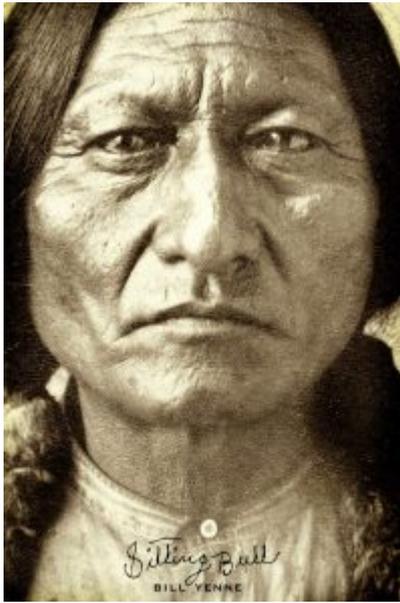


At Standing Rock



April 1st 2016

It is 1876.
Sitting Bull stands
silent and alone in the dark
on Standing Rock.

He awaits sight of Mother
Nature's beautiful plain.

The proud Sioux Chief
then sits
with eagle-eyed,
head-dressed head in hands
crying into the mist
on the cusp of morning.

No one else
has yet awakened in the camp.

The day is dawning
long before the *clever clocks* –
the ones on silver chains
that shun a need for sun –
march in on the lily-white chests
of timeless men with guns

in the inside pockets
of brass-buttoned uniforms.

He carries
the heavy gift of holy sight,
looks out into the future
of his Great People

but sees only blood
stretch out
in a bleeding delta
of generations
as far as his mind's eye
can bear to see.

A raven flies overhead
and casts a dark shadow
on the red clay, on stone,
onto a tree trunk; and
then – after it glides low
across the rosy-fingered
sky – fleetingly it lands
on the sacred back
of a lone white buffalo
standing conspicuous
in the innocence
of the sleeping, steaming herd.

It too lifts its heavy head.
It too wants to bellow aloud.

He cries-out (silently) again;
sweats blood, unseen.

He remembers the vast herds
of his childhood.

They are both all eyes and ears
and nostrils. They scent the wind.

His heart bears the searing heat
and pain of inevitability.

It will be a short-lived victory
at Little Bighorn.

He knows this, but will not tell
his beautiful fresh-faced Braves.

Many will die there
but at least they will hold some
hope and love in their hearts;
and feel alive before they bleed.

*

Those mighty bellows echo
through to this day
and – in their wake –
that proud and tenacious race
with no rush for oil

(the new fools' liquid gold)
rides in again on horseback,
two hundred strong,
to stand for hope here
in this ugly face of greed.

John D. Kelly

The photograph is from the cover of Bill Yenne's book *Sitting Bull*