

***GERONIMO, CHARLES
A. EASTMAN, JOHN
STEVENS CABOT
ABBOTT, BLACK HAWK,
CHARLES M. SCANLAN***



***THE LIFE
OF A NATIVE
AMERICAN***

**Geronimo, Charles A. Eastman, John Stevens
Cabot Abbott**

The Life of a Native American

**The Life of Geronimo, Charles Eastman, Black Hawk,
King Philip, Sitting Bull & Crazy Horse**

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I. Earliest Recollections

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I. Hadakah, “The Pitiful Last”

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What boy would not be an Indian for a while when he thinks of the freest life in the world? This life was mine. Every day there was a real hunt. There was real game. Occasionally there was a medicine dance away off in the woods where no one could disturb us, in which the boys impersonated their elders, Brave Bull, Standing Elk, High Hawk, Medicine Bear, and the rest. They painted and imitated their fathers and grandfathers to the minutest detail, and accurately too, because they had seen the real thing all their lives.

We were not only good mimics but we were close students of nature. We studied the habits of animals just as you study your books. We watched the men of our people and represented them in our play; then learned to emulate them in our lives.

No people have a better use of their five senses than the children of the wilderness. We could smell as well as hear and see. We could feel and taste as well as we could see and hear. Nowhere has the memory been more fully developed than in the wild life, and I can still see wherein I owe much to my early training.

Of course I myself do not remember when I first saw the day, but my brothers have often recalled the event with much mirth; for it was a custom of the Sioux that when a boy was born his brother must plunge into the water, or roll

in the snow naked if it was winter time; and if he was not big enough to do either of these himself, water was thrown on him. If the new-born had a sister, she must be immersed. The idea was that a warrior had come to camp, and the other children must display some act of hardihood.

I was so unfortunate as to be the youngest of five children who, soon after I was born, were left motherless. I had to bear the humiliating name "Hakadah," meaning "the pitiful last," until I should earn a more dignified and appropriate name. I was regarded as little more than a plaything by the rest of the children.

My mother, who was known as the handsomest woman of all the Spirit Lake and Leaf Dweller Sioux, was dangerously ill, and one of the medicine men who attended her said: "Another medicine man has come into existence, but the mother must die. Therefore let him bear the name 'Mysterious Medicine.'" But one of the bystanders hastily interfered, saying that an uncle of the child already bore that name, so, for the time, I was only "Hakadah."

My beautiful mother, sometimes called the "Demi-Goddess" of the Sioux, who tradition says had every feature of a Caucasian descent with the exception of her luxuriant black hair and deep black eyes, held me tightly to her bosom upon her death-bed, while she whispered a few words to her mother-in-law. She said: "I give you this boy for your own. I cannot trust my own mother with him; she will neglect him and he will surely die."

The woman to whom these words were spoken was below the average in stature, remarkably active for her age (she was then fully sixty), and possessed of as much goodness as intelligence. My mother's judgment concerning her own mother was well founded, for soon after her death that old lady appeared, and declared that Hakadah was too

young to live without a mother. She offered to keep me until I died, and then she would put me in my mother's grave. Of course my other grandmother denounced the suggestion as a very wicked one, and refused to give me up.

The babe was done up as usual in a movable cradle made from an oak board two and a half feet long and one and a half feet wide. On one side of it was nailed with brass-headed tacks the richly-embroidered sack, which was open in front and laced up and down with buckskin strings. Over the arms of the infant was a wooden bow, the ends of which were firmly attached to the board, so that if the cradle should fall the child's head and face would be protected. On this bow were hung curious playthings—strings of artistically carved bones and hoofs of deer, which rattled when the little hands moved them.

In this upright cradle I lived, played and slept the greater part of the time during the first few months of my life. Whether I was made to lean against a lodge pole or was suspended from a bough of a tree, while my grandmother cut wood, or whether I was carried on her back, or conveniently balanced by another child in a similar cradle hung on the opposite side of a pony, I was still in my oaken bed.

