

LUTHER STANDING BEAR

"The Plains Were Covered with Dead Bison."

Our scouts, who had gone out to locate the buffalo, came back and reported that the plains were covered with dead bison. These had been shot by the white people. The Indians never were such wasteful, wanton killers of this noble game animal. We kept moving, fully expecting soon to run across plenty of live buffalo; but we were disappointed. I saw the bodies of hundreds of dead buffalo lying about, just wasting, and the odor was terrible.

Now we began to see white people living in dugouts, just like wild bears, but without the long snout. These people were dirty. They had hair all over their faces, heads, arms, and hands. This was the first time many of us had ever seen white people, and they were very repulsive to us. None of us had ever seen a gorilla, else we might have thought that Darwin was right concerning these people.

Outside these dugouts we saw bale after bale of buffalo skins, all packed, ready for market. These people were taking away the source of the clothing and lodges that had been provided for us by our Creator, and they were letting our food lie on the plains to rot. They were to receive money for all this, while the Indians were to receive only abuse. We

Luther Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), 67–68.

thought these people must be devils, for they had no sympathy. Do you think such treatment was fair to the Indian?

But some of you may say, "Oh, the plains had to be cleared of the buffalo, and that was the only way." That may all be very true; but did you ever stop to think of the thousands of Indians who had to go hungry in consequence of this wholesale slaughter? Why not look at it this way: Suppose a man had a farm with lots of cattle, and it was thought a good idea to build a town on his farm. Should you consider it right if other people had gone in and shot and killed all the farmer's cattle without paying him for the slaughter? No, you would not consider such a proposition fair or just. They would first have to pay the farmer for destroying his herds, so he could buy clothing and food for his family.

When we camped at this place where the dugouts were built, I remember that our mothers told us to hurry and go to sleep, or the hairy men would "get us." We knew they carried long sticks which made a great noise, with which they killed our buffalo. These "sticks" we called "mazawaken," or "holy iron." These people cared nothing for us, and it meant nothing to them to take our lives, even through starvation and cold. This was the beginning of our hatred for the white people. But still we did not kill them.