



My Life Among the Indians

George Catlin

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George Catlin (1796 –1872) was an American painter, author, and traveler of the Old West who specialized in portraits of Native Americans. Travelling to the American West five times during the 1830s, Catlin was the first white man to depict Plains Indians in their native territory. The author spent eight years traveling among the Indians of the Northwest and the prairies, noting their customs and recording his observations with pen and brush. Catlin published his observation in a multi-volume set of books on the Indian tribes he witnessed. In "My Life Among the Indians" the parts of Catlin's volumes on the North American Indians which will be of most interest to the public have been condensed and brought together in chronological order. It is a splendid book to read and to own, being made up from two large volumes of letters written by George Catlin, the well-known painter of Indian subjects. There are sixteen illustrations from the artist's original drawings. Mr. Catlin traveled extensively in the Indian country, making a fine collection of Indian specimens which he afterwards exhibited in this country and in foreign lands. Many of these specimens, together with his paintings, which were so true to life among the Indians, are still preserved in Washington. It was Catlin who, in 1832, made the suggestion that the government should set aside a great National Park in the Yellowstone region. "Mr. Catlin's scheme, as it then took shape in his mind, and was carried out without deviation, was the formation of an Indian gallery, for which he would use his skill as a painter in securing portraits among the different tribes he would personally visit; in reproducing pictorially their customs, hunt games, and manner of living; in collecting their robes, headdresses, pipes, weapons, musical instruments, and articles of daily life; and in studying their social life, government, and religious views, that he might arrive at their own view of their relation to the world in which they lived. This world he also wished to investigate geographically and topographically. In brief, he wished to see the Indian in his native state, and, if possible, to discover his past. His future he knew. The Indian would disappear before advancing civilization. "Mr. Catlin's personal equipment for his task was a lithe, alert frame, about five feet eight inches tall, made sturdy and enduring by the outdoor life of his boyhood, a knowledge of woodcraft, a trained eye with the rifle, fine horsemanship, simple habits, a mechanical, even an inventive mind, and great steadfastness of purpose."

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