This grandmother, who had already lived through sixty years of hardships, was a wonder to the young maidens of the tribe. She showed no less enthusiasm over Hakadah than she had done when she held her first-born, the boy's father, in her arms. Every little attention that is due to a loved child she performed with much skill and devotion. She made all my scanty garments and my tiny moccasins with a great deal of taste. It was said by all that I could not have had more attention had my mother been living.

Uncheedah (grandmother) was a great singer. Sometimes, when Hakadah wakened too early in the morning, she would sing to him something like the following lullaby:

Sleep, sleep, my boy, the Chippewas
Are far away—are far away.
Sleep, sleep, my boy; prepare to meet
The foe by day—the foe by day!
The cowards will not dare to fight
Till morning break—till morning break.
Sleep, sleep, my child, while still 'tis night;
Then bravely wake—then bravely wake!

The Dakota women were wont to cut and bring their fuel from the woods and, in fact, to perform most of the drudgery of the camp. This of necessity fell to their lot, because the men must follow the game during the day. Very often my grandmother carried me with her on these excursions; and while she worked it was her habit to suspend me from a wild grape vine or a springy bough, so that the least breeze would swing the cradle to and fro.

She has told me that when I had grown old enough to take notice, I was apparently capable of holding extended conversations in an unknown dialect with birds and red squirrels. Once I fell asleep in my cradle, suspended five or six feet from the ground, while Uncheedah was some distance away, gathering birch bark for a canoe. A squirrel had found it convenient to come upon the bow of my cradle and nibble his hickory nut, until he awoke me by dropping the crumbs of his meal. My disapproval of his intrusion was so decided that he had to take a sudden and quick flight to another bough, and from there he began to pour out his

wrath upon me, while I continued my objections to his presence so audibly that Uncheedah soon came to my rescue, and compelled the bold intruder to go away. It was a common thing for birds to alight on my cradle in the woods.

My food was, at first, a troublesome question for my kind foster-mother. She cooked some wild rice and strained it, and mixed it with broth made from choice venison. She also pounded dried venison almost to a flour, and kept it in water till the nourishing juices were extracted, then mixed with it some pounded maize, which was browned before pounding. This soup of wild rice, pounded venison and maize was my main-stay. But soon my teeth came—much earlier than the white children usually cut theirs; and then my good nurse gave me a little more varied food, and I did all my own grinding.

After I left my cradle, I almost walked away from it, she told me. She then began calling my attention to natural objects. Whenever I heard the song of a bird, she would tell me what bird it came from, something after this fashion:

“Hakadah, listen to Shechoka (the robin) calling his mate. He says he has just found something good to eat.” Or “Listen to Oopehanska (the thrush); he is singing for his little wife. He will sing his best.” When in the evening the whippoorwill started his song with vim, no further than a stone’s throw from our tent in the woods, she would say to me:

“Hush! It may be an Ojibway scout!”

Again, when I waked at midnight, she would say:

“Do not cry! Hinakaga (the owl) is watching you from the tree-top.”

I usually covered up my head, for I had perfect faith in my grandmother’s admonitions, and she had given me a dreadful idea of this bird. It was one of her legends that a

little boy was once standing just outside of the teepee (tent), crying vigorously for his mother, when Hinakaga swooped down in the darkness and carried the poor little fellow up into the trees. It was well known that the hoot of the owl was commonly imitated by Indian scouts when on the war-path. There had been dreadful massacres immediately following this call. Therefore it was deemed wise to impress the sound early upon the mind of the child.

Indian children were trained so that they hardly ever cried much in the night. This was very expedient and necessary in their exposed life. In my infancy it was my grandmother's custom to put me to sleep, as she said, with the birds, and to waken me with them, until it became a habit. She did this with an object in view. An Indian must always rise early. In the first place, as a hunter, he finds his game best at daybreak. Secondly, other tribes, when on the war-path, usually make their attack very early in the morning. Even when our people are moving about leisurely, we like to rise before daybreak, in order to travel when the air is cool, and unobserved, perchance, by our enemies.

