

Mary Henderson EASTMAN, *Dahcotah; Life and Legends of the Sioux* (Afton, Minnesota, Afton Historical Society Press, 1996, 198 p., 20 illus.)

This is a reissue of a book published in 1849. The editors indicate that the only changes they have made is to correct "obvious typos" but they otherwise preserve the flavour of the original. However, they have replaced four lithographs provided by the author's husband, the military artist Seth Eastman, with twenty-two of his watercolours. Another addition to this new edition, is the biographical "Preface" authored by Rena Neumann Coen.

The promotional material on the flyleaf suggests that the book's greatest merit is in the ethnographic material it contains on the Sioux who lived around Fort Snelling in present-day Minnesota. Yet, much of the ethnographic information is very general, repetitious, and it is not always clear whether a description of particular behaviour represents a cultural pattern or is idiosyncratic. Detailed ethnographic notes would have enhanced the usefulness of the stories.

Of the three elements of this book (body text, illustrations, and preface), it is the Preface which has greatest value. Ms. Coen assesses the author's contribution to American literature by placing her in a time/place matrix that contains discussions of the issues which concerned mid-nineteenth century American writers such as the status of women in middle and lower class society, the question of race in the days preceeding the American Civil War, and the relationship between Christian education and morality. Also, Ms. Coen discusses the initiative exercised by Ms. Eastman on her own behalf to get her books published as well as the great effort she made in

getting her husband recognized as a “frontier artist of Indian life”. It seems that Ms. Eastman was an astute businesswoman and politician.

In short, the major text must be read with great care and probably more as an example of nineteenth century women’s literature than as ethnography, the illustrations may be enjoyed as nineteenth century American paintings by a minor artist, and the Preface can be read for its genuine contribution to scholarship. I suggest reading it at a library rather than paying the hefty \$45.00 (US) price of the book.

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