

Luther Standing Bear

THE LAND OF THE SPOTTED EAGLE

M & A



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The Land of the Spotted Eagle

An Ethnographic Description of Traditional Lakota Life and Customs

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CHIEF STANDING BEAR IN FULL REGALIA

It is this loss of faith that has left a void in Indian life—a void that civilization cannot fill. The old life was attuned to nature’s rhythm—bound in mystical ties to the sun, moon and stars; to the waving grasses, flowing streams and whispering winds. It is not a question (as so many white writers like to state it) of the white man “bringing the Indian up to his plane of thought and action.” It is rather a case where the white man had better grasp some of the Indian’s spiritual strength. I protest against calling my people savages. How can the Indian, sharing all the virtues of the white man, be justly called a savage? The white race today is but half civilized and unable to order his life into ways of peace and righteousness.

Luther Standing Bear, “The Tragedy of the
Sioux,”
American Mercury 24, no. 95 (November
1931): 277.

PREFACE

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In this book I attempt to tell my readers just how we lived as Lakotans—our customs, manners, experiences, and traditions—the things that make all men what they are. There are reasons why men live as they do, think as they do, and practice as they do; hence, there were forces that made the Lakota the man he was.

White men seem to have difficulty in realizing that people who live differently from themselves still might be traveling the upward and progressive road of life.

After nearly four hundred years' living upon this continent, it is still popular conception, on the part of the Caucasian mind, to regard the native American as a savage, meaning that he is low in thought and feeling, and cruel in acts; that he is a heathen, meaning that he is incapable, therefore void, of high philosophical thought concerning life and life's relations. For this 'savage' the white man has little brotherly love and little understanding. From the Indian the white man stands off and aloof, scarcely deigning to speak or to touch his hand in human fellowship.

To the white man many things done by the Indian are inexplicable, though he continues to write much of the visible and exterior life with explanations that are more often than not erroneous. The inner life of the Indian is, of course, a closed book to the white man.

So from the pages of this book I speak for the Lakota—the tribe of my birth. I have told of his outward life and tried to tell something of his inner life—ideals, religion, concepts

of kindness and brotherhood; of laws of conduct and how we strove to arrive at arrangements of equity and justice.

The Lakotas are now a sad, silent, and unprogressive people suffering the fate of all oppressed. Today you see but a shattered specimen, a caricature, if you please, of the man that once was. Did a kind, wise, helpful, and benevolent conqueror bring this situation about? Can a real, true, genuinely superior social order work such havoc? Did not the native American possess human qualities of worth had the Caucasian but been able to discern and accept them; and did not an overweening sense of superiority bring about this blindness?

These questions may be answered in the light of the reader's sense of justice and quality of imagination. As for myself I risk this indulgence and say: Of my old life I have much to remember with pride. There were among us men of vision and humane ideals; there were great honesty and loyalty; beautiful faith and humility; noble sacrifice and lofty concepts. We were unselfish and devout. In some instances we attained notable success, and we were on the way. On the whole, we succeeded as well in being good and creditable members of our society as do many of the dominant world in being good members of their citizenry.

Nevertheless, Indian life has been enriched with fine and understanding white friends, and one such, a man of true nobility, has been of inestimable value to me in reading my manuscript and offering suggestions—Professor Melvin Gilmore, Curator of Ethnology for the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, himself an author. As a botanist of recognized standing he made valuable suggestions, and his keen technical knowledge refreshed my memory that had become somewhat dimmed through a broken contact with the land of my birth. To Professor Gilmore I express my

sincerest appreciation, not only for his assistance in this particular work, but for his fidelity in portraying the Sioux people in his published works.

My last word is to give credit to my niece and secretary, Wahcaziwin, who now assists me in writing and editing. All former difficulty has been eliminated, since my hardest work came in making myself understood in all the details and intricacies of Indian thought and life. But Wahcaziwin has a broad and complete understanding of her own, and when I speak she fully understands.

Chief Standing Bear

EXPLANATORY NOTE

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Lakota is the tribal name of the western bands of Plains people now known as the Sioux, the eastern bands calling themselves Dakotas. The word Sioux is not an Indian but a French word, and since the author is dealing with the tribal customs of his people, he chooses to use the ancient tribal name of the band to which he belongs.

