THE LURE OF THE MISSISSIPPI

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THE LURE OF THE MISSISSIPPI

BY

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ILLUSTRATED BY W. L. HOWES

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THE LURE OF THE MISSISSIPPI

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“Come out, you white men, and fight!”

FOREWORD

The story told here has for its scenic background the Mississippi River and its fine northern tributary, the Minnesota, the “Sky-tinted Water” of the Sioux Indians.

The story opens in the spring of 1861. The Civil War has begun. Lincoln has called for 75,000 volunteers, while to regiments and batteries of the small regular army orders have been issued to hurry to Washington as fast as possible. Colonel John C. Pemberton embarks his battery on the *Fanny Harris*, at Fort Ridgely on the Minnesota River. Hundreds of sullen Indians watch the troops leave, and visions of regaining their rich hunting grounds in the Minnesota valley arise in the minds of the starving savages, who have been brooding for several years over real and fancied wrongs.

Within a year of the departure of the soldiers, a furious Indian war sweeps over the young State of Minnesota, while on the Mississippi from Cairo to New Orleans Federal and Confederate fleets and armies battle for the control of the Great River. On this historical background move the characters of the story: Barker, the old trapper; Tatanka, the Sioux scout; Tim and Bill Ferguson, two Southern boys; and their doubtful friend, Cousin Hicks.

At Vicksburg, in the summer of 1863, we meet again the former Colonel John C. Pemberton, now a general in the Confederate army, stubbornly defending the besieged city against the Federal army under General Grant.

D. Lange.
St. Paul, Minnesota,
June, 1917.

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“Come out, you white men, and fight!”

With his right hand he raised the man’s head above the current.

“Walking is good, on you can ride on a log, the water is fine.”

The two men bought a boat of the trader.

“It is a forest of ghost trees,” Tatanka murmured.

“Take him out of our lines to that open field.”

CHAPTER I—ON BOARD THE *FANNY HARRIS*

There came through the night loud crashing and rumbling sounds, and a confusion of men's voices from the steep road leading down from Fort Ridgely to the boat-landing on the Minnesota River.

All afternoon, big William Ferguson and his ten-year-old brother, Timothy, had watched the six-mule teams of the United States Army trot down the steep narrow road with guns, caissons and army supplies, for Colonel Pemberton had been ordered to leave the Sioux frontier in Minnesota and rush his battery and men to Washington as fast as possible. Fort Sumter had been fired on. President Lincoln had called for 75,000 volunteers, and from north and west, the scattered detachments and batteries of the regular army were rushed to Washington. The long-threatened Civil War had begun.

But in those days, Minnesota was a long way from the Atlantic coast, for the railroads had only just touched the Mississippi River. The soldiers at Fort Ridgely had to travel five hundred miles by steamboat to La Crosse, and in order to make all possible haste, they continued by torchlight the loading of guns, caissons, ammunition, horses, and stores.

It was the liveliest day little Tim Ferguson and his big brother, Bill, had ever seen. Bill had at last gone to sleep, wrapped in his blanket, with his head resting on a coil of rope, but the active Tim had never tired of watching the soldiers loading the big guns, and the carpenters and engineers repairing the boat for the fast and dangerous downriver trip on the flooded, winding Minnesota.

When the crash of timbers and the shouts of men rang through the night, he shook his sleeping brother, calling:

"Get up, Bill, get up! A mule team has rolled down the bluffs; I told you they would. Come along, Bill!"

Tim had guessed right. Among the trees lay the wagon and mules, while boxes of shells and hard-tack were scattered through the brush. Had it not been for the trees and brush, men, mules and wagon would have rolled straight into

the swollen river.

“He’s sure a goner,” remarked one of the men, as he cut the traces of Old Harmony, the biggest mule of the battery. The neck of the mule was caught between two trees and his tongue was hanging out of his mouth full length. However, no sooner was he released, than he got up, shook himself, scrambled up the bluff and did not stop until he reached the corral, where he uttered one of those bugle-calls which had earned him the name of Old Harmony. But soldiers are accustomed to accidents of this kind, and within half an hour, Old Harmony’s Six were once more hitched to the big army-wagon. Both drivers and mules were a little more careful to keep the road and, by the light of glaring and smoking torches and blazing bonfires, the loading of the boat was rapidly finished.

When reveille sounded at daybreak, the men marched into the mess-hall at Fort Ridgely for their last breakfast in Minnesota.

There had been little sleep at the post during the night. Had a painter like Catlin been present, he could have left us some fine dramatic canvases.

Opposite the side of the fort which faced the open prairie away from the river, some six or seven hundred Sioux Indians were encamped. Only the squaws and the little children rolled up in their blankets in the tepees that night. Some of the men sat smoking around their camp-fires, but most of them sat on the river bank watching the boatmen and the soldiers working in the red glare of the torches and bonfires. They had heard that the white people were having a war amongst themselves. Now they knew that the story was true. The soldiers were going away on the steamer, and with the soldiers were going most of the big guns, against whose terrible thunder, balls, and canister no Indian braves have ever been able to keep up their courage.