As a little child, it was instilled into me to be silent and reticent. This was one of the most important traits to form in the character of the Indian. As a hunter and warrior it was considered absolutely necessary to him, and was thought to lay the foundations of patience and self-control. There are times when boisterous mirth is indulged in by our people, but the rule is gravity and decorum.

After all, my babyhood was full of interest and the beginnings of life's realities. The spirit of daring was already whispered into my ears. The value of the eagle feather as worn by the warrior had caught my eye. One day, when I was left alone, at scarcely two years of age, I took my uncle's war bonnet and plucked out all its eagle feathers to

decorate my dog and myself. So soon the life that was about me had made its impress, and already I desired intensely to comply with all of its demands.

II. Early Hardships

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One of the earliest recollections of my adventurous childhood is the ride I had on a pony's side. I was passive in the whole matter. A little girl cousin of mine was put in a bag and suspended from the horn of an Indian saddle; but her weight must be balanced or the saddle would not remain on the animal's back. Accordingly, I was put into another sack and made to keep the saddle and the girl in position! I did not object at all, for I had a very pleasant game of peek-aboo with the little girl, until we came to a big snow-drift, where the poor beast was stuck fast and began to lie down. Then it was not so nice!

This was the convenient and primitive way in which some mothers packed their children for winter journeys. However cold the weather might be, the inmate of the fur-lined sack was usually very comfortable—at least I used to think so. I believe I was accustomed to all the precarious Indian conveyances, and, as a boy, I enjoyed the dog-travaux ride as much as any. The travaux consisted of a set of rawhide strips securely lashed to the tent-poles, which were harnessed to the sides of the animal as if he stood between shafts, while the free ends were allowed to drag on the ground. Both ponies and large dogs were used as beasts of burden, and they carried in this way the smaller children as well as the baggage.

This mode of travelling for children was possible only in the summer, and as the dogs were sometimes unreliable, the little ones were exposed to a certain amount of danger. For instance, whenever a train of dogs had been travelling

for a long time, almost perishing with the heat and their heavy loads, a glimpse of water would cause them to forget all their responsibilities. Some of them, in spite of the screams of the women, would swim with their burdens into the cooling stream, and I was thus, on more than one occasion, made to partake of an unwilling bath.

I was a little over four years old at the time of the "Sioux massacre" in Minnesota. In the general turmoil, we took flight into British Columbia, and the journey is still vividly remembered by all our family. A yoke of oxen and a lumber-wagon were taken from some white farmer and brought home for our conveyance.

How delighted I was when I learned that we were to ride behind those wise-looking animals and in that gorgeously painted wagon! It seemed almost like a living creature to me, this new vehicle with four legs, and the more so when we got out of axle-grease and the wheels went along squealing like pigs!

The boys found a great deal of innocent fun in jumping from the high wagon while the oxen were leisurely moving along. My elder brothers soon became experts. At last, I mustered up courage enough to join them in this sport. I was sure they stepped on the wheel, so I cautiously placed my moccasined foot upon it. Alas! before I could realize what had happened, I was under the wheels, and had it not been for the neighbor immediately behind us, I might have been run over by the next team as well.

This was my first experience with a civilized vehicle. I cried out all possible reproaches on the white man's team and concluded that a dog-travaux was good enough for me. I was really rejoiced that we were moving away from the people who made the wagon that had almost ended my life, and it did not occur to me that I alone was to blame. I could

not be persuaded to ride in that wagon again and was glad when we finally left it beside the Missouri river.

The summer after the “Minnesota massacre,” General Sibley pursued our people across this river. Now the Missouri is considered one of the most treacherous rivers in the world. Even a good modern boat is not safe upon its uncertain current. We were forced to cross in buffalo-skin boats—as round as tubs!