INTRODUCTION

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I have often thought it a great pity that our people, the European race, should have burst in upon this land of America and spread ourselves over it as we did in the manner of unsympathetic aliens instead of introducing ourselves as prospective friends, desiring to become fully acquainted with the native features of beauty and of interest in the land, and with the admirable qualities of its people. The native people were able, willing, and ready to be our guides, and to put us at ease in the land which was their home, and to make us feel at home in it also. But we preferred to begin, and to carry on, so far as possible, the removal and destruction of all the belongings of this home and to substitute for them, whether fitting or not, the belongings of our former home in Europe. So we proceeded to destroy instead of adapting and enriching America. We began merely to try to build a New Spain, a New France, a New Netherlands, and a New England. Instead of accepting the good gifts of this new land and people, and adding to them desirable gifts from our own store, thus completely furnishing a really new and handsome home, we spurned them, and our endeavor has resulted in destroying untold native beauty and desirable character, in place of which we have succeeded in establishing a second-hand establishment, furnished out with many of the belongings of the old home to which we were accustomed, but lacking here their proper sense of fitness and independence. We have destroyed and driven out many delightful native birds and in their place have introduced such pests as the starling

and the house sparrow. We have changed the landscape, and over extensive areas have destroyed all the native vegetation, and instead of exquisitely beautiful and richly varied native flowers appearing in continually successive waves of color throughout the round of the seasons, both in forest and prairie, we now have burdock, mullein, dandelion, and wild carrot and other boisterous intruders.

Meantime the native people of America could only look on at this devastation in inarticulate and sorrowful amazement. Whereas they had always lived on terms of friendliness and accord with nature, they saw our people ever set themselves in intentional antagonism with set purpose of 'conquering nature,' often simply for the sake of conquest.

It is strange that the people of European race coming into possession of this country never did make themselves acquainted with the native people of America. Instead of accepting them simply as one among the human races of the world, endowed with the powers of thought, with emotions and sentiments similarly as are all other races, they have preferred always to view them either in a hazy and spectral light or else in an equally unreal lurid light. Strangely enough, our people have refused to look upon the native people of America as people who had to adjust themselves to their natural environment and to reclaim their necessary food, clothing, and shelter, and to satisfy the demands of their æsthetic nature from among the natural gifts of this land.

Being so constantly misunderstood, the native people of America have been unable to give themselves true expression in the patterns of thought and feeling of the alien race, and hence have been for the most part mute or inarticulate. But now some representatives of the native

American race are succeeding in some manner and degree in portraying the thought and feeling and the life of their people to the understanding of the alien race. In this undertaking *The Land of the Spotted Eagle* does fairly delineate the old native life in such manner as should be grasped with facility by the intelligence and the common human feeling of all persons. If the following paragraph from this book might be extensively and understandingly read by all our people it should go far to correct many false notions:

‘We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and winding streams with tangled growth, as “wild.” Only to the white man was nature a “wilderness” and only to him was the land “infested” with “wild” animals and “savage” people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery. Not until the hairy man from the east came and with brutal frenzy heaped injustices upon us and the families we loved was it “wild” for us. When the very animals of the forest began fleeing from his approach, then it was that for us the “Wild West” began.’

Melvin R. Gilmore
University of Michigan

CHAPTER I

CRADLE DAYS

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As a babe I was cared for and brought up in the same manner as all babes of the Lakota tribe. Wrapped in soft warm clothing made from buffalo calf skin I lay on a stiff rawhide board when not held in my mother's arms. This board was slightly longer than my body, extending a few inches below my feet and above my head. It was without spring, hard and unbending, but it kept my tender back straight and allowed my neck to grow strong enough to hold up my head.

Special attention was given to the head of every Lakota babe, for a smooth round cranium was considered very pretty, and the Lakota mother, in common with all mothers, wished her child admired and praised. Accordingly, it was the custom to make for a newborn babe a strong but soft and pliable cap of deerskin or of buffalo calf skin. This garment fitted smoothly, but was made to let out as the child grew in size. For six or eight months, or as long as the bony structure was soft, the child wore this cap to keep the head from becoming misshapen.