“If the soldiers go away and take the big guns, we can get back the land along our river. We have been cheated out of it, and the Whites have never paid us for it,” a middle-aged warrior remarked.

“We can do more,” added a fierce-looking young man, known as the Boaster; “we can drive all the Whites out of Minnesota. But we shall keep their horses and their squaws and we shall make big feasts of their oxen. The Winnebagoes will help us. We shall make peace with the Chippewas and they will help us.

“We shall have our villages again at Kaposia and at Wabasha, on the Great River, and the Whites will have to stay on the other side of the Great River. This is our country and Manitou will send back the buffalo and the elk, and the deer will become numerous again. We shall have plenty of meat and skins as in the days of our fathers before the Whites had poisoned the land with their plows, for the black soil which the plows turn up is bad medicine for buffalo and elk and deer.”

When the shadows of the trees began to be reflected on the grayish current,

the last morning blast of the *Fanny Harris* echoed over the flooded valley. The three howitzers left at the fort fired a salute, the few remaining men cheered their departing comrades and the soldiers on board replied with a ringing hurrah for Abe Lincoln and Fort Ridgely. Then the pilot rang a bell, the hawsers were drawn on board, the big stern-wheel churned the water to a white foam, the heavily-laden steamer backed into the current, turned around slowly, and headed down stream for Fort Snelling near St. Paul.

On board, besides the soldiers, were Bill and Tim Ferguson, Sam Baker, a trapper, and Black Buffalo, an Indian scout.

The Ferguson brothers were Southern boys from Vicksburg, who had come North with a man they called Cousin Hicks, and with whom they lived in a squatter's cabin a few miles below Fort Ridgely. Hicks, about whose business in the Indian country there were many conflicting rumors afloat, had been away for a week visiting the Indians on the upper Minnesota, and in his absence Baker and Black Buffalo had invited the Ferguson boys to go with them to Fort Snelling and St. Paul.

The trip of the *Fanny Harris* from Fort Ridgely to La Crosse was never forgotten by any one on board. The *Fanny Harris* being a stern-wheeler, was naturally difficult to steer in a strong current. The Minnesota is one of the most twisted and crooked rivers in the West. In April, 1861, the water was so high that the placid, winding river had grown a mile wide, flooding its valley from bluff to bluff, and in many places the water flowed with a rushing current, crossing the river bed at all angles and making innumerable short cuts across fields, marshes, and woods.

"Back her up," the pilot's bell would sound as he tried to round one of the countless points or bends. But it was impossible to back the heavy boat against the current. The engineers could not even stop her. The best they could do was to check her speed and let her drift flanking around the wooded points, where trees and boughs raked her whole length, tearing down stanchions, guards, and gingerbread work with a deafening crash.

At other times, she would plunge straight into the timber, bending the smaller willows and other brush like so many reeds and tearing good-sized trees by the roots out of the soft mud, but before she could be again gotten into clear water, a big cottonwood bough had torn away another joint of her chimneys and smashed another part of her pilot-house.

But all this time, Colonel Lantry, who had been in supreme command ever since the boat had left Fort Snelling, stood on deck with the captain, or at the wheel with the pilots.

"Keep her going, keep her going! Keep your wheel turning!" were the only orders he gave to captain or pilot as he dodged trees and falling timbers.

“We must get to Washington, before the Rebels get there!”

“We’ll never get there,” vowed an old artilleryman who had been through the Mexican war with this same battery. “This is worse than a battle. We’ll never get there. We’ll be swimming around with the muskrats and roosting on the drift-wood and haystacks with them.

“I’d rather be in a battle where I can use my piece, than sail through the timber in this blooming tub on this beastly twisted river!”

Toward evening the steamer again crashed into the timber and a willow tree, springing back as the side of the boat had passed it, tore away several planks or buckets from the wheel.

“Boys, it’s for the rat-houses now,” called out the old gunner as the boat stopped with a crash.

But Colonel Lantry coolly repeated his usual: “Keep her going, Captain; keep her going! The Government will build you a new boat!” However, with a broken wheel she could not keep going.

“Take the anchor over to the other shore,” Captain Faucette ordered three men. “Then pass the line around the capstan and we’ll pull her back into open water. Well tie up here for the night and repair the wheel.”

Repairing the wheel was hard and dangerous work. With one hand the men worked at screwing down and unscrewing bolts and nuts, with the other hand they hung on to dripping, slippery planks and beams.

“Careful men, careful,” Captain Faucette cautioned them. “Any man that goes overboard into this icy current is lost.”

By the light of lanterns and torches, the men worked with a will. One bucket was just being lifted into place, when there was a scramble and a plunge—“Man overboard!” The cry arose and at once there was a confusion of hurrying feet and calling voices.