The Washechu (white men) were coming in great numbers with their big guns, and while most of our men were fighting them to gain time, the women and the old men made and equipped the temporary boats, braced with ribs of willow. Some of these were towed by two or three women or men swimming in the water and some by ponies. It was not an easy matter to keep them right side up, with their helpless freight of little children and such goods as we possessed.

In our flight, we little folks were strapped in the saddles or held in front of an older person, and in the long night marches to get away from the soldiers, we suffered from loss of sleep and insufficient food. Our meals were eaten hastily, and sometimes in the saddle. Water was not always to be found. The people carried it with them in bags formed of tripe or the dried pericardium of animals.

Now we were compelled to trespass upon the country of hostile tribes and were harassed by them almost daily and nightly. Only the strictest vigilance saved us.

One day we met with another enemy near the British lines. It was a prairie fire. We were surrounded. Another fire was quickly made, which saved our lives.

One of the most thrilling experiences of the following winter was a blizzard, which overtook us in our wanderings. Here and there, a family lay down in the snow, selecting a

place where it was not likely to drift much. For a day and a night we lay under the snow. Uncle stuck a long pole beside us to tell us when the storm was over. We had plenty of buffalo robes and the snow kept us warm, but we found it heavy. After a time, it became packed and hollowed out around our bodies, so that we were as comfortable as one can be under those circumstances.

The next day the storm ceased, and we discovered a large herd of buffaloes almost upon us. We dug our way out, shot some of the buffaloes, made a fire and enjoyed a good dinner.

I was now an exile as well as motherless; yet I was not unhappy. Our wanderings from place to place afforded us many pleasant experiences and quite as many hardships and misfortunes. There were times of plenty and times of scarcity, and we had several narrow escapes from death. In savage life, the early spring is the most trying time and almost all the famines occurred at this period of the year.

The Indians are a patient and a clannish people; their love for one another is stronger than that of any civilized people I know. If this were not so, I believe there would have been tribes of cannibals among them. White people have been known to kill and eat their companions in preference to starving; but Indians—never!

In times of famine, the adults often denied themselves in order to make the food last as long as possible for the children, who were not able to bear hunger as well as the old. As a people, they can live without food much longer than any other nation.

I once passed through one of these hard springs when we had nothing to eat for several days. I well remember the six small birds which constituted the breakfast for six families one morning; and then we had no dinner or supper to

follow! What a relief that was to me—although I had only a small wing of a small bird for my share! Soon after this, we came into a region where buffaloes were plenty, and hunger and scarcity were forgotten.

Such was the Indian's wild life! When game was to be had and the sun shone, they easily forgot the bitter experiences of the winter before. Little preparation was made for the future. They are children of Nature, and occasionally she whips them with the lashes of experience, yet they are forgetful and careless. Much of their suffering might have been prevented by a little calculation.

During the summer, when Nature is at her best, and provides abundantly for the savage, it seems to me that no life is happier than his! Food is free—lodging free—everything free! All were alike rich in the summer, and, again, all were alike poor in the winter and early spring. However, their diseases were fewer and not so destructive as now, and the Indian's health was generally good. The Indian boy enjoyed such a life as almost all boys dream of and would choose for themselves if they were permitted to do so.

The raids made upon our people by other tribes were frequent, and we had to be constantly on the watch. I remember at one time a night attack was made upon our camp and all our ponies stampeded. Only a few of them were recovered, and our journeys after this misfortune were effected mostly by means of the dog-travaux.

The second winter after the massacre, my father and my two older brothers, with several others, were betrayed by a half-breed at Winnipeg to the United States authorities. As I was then living with my uncle in another part of the country, I became separated from them for ten years. During all this time we believed that they had been killed by the whites,

and I was taught that I must avenge their deaths as soon as I was able to go upon the war-path.

I must say a word in regard to the character of this uncle, my father's brother, who was my adviser and teacher for many years. He was a man about six feet two inches in height, very erect and broad-shouldered. He was known at that time as one of the best hunters and bravest warriors among the Sioux in British America, where he still lives, for to this day we have failed to persuade him to return to the United States.