When night came I was taken from my cradle and my body given further attention. I was stripped of my clothing and placed upon a soft bed by the fire where I was warm and comfortable. My entire body was thoroughly rubbed and cleansed with buffalo tallow. I was allowed to kick my legs, swing my arms, and exercise my muscles. My little brown body got the air and grew used to being without clothing. It was the aim of my mother gradually to get me used to all

kinds of temperature, for she knew my health depended upon it. So, soon after birth and even in the coldest months, this training was carried on. It became a ritual that was regularly and religiously kept and I was never put to bed until I had been cleansed and massaged. After a time all Lakota babes became, as the Chinaman said, 'All face.'

This thoughtful care was taken of me for the sake of keeping my growing body healthy and well formed just as it was at birth. It was intended that I should become an erect and a straight-limbed man without marks or blemishes. My muscles must be supple and I must use them with agility and grace. I must learn to run, climb, swim, ride, and leap with as much ease as most people walk.

Manhood was thus planned in babyhood. My mother was raising a future protector of the tribe. When the days of age and weakness came to the strong and active, there would have to be those to take their places. I was being fitted to take one of these places of responsibility in the tribe.

For the first six years of my life, mother's thought was so largely centered on me that she sacrificed even companionship with my father in order to give me her full time. A weak or puny baby was a disgrace to a Lakota mother. It would be evidence to the tribe that she was not giving her child proper time and attention and not fulfilling her duty to the tribe. More than that, it was evidence that she had not used proper social discretion and defied an age-old tradition. It was a law with the Lakotas that for the first six years of a child's life it should have the unrestricted care of the mother and that no other children should be born within the six-year period. To break this law was to lose the respect of the tribe and both father and mother suffered the penalty. A fine, healthy child was therefore a badge of pride and respect and healthy babies were the rule.

As for crippled or deformed babies, I have never known one to be born so. Occasionally, however, a child was born with a blue or red mark on the body, but this caused no concern having nothing to do with the health of the child. Among adults a cripple was so because of some accident of life or war. Now and then a man or woman would become afflicted with a crooked mouth or one that drooped at the corner. The explanation for this condition was that the person so troubled had at some time spoken unkindly or maliciously of another who had passed on to the land of the ghosts. The spirit of the injured one returning in the state of resentment would come close to the offending one and startle him with a quick whistle. The offender in his fright would turn quickly in the direction of the sound and the side of his face would be drawn down at the corner. No innocent person could hear the whistle of the ghost, but the guilty one hearing would be marked for life. Guilt was thus betrayed. So it became bad form for one Lakota to speak harshly of another, and the habit of speaking slowly and carefully with guarded words became the polite custom.

The stiff piece of rawhide on which I was kept most of the day was not at all uncomfortable with its soft padding of buffalo hide. Being so simple in construction, it enabled my mother to carry me about with her while busy with her household tasks. My head reclined on the board and could not bob backwards as she walked or moved about at her work or rode her pony. This cradle was not meant to be attractive, but was just an everyday utility article. For dress-up occasions I was carried about in a lovely cradle made of smooth rawhide boards covered with the softest of buckskin. The hood was also of buckskin decorated with porcupine quills dyed in the brightest of colors. To this gayly colored hood there were fastened tassels of eagle feathers

also dyed in bright colors. It was kept perfumed with 'wahpe waste mna' or sweet leaves.

For six or eight months I spent a good deal of time in one of these cradles. When camp was moving, mother put me on her back and wrapped me to her with her blanket. Sometimes she placed me on the travois for a journey, but not often. If she rode her pony, she first mounted, then I was handed to her. With her blanket she fastened me securely to her. When I became old enough to sit up, she put me astride the horse in front of her. I cannot, of course, remember the first time I rode this way, but neither can I remember learning to ride by myself.

Most of mother's work was performed while carrying me in my cradle on her back. She packed and unpacked her horses and even put up her tipi while carrying me in this fashion.

When working in the tipi she often leaned my cradle against something so that I stood in an upright position. In this way I could look around and, no doubt, I watched mother's movements as she worked, listened to her as she talked or sang little songs to me. If I fell asleep she took me out of the cradle and I slept while she watched.

Most of the time a Lakota infant was lightly and simply dressed, but a great deal of time and care went into the making of the material for garments. Mothers preferred a light-weight buckskin or unborn buffalo calf skin for such purposes. When properly tanned, no manufactured material can equal these skins in richness of texture and quality. When the process of tanning is complete, these skins are exquisitely white, richer in sheen than fine broadcloth, and softer than velvet. The Lakota woman washed these garments in water and by rubbing brought them back to

their original softness and whiteness. Garments for dress wear were trimmed with fringe, quillwork, and paintings.