Tim, the Indian, and the trapper were just eating supper, while Bill had been watching and helping the men. Bill ripped off his coat. “Hold up the torches!” he called, and sprang after the man, who was just disappearing behind the wheel. The icy flood almost choked him, but he struck out after the man. By the glare of the torches he caught a glimpse of him bobbing up and being carried toward a mass of driftwood. He seized the back of the man’s shirt, pulled him to the driftwood, and tried to climb up, but it would not support his weight. He hooked his left arm around an overhanging willow, and with his right hand he raised the man’s head above the current.

“Bring a boat, quick!” he called. “I can’t hold on long. I’m all numb!”

In a few minutes, Mattson, the unfortunate carpenter, and Bill were safe on board and Colonel Lantry took charge of them.

“Here,” he said to two soldiers, “turn this man over on his face and bring

[image]

With his right hand he raised the man's head above the current.

him to. You know how."

Then to the men: "On with your work, men. We must reach Fort Snelling to-morrow night."

Bill had slipped away to his corner on the coil of ropes. His teeth chattered and his hands felt so numb that he could hardly wriggle out of his wet and sticky garments.

When he was once more in dry clothes, he hurried to the mess-room and asked the cook for the hottest tea he had.

The cook did not have to be told.

"I'd give you something better," he said, "if I had it, but the hot milk is all gone. The captain is in a deuce of a hurry, so we went right by Mankato and St. Peter without stopping."

After two cups of hot tea, sweetened with plenty of brown sugar, Bill's teeth stopped rattling, but set themselves with a will into the meal of ham, potatoes, and bread placed before the hungry boy, who had not yet had his supper.

While Bill was eating, Colonel Lantry came around.

"Where did you learn it, boy?" he asked. "It was a neat piece of work."

"Oh, I learned it at Vicksburg," Bill replied. "We boys used to swim across the river, but there the water is warm."

"At Vicksburg," the officer repeated. "You are not going to Vicksburg! You are too young to enlist. You had better stay in Minnesota. There's likely to be hell at Vicksburg before this war is over."

CHAPTER II—IN GREAT ANXIETY

The words of the Colonel had aroused a train of thoughts in the boy.

Was there really going to be war at Vicksburg? The boys had heard talk of

war, but not until they had watched the loading of the guns and the embarking of the soldiers and had heard the pressing orders of the keen, straight army officer to “keep her going,” to “push her through,” had this war talk meant anything to them.

Tim was almost too young to understand such things, but to Bill the war had suddenly become a fearful reality. Fortunately, these big guns were not going to Vicksburg; they were going to Washington, which was a long, long way from Vicksburg.

From the talk of the men and from newspapers which had occasionally fallen into Bill’s hands, the boys had learned that during the previous winter their own State, Mississippi, had left the Union, and that Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and Louisiana, had likewise followed the lead of South Carolina, which had seceded a few days before Christmas.

By this time almost everybody on the boat was asleep, except the carpenters and engineers, who were still working to put the steamer into first-class running shape.

But Bill’s mind turned from the great problem and puzzle of national events to more personal problems, which in a vague manner he had often tried to solve.

Why had his mother never told him anything about his grandfather in Tennessee, except that he was a very good man, who lived on a large plantation, and had many slaves? Why had he and Tim never visited their grandfather? Many boys of Vicksburg spent months at a time on the plantations of their grandfathers.

What kind of a man was their cousin, Hicks, really?

Both Bill and Tim liked Trapper Barker very much and even Black Buffalo, although he was an Indian, and spoke only a broken English, they liked, but they had begun to feel that there was something mysterious about Cousin Hicks. He didn’t try to make a farm. He had bought no farm horses nor oxen like the other settlers. He had only planted a little corn and a few potatoes and beans and he let the boys do the work in the small field, while with a light team and wagon he visited around amongst the Indians and Whites. Why didn’t he stay at home and work like the German and Irish and Yankee settlers?

Had he only gone to Minnesota so that Tim might grow big and strong in the northern climate? Tim had often been sick at Vicksburg, but now he was as strong and active as any small boy of his age; however, Cousin Hicks seemed to take little interest in Tim’s health.

At last the troubled boy fell asleep and all his puzzles were forgotten until the clear call of the bugler: “We can’t get them up—we can’t get them up in the morning!” echoed over the flooded valley. It seemed to Bill that he had slept only a five minutes, although it was now full daylight. The ruddy sheen of the rising sun was reflected in a broad streak of red from the swirling, rushing and gliding

waters, while masses of black smoke were curling from the chimneys of the boat.

The *Fanny Harris* had filled up with coal before she left St. Paul, because the wood-yards were flooded and much of the cord-wood piled up for sale at the different landing places had drifted down stream.

The second day's travel was much like the first, but contrary to the expectation of the artillerymen, the boat did reach the Fort Snelling landing in the evening, having made more than three hundred miles in two days.

Her appearance, however, was more like that of a wreck than of a safe ship. Had there been any turn-bridges in those days, they would not have had to open for her. Only six feet were left of her tallest smokestack, while the other projected only a yard above the deck.

But Colonel Lantry would not stop for repairs.

"How are her hull and engine?" he asked.

"All sound, sir," replied Captain Faucette.

"Then we shall cast off at daylight," he ordered. "You can patch her up at La Crosse."

