These were not the last words of Iron Soldier, but he speedily grew weaker, and his breath now and then came in gasps. He spoke occasionally to give some further directions, and to ask for water. Until sunset he sat with a rapt expression, looking out over a vast expanse of prairie to eastward. When the world of night fell he aroused and chanted his death song. The children brought up wood and made a fire that the man's spirit might not go out in darkness. In the night the soldier ceased to breathe, and they saw that he was dead. In the place of relatives who should mourn for him Zintkala blackened her face with earth, and drew her blanket close about her head. She went out upon the hillside and cried, wailing piteously for the death of a great warrior.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BIG YELLOW RIVER

When morning came, Etapa and Zintkala raised a heap of stones over the body of Iron Soldier. Thus they gave him the monument which his warrior's heart had craved. His war-club, his knife and his pipe they placed at his hands.

His short "buffalo gun," the trophies he had taken in evidence of his prowess, his powder horn and bullet pouch were made fast to his saddle, which Etapa put upon his own horse, in order that this property of the soldier's might be sent to his relatives.

The children would gladly have taken the warrior's pony but the animal was too poor and weak for continued and fast travel.

They now changed their camp to the far end of the marsh lake, where they stayed for another two suns, gathering and curing meat. Upon the rich grasses of the upland their ponies recovered heart and strength, and they departed for the Missouri River, well provided for a long journey.

Two days of uneventful travel across flat prairies and the river hills brought them to the bluffs of the Missouri. There was no mistaking

the deep valley, with its broad winding ribbon of yellow water and gray sands. The children chattered delightedly at sight of this river which ran through their own country, that broad belt which still belonged to their nation. They camped upon its banks, feeling that, at last, they were near to the towns of their own people, and secure from the attack of foes.

They knew that they must go down the river several days' journey to arrive at the Yankton village, where their mother's people lived. They had plenty of cured meat left for this travel, but they had been riding hard and both their animals and themselves needed rest. They had become much attached to their hardy ponies, White Dog and Red Stars, and they picketed these animals carefully where there was the best grass. It was mid-forenoon when they stopped, and they passed a share of the day lying within the shade of some cottonwood trees in refreshing sleep.

When they awoke they sat happily for a long time on the river bank. Looking upon this familiar yellow current they felt much at home. They had only to follow its course for a little time to get among their own people. Yet now that they were, as they supposed, so near to Yanktonais villages they were not impatient to advance, as they would have been toward their own Oglala town.

They had gained in courage and self-reliance, and the possession of two strong ponies and a supply of cured meat gave them a stout feeling of independence. They did not move from their camp among the cottonwoods until the following morning.

They then went down the stream, following its eastern bank, for on that side lived the Yanktonais. They traveled in the valley, except where bluffs came to the river's brink. Much of the way they followed ancient beaten trails, which had been used from time immemorial by Indians, traveling up and down the river. Here and there they passed the sites of villages long since abandoned. The beaten earth, the buffalo skulls, decayed antlers of deer and elk, and old, charred tepée stakes were additional and welcome evidences of a Sioux country. Even tumble-down scaffoldings, from which the remains of the dead had been removed, were cheerful sights to these returning voyagers.

Yet this was an almost gameless country. Already the buffalo had been driven far to the westward, and they were not often seen along the Missouri. Far up the river, too, trading posts had long been established, and the trappers, voyageurs, and Indian fur and robe hunters had stripped the river of its game animals; hence so many abandoned villages. In a day's ride the children saw no more than a half-dozen fleet-

footed antelope and they saw no other animals larger than ground-squirrels. Their own buffalo country lay yet five or six days' hard riding to west of the big river. But they knew that route up and down the Smoky River, from the Yankton village, whither they were going. They did not know for just how many suns they must travel down the river, but the assurance of reaching their own people in safety was now very great.

So they rode joyously and carelessly. On the second day after crossing the mouth of a stream they came upon the site of a newly vacated village, where there was every evidence that a large number of people had lived for a long time, and that their removal had been undertaken and accomplished in haste. Very few of the tepée stakes had been pulled. These stood just as the covers had been stripped from them. Lying about were old pieces of skins, rope, articles of household furniture, odds and ends, which ordinarily Indian families would not have left behind.

Evidently these people had moved their village in a hurry, and were intending to go a long distance, and to travel fast. They had crossed the river right there, too, swimming their horses to a dry sand-bar, upon which a trail could be distinguished from a high bank near the abandoned town. This was doubtless one of those

Yanktonais towns of which Iron Soldier had spoken.

This evidence of a hasty leaving gave the children some uneasiness. Yet it was getting on toward the buffalo killing season, and if people heard that there were plenty of buffaloes a long way off they would, of course, make haste to go to that country, for sometimes the people had to travel many suns before they could find the buffalo, and they must start early.

This was Zintkala's reasoning. But after careful examination of the ground, Etapa came to another conclusion.

"I think, older sister," he said, "that these Yanktonais folk have heard about the war people are talking of, and they were afraid the white soldiers would come to attack their women and children. Therefore, they are moving rapidly to take them a long way off."