For sanitary purposes the down from the cottonwood tree pods was used. Also in the fall of the year cattails furnished a soft airy down, but the cottonwood down was preferable. No like article manufactured in mills can equal this down in silky fineness, so light it floated in the air on a still day. Besides, the supply was plentiful and the women kept it stored in large deerskin bags. For sanitary purposes finely powdered buffalo chips were also stored away and was most effectual in its intended purpose.

As the Lakota child continued to develop, it had the constant companionship of an elder; if not father or mother, then aunt, uncle, or one of the numerous cousins of the band. Children were always welcome charges of all who were older. Every child not only belonged to a certain family, but also belonged to the band, and no matter where it strayed when it was able to walk, it was at home, for everyone in the band claimed relationship. Mother told me that I was often carried round the village from tipi to tipi and that sometimes she saw me only now and then during the day. I would be handed from relative to relative and someone was constantly amusing me.

A large portion of the care of a child fell to its grandmother, and in some respects she was as important in the child's life as the mother. The interest of the older women became centered on the welfare of children, and, possessing both experience and wisdom, they were much depended upon. This wisdom concerning the lore of taking care of little ones gave grandmother a superior position, especially with the younger women and mothers. It made a place for her as teacher and adviser in her band. It was, too, lighter work than carrying wood and water and tanning

skins, these tasks being taken care of by the younger and stronger women.

Grandmothers became skilled in preparing food for children, and most of them had a host of little ones running after them all the time. When children became hungry, they nearly always ran to grandmother first for food and she was never found lacking in a supply. Nor were children ever refused in their request for food. There was a special delicacy which took time and patience to prepare and of which all children were fond. This was *wasna* and it was grandmother's job to make it. *Wasna* was made of dried meat and dried choke-cherries pounded together, seeds and all, until it was a fine meal. This meal was thoroughly mixed with and held together in loaves or cakes by the fat skimmed from the boiled bones of the buffalo. It was not only a delicious food, but a health food good for young children beginning to eat solid food. No one claimed grandmother's official job as *wasna*-maker.

Grandmother took care of all our toys. Our winter toys she stored away in the summer. When winter came she stored away the summer toys. She made pretty bags in which she laid away our marbles, tops, and other toys.

Most grandmothers seemed to be happiest when caring for a number of little ones. And I especially remember one grandmother for her fondness for children. This grandmother—I have forgotten her name—belonged to the band of my grandfather, Chief One Horse. This old lady lived to a great age, but before her death became stricken with blindness. With all this handicap she could not give up caring for her charges. One day she called all the children together and began painting their faces. This was a daily task for someone and it was her way of helping. The children all grouped about her, each waiting his turn. Her

bags of paint were near and soon all the children were fixed up. But pretty soon the children began to feel a queer drawing sensation of the face as if it was being all puckered up into one spot. They began to look at one another and found that each little brown face was speckled with white and withered in places. Then curious mothers began to look their children over. It was soon discovered that grandmother had got her bags of salt mixed up with her bags of paint and each child was generously salted instead of painted. This incident became a great joke in the village. Everybody laughed, including grandmother herself. The joke became history, for her band was thereafter called *Mini skuya ki cun*, or, 'The band that paints their faces with salt.' It is so called to this day.

When I became old enough to walk, I spent much time in the tipi of my grandmother. If mother and father were going out for the evening and I did not care to go, I went and slept in grandmother's tipi and I was always welcome. I remember my grandmother as a patient and tireless worker. She went on long walks gathering fruits and plants, and sometimes she took me with her. When I grew old enough to understand, she told me many things about their nature and usefulness. Much of her simple knowledge would be of value today.

In learning to talk, Lakota children were encouraged and helped, beginning about the same time as children of the white race. But there was no 'baby talk' for them. All speech in their presence was full and complete.

