

CHAPTER XI

THEY DANCE TO GRANDFATHER INYAN

Wi, the sun, had passed his meridian when the little voyagers emerged from the jungle and came again, with a great delight, under the protection of the giant trees—upon the friendly trunk-grown spaces where there were no bushes, briars, nor jagged, hidden stones to bruise the feet and tear the moccasins.

But this time they did not walk through silent aisles. No air stirred the under-world, but its high canopy of evergreens was shaken by a strong west wind. The voyagers stopped often to gaze at these mighty swaying tree-tops and to listen to the roaring song of Wakinyan as his wind blew among them. Now and then a limb, thickly feathered with green needles, was broken from its parent stem and fell, top downward, floating gently like the dropping of a prairie tumble weed.

Where the lower spaces were so still, where there was such a fragrant incense, and the earth was pleasant to the feet, the children did not think that harm could come to them.

When they found a little dip containing good water they built a fire fearlessly. Very sweet and good the goose meat tasted and again they ate a large quantity, all they had, in fact.

DANCE TO GRANDFATHER INYAN

About mid-afternoon they came to a country of sand hills, where the trees were scattering and the sloping sun shone among them cheerfully. Among the hillocks, too, they came upon a fine pool of water with sunny sand banks and where small game was abundant.

They were weary with their long tramp through the jungle but here they rested quickly and after a time they reveled in the sands, enjoying their sunlit warmth and shiny whiteness. Here they remembered indeed the dunes of the Niobrara, where they had builded sand heaps for tepées and villages, where sticks thrust in the ground represented soldiers and people and horses—forked sticks were for the Scili or Pawnees. And they had traced in tiny finger trenches the winding courses of streams, and with little punches of the finger ends the cunning and devious trails of the men—and the boys—who had gone to war.

And the pony stealing! How exciting that had been! Sticks, ringed and streaked by bark peelings, and usually long enough to bestride, represented ponies. How elaborately they had planned their mimic raids against the herds of mimic hostiles, and how their own soldiers always came riding home in triumph with many horses which they generally gave away to poor people! And sometimes, too, these warriors bore upon poles some curiously-tied tufts of

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

prairie grass, which represented the scalps of the Hohé, the Scili, or of white men, and there was triumph and dancing indeed.

For is it not patriotic and glorious to slay the enemies of one's own nation, those who would wrest from a people not only their lives but their homes and their hunting grounds—who would wipe them off the face of the earth? And do not the children of everybody's dear native land march under banners, with uplifted eyes and devout faces, singing the songs of victory; and are the tomahawk and the scalping knife less merciful than the bayonet and the exploding shell?

The little voyagers were daughter and son of a patriotic soldier and a patriotic mother, children of a federation which for centuries controlled a magnificent empire of territory, whose men, aye, and whose women, have fought for every inch of its ground with a heroism and despair never exceeded in the annals of history.

But this is a digression from a simple story of the wanderings of Zintkala-Zi and Etapa. The little maiden did not long forget the needs of the moment which were patching and moccasin-making. Her coarse cloth skirt was torn and needed repairs and her moccasins and leggins were much the worse for wear. So her *parflèche* was again emptied of its contents and her jacket of open sleeves was spread upon her lap to be darned. Etapa's buckskin capote and string-

DANCE TO GRANDFATHER INYAN

wound leggins had thus far suffered but little, save that they had to be rubbed dry and soft after their wettings.

While she worked Etapa set his wiles to capture a pair of red squirrels which presently appeared—wrong-end-up—barking from the near tree trunks. The Indian boy disdained to use a bow and arrow upon creatures so small and of such temerity, for he had already sufficiently proved himself a hunter. He therefore sought to distract the small, saucy animals with strange maneuvers, to fill them with still greater excitement and, when he had succeeded, left his blanket hanging upon the bush where he had played his antics and stole away behind its shelter. He thus wormed himself silently away till he had gained the cover of a hillock when he stole softly around behind the oak tree trunk where, only a few feet from the ground, the little up-ended fellows were "sqwukking" themselves hoarse.

With an owl-like swoop of his capote the lad actually swept one of the squirrels off its perch but, in falling, the nimble creature evaded his quick pounce and so escaped. He did not succeed in catching either squirrel although he chased them to another tree. There were hundreds of wild pigeons in these woods. Several of these birds and a grouse he killed in skirting the little lake.

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

In one of these short excursions the boy came upon a venerable gray boulder which stood as high as the surrounding trees and was many steps in circumference at its base. Except where the moose had eaten them off this towering rock was thickly grown with lichens which gave it a hoary appearance of great age.

Etapá stood for some minutes, his eyes cast upward, venerating this aged and eternally-enduring one which knows not time, seasons nor change. Then the boy went softly back to Zintkala. "Come," he said, "I have found Grandfather Inyan—the very aged one. Let us smoke and pray to him."

So they went together softly among the sand hillocks until they confronted Grandfather Inyan. While Etapá prepared his pipe and willow bark for smoking, Zintkala stood—as a small devotee before a shrine—looking devoutly up at the everlasting one, the vast sentinel and guide set so mysteriously among the trees.

"It is taku-wakan," (something wonderful), she said. While Etapá smoked, offering incense to the rock, sky and trees, she prayed thus:

"Behold us, small ones, O Grandfather Inyan. You are doubtless very old and wise, therefore you, O Grandfather Inyan, and ye trees, assist us greatly that we may find our way homeward."

Fire is sacred to Inyan, therefore under the

DANCE TO GRANDFATHER INYAN

shadow of the great rock they built one of dry sticks and gathered a heap of fagots to keep the blaze going until far into the night. Then alternately they returned to the pond and bathed and purified their bodies, for, they said, "We will make a feast and dance to Grandfather Inyan, and so he shall help us."

After they had eaten they combed their hair, greasing it with pieces of goose fat which Zintkala had saved, and then braided and tied their tresses becomingly.

After a reasonable time, by the light of the fire they had built to him, they gave a sacred dance to Grandfather Inyan and his protecting pines. Upon a little plat of level ground, facing a broad scarp of the rock and embowered in dark-topped evergreens, these little brown children danced.

The girl with close drawn blanket, with rapt face and serious air, performed her part in measured dainty movements, dancing with her toes turned inward.

The boy, with less grace but no less reverent face, sprang lightly from foot to foot chanting low ejaculations of prayer.

Had the rock and the trees, sheltering their small circle of light and their brown swaying figures, possessed the ears, hearts and powers attributed to them, they must have moved even their roots to respond to the appeals for pity

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

which these lost and revering waifs addressed to them.

When they had danced until they were weary they stretched themselves tightly rolled in their blankets upon the sands and, with renewed trust in the future, fell asleep.

CHAPTER XII

FLIGHT

Again a balmy spring morning with no stir of wind and the woods silent save for the scream of a jay or the chirruping of pine-inhabiting birds.

It was nearly sunrise when the voyagers crawled out of their blankets. After the first buoyant breath they remembered that the plentiful pigeons had flown away at sunset of the evening before and, in their feast to Grandfather Inyan, they had eaten all the birds they had.

There was nothing to regret, but they were so hungry and there were no birds in sight. There were red squirrels in these woods and, though they were very small, a number of them would make a suitable meal—and so Etapa strung his bow to hunt for them.

"Hoye, sister," he said, "if any birds arrive at these trees, cry out to me and I will come to shoot them."

He was about to go after the squirrels when he saw in Zintkala's face the dawning sense of fear and uneasiness which, for no apparent cause, he himself was beginning to feel. When he finished speech he failed to move in the direction he had intended. Both children stood in listening attitude.