At La Crosse the soldiers, guns, and horses were transferred to railroad cars. Col. John E. Pemberton accompanied his men to Washington, where he resigned and entered the service of the Confederate States.

The four civilian travelers left the *Fanny Harris* at Fort Snelling, and stayed a few days at Snelling and St. Paul, till Barker and Black Buffalo had finished their trading.

At these two places, the excitement was as great as it had been at Fort Ridgely. Fort Snelling had been made the recruiting station for the State, and from all over the State men were responding to the call of President Lincoln. Hundreds of men were encamped in tents and rapidly constructed shacks, because the old stone barracks could not hold them all. Captain Acker's company was already complete and before the end of the month the First Minnesota Regiment was mustered in.

At the frontier town of St. Paul, the excitement was as great as at Fort Snelling. Everybody talked war, while at the river front two dozen boats were hastily loading and unloading. Mixed with the excited white people were a number of silent, stolid-looking Indians, both Chippewa and Sioux. They were found in the stores, on the streets and at the boat landing.

The town seemed full of soldiers from all parts of the State. Some of the men of the *Fanny Harris* had deserted the boat at Fort Snelling, because they were afraid if they waited they might not be able to get in on the 75,000 President Lincoln had called for.

On the first up-river boat, the two lads and their friends started back for Fort Ridgely. They were all in a sad mood. Bill could not help thinking of the

words of the officer, in regard to Vicksburg, while Barker and Black Buffalo were turning over in their minds the looks and the talk of the Sioux, who in the red glare of torches and bonfires, had been watching the loading of cannons and other preparations for the departure of the soldiers.

Black Buffalo especially seemed in a sullen mood.

"Who is the white boys' cousin?" he asked Barker, when the two were sitting alone on the rear deck after dinner, while the boys were watching immense flocks of geese, ducks, and cormorants that were now going north over the flooded valley.

"He pretends to be their friend," replied the trapper, "but I am, like yourself, much puzzled by his actions and behavior. He does nothing for the boys. He talks of finding a good squatter's homestead for them, but even Bill is much too young to hold a piece of land till it is surveyed and opened for settlement."

"He is not their friend," Black Buffalo uttered gruffly. "I see him often talking with bad Indians and bad white men. I do not like him; he is a bad man. He sells rum to the Indians, when he thinks no eyes see him, and he talks against the good work of the missionaries.

"We should keep our eyes on him. He means to do some harm to the boys."

"What harm could he do to them?" Barker asked, trying to conceal his own fears and the anxiety he had often felt about the relation of the two boys to their supposed cousin.

"We must watch him," he said to Black Buffalo; "there is something strange about him. He can talk well, but his eye is unsteady."

"Yes," replied the Indian, "his words do not tell you what is in his heart."

In the middle of the afternoon, the engine broke down and the boat tied up near the present town of Belle Plaine, about fifty miles above St. Paul.

While the engineers were repairing the machinery, the two boys and their friends went out in two small boats to hunt ducks and geese on the flooded marshes.

They landed on a small island of high land and the men chose a convenient blind behind some bushes. The boys had no guns and had just gone along to watch the fun and to bring in the ducks which the hunters would drop, but they found some unexpected and exciting hunting for themselves.

"See the rabbit, see the rabbit!" Tim cried. "He is sitting on a stump with water all around him."

The boys were surprised to find that the rabbit did not try to get away as they approached.

"He's dead," said Tim.

"No, he isn't," laughed Bill, "I see his nose move; he is breathing."

Some brush had drifted against the stump and the rabbit had eaten it as far

as he had been able to reach.

When the boys lifted the rabbit into the boat, they had another surprise, for nestled under his fur they discovered a black meadow mouse that had also sought refuge on the stump when the water had risen.

"Take him off," Tim begged, "he'll freeze to death on the stump," and Bill took him off and placed him under the rabbit, who was quietly squatting under the seat as if he belonged there.

When the boys returned to the brush-and-grass-covered island, they discovered four more rabbits, who, however, were more lively than the one on the stump. They ran about in a most puzzling zigzag fashion and one even tried to swim across a channel to another piece of dry land. But the boys caught them all and put them in the boat, from which they did not try to escape.

While they were chasing the rabbits the boys made another discovery. The island was alive with black meadow-mice; there were hundreds of them. Every tuft of dead grass, every bush, every pile of dead leaves was crowded with them.

"Oh, Tim," teased Bill, "let's row back to the boat and get some pie for all your pets."

But Tim had caught the twinkle in his brother's eye. "Ah, you can't fool me," he came back. "Don't you think I know that these wild mice have plenty of grass and brush to eat till the water goes down?"

It did not take the boys long to decide what to do with the rabbits.

"If we could only keep them," was Tim's wish. "We would have as much fun with them as we had with our rabbits at Vicksburg."

"No use; we can't keep them," Bill argued. "We would have to stay at home every day or let them out, and if we let them out, they will eat up our garden and Cousin Hicks will kill them. There are too many rabbits at our shack now."

