
TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

frequently climbed the river's banks to look. Several times, however, the magpies had talked to them and flown on down the stream. The birds thus evidently beckoned them on to find the Oglalas.

The face of the country had changed, and the voyagers found themselves in a strange land, a country of tall buttes and gaping cañons, of wonderful high rocks of many colors, of colossal formations which appeared to be immense tepées of earth and stone. The stream had increased in volume but, with a courage not less than sublime, they steered their bull boat over rapids and into the dark forbidding shadows of the cañons.

CHAPTER XXX

A PARADE FIGHT

Fire Cloud's village of Oglalas together with several bands of Yanktonais and Brulés had gathered in a semi-military encampment in the Bad Lands. Hither they had come because of the war cloud which had gathered over all the land. Their soldiers had not fled to this country from fear, but to gain a stronghold for their women and children, and where they might fight to advantage should the armies of the blue coat come against them.

Too well they knew that a Sioux was a Sioux to be killed or captured without discrimination when the Great Father sent his angry soldiers into their country, and that to be captured was to suffer—worse than death—disease and slow starvation. And here was much good fighting ground; here were many cunning hiding places and covered lines of escape.

Being a large company of many hundreds, the Sioux did not seek to hide their village nor to pitch their tepées within natural defences. They depended rather upon their scouts to inform of the approach of enemies, and held themselves in readiness to fortify or to break camp and scatter upon short notice should necessity demand. So they were camped along the

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

river, where there was wood and grass, upon an open flat, surrounded by castellated buttes and the eroded heights and washouts of the Bad Country.

This open plain, which extended for several miles along the stream, became the parade ground and riding school of their young men. Here they raced their ponies and practiced the arts of war. Many posts of half-decayed cottonwoods and willows were set in the earth, and every day riders hurled themselves past these lines of dummy men, shooting their arrows and throwing the lance. Some became very expert in "hitting the post," and were commended by their elders who often looked on, enjoying the sport. The makers of bows and arrows, lances and other material of war, were uncommonly busy at this season.

Many antelope and elk also were killed by the large parties of hunters who, on account of their numbers, went out fearlessly to the chase. The summer days at this camp were really gala-days and the people had not been happier for a long time. Early in the dry grass moon, too, buffaloes trailed in large bands, across the Bad Lands. The Sioux took meat and robes until their women could no longer handle the stores. They had enough to furnish meat and clothing for no one knew how long. When they had considered this good fortune they said:

A P A R A D E F I G H T

"Now indeed we know that we have done well to come to this place, for the Waniyan Tanka has evidently sent the buffaloes against a time of need."

The hunters gave feasts to their friends and made many smoke offerings. After the hunting the young men and some of the middle-aged resumed the games, the races, and sham battles.

Some weeks before the buffalo killing a large village of river Crows, living in the valley of the Yellowstone, discovered this new town of the Sioux. The Crows were much alarmed lest a large war party should come against them. So they sent runners to the up-river Crows and to their cousins among the Mountain People saying, "A very big village of Sioux have arrived near to us. Come quickly and help us fight them, lest we be destroyed!"

These people, who lived but a few days' ride distant, immediately sent large war parties. So many Indians gathered at the Crow village that they fetched their women and children, lest these should be surprised and scattered. A camp formed on the Yellowstone even larger than that in the Bad Lands. The wise men of these bands held many councils considering how best to proceed against the invaders, and their young men, too, practiced the sham fights and vied with each other in feats of horsemanship.

The allies sent out their most cunning scouts

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

to spy upon the Sioux, and these reported great preparations for war among the enemy. They were about to go against the Sioux when the buffaloes came. After a great killing and many feasts the head men said, "Now we must attack those people and destroy their town."

They again sent scouts to see if the Sioux remained. Three of these approached the Dakota town from some heights. They were mounted upon fleet horses, and wished simply to look down upon the river valley from some secluded elevation. They were riding upon the scarp of a bluff in a gorge, when they heard voices of strangers. Looking to the opposing bluff they saw two riders, who sat upon their ponies, making signals. The men were Sioux, and the Crow scouts were fearful at first lest themselves had fallen into a trap.

But their alarm was quickly disposed of, for one of the strangers shouted at them in a tongue which they understood:

"Ho, Kangi! you indeed imagine that you are very cunning. You are like your relatives, the real crows, who fly squalling with a loud noise so that everyone sees them. If your soldiers are not all cowards and skunks you will come on to fight us. If you do not come soon we will send some of our old women to beat your men with switches."

This speech, flung at them from across a deep

A P A R A D E F I G H T

cañon and beyond arrow range, exasperated the Crow scouts greatly. They shouted their war cry and retorted with bitter taunts.

"You Dakotas will see us soon enough!" cried one at length. "You had better send your women and children and your herds home quickly. Even then, after we have given your bodies to the coyotes, we will follow and take your property."

The answer of the Sioux to this harangue was certainly irritating. These scouts simply sat on their ponies cawing "haw! haw! haw!" and doubled themselves with laughter.

The Crows returned to the Yellowstone and reported the impossibility of taking the Sioux by surprise. They also told faithfully of the challenge of the Sioux scouts and, learning of this, the young men of the allies were eager to go against the Dakotas, and their elders said, "If these Sioux think we are afraid, all the Dakotas will come to take our country and thus they will give us much trouble. Come, let us adventure our bodies against them!"

The next day many hundreds of men in full war dress set out for the Bad Lands. As this large war party approached their stronghold its movements were noted and reported by the Sioux spies.

At their encampment the tepées were pitched together in compact rows and this solid village was surrounded, at a safe distance, by a row of

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

willow posts with stout poles laid against them and attached with rawhide ropes. Thus they raised an effective barricade against charging horsemen. They also built large corrals to protect their herds from a night stampede. The posts and poles for this work they had cut at their leisure during the summer.

