of them. This, in connection with the character of their country, enabled them to keep out of sight for more than a generation.

Fifteen miles in an air line from their foothill stronghold, trains on the Southern Pacific Railroad passed daily back and forth. Yet in their rugged canyon, where the scrub-oak and poison-oak are so thick that the explorer can make only two miles a day through it (I speak from experience) they passed long years safe from detection. The story of how the small remnant of a tribe were finally discovered and became scattered, I have told in another place.¹ I merely want to insist here that the

¹ Popular Science Monthly, March 1916
last survivor, who fell into my hands in 1910, was still a stone-age Indian, as unaccustomed to the ways of civilization as could well be imagined.

I should like to tell something of my acquaintance with Ishi, especially those incidents which illustrate the character of the man and shed light on his peculiar viewpoint. I may begin by speaking of railroad trains. Our friendship started at Oroville, California, where loneliness and hunger had driven Ishi to come into a slaughter-house near town. In bringing him down to the University, where his home was to be for the rest of his life, it was necessary to take the train. Behold Ishi and myself, an attendant Indian, and some hundreds of interested pale-faces, waiting on the platform for the train to come in. As Number Five appeared in the distance and came whistling and smoking down the humming rails in a cloud of dust, Ishi wanted to get behind something. We were standing some distance from the track as it was, for I felt that he might be afraid of the engine. My charge however wanted to hide behind something. He had often seen trains. Later he told us in his own language that he had in his wanderings seen trains go by in the distance. But he did not know they ran on tracks. When he saw them he always lay...
down in the grass or behind a bush until they were out of sight. He visualized a train as some devil-driven, inhuman prodigy. Security lay not in keeping off of the right-of-way, but in keeping out of its sight.

Here is another fact that illustrates his personal attitude. To a primitive man, what ought to prove most astonishing in a modern city? I would have said at once, the height of the buildings. For Ishi, the overwhelming thing about San Francisco was the number of people. That he never got over. Until he came into civilization, the largest number of people he had ever seen together at any one time was five! At first a crowd gathered around him alarmed him and made him uneasy. He never entirely got over his feeling of awe, even when he learned that everybody meant well. The big buildings he was interested in. He found them edifying, but he distinctly was not greatly impressed. The reason, as far as I could understand it, was this. He mentally compared a towering twelve-story building not with his hut in Deer Creek, which was only four feet high, but with the cliffs and crags of his native mountains. He had something in some way analogous stored up in his experience. And to see five thousand people at once was something undreamed of, and it upset him.

Which is to be considered more interesting and surprising, per se, an ordinary trolley car or an automobile? For Ishi, the trolley car, every time. I stupidly expected him to grow excited over his first automobile, as I did over mine, in the year 1898. For Ishi, of course, both were plain miracles. Both the auto and the street car were agitated and driven about by some supernatural power—one as much as the other. The street car, however, was the bigger of the two, it had a gong which rang loudly at times, and moreover was provided with an attachment which went "shoo!" and blew the dust away when the air-brakes were released. Ishi would watch trolley cars by the hour.

Aeroplanes, by the way, he took quite philosophically. We took him down to Golden Gate Park to see Harry Fowler start to fly across the continent. When the plane was trundled out and the engines started, the Indian was surprised and amused at the uproar they created. The machine was finally launched, and after a long circuit, soared back above our heads. As it came overhead we particularly called his notice to it. He was mildly interested. "Saltu?" he said interrogatively, nodding toward the plane a thousand feet skyward, "White man up there?" When we said yes he laughed a bit, apparently at the white man's funny ways, and let it pass. Either he was ready to expect anything by that time, or else his amazement was too deep for any outward expression. Like most "nature-people," he was
inclined to preserve his dignity in the face of the unfamiliar or the overwhelming, giving very little sign. Under equivalent stimulation of course the pale-face dances about and squeals.

Ishi was however jarred completely out of his equanimity, amazed past speech or movement, by a window-shade. On the morning of his second day at the Museum, I found him trying to raise the shade to let the sunlight in. It gave me a queer feeling to realize that never in his experience, either in his canyon home or in the Oroville jail (the first thirty hours of civilization he spent as an honored guest at Butte County’s penal establishment) had he encountered the common roller shade. He tried to push it to one side and it would not go. He tried pushing it up and it would not stay. I showed him how to give it a little jerk and let it run up. The subsequent five minutes he utilized for reflection. When I came back at the end of that time, he was still trying to figure out where the shade had gone.