So the boys rowed their catch of game ashore. When the boat touched land, the stupid rabbits became lively at once. They hopped out of the boat and, true to their instinct for hiding, disappeared at once; some into a hole and others under a pile of brush.

On their way back the boys, quite excited about this new way of hunting, peeped into a hollow log.

"There's an animal in it!" exclaimed Tim.

"Look out!" Bill warned him, "maybe it's a skunk. If you catch a skunk, you can't go back on the boat."

"It's no skunk," replied Tim. "It's a gray animal. It's a coon. Let's catch him."

Bill poked the animal with a stick and before he had time to warn his younger brother to look out for the coon's teeth and claws, Tim had grabbed the creature by the neck, dropped him in the boat and thrown his coat over the

snarling animal.

"Look at him," Tim cried. "Doesn't he look funny, peeping out from under my coat?"

"My, but he is thin! I bet he is cold and starved. Let us take him to the hunters and give him something to eat."

"Mr. Barker, what does a coon eat!" Tim shouted as they approached the men. "We've caught one."

"Anything, except wood," the trapper told them. "Give him a piece of duck-meat. We have ducks enough for the whole boat."

When Tim offered the raccoon a piece of duck-meat, he took it, soused it in the water in the boat, devoured it greedily and began whining for more. He ate several other pieces in the same way.

"Why does he wash his meat?" the boys asked.

"It's just his queer way," the trapper told them. "You give him a piece of fresh pie, and he'll souse it in a mudhole before he eats it.

"A coon's a queer fellow. My German neighbors call him 'washbear,' on account of his peculiar habits. I had a tame coon once, but he died from eating a pan of boot-grease."

"Why didn't you watch him?" asked Tim.

"You can't watch a coon," the trapper laughed, "he's always in some mischief. I'd rather watch ten boys than one coon."

On the four days it took the boat to reach Fort Ridgely the boys had plenty of time to ask the trapper about the war.

"It won't last long, that's what I think," the trapper told them. "When the Confederates see that Abe Lincoln has 75,000 soldiers, they will quit."

"Will they fight at Vicksburg?" asked Bill.

"No, you needn't worry, boys. They'll soon fix it all up at Washington and the soldiers will come home."

"The officer said it would be hell at Vicksburg," Tim remarked, "and it would be a big, long war."

"That's what some of the army officers think," the trapper admitted, "but most other people don't think so."

Black Buffalo was as much puzzled by the war between the white people as the boys.

"Do the people from this country want to go south," he asked, "just as the Chippewas from the North want to come into our Sioux country?"

"No, that isn't it," the trapper explained. "The white people of the South want to keep their black slaves, and they wish to have a country and a president of their own. They don't like Abe Lincoln."

When on the evening of the fourth day, the steamer whistled for the Fort

Ridgely landing, the boys were glad to get off the boat, but felt very uneasy about the reception Cousin Hicks would give them.

"I wish we could go back to Vicksburg," Tim whispered to his brother. "I am homesick."

"Come on, boys," Mr. Barker called in his pleasant, manly voice. "I'll stay at your shack to-night, and if your cousin is at home, I'll have a visit and a talk with him. Don't forget your coon, Tim; I guess you will have to carry him if you want to take him home."

CHAPTER III—PLAIN TALK AND UGLY RUMORS

Cousin Hicks was at home and greeted the boys with apparent heartiness. To Barker he was friendly, but did not invite him to stay over night.

"You need not go to any trouble," the trapper told him. "We have had our supper on the boat, and I will just spread my blanket on the floor for the night. You know a seasoned trapper can sleep anywhere."

"Yes, do make yourself at home," Hicks said now. "I am glad you took the boys with you to St. Paul. It is a bit lonesome for them here, and I have to be away a good deal."

Next morning Hicks walked along the prairie road with Barker, and the trapper knew that Hicks had something to say to him.

When they were no longer within sight of the shack, Hicks began:

"It would suit me just as well, Barker, if you wouldn't take those lads away from my place. I'm their guardian and I reckon I can look after them."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Mr. Hicks. I always thought the boys ought to have a guardian. But I want to tell you that, in my opinion, you have done blessed little guarding."

"Just the same," Hicks replied, his Southern accent becoming more pronounced, "it would suit me just as well if you and yours wouldn't meddle in my business."

"Now look here, Hicks," the trapper turned on him with his gray eyes flashing, "this isn't a matter of business at all. You claim to be the friend or guardian

of these two boys, and you not only neglect them, but you expose them to great danger."

"Where's the danger, and what...?" Hicks started, his anger plainly rising.

"Hicks," the trapper cut him short, "don't pretend to me that you don't know. You know as well as I do that a storm is brewing here and that the Indians may break into murder and war almost any day. It would not have surprised me if they had broken out before the *Fanny Harris* had reached La Crosse."

"All the same," retorted Hicks, trying to straighten his lank and stooped body, "you and yours will let those boys alone in the future."

