



SOCIAL STUDIES

Sitting Bull

By Ohiyesa (Charles A. Eastman)



Sitting Bull's boyhood must have been a happy one. It was said of him in a joking way that his legs were bowed like the ribs of the ponies that he rode constantly from childhood. He had also a common nickname that was much to the point. It was "Hunkesh nee," which means "Slow," referring to his inability to run fast, or more probably to the fact that he seldom appeared on foot. In their boyish games he was wanting to take the part of the "old man," but this does not mean that he was not active and brave.

It is told that after a buffalo hunt the boys were enjoying a mimic hunt with the calves that had been left behind. A large calf turned viciously on Sitting Bull, whose pony had thrown him, but the alert youth got hold of both ears and struggled until the calf was pushed back into a buffalo wallow in a sitting posture. The boys shouted: "He has subdued the buffalo calf! He made it sit down!" And from this incident was derived his familiar name of Sitting Bull.

It is a mistake to suppose that Sitting Bull, or any other Indian warrior, was of a murderous disposition. It is true that savage warfare had grown more and more harsh and cruel since the coming of white traders among them, bringing guns, knives, and whiskey. Yet it was still regarded largely as a sort of game, undertaken in order to develop the manly qualities of their youth. It was the degree of risk which brought honor, rather than the number slain, and a brave must mourn thirty days, with blackened face and loosened hair, for the enemy whose life he had taken. It was a point of honor in the old days to treat a captive with kindness.

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To be sure, he did not learn his lessons from books. All that he learned he verified for himself and put into daily practice. In personal appearance he was rather commonplace and made no immediate impression, but as he talked he seemed to take hold of his hearers more and more. An incident that made him well known was his taking of a boy captive in battle with the Assiniboines. He saved this boy's life and adopted him as his brother. Hohay, as he was called, was devoted to Sitting Bull and helped much in later years to spread his fame.

Sitting Bull was a born diplomat, a ready speaker, and in middle life he ceased to go upon the warpath. He was bull-headed; quick to grasp a situation, and not readily induced to change his mind. He was not suspicious until he was forced to be so. It may be said without fear of contradiction that Sitting Bull never killed any women or children. He was a fair fighter, and while not prominent in battle after his young manhood, he was the brains of the Sioux resistance.