He is a typical Indian—not handsome, but truthful and brave. He had a few simple principles from which he hardly ever departed. Some of these I shall describe when I speak of my early training.

It is wonderful that any children grew up through all the exposures and hardships that we suffered in those days! The frail teepee pitched anywhere, in the winter as well as in the summer, was all the protection that we had against cold and storms. I can recall times when we were snowed in and it was very difficult to get fuel. We were once three days without much fire and all of this time it stormed violently. There seemed to be no special anxiety on the part of our people; they rather looked upon all this as a matter of course, knowing that the storm would cease when the time came.

I could once endure as much cold and hunger as any of them; but now if I miss one meal or accidentally wet my feet, I feel it as much as if I had never lived in the manner I have described, when it was a matter of course to get myself soaking wet many a time. Even if there was plenty to eat, it was thought better for us to practice fasting sometimes; and hard exercise was kept up continually, both for the sake of health and to prepare the body for the

extraordinary exertions that it might, at any moment, be required to undergo. In my own remembrance, my uncle used often to bring home a deer on his shoulder. The distance was sometimes considerable; yet he did not consider it any sort of a feat.

The usual custom with us was to eat only two meals a day and these were served at each end of the day. This rule was not invariable, however, for if there should be any callers, it was Indian etiquette to offer either tobacco or food, or both. The rule of two meals a day was more closely observed by the men—especially the younger men—than by the women and children. This was when the Indians recognized that a true manhood, one of physical activity and endurance, depends upon dieting and regular exercise. No such system is practised by the reservation Indians of to-day.

III. My Indian Grandmother

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As a motherless child, I always regarded my good grandmother as the wisest of guides and the best of protectors. It was not long before I began to realize her superiority to most of her contemporaries. This idea was not gained entirely from my own observation, but also from a knowledge of the high regard in which she was held by other women. Aside from her native talent and ingenuity, she was endowed with a truly wonderful memory. No other midwife in her day and tribe could compete with her in skill and judgment. Her observations in practice were all preserved in her mind for reference, as systematically as if they had been written upon the pages of a note-book.

I distinctly recall one occasion when she took me with her into the woods in search of certain medicinal roots.

“Why do you not use all kinds of roots for medicines?” said I.

“Because,” she replied, in her quick, characteristic manner, “the Great Mystery does not will us to find things too easily. In that case everybody would be a medicine-giver, and Ohiyesa must learn that there are many secrets which the Great Mystery will disclose only to the most worthy. Only those who seek him fasting and in solitude will receive his signs.”

With this and many similar explanations she wrought in my soul wonderful and lively conceptions of the “Great Mystery” and of the effects of prayer and solitude. I continued my childish questioning.

“But why did you not dig those plants that we saw in the woods, of the same kind that you are digging now?”

“For the same reason that we do not like the berries we find in the shadow of deep woods as well as the ones which grow in sunny places. The latter have more sweetness and flavor. Those herbs which have medicinal virtues should be sought in a place that is neither too wet nor too dry, and where they have a generous amount of sunshine to maintain their vigor.

“Some day Ohiyesa will be old enough to know the secrets of medicine; then I will tell him all. But if you should grow up to be a bad man, I must withhold these treasures from you and give them to your brother, for a medicine man must be a good and wise man. I hope Ohiyesa will be a great medicine man when he grows up. To be a great warrior is a noble ambition; but to be a mighty medicine man is a nobler!”

She said these things so thoughtfully and impressively that I cannot but feel and remember them even to this day.

Our native women gathered all the wild rice, roots, berries and fruits which formed an important part of our food. This was distinctively a woman's work. Uncheedah (grandmother) understood these matters perfectly, and it became a kind of instinct with her to know just where to look for each edible variety and at what season of the year. This sort of labor gave the Indian women every opportunity to observe and study Nature after their fashion; and in this Uncheedah was more acute than most of the men. The abilities of her boys were not all inherited from their father; indeed, the stronger family traits came obviously from her. She was a leader among the native women, and they came to her, not only for medical aid, but for advice in all their affairs.