When the Crow spies reported this fortified village to their war leaders and partisans some said, "We cannot take this Sioux town, therefore let us make a stronghold from which we may harass them."

This counsel was agreed upon and the Crows and Mountain People camped upon an easily defended elevation where there was water and feed for their horses. This war camp was made above the Sioux town overlooking the river flats, and where the party could keep open communication with their people on the Yellowstone.

After a day or two of expectant waiting the Sioux, seeing the enemy hesitate to attack, went out as before and resumed their games and shooting at the post. Only now they donned their war shirts and feathered bonnets.

This open contempt nettled the allies and they, too, sent their young men down, bedecked and painted, to display themselves in the valley above and on the other side of the stream. A party of Sioux approached some of these within hailing distance and signaled across the river.

A P A R A D E F I G H T

"Koo-ée, Kangi!" they shouted. "Come down on this plain and fight us. Let us fight in the large circles that none may take advantage. We shall see who are the best soldiers!"

This challenge to a fair fight in open field, pleased the Crow and Mountain soldiers, in fact fired them into enthusiasm.

"Good—good!" cried their leader after they had digested the matter. "We will surely venture our bodies in battle. Come forth from your willow pen to-morrow and we will go against you. See that you do not hide in your corrals!"

True to their promises the allies rode down from their heights in the morning and forded the stream to a wide open ground. When they saw these squads of horsemen really coming off the bluffs a great shout ran through the Sioux town. They had scarcely credited the boast of the Crows whom, on the whole, they had bested in years of predatory fighting. The big village was thrown into an uproar as men ran for their horses or rushed into the tepée to don paints and war dress. In an incredibly brief space of time crowds of pony riders, as gay and fantastic in appearance as masqueraders at Mardi Gras, went clattering out upon the river flat. They were armed mostly with the bow and arrow, but many carried lances decked with streamers of vivid colors.

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

Though the writer has been eye-witness to such scenic display of wild riders as followed, no pen is adequate to description. These hostile war parties were not gathered from agency imprisoned creatures of broken and dependent spirit. They had never known the rule of an autocrat who might—or who might not—issue rations to their starving families as one throws bread to a dog.

They rode to battle as athletes meet upon the arena, hardy and daring in spirit and of iron endurance of body and limb. The foremost troops of the opposing bodies approached each other singing in loud minor strains to the beat of drums and clack of medicine rattles.

At a point perhaps two miles from the Sioux town the fighting began. There was no plan of battle to be noted. Groups and squads of horsemen, scattered hither and thither, were apparently riding aimlessly. Still others were coming singly and in strings from each of the hostile camps.

Suddenly, as flocks of birds scatter, a wild chaotic rout of flying riders spread upon the plain. Each frantic yelling horseman scurried at racing speed and each seemed bent upon his own business, quite regardless of the stampede before and behind.

Chaos reigned, but out of it came order in a twinkling. As by some trick of legerdemain the

A P A R A D E F I G H T

scurrying formless clouds wheeled into wide oblong rings of riders. Viewed from the heights about, the rims of these rings, revolving in opposite directions, might have seemed to run together. At the nearest point of contact they did not, in fact, vary much from fifty yards. For a quarter mile or so the hostile lines, riding in the same direction, ran nearly parallel to each other. No better arena for individual feats of riding, of daring and of marksmanship, could be devised.

In this fair and open field-fighting the Crows and their cousins of the mountain met the Oglalas, Yanktonais and Brulés and, despite any prejudice to the contrary, without purpose or thought of treachery to their young men's agreement.

Theirs was a parade battle which indulged to the fullest extent the native love for display and excitement. The faces and bare legs of the wild riders were streaked with brilliant paints. Gorgeous and trailing war-bonnets were the marks of men of distinction, while the flying braids of others, their saddle and bridle trappings, and even their horses' tails were decorated with gay streamers.

Seven-eighths of each wheeling circuit was ridden out in safety and, to save the wind of their ponies, the fighters rode at an easy gallop, displaying feats of horsemanship and whooping

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

and yelling until their noise filled the ears of all the anxious watchers at the Sioux village.

As each rider approached what may be termed the firing line, unless he wished to make a brave show by sitting upright, he threw himself upon or alongside his animal's withers and rode at top speed shooting his arrows over or under the pony's neck. Not many arrows could be discharged in a single dash by even the most expert of shooters, and usually these flew rather wide of the mark. But now and then a ruck of riders massed, and the feathered shafts flew thick and fast. In these *melées* happened most of the casualties. Here and there a pony was bowled over or a rider stricken and carried, living or dead, across the circuit on which he fell.

If a man's horse was killed and himself uninjured he loped away, inside his own lines, to secure a fresh one. As a pony could not run many times the circuit of these wide rings, and keep the pace, strings of horses were continually going to and fro between camp and battlefield. Many riders replenished their quivers by riding inside the fighting line, hanging from the saddle, and plucking the enemies' shafts from the ground. Some did this, with most admirable nerve and dexterity, amid a flight of whizzing missiles.

Thus passed several hours of glorious exercise and good fighting. A number had been killed

A P A R A D E F I G H T

and wounded on either side, but at midday neither circle of fighters had shown any marked superiority, and suddenly signals ran along the lines and the rings were broken and the riders fell together, at their centers, as by magic.

The crowds thus grouped flung themselves off their tired ponies and stretched their bodies upon the grass for rest and to smoke and eat and tell of brave exploits. Here food and water was brought by boys and young men, eager to be of service. And so for several hours the hostile armies reposed over against each other.