Barker felt this was a threat. "Good," he replied. "If that's your trump card, I'll play mine. Hicks, if any harm comes to those lads, I'll hunt you down and make you pay for it. Remember that! Your duty is to take those lads home to Vicksburg and you can come back with a load of rum, if you want to. We're through. Good morning."

The two men stood facing each other a moment. A whirling gust blew off the old gray hat of Hicks, and he hurriedly caught it and put it on again. Then, without a word, he turned and with a slouching gait started to go back.

Something about Hicks had startled Barker. For a moment he stood thinking. Had he not seen this man years ago? Then he leaned against an old gnarly bur-oak. Hicks turned as if he would come back, but when he saw the trapper watching him, he changed his mind.

"No, Hicks," the trapper thought, "your game won't work on me. You can't plug me in the back and bury me in the brush in the ravine."

But where had he met this man before? He lit his pipe and thought. Now it flashed upon him. Ten years ago, when he had been trapping and hunting wild turkeys in the valley of the Wabash, in Indiana, he had met a man he had never forgotten. The man was under arrest for murder and the sheriff stopped over night with him in Barker's cabin. The next day he broke away and had never been heard from. He had black hair then, dark eyes, and a small red scar stood out sharply on his white forehead.

"That man was Hicks!" the trapper exclaimed. "I never forgot that scar."

"Why has he brought those boys into the Indian Country?" Barker asked himself. "How could any parents trust their boys to a man of his kind?" But Hicks could be very pleasant, and he was a good talker. He had made many friends among both Whites and Indians. He seemed to have some money and was a liberal spender. Nevertheless, after turning over in his mind all he knew about Hicks, Barker could not make up his mind why Hicks and the boys were here and why Hicks so absolutely neglected the boys he had evidently promised to look after.

A week later Barker met the boys at a slough, where both he and the lads

sometimes went for a mess of wild ducks and the trapper decided to see what he could find out about Cousin Hicks. The boys being asked, told freely what they knew.

Cousin Hicks was some distant relative of their mother. He had lived at Vicksburg about a year and had often visited at their home and had sat many hours chatting with their father in his little store. The boys had gone north with him, so they could squat on some good land, and because Tim was often sick at Vicksburg. As soon as their parents could sell their store, they would also come north, because they had heard and read about the boom in Minnesota lands and what big crops of wheat it would raise. The boys liked it in Minnesota, only Tim got homesick at times. Cousin Hicks was not mean to them, only he didn't work and didn't stay at home, but he never worked much in Vicksburg, either.

There had been some trouble and a lawsuit between their two grandfathers in Tennessee and the boys had never been to see them.

That was all the boys knew. It did not help Barker much, but he felt more sure than ever that Hicks was playing some crooked game and he decided to watch things, no matter what might be the outcome.

When fall came, the boys had eaten all the corn in their garden and in order to have something to live on during the winter, they went to a large slough to gather wild rice in the way they had learned of the Indians.

As the winter passed, bad news came for the lads from the South. Their father wrote that the war was getting worse and that on account of it he could not hope to sell his store, but that the boys might as well stay in Minnesota.

The war had indeed, by this time, assumed immense proportions, both in the East and in the West near the Mississippi River. In the West, Grant had captured the important points of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson and had fought the terrible two days' battle of Shiloh. After this battle, most Northerners became convinced that the Confederacy would not suddenly collapse after one or two battles.

By the first of July, 1862, the land forces, under Grant and two fleets of gunboats, the lower under Admiral Farragut, and the upper under Commodore Henry Davis, had obtained control of the Mississippi River, except for a stretch of river between Vicksburg and Port Hudson, a distance of two hundred miles.

By far the most important and strongest point on the river still held by the Confederates was Vicksburg. It is located on the east side of the river on high land with wooded hills about two hundred feet high directly to the east of the city. The cities of St. Louis, Cairo, Memphis, and New Orleans were all held by the Union forces. It was of great importance for the Union forces to capture Vicksburg, because the capture of this city would give them complete control of the great river and would cut the Confederacy in two, cutting off their supply

of grain and meat from Arkansas and Texas. If Vicksburg could be taken, the Confederacy would be blockaded on the Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico, and on the Mississippi.

The task of taking this important city fell to General Grant, and it proved a most difficult undertaking. The heavy batteries of guns placed in all favorable positions could not be silenced by the Federal gunboats. The city was also defended by a garrison of several thousand men, and on July 15th, the iron-clad Confederate ram, *Arkansas*, coming out of the Yazoo River, just above Vicksburg, ran through and practically defeated the whole fleet of Commodore Davis. For several days this one Confederate gunboat held both Admiral Farragut's fleet and the fleet of Commodore Davis at bay until both withdrew, one up, the other down, the river.

The fight of the *Arkansas* under its fearless Captain I. N. Brown, is one of the most heroic chapters in naval warfare.