And so the days of my infancy and childhood were spent in surroundings of love and care. In manner, gentleness was my mother's outstanding characteristic. Never did she, nor any of my caretakers, ever speak crossly to me or scold me for failures or shortcomings. For an elder

person in the Lakota tribe to strike or punish a young person was an unthinkable brutality. Such an ugly thing as force with anger back of it was unknown to me, for it was never exhibited in my presence. For this nobility alone I sing the praises of the Lakotas—this thing alone denotes them a brave people.

Mother was a comely woman, not very large but plump and rounded in form. Her face was soft in outline and her features were good. Her skin was light in color and fine in texture. Her long black hair she wore in two braids which hung one on each side of her face after the fashion of the women of her tribe. When she was a child she was quite pretty and possessed a sweetness of disposition. She was called Wastewin, or Pretty Face, and since it turned out that she became a belle in her tribe she was well named. Her name signified grace and goodness as well as good looks, and my mother possessed both of these qualities.

As soon as I could walk steadily, my training in obedience began. I was asked to do little errands and my pride in doing them developed. Mother would say, 'Son, bring in some wood.' I would get what I was able to carry, and if it were but one stick mother would in some way show her pleasure. She had a way of saying 'Son' that expressed great affection for me. It was in doing this very errand for her that I met with my first childish mishap. I was a very small child, but I came into the tipi with some sticks for the fire and in my eagerness I stumbled and fell headlong. One of my hands went into the live coals and I have the scars to this day.

I not only obeyed mother, but I just as readily obeyed father, grandmother, and grandfather. This, no doubt, helped in keeping peaceful relations in the family group.

But lessons in obedience were not the only ones to begin at an early age. I was taught kindness to grandmother and

to all old people. I saw my mother give frequently to them and I was allowed to give at the same time. I learned truthfulness, respect for the rights of all people, order, and like virtues. So each day, with a brightening mind, I learned by examples of kind action. Just as the tiny roots of a plant silently absorbed the earth food, so my childish consciousness absorbed the influences which surrounded me, especially the silent, subtle influence of my mother.

Lakota babies cried very little, as has often been noted and commented on by white writers. This habit of being quiet was not due to punishment but to training. It was, no doubt, dangerous in olden days to allow a child to cry, especially at night or when the camp was on the march. Children were told, 'Be quiet, a witch might hear you.' This is the only way in which Lakota children were frightened, so far as I know, until the white man came among us, and then mothers often said, 'Be quiet, child, a white man may be near.' So the white man was used to frighten little Indian children into silence. Indian women, and as might be expected, Indian children, were much frightened at the first white man they saw. Many times a white mother has said to her child, 'Be good or a terrible Indian will get you.' But just as many Indian mothers have quieted their children with the dread thought that a white man might be near. We with mature minds might ponder on this and see what we have really done to children with these foolish statements. We can see, if we are fair with ourselves, that much unnatural fear and hatred may have been bred in this way.

Now and then twins were born to a Lakota woman, but not often. In our tribe they were regarded as very mysterious beings. Twins were people, it was believed, who had lived with the tribe at some past time and had come back again to live life over. They were therefore regarded as

old people and not young people. I have seen twins with ear-holes for earrings and this was proof that they had lived before with us. The spirits of little twins would hover about a tipi, lifting up the curtains and peeking in. They were then looking for a place in which to be reborn. They were visible only to certain people and when the person who saw them shouted or called for some one else to look, the twins disappeared. These little twin spirits always appeared about the tipi tied together with a rope.

The twins who were born among us had habits and characteristics that boys and girls born singly did not have. They were always doing things that ordinary boys and girls did not do. Though it was forbidden for Lakota brothers and sisters to speak and joke freely with one another, twin brothers and sisters were the closest of companions and often stood apart from the others, holding whispered conversations; and it would never be known what the whispered talk was all about. There were ties between twins that did not exist for the rest of us and they broke social laws that we were not permitted to break. Another strange thing was that if one of the twins died the other scarcely ever lived. Marriage sometimes brought about a break in companionship if the twins were brother and sister. However, if the twins were of the same sex the companionship usually continued. From the mother's standpoint, twins were as well liked as other children and there was never any difference in the treatment of them.

As a child I was of just as great importance to my warrior father as I was to my attentive mother. He found it a great pleasure to provide for us both and much of the time he was away on the hunt procuring food and clothing. Whenever he was about the tipi we spent much time together. Indian fathers seem to enjoy their sons, and mine played often

with me. It was a pastime with him to lie on the ground on his back and with his legs crossed toss me up and down on one foot. It was his delight and mine also to 'play horse' this way. Father sang to me, too, but not the childish songs and the lullabys that mother sang. He sang the brave or warrior songs, so I grew up loving the songs of my people and learning them as soon as I could speak.