In bravery she equaled any of the men. This trait, together with her ingenuity and alertness of mind, more than once saved her and her people from destruction. Once, when we were roaming over a region occupied by other tribes, and on a day when most of the men were out upon the hunt, a party of hostile Indians suddenly appeared. Although there were a few men left at home, they were taken by surprise at first and scarcely knew what to do, when this woman came forward and advanced alone to meet our foes. She had gone some distance when some of the men followed her. She met the strangers and offered her hand to them. They accepted her friendly greeting; and as a result of her brave act we were left unmolested and at peace.

Another story of her was related to me by my father. My grandfather, who was a noted hunter, often wandered away from his band in search of game. In this instance he had with him only his own family of three boys and his wife. One evening, when he returned from the chase, he found to his surprise that she had built a stockade around her teepee.

She had discovered the danger-sign in a single foot-print, which she saw at a glance was not that of her husband, and she was also convinced that it was not the foot-print of a Sioux, from the shape of the moccasin. This ability to recognize footprints is general among the Indians, but more marked in certain individuals.

This courageous woman had driven away a party of five Ojibway warriors. They approached the lodge cautiously, but her dog gave timely warning, and she poured into them from behind her defences the contents of a double-barrelled gun, with such good effect that the astonished braves thought it wise to retreat.

I was not more than five or six years old when the Indian soldiers came one day and destroyed our large buffalo-skin teepee. It was charged that my uncle had hunted alone a large herd of buffaloes. This was not exactly true. He had unfortunately frightened a large herd while shooting a deer in the edge of the woods. However, it was customary to punish such an act severely, even though the offense was accidental.

When we were attacked by the police, I was playing in the teepee, and the only other person at home was Uncheedah. I had not noticed their approach, and when the war-cry was given by thirty or forty Indians with strong lungs, I thought my little world was coming to an end. Instantly innumerable knives and tomahawks penetrated our frail home, while bullets went through the poles and tent-fastenings up above our heads.

I hardly know what I did, but I imagine it was just what any other little fellow would have done under like circumstances. My first clear realization of the situation was when Uncheedah had a dispute with the leader, claiming that the matter had not been properly investigated, and that none of the policemen had attained to a reputation in war which would justify them in touching her son's teepee. But alas! our poor dwelling was already an unrecognizable ruin; even the poles were broken into splinters.

The Indian women, after reaching middle age, are usually heavy and lack agility, but my grandmother was in this also an exception. She was fully sixty when I was born; and when I was seven years old she swam across a swift and wide stream, carrying me on her back, because she did not wish to expose me to accident in one of the clumsy round boats of bull-hide which were rigged up to cross the rivers which impeded our way, especially in the springtime. Her strength

and endurance were remarkable. Even after she had attained the age of eighty-two, she one day walked twenty-five miles without appearing much fatigued.

I marvel now at the purity and elevated sentiment possessed by this woman, when I consider the customs and habits of her people at the time. When her husband died she was still comparatively a young woman—still active, clever and industrious. She was descended from a haughty chieftain of the “Dwellers among the Leaves.” Although women of her age and position were held to be eligible to re-marriage, and she had several persistent suitors who were men of her own age and chiefs, yet she preferred to cherish in solitude the memory of her husband.

I was very small when my uncle brought home two Ojibway young women. In the fight in which they were captured, none of the Sioux war party had been killed; therefore they were sympathized with and tenderly treated by the Sioux women. They were apparently happy, although of course they felt deeply the losses sustained at the time of their capture, and they did not fail to show their appreciation of the kindnesses received at our hands.