Why the Federals allowed this formidable ram six weeks to be completed and armed at Yazoo City, within fifty miles of their own upper fleet, has thus far remained a mystery. On the fifteenth of August, Bill and Tim Ferguson, after an interval of several months, received the following letter from their father at Vicksburg:

> "My dear boys:
>
> "You have probably read or heard about the fighting that has been going on here. Your mother and I live in a cave now and we are getting used to the screeching and bursting of shells, which the Federal gunboats throw into the city. But now our one little iron-clad *Arkansas* has driven off both the upper and lower Federal fleet. Think of that! and last night your mother and I slept at home once more.
>
> "You boys would like to see the *Arkansas*. She looks like a scow with an iron house boat built on it. The house-boat part has slanting sides in every direction. Captain Brown, her commander, built her at Yazoo City; Brown had thousands of railroad rails bent into shape and with these he completely covered her sides and where he could not use rails, he used boiler-plate. If we only had a few more Browns and *Arkansases*, we would soon chase the whole Yankee fleet into the canebrakes.
>
> "Most people here are still very hopeful that no serious attempt will be made by Grant and the Northern fleet to take Vicksburg, but I fear they are mistaken.
>
> "Our fleet was so hopelessly smashed at Memphis that we have only a few vessels left, while the Federals seem to have no end of

gunboats and transports. It may be that the Gibraltar of the Great River can not be taken, but I feel sure that Grant and Sherman and Admiral Porter now commanding the Federal fleet above Vicksburg, are going to try it. When that time comes, Vicksburg will be a bad place to live in.

"Mother would like to send you some turkeys and chickens, but as that is impossible, she hopes that you may really enjoy the wild ducks and geese that you have written about.

"We are very glad that you are far away from this fearful and sad war and we wish you to stay north till peace has come again."

The writer did not know that at the very time he wrote these words, two thousand Sioux were encamped on the Minnesota River, within a few hours' ride of his boys, and were ready at almost any moment to rush into a war much more cruel than that being waged on the Great River, where only armed men fought against armed men.

CHAPTER IV—THE BREAKING OF THE STORM

Men who have lived outdoors and know the moods of nature fear the breaking of a storm that has been long brewing.

The Indian War which broke over the summery plains and valleys of Minnesota on Monday morning, August 18, 1862, swept over a large section of the State with the rush and fury of a long-brewing storm.

For several years the Sioux had been gathering a store of hatred and desire of revenge for real and fancied wrongs. On Sunday, the 17th of August, a few young Indians in an accidental quarrel with some farmers in Meeker county killed some cattle and murdered several whites. Under ordinary conditions this would have ended in the surrender and punishment of the criminals, but now it was the signal for three thousand Sioux warriors to rush into a carnival of murder and rapine, which swept over the frontier settlement as a tornado rushes through the forest.

At daybreak on the 18th, Black Buffalo knocked on the cabin of Trapper Barker.

"Get up, my friend," he called, "the war has begun. You must flee, or you will be murdered.

"I have just learned that Chief Little Crow has told the warriors to kill all white people they can find, and the warriors have started in large and small parties in all directions. Some people at the Lower Agency, near the big Indian camp, have already been killed. Make haste, Mehunka, or you will be killed."

"Do all the Indians want the war?" asked Barker, as he hurriedly dressed himself for flight.

"No," said Black Buffalo. "Many of us, Little Paul, John Other Day, myself, and many others think this war is foolish and will only bring tears and mourning to our women and children, and ruin to our whole people, but we are powerless to stop the madness of Little Crow and the young men."

"I have an extra saddle-horse," said Barker as he was ready to mount. "We must warn Bill and Tim."

"You are right, Mehunka; I have brought an extra horse. The white boys should come with us, if they are willing."

"They must come with us!" exclaimed Barker, "whether they will or not."

"Perhaps the lanky white man will not let them," Black Buffalo suggested. "He wishes to keep the boys here. I do not know why. He would not mourn if harm came to them. He does not love them."

"Lanky Hicks be cursed!" Barker exclaimed in Sioux. "I shall point my rifle at his head, if he refuses to let them go; he should have taken them home long ago."

Bill and Tim were just eating their simple breakfast of wild rice and maple syrup when they saw two horsemen coming at a gallop.

"Look, Bill," cried Tim, "here comes Mr. Barker and Tatanka! Hurrah! We'll go and hunt ducks on the slough to-day. It's so long since they have visited us."

But when Barker hastily jumped off his horse and entered the cabin before the lads could cry, "Come in," to his knock, they knew that their two friends had not come to invite them to go hunting.

"Good morning, my lads," Barker greeted them. "Where is Cousin Hicks?"

"We don't know," answered Bill. "We haven't seen him since Friday."

"Put on your hoots, roll up your coats and blankets, and come along," the trapper continued. "The Sioux have gone to war and are killing the people all around. You must not lose a minute; a bunch of them may show up almost any moment."

When all were ready to mount, Tim asked, "What about Cousin Hicks? Will the warriors get him?"

Bill thought he saw a flash of anger in the dark eyes of Tatanka at the mention of Cousin Hicks, and the Indian said something in Sioux which the boys did not understand.

But the trapper laughed and remarked:

"I thought you were a Christian, Tatanka?"

"I am," replied Black Buffalo in Sioux, "but not when I see that man."

