



The Soul of the Indian: An Interpretation (1911) **[Illustrated]**

Charles Alexander Eastman

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Charles Alexander Eastman (1858 – 1939) was a Santee Dakota physician educated at Boston University, writer, national lecturer, and reformer. In the early 20th century, he was "one of the most prolific authors and speakers on Sioux ethnohistory and American Indian affairs."

Eastman was of Santee Dakota, English and French ancestry. After working as a physician on reservations in South Dakota, he became increasingly active in politics and issues on native American rights, he worked to improve the lives of youths, and founded thirty-two Native American chapters of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). He also helped found the Boy Scouts of America. He is considered the first Native American author to write American history from the Native American point of view.

The Soul of An Indian, Dr. Charles A. Eastman has accomplished successfully the most remarkable study of his own people the North American Indians—that has ever been published anywhere, at any time. It is more than a study; it is an interpretation of Indian life, habits, customs, before the Indian came in contact with the whites; it is a revelation of the spiritual life of the Indian, as he was originally, which shows him in constant effort to "walk with God," as truly, in his own way, as the ancient Hebrews tried to "walk with God" in their way. There are differences, of course; the Indian, for example, spoke of the Creative Power of the Universe as "the Great Mystery." So wonderful, so sacred, so infinite, was the Great Mystery, that the Indian, with innate wisdom, never tried to define it, even to understand it, knowing far better than some of his white brethren the limits of human understanding.

The foundation of the Indian's entire life was his belief in, his worship of, the Great Mystery, which pervaded the world, whispering messages of peace, comfort, courage, in the rustling of leaves in tall trees, flinging joyously in the music of waterfall and rushing brook, uttering warning notes in storm and tempest. From babyhood the Indian mother taught her child to listen to the Voice of the Great Mystery, to learn therefrom the lesson of silent reflection, of it in everything, and to pray at all times, especially when in doubt or trouble; prayers which were not spoken aloud, but which were felt in the heart and expressed outwardly by attitude alone.

How this dependence upon the Great Mystery became to the Indian in a very real part of his entire life is explained by the author. It was present in childhood, in youth, in marriage, in the hunt, and in the occasional wars. The physical training of young braves, the care with which maidens were guarded, the systematic, enlightened, successful training which resulted in subordinating the body to the soul are told so directly, so simply, so thoroughly as to carry conviction to the reader.

None but an Indian could have written this book; and Dr. Eastman, besides being an Indian chief, possesses collegiate and university training of high order. Nothing like it has ever been written. In all probability no other man could have written it, and logically no other man in future could write it—for the Indian of Ohiyesa's childhood and youth has wholly vanished from the stage of human life, never to return.

This little book can claim a place among the few volumes which thoughtful men and women set apart from others to cherish and reread from time to time as a source of lasting inspiration.

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