"Then let us go across the river, too, younger brother," urged the sister. "I fear to stay on this side lest the enemy come."

"No, let us not do so yet," replied the boy. "We can at any time swim across the river with our horses. I do not see that anyone has been here since these people went away. They have been gone five suns, I think."

They passed on from this point another day's journey upon the east side of the river. They saw nothing to alarm them, but on the second

day came upon another abandoned village, bearing the same evidence that people had moved across the river and gone off in haste. Without doubt runners had come to these villages recently, bearing news of great importance.

The children had again only the choice of two conclusions. Either the soldiers of the Great Father were coming to destroy these towns or there were a great many buffaloes a long journey to the westward, and the herds perhaps moving farther away.

They were filled with alarm and uneasiness. As the country directly west was unknown to them they felt that they had need to travel on to the Yankton village, where their mother's people lived, in order to find their way homeward. They now feared that they would find that town also abandoned—and their anxiety was very great.

They still kept to the east side of the river for Etapa reasoned, with admirable judgment, that if an enemy were surely coming to attack the Indians of those towns, they would at once cross the river and take up their trails. Therefore the voyagers were already traveling upon the safest side.

On the third day, at near noon, they found themselves upon a high bluff looking down upon a country which they suddenly recognized as familiar. This was the country of the Yank-

tons, and, in a strip of timber, not far down the river, the tepées of their mother's people should be found if these had not, like the Yanktonais, suddenly removed.

Instinctively the little voyagers scanned the flats and hill slopes, on both sides the river, for the pony herds or at least some scattered animals which should be grazing. There were none to be seen. Nor was there any smoke curling above the trees, nor any person or living object on all the stretch of river bars and open valley.

"They are gone," said Etapa. "They are gone," echoed Zintkala, and they turned their faces away from each other.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BOAT WHICH WAS NOT STRAIGHT TONGUE'S

The little voyagers had told each other that perhaps they should find the Yanktons and Santees gone from their village. Nevertheless, each felt an overwhelming sense of disappointment when the fact of removal was made apparent. They rode down the bluffs, along the valley, and into the timber without speaking. Doubtless the lump of homesickness and desolation which each of these children was trying to swallow was quite as big and ached quite as hard as though they had been German, French or English.

When they reached the deserted village grounds they sat for a time upon their ponies, looking at the skeleton tepées, the empty pony corrals, the familiar trees, the well trodden grass plats and shady places, where they had played with their young relatives. They neither spoke to nor looked at each other. They rode slowly and silently down the river to an old swimming ford, where their trail showed that the Yanktons had crossed some days since.

Here the voyagers stripped to the breech-

clout, tied all their clothing and effects securely on top of their blanket saddles, and drove their ponies into the current. They swam behind, holding to the animals' tails, and thus guided their course. After they had swam and floated with the current for half a mile or so, they reached shallow water and waded out upon a bar of dry sand which extended in a pointed neck into the current. This long shifting bar the Yanktons and Santees had used many years for a landing in crossing to the west. In its sand they were also obliged to travel up stream again a considerable distance to gain ascent of the bluff bank on that side.

Upon this bar, near the point, Etapa and Zintkala stopped to dry and rub their clothes, which, as their saddles were low, had been wetted more or less. Their ponies, with dragging picket ropes, stood in the sand and lazily switched at occasional flies. It takes a long time to dry buckskins properly. They need to be rubbed vigorously to keep the skins from shrinking and becoming rough and uncomfortable to wear. The children had been engaged in this work for some time when they heard a noise which suddenly filled them with excitement. Chuff! Chuff! Chuff! It was the hoarse grumbling cough of a river steamer! These sounds came from up the river, and Zintkala and Etapa leaped to their feet and clapped their hands joyfully.

"Straight Tongue's boat! Straight Tongue's boat!" shouted the delighted little Sioux. They made haste to put on their clothes. The only steamer they had ever seen had stopped the spring before to leave at the Yankton village a man whom all the Dakotas, who knew him, loved. The bands whom he had visited had given him the name of Straight Tongue,* because they had found that his words were true, and that he kept his promises. This man was indeed the true friend of Indians, and a missionary who did everything within his power to assist these poor people in their struggles to obtain justice. Something he was able to do—though but little—here and there to stay the tide of ruthless and lawless invasion which overwhelmed them.

Zintkala and Etapa knew this man, and, better still, he knew them as the children of Fire Cloud of the Oglalas. Once, when they had been visiting the Yanktons, Straight Tongue had stayed among these Indians a number of suns. His boat had brought him up the river and had come down to take him away. He had talked much with the people, and they had been very sorry to see the good man go. They would gladly have kept him with them.

While the brother and sister were at the mission school, also, Straight Tongue had visited that place. He had spoken kindly to them, Zintkala and Etapa. He had remembered their names and had taken each by the hand.

* This man was Bishop H. P. Whipple.

As these children had seen but the one steamboat—which was very mysterious and wonderful—they had supposed there was but one such, and that was Straight Tongue's. They had always spoken of this boat as Taku-wakan-tanka, (something-mysteriously-wonderful).

