

PREFACE

IN OFFERING this book to the public after having had the manuscript actually on my desk for more than nine years, let me say frankly that no one realizes better than myself, now, the magnitude of the subject and the many faults of my attempt to handle it.

My attention was first directed to the Sign Language in 1882 when I went to live in Western Manitoba. There I found it used among the various Indian tribes as a common language, whenever they were unable to understand each other's speech. In later years I found it a daily necessity when traveling among the natives of New Mexico and Montana, and in 1897, while living among the Crow Indians at their agency near Fort Custer, I met White Swan, who had served under General George A. Custer as a Scout. He had been sent across country with a message to Major Reno, so escaped the fatal battle; but fell in with a party of Sioux, by whom he was severely wounded, clubbed on the head, and left for dead. He recovered and escaped, but ever after was deaf and practically dumb. However, sign-talk was familiar to his people and he was at little disadvantage in daytime. Always skilled in the gesture code, he now became very expert; I was glad indeed to be his pupil, and thus in 1897 began seriously to study the Sign Language.

In 1900 I included a chapter on Sign Language in my