America's history is paradoxical. The nation was born echoing the spirit of liberty and self-determination and served as the refuge for the oppressed and impoverished of Europe. During the process of growth and maturation, however, the ideals proclaimed in the halls of Philadelphia were somehow lost to the plantation barons of the South and to the adventurous souls who challenged and conquered the American West. Liberty in those environments was translated into human exploitation and Indian removal. Manifest Destiny, the belief that white men were ordained to rule this continent, was won at the terrible expense of Indian blood and freedom. As an anonymous warrior remarked: "They made us many promises, more than I can remember, but they never kept but one; they promised to take our land, and they took it." Dorothy Clarke Wilson, in her compassionate biography and popular history, recounts the experiences of the Omahas and Poncas with American justice and the determined struggle of a courageous Indian woman to expose the wrongs visited upon her people.

Her name in the Omaha language was Bright Eyes, but she was also Susette La Flesche, daughter of a French-Indian who became the last head chief of the Omahas. Dorothy Clarke Wilson, as a novelist, in Bright Eyes re-creates, with some literary license, the early struggles and identity crises that this woman's dual background created. There was not one world but two, and Bright Eyes had to learn to live in both of them. Sometimes it seemed that she was two people, accepted neither by the Indians nor the white culture, but she was also to overcome these difficulties and bridge the gap that represented the two forces within her. Educated in the East, she returned to her reservation in 1875 at the age of twenty-one with one purpose: to educate her people and bring them into the modern age. Instead, she was thrust into an intense and historic drama that altered her life and contributed to the improvement of the conditions of the American Indian.

A kindred tribe, the Poncas, their treaty broken in 1876 in the reaction to the Custer defeat, was exiled to barren desert land in the Indian territory. With her brother Francis, the dynamic Ponca chief Standing Bear, and the reformer and future Populist, Thomas Tibbles, she traveled East to enlist the support of sympathetic white people.
The author recounts how Bright Eyes, at first shy and terrified, grew as an orator and began filling halls and churches from Boston to Washington, D. C. She became a powerful and much feted spokeswoman for the Indian cause and included among her admirers such notables as Helen Hunt Jackson, Wendell Phillips, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. In an era when white women were struggling for their political rights, Bright Eyes symbolized the crusading woman at her best. Overcoming the racial and sexual barriers that faced her, she challenged the government bureaucracy and was able to win some substantial concessions for both the Poncas and the Omahas. Later, as the wife of Thomas Tibbles, she lectured in England, fought for Indian citizenship and other reform causes, and was at Wounded Knee during the massacre of 1890. Although she died at the young age of forty-eight in 1902, the struggle for justice far from consummated, her people and the American conscience were enriched by her efforts.

On the whole, the book is quite readable and interesting, although a more scholarly approach would have served the topic better. The themes are often treated in a simplistic manner and solely from the Indian point of view, and there is no attempt at interpretation or analysis. Without footnotes, it is impossible to determine whether the author's statements and quotes are accurate. Nevertheless, because of the need for literature on the Indian experience, a good popular history can make a valuable contribution if it attempts to acquaint the public with the essentials of a historical problem. This, Dorothy Clarke Wilson accomplishes with skill and style.

_Upsala College_  
East Orange, New Jersey  

Michael N. Dobkowski


As we approach the celebration of the nation's bicentennial, a plethora of volumes dealing with revolutionary America is being published almost daily. Some are written by the specialist for others similarly inclined. The vast majority, however, are designed to appeal to