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## A REMARKABLE STORY

Truth is often stranger than fiction, as the following, written by Clarke Knowlton in the North American Indian, will prove:

A ripple of deerskin . . . a flash of blanket . . . proud eagle feathers, strong against the commonplace background; the audience grows quiet, interested, a little skeptical; he stands above them, remote, unsmiling—the white cloud glory of the amazing headdress a triumphant challenge to unbelief. Tahan is back on the platform after an absence of some years, back on the platform to face children of this century, as he faced many children of the last with a message of great spiritual beauty drawn from the intimate life of an uncomprehended race.

He speaks, and his voice makes deep music. . . The blanket slips from his shoulders, revealing a slender, supple, colorful figure clad in soft deerskin garments—the same garments he “wore upon the warpath some 60 years ago.” . . . And in watching this figure one forgets the background, and the words “I was free born!” spring into mind; for there is an inimitable something of wind and water above those effortless, flowing gestures. . . . One watches the hands—a bird, a buffalo, galloping horsemen: they tell the whole story, tell it in the sign language, language once used upon the plains—carelessly, continuously, one suspects unconsciously, they testify to an art now as vanished as the life which gave it birth. . . . And with a start one becomes aware that hands of the children are also in motion, that they have caught the significance of those picturing hands: crudely, clumsily they attempt to follow, instinctively answering the call of this strange, wild message.

And a shadowy world takes form and color. “Tahan, you are good!” Zepkhoeete said to him each morning. “My Father-Chief, you are good!” replied Tahan. “My son, you’ve told the truth, I am a good man, and you’re a good boy!” declared Zepkhoeete, and that was the way they started the day. . . . The training of an Indian boy in the days before the white man had taught them other ways. . . . Children’s games. . . . Stories. And through it all, everywhere, the bright substance of the Indian ideal: “Truth first, though self and beloved nations perished!” “Man-

hood—which included courage; faithfulness, honesty and strength;” “Self-purification” and “Unswerving realization of man’s dependence on a power beyond himself”—a power manifest in recognizable qualities, a power that gave man joy and life and strength.

Many things he tells, things learned in the Kiowa teepees in the days before the Civil War. Something of his own story he tells: how as an infant he was adopted by a young Kiowa war-chief who found him after a Kiowa raid; how he grew up ignorant that he was the son of Al-zada, an Indian woman of the Osage tribe, and “California Joe,” a white man, well known frontiersman and intimate friend of “Buffalo Bill,” Kit Carson, Jim Bridger, and the like. “How, after that terrible winter night when the white soldiers fell upon the sleeping Indian village, he with others was driven through the snow, naked and bleeding, having seen their property destroyed, their friends killed, and their ponies shot, to a white man’s fort; and how there he was recognized as of white blood, his identity established through the hard-wrung testimony of his foster father, how he was separated from the only parents he had ever known and sent into the white man’s land. How he escaped from the Texas ranch, joined a wild band of outlaw Indians, and for many years was a scourge to the frontier with a price upon his head.”

He was 30 when he learned the alphabet; at 37 he was an ordained Presbyterian minister with a knowledge of English and classical languages—he had a strong preference for Greek—as well as of many of the 50 Indian tongues still spoken in the United States. Amazing progress? Well, why not? He says he found work and study a joy. Yet he never went to school a day in his life; and if he “was educated by life” as he says, he still regrets the opportunities which he feels would have been his through the advantages of school and college.

With him on the platform is his accomplished daughter, “Nacoomie,” to whom, in part, he has been able to hand on his rich heritage of Indian lore. Her part in the program is to explain the function of music in the daily life of the Indian, and to demonstrate on her

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