As I recall now the remarks made by one of them at the time of their final release, they appear to me quite remarkable. They lived in my grandmother’s family for two years, and were then returned to their people at a great peace council of the two nations. When they were about to leave my grandmother, the elder of the two sisters first embraced her, and then spoke somewhat as follows:

“You are a brave woman and a true mother. I understand now why your son so bravely conquered our band, and took my sister and myself captive. I hated him at first, but now I admire him, because he did just what my father, my brother or my husband would have done had they opportunity. He

did even more. He saved us from the tomahawks of his fellow-warriors, and brought us to his home to know a noble and a brave woman.

“I shall never forget your many favors shown to us. But I must go. I belong to my tribe and I shall return to them. I will endeavor to be a true woman also, and to teach my boys to be generous warriors like your son.”

Her sister chose to remain among the Sioux all her life, and she married one of our young men.

“I shall make the Sioux and the Ojibways,” she said, “to be as brothers.”

There are many other instances of intermarriage with captive women. The mother of the well-known Sioux chieftain, Wabashaw, was an Ojibway woman. I once knew a woman who was said to be a white captive. She was married to a noted warrior, and had a fine family of five boys. She was well accustomed to the Indian ways, and as a child I should not have suspected that she was white. The skins of these people became so sunburned and full of paint that it required a keen eye to distinguish them from the real Indians.

IV. An Indian Sugar Camp

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With the first March thaw the thoughts of the Indian women of my childhood days turned promptly to the annual sugarmaking. This industry was chiefly followed by the old men and women and the children. The rest of the tribe went out upon the spring fur-hunt at this season, leaving us at home to make the sugar.

The first and most important of the necessary utensils were the huge iron and brass kettles for boiling. Everything else could be made, but these must be bought, begged or borrowed. A maple tree was felled and a log canoe hollowed out, into which the sap was to be gathered. Little troughs of basswood and birchen basins were also made to receive the sweet drops as they trickled from the tree.

As soon as these labors were accomplished, we all proceeded to the bark sugar house, which stood in the midst of a fine grove of maples on the bank of the Minnesota river. We found this hut partially filled with the snows of winter and the withered leaves of the preceding autumn, and it must be cleared for our use. In the meantime a tent was pitched outside for a few days' occupancy. The snow was still deep in the woods, with a solid crust upon which we could easily walk; for we usually moved to the sugar house before the sap had actually started, the better to complete our preparations.

My grandmother worked like a beaver in these days (or rather like a muskrat, as the Indians say; for this industrious little animal sometimes collects as many as six or eight bushels of edible roots for the winter, only to be robbed of

his store by some of our people). If there was prospect of a good sugaring season, she now made a second and even a third canoe to contain the sap. These canoes were afterward utilized by the hunters for their proper purpose.

During our last sugar-making in Minnesota, before the "outbreak," my grandmother was at work upon a canoe with her axe, while a young aunt of mine stood by. We boys were congregated within the large, oval sugar house, busily engaged in making arrows for the destruction of the rabbits and chipmunks which we knew would come in numbers to drink the sap. The birds also were beginning to return, and the cold storms of March would drive them to our door. I was then too young to do much except look on; but I fully entered into the spirit of the occasion, and rejoiced to see the bigger boys industriously sharpen their arrows, resting them against the ends of the long sticks which were burning in the fire, and occasionally cutting a chip from the stick. In their eagerness they paid little attention to this circumstance, although they well knew that it was strictly forbidden to touch a knife to a burning ember.

Suddenly loud screams were heard from without and we all rushed out to see what was the matter. It was a serious affair. My grandmother's axe had slipped, and by an upward stroke nearly severed three of the fingers of my aunt, who stood looking on, with her hands folded upon her waist. As we ran out the old lady, who had already noticed and reproved our carelessness in regard to the burning embers, pursued us with loud reproaches and threats of a whipping. This will seem mysterious to my readers, but is easily explained by the Indian superstition, which holds that such an offense as we had committed is invariably punished by the accidental cutting of some one of the family.