Since father was training me also, the lessons that mother began were kept up by him. When I became sturdy enough to run he would tell me to bring his pony close to the tipi door so it could be bridled. One thing that I ran after more than anything else was the village whetstone. Usually there were but one or two of these useful articles in a village, so it was much in demand. Whenever father wanted to sharpen his arrows he sent me for the 'izuza' or rubbing-stone. I went from tipi to tipi until I had found the much-used article.

Father gave me my first pony and also my first lesson in riding. The pony was a very gentle one and I was so small that he tied me in place on the pony's back. Not that I would suffer fright, but so that father could lead the pony about slowly while I got used to the sway of the animal's motion. In time I sat my horse by myself and then I rode by father's side. When I could keep pace with him and my pony stayed side by side with him, that was real achievement, for I was still very small indeed.

Such expressions as 'I can't,' and 'I don't want to,' found no place in my mind. I did not have to listen to long speeches on 'how to be like father.' A lesson, in fact, did not imply much conversation on either side. But since I was to learn to do the things that he did, I watched my father closely.

Certain ceremonies are considered very important in the life of a Lakota child and to these father attended. Of course, the morning of my birth, father had a man cry the news to the village and gave away a horse. But my first real ceremony took place a few days later. This was my naming ceremony. There are two other important ceremonies in the life of a Lakota child, and I, being the son of a chief, received them all.

The morning of my naming ceremony the singing of praise songs announced to the village that the ceremony was to take place. The singers stood by our tipi door and sang songs of praise for my father. When the people of the village had assembled, a praise singer called out, 'Hear All! Hear all! The son of Standing Bear will be named. Hear all! Hear all! His name will be Plenty Kill.' Mother came out of the tipi holding me in her arms. In the meantime father had selected an old man who was to receive the horse to be given away in honor of the event. Some one led the horse up and the end of the rope about its neck was placed in my tiny hands. He took the rope from my hands and extending his arms toward me said, 'Ha-ye-e-e, Ha-ye-e-e,' which meant both thanks and blessings for me. He led the horse away while the singers still sang songs of praise.

About nine months after my birth the second ceremony took place. At this time my ears were pierced and it was a much more impressive ceremony than the first. It was held during the sun dance when many bands were gathered together. It was customary to hold many minor ceremonies of various sorts before the actual Sun Dance began. There was much singing and much dancing by groups of performers. Also there was a great deal of giving and receiving of presents.

The ceremony began, as usual, with the singers announcing the ceremony. Then mother walked to the center of the large circular enclosure carrying me in her arms and leading two splendid spotted horses. They were lively and spirited and pranced about a good deal while different groups took up the singing. An old man, considered an expert in piercing ears, came and stood beside mother. He carried instruments of bone, sharp and fine as needles. Father then came, and last of all the needy man who was to have the two spotted horses. There was more singing while the old man thrust my ears with the sharp instrument and father placed something in them which he had prepared for the purpose. For several days mother watched my ears carefully and soon they were ready for rings. The two holes in my ears cost father two valuable spotted horses.

CHAPTER II

BOYHOOD

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With the coming of boyhood, life became more lively and exciting and gradually my activities took me further away from the care and influence of the tipi. I still continued to learn, however, in the same manner in which I had learned as a babe—by watching, listening, and imitating. Only I watched my mother less and began to observe the ways of my father more. In time too, I took to watching the older boys and whatever they did I tried to do.

In Lakota society it was the duty of every parent to give the knowledge they possessed to their children. Each and every parent was a teacher and, as a matter of fact, all elders were instructors of those younger than themselves. And the instruction they gave was mostly through their actions—that is, they interpreted to us through actions what we should try to do. We learned by watching and imitating examples placed before us. Slowly and naturally the faculties of observation and memory became highly trained and the Lakota child became educated in the manners, lore, and customs of his people without a strained and conscious effort. I have known children to become very apt in learning the songs they heard. One singing would sometimes suffice and the child would have the words and tune so well in mind that he could never forget it.