They stood out upon the bar near to the water's edge, that they might easily be seen when the boat should pass. They hoped that it would come near enough so that Straight Tongue would see them, and that he would wish to inquire whither the Dakotas of the village were gone. Or, they thought, it might be that Straight Tongue knew this, even that he had sent these people away, and could tell where they were. This good man spoke their language, and they wished very much that he would land his boat there. He could, no doubt, tell them whether the Great Father's soldiers were coming. Thus they reasoned with hope and joy.

"Brother, I think Straight Tongue will surely see us," said Zintkala. "Do you think he will be in the boat tepée? He will surely remember the Yanktons and come out to see them?"

"Straight Tongue's boat is coming very fast—I do not see him—see what a great smoke he is making," answered Etapa, with excitement.

Absorbed in the wonder of this coughing,

churning, smoking vessel the little voyagers stood, all eyes and ears, until suddenly the ranks of wood upon its fore-deck swarmed with men, having guns in their hands, as they could see by the glint of the sun upon the barrels. These men immediately began to shoot and yell.

Not until they saw the water spattering in their front and heard the whining yeun!—yeun!—yeun! of bullets passing overhead did the astonished children realize that the men upon that boat—Straight Tongue's boat!—were shooting at them. When convinced they were terribly frightened, but certain there had been some dreadful mistake. They looked wildly about for some avenue of escape. There was none, for the flat sand-bar was raised scarcely a foot above the water's edge. Seeing their hopeless situation the voyagers waved their arms in frantic appeal. They shouted their names—the name of their father. They called to Straight Tongue, "Do not shoot at us!"

Their appeals were answered by a storm of shots. Hoping against hope, that when the boat came nearer, their signals and cries would reach friendly or pitying ears, the little Sioux took refuge behind their ponies.

Still thinking Straight Tongue's men were shooting by mistake, they continued to wave their arms above their heads. They shouted piteous appeals. "No shoot! No shoot!" they

cried in English. "Ho! cola! cola!" (friends! friends!).

The boat had now come within more accurate range. Etapa's pony was stricken dead and dropped at his feet. He ran behind his sister's horse, and the two redoubled their frantic hand-wavings and shouted appeals for pity.

But more men—a packed crowd—had climbed upon the wood ranks. In wild excitement these were shooting with rifles, revolvers, all sorts of firearms. It was rare sport for them, this opportunity to kill a couple of hated redskins.

Zintkala's pony was struck twice and, mortally hurt, broke away and plunged erratically about in the sand.

The little voyagers now ran, still holding up their hands in vain appeal. Half way across the bar Zintkala fell. Etapa reached the shallow water a few rods from where they had stood and flung himself face downward.

Wild and savage whoops and cheers greeted the little girl's fall, and these were repeated when the boy dropped; but, seeing his black head move upon the surface as he attempted to swim or crawl to deeper water, the boat's pitiless crew assailed him with a fresh storm of bullets. Then either the nature of the channel demanded retreat from the bar, or the boat's pilot was not void of heart, for the steamer drew rapidly away

toward the opposite bank of the river and passed beyond bullet range.

Etapa, in sudden fear lest the boat should round the bar, and thus the shooters should attack him from that side, retreated to the sand. He looked fearfully after the steamer until it had passed around a bend and out of sight. He had supposed his sister was dead, having seen her fall, but, upon turning to the bar again, he saw her sitting upon the sand with her hands clasping her head. With a joyful cry the boy ran toward her.

"Hoye, Tanké," he shouted. "It appears the waśécunpi have not killed you!"

Zintkala did not answer nor appear to hear him until the boy ran to her, shouting her name in great anxiety. As he came up the little girl lifted a blood-streaked face and gazed at him dazedly for a moment. A bullet had grazed her head, cutting the skin upon her temple, and joyfully the boy saw that her hurt was neither mortal nor very dangerous.

He ran to her dead pony, secured her tin basin and fetched it to her filled with water. She had now begun to realize what had happened. She bathed her bloody face and hands and so collected her senses and came fully to herself.

Her eyes turned toward her fallen pony. "Why did Straight Tongue's men kill our horses?" she wailed, beginning to cry.

The boy's eyes followed hers to the dead ponies, and he struggled with his desolate feeling of loss. But he answered with that sense of justice and acceptance of the inevitable which characterizes individuals of the American race.

"Older sister," he said, "it was not Straight Tongue did thus to us. It was the white soldiers. They have taken his boat from him and are going up and down the river killing our people. So it is that we find them all fled from their villages."

This seemed a very reasonable solution of the calamity which had befallen them. The little girl visibly brightened. At least there was comfort in the thought that Straight Tongue could not have so betrayed and ill-treated his friends.

"How, I think that is true," she said, ceasing to cry. "It was the war soldiers who came. It seems that we were very careless to stand thus near."

After a little time her wound ceased to bleed, and the two went to their ponies and unpacked such things as they wished to carry with them. They took what cured meat they had left, their blankets, the gun, powder horn, bullet pouch, and scalp trophies of Iron Soldier, the basin and such pieces of buckskin as they had used for packing purposes. They left behind Etapa's hatchet and all cumbersome articles. Thus lightly equipped they took up their march again on foot.