

In the celebration of this coup his father gave away many horses and bestowed on his son his own name of Sitting Bull.

Not by heredity, election or choice was Sitting Bull a chief, but by his pretense at mysticism, his knowledge of the superstitions of his people and his unhesitating use of this knowledge in playing upon their ignorance, he became a leader. For one thing though he must be given credit: he had exceptional judgment and his predictions usually were fulfilled. Hence he came to be known and feared as the "maker of good medicine." His hold upon the Indians became so strong that even the contempt of real war chiefs could not shake their faith in him.

It is not generally known, but Sitting Bull fled in fear at the Battle of the Greasy Grass or Little Big Horn, as it is better known, where Custer and his men were annihilated. The premature attack on the camp by the men under Major Reno threw the Indians at the upper end of the camp into confusion, and had it been timed simultaneously with that of Custer, the result of that engagement might have been different, but it came too soon and the Indians were restored to order and prepared when Custer arrived. But when Reno's bullets rattled through the tepee poles, Sitting Bull departed precipitately and without bidding farewell. Although his band had to send messengers to him with news of the victory before he could be induced to return -- and they found him many miles from the scene of conflict -- he managed to persuade the majority of his followers that he had gone into the hills to "make medicine." And the fact that he had just before predicted a great and glorious victory over the whites gave him even more prestige than ever.

Most of his tribe knew that he was a coward, but they feared his medicine and remained loyal to him until his reverses, after he had