This process of learning went on all the time. There was no period in the life of the Lakota child such as that referred to by some as the 'playtime' of life, when the child is growing only in body size and not in mind. Body and mind

grew together. No one would be able to say how much can be learned through great keenness of sight and hearing unless, having possessed them, they were suddenly deprived of them.

But very early in life the child began to realize that wisdom was all about and everywhere and that there were many things to know. There was no such thing as emptiness in the world. Even in the sky there were no vacant places. Everywhere there was life, visible and invisible, and every object possessed something that would be good for us to have also—even to the very stones. This gave a great interest to life. Even without human companionship one was never alone. The world teemed with life and wisdom; there was no complete solitude for the Lakota.

Such living filled one with a great desire to do, to be, and to grow. In my boyhood, and in actual childhood, I was filled with the desire to be a brave and this desire urged me to constant activity. I was overjoyed when at the age of ten years my father arranged for me to accompany him on a war party. I was not the least bit afraid and was only sorry when for some reason we were forced to come home without having met the enemy.

The way in which Lakota children were trained caused them to regard with admiration all those of wisdom and experience. All yearned for wisdom and looked for experience. For myself, I felt that if I grew wise, my people would honor me; if I became very brave, I should be like father, and if I could become a good hunter, it would please my mother. And so I thrived upon the thought of achievement and approval and I do not think that I was an unusual Indian boy. Dangers and responsibilities were bound to come, and I wanted to meet them like a man. I looked forward to the days of the warpath, not as a calling nor for

the purpose of slaying my fellowman, but solely to prove my worth to myself and my people.

One lesson to learn was to be strong in will. Little children were taught to give and to give generously. A sparing giver was no giver at all. Possessions were given away until the giver was poor in this world's goods and had nothing left but the delight and joy of pure strength. It was a bounden duty to give to the needy and helpless. When mothers gave food to the weak and old they gave portions to their children at the same time, so that the children could perform the service of giving with their own hands. Little Lakota children often ran out and brought into the tipi an old and feeble person who chanced to be passing. If a child did this the mother must at once prepare food. To ignore the child's courtesy would be unpardonable. But it is easy to touch the heart of pity in a child, so the Lakota was taught to give at any and all times for the sake of becoming brave and strong. The greatest brave was he who could part with his most cherished belongings and at the same time sing songs of joy and praise. It was a custom to hold 'Give-away-dances' and to distribute presents that were costly and rare. To give is the delight of the Lakota.

Such an education could not be confined to a certain length of time nor could one be 'finished' in a certain term of years. The training was largely of character, beginning with birth and continued throughout life. True Indian education was based on the development of individual qualities and recognition of rights. There was no 'system,' no 'rule or rote,' as the white people say, in the way of Lakota learning. Not being under a system, children never had to 'learn this today,' or 'finish this book this year' or 'take up' some study just because 'little Willie did.' Native education was not a class education but one that

strengthened and encouraged the individual to grow. When children are growing up to be individuals there is no need to keep them in a class or in line with one another.

Never were Lakota children offered rewards or medals for accomplishment. No child was ever bribed or given a prize for doing his best. No one ever said to a child, 'Do this well and I will pay you for it.' The achievement was the reward and to place anything above it was to put unhealthy ideas in the minds of children and make them weak. Neither were lessons forced upon a child by an attitude of threat or by punishment. There was no such thing as the 'hickory stick,' and any Lakota caught flogging a child would have been considered unspeakably low. I have never heard of a child in my tribe leaving home on account of discontent or to escape parental rule. There could be no greater freedom elsewhere. Neither have I ever heard of young people committing suicide over studies or duties imposed upon them. Lovers occasionally planned death for themselves, but never children.

In the course of learning, the strength of one small mind was never pitted against the strength of another in foolish examinations. There being no such thing as 'grades,' a child was never made conscious of any shortcomings. I never knew embarrassment or humiliation of this character until I went to Carlisle School and was there put under the system of competition. I can never forget the confusion and pain I one day underwent in a reading class. The teacher conceived the idea of trying or testing the strength of the pupils in the class. A paragraph in the reading book was selected for the experiment. A pupil was asked to rise and read the paragraph while the rest listened and corrected any mistakes. Even if no mistakes were made, the teacher, it seems, wanted the pupils to state that they were sure