

MARY COLLINS

TELLS OF THE DANCES OF THE SIOUX AND THE INFLUENCE HELD BY SITTING BULL

A Short Autobiography

If I were to tell how I happened to become a missionary to the Indians and start at the beginning I should go back 300 years for I have several ancestors who were interpreters and missionaries to them. Thomas Stanton, one of my ancestors, was appointed by the King as interpreter in the Picquot war. Another ancestor was appointed by the King and sent to Harvard to study to be a minister to the Picquot Indians, learning their language and becoming a missionary to them. When I came out here in 1875 to Oahe I came in contact with the Indians for the first time in my life and I found that there was something in me that seemed to respond to the Indian and that I had ability to learn their language and even when I could not understand them when they were speaking I intuitively knew what they meant, then I decided that there must be something in ancestry which accounted for my liking for and ease in comprehending them. I studied their language and customs for ten years and was asked to start a school and enter into the educational work but I was not fitted for that, my desire was for the pioneer work so I chose that rather than the school work. I went to Standing Rock in 1885 when Sitting Bull's people were not civilized; they did not appear in the dress of later days but were wild and crude in all their ways. Before I went to them I had acquired some knowledge of medicine and had quite a little faculty for nursing and caring for sick people so that when I came to the Indians they welcomed me warmly as a 'medicine woman.' Sitting Bull lived ten miles from where I was and of course he was the head chief of the Indians. He was very much opposed to the Indians becoming civilized and so he came to see me probably to discover what my intentions were. He was very glad to find that I was a medicine woman and tried to have me agree that I would not have the Indians leave their old ways of living but that I should teach them to read and to care for them when they were ill; he urged most strongly however that they must not be persuaded to abandon their dances. This of course I wouldn't consent to do. The Indians proved anxious to learn tho and I started a little school and taught them to read. Ten or twelve young men Indians were especially bright and interested and we formed a little society; I entertained them at my house where they studied and became Christians. At this time the Indians seemed to have arrived at a period that was very