Concerning foods he had certain prejudices which he was never able to overcome. For example he politely asked to be excused from gravies and sauces. He did not take at all kindly to the notion of boiling food. Fried, baked, roasted, broiled, or raw he could understand. He did not like those processes which lead to semi-liquids. No milk if you please for Ishi, and no eggs unless they were hard boiled. All such things, he said, lead to colds in the head! The real basis of his dislike seemed to be
their aesthetic effect. I have often wondered since just how far our eating habits may be considered messy. He wanted his food dry and clean appearing. For drink he liked only transparent beverages, that could not have anything concealed about them. Tea was his idea of the proper drink.

I should like to say that in all his personal habits he was extraordinarily neat. At his first dinner he behaved as many another man has done under similar circumstances. He waited patiently until someone let him know, by setting the example, whether a given dish was to be consumed with the aid of a spoon, a knife, some kind of a fork, or with the plain fingers. Then he calmly did likewise. His actions were always in perfectly good taste. Even during his first days in civilization, he could be taken comfortably into any company. He had a certain fastidiousness which extended to all his belongings. His effects were kept carefully in order. Not only his apparel, but his arrow-making appliances, his bow, and his other impediments, were always in perfect array. During the time he lived at my home a certain member of my family constantly urged me to model my own behavior in such respects after the Indian's shining example.

Ishi moreover was remarkably clever with his hands. In his own way he was a fine workman. He made bows of perfect finish. He could chip arrow-points to perfection out of any of the materials which give a conchoidal fracture—obsidian, flint, agate, or bottle-glass. Some of his handsomest specimens were made out of bromo-seltzer bottles. No more beautiful arrow-points exist than the ones he made. His finished arrow—point, shaft, and feathering—is a model of exquisite workmanship.

On the whole he took very kindly to civilization. He seemed apprehensive at times that we would send him back ultimately to his wilderness. Once when we were planning with much enthusiasm to take him on a camping trip, to revisit with him his foothill home, he filed a number of objections. One was that in the hills there were no chairs. A second was, that there were no houses or beds. A third was, that there was very little to eat. He had been cold and gone empty so often, in the hills, that he had few illusions left. In camp, however, he proved to be a fine companion. He could swim and wash dishes and skylark with anybody, and out-walk everybody.

He convinced me that there is such a thing as a gentlemanliness which lies outside of all training, and is an expression purely of an inward spirit. It has nothing to do with artificially acquired tricks of behavior. Ishi was slow to acquire the tricks of social contact. He never learned to shake hands but he had an innate regard for the other fellow's existence, and an inborn considerateness, that surpassed in fineness most of the civilized
breeding with which I am familiar. His life came to a close as the result of an over susceptibility to tuberculosis, to which he was some time or other exposed, and to which he never developed the slightest immunity. He contributed to science the best account he could give of the life of his people, as it was before the whites came in. To know him was a rare personal privilege, not merely an ethnological privilege. I feel myself that in many ways he was perhaps the most remarkable personality of his century.

**SOCIAL SERVICE WORK IN BALTIMORE**

*BY SARAH COLLINS FERNANDIS*

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THE year's work of the Women's Cooperative Civic League, as carried on through its committees, embraces the activity of the Home Gardens Committee, of which Mrs. J. Logan Jenkins is chairman. This committee, as in former years, has been active in developing the idea of the "City Beautiful," through the encouragement of the cultivation of backyard gardens and window boxes. New neighborhoods have been reached during the past year and a larger number of prizes than ever before have been awarded. A public meeting has been held and the story of the "City Beautiful" has been carried to new groups. A very gratifying cooperation in this idea of securing a beautified Baltimore is the taking down of backyard fences in two blocks—the one on McCulloh Street and the other on Prestman Street—by which the beauty of these two neighborhoods has been greatly enhanced.

The whole League, with a number of friends and well-wishers, joined the Home Gardens Committee last May to make the flower-mart at Perkins Square one of our most satisfactory achievements. The beautifully decorated square, the crowds of

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