If the boys had not implicitly believed Barker and Tatanka, they would have thought their story some crude joke, for as they started their horses at an easy gait, they saw no sign of war or Sioux warriors. The dew still lay heavy on the tall grass in the swales, while many kinds of butterflies, white, yellow, blue, and tawny red, were sipping their morning draught of honey from goldenrods and wild sunflowers, and from the fragrant milkweeds and purple lead-plants.

Now and then, a meadow-lark warbled its cheerful song from a knoll or rock, while the little striped gophers chased each other or sat like horse-pins in front of their holes and scolded vociferously at the passing riders.

"What are they saying?" Tim asked of the trapper.

"They are talking bad talk at Meetcha, your raccoon," Barker replied, with a smile. "You let Meetcha catch one. Manetcha is a brave animal near his hole."

Tim let Meetcha try it, but every time he came within a few feet of a chattering, scolding gopher, the little striped creature turned a somersault and shot into his hole.

"Take him up, Tim," said the trapper after a few minutes; "we have not much time to hunt gophers."

They now started their horses at a run for the two nearest settlers and gave them the warning.

"Get away as quick as you can. Don't follow the road to Fort Ridgely or New Ulm, or you'll be ambushed there in the timber. Keep a sharp lookout and hide in the grass or brush or corn, if you see Indians. Don't trust any; they are all on the warpath now."

Without waiting for the settlers to move, the four horsemen started at a brisk gallop for a third settler at the head of a wooded ravine.

"Keep away from the timber," Tatanka cautioned them. "Indians like to hide when they fight."

The riders approached the cabin carefully over the prairie. The door was standing open.

The boys still felt as if the whole story was a bad hoax, but now the two men stopped their horses, examined the caps on their guns, and then Tatanka carefully crept up to the shanty through some scrub-oaks.

"What is Tatanka afraid of?" asked Tim.

"He is afraid," Barker explained, "that some Indians have seen us and are

hiding in the house or behind it."

Now Tatanka appeared in front of the shanty and motioned the others to come. In the house everything was confusion. The table was turned over and the broken dishes were scattered and tumbled about on the floor. Every pane in the one small window was smashed and in the hazel-brush just behind the little home, Jim Humphrey, the owner, lay dead, his hands still gripping the handle of an ax.

"The brutes have taken Jim's wife and daughter with them," murmured Barker. "Boys," he continued, "you stand watch while Tatanka and I cover poor Humphrey's body with green twigs and earth. We dare not wait to do more."

What had thus far seemed like a horrible dream to the boys, had now become a ghastly reality. They were face to face with the horrors of savage warfare.

The next cabin, two miles northeast, was on fire and six men, three on horseback and three on a farm-wagon, were coming toward them. The four fugitives halted. "What are they!" Barker asked.

"They are Indians," Tatanka decided at once. "We must make a run for the clump of poplars north of us."

In the center of the round clump of poplars and thick brush, they tied their horses.

"They can't see them here," Tatanka stated. "Now, we must lie down near the edge of the brush, but so that they cannot see us, and don't waste your powder. We may have to stay here for a long time."

The Indians had all turned off the road and were approaching the thicket.

"Give them a shot, Bill," said Barker. "They are only a quarter of a mile away. It's going to be a fight for our lives."

Two of the Indians returned Bill's fire, but their balls or shot fell short.

"I think they have nothing but old trader guns. In that case, we may be able to beat them off," remarked Barker.

The Indians took the team out of range. Then, three of them on horseback, and three on foot, they surrounded the grove.

One of the Indians on foot waved his blanket and shouted:

"Come out, you white men, and fight. You are squaws, you are rabbits."

The horsemen slowly rode around the copse, while it became evident that the other three were trying to crawl up through the grass to a small clump of hazel-brush.

"Keep cool, boys," the trapper admonished. "Don't waste powder; hit your mark. Anybody can hit the prairie."

"What do they want of us?" asked Tim, who had tied his coon to a tree. "We have nothing."

"My lad," laughed the trapper, "we have good horses and guns and four

extra-fine scalps, and they want to play great heroes in camp to-night."

Two hours passed without a shot being fired. The sun had grown hot, the heat-cats began to run up the south-facing hill, and Bill and Tim found this tedious waiting and watching the hardest kind of work they had ever done. Barker and Tatanka did not seem to mind it. They kept their eyes on the enemy but chatted and joked quietly in the most unconcerned manner, as if being besieged by Indians were a most ordinary thing to them.

"I don't think they are a bit afraid," said Bill.

"I'm not afraid," Tim answered, "as long as the Indians don't come into our bush. But I'm hungry and awfully thirsty."

"I think I can find water," said Bill. "I'm awfully thirsty, too. You watch my Indian a little while."

In half an hour Bill came back. "Tim," he reported, with joy, "go to the big poplar near the horses. I've dug a well there with my hands and knife. The water isn't very good, but it will give you a drink."

Tim went and told the men about Bill's well, and both took turns to get a drink.

"Oh!" remarked Tatanka, with a grin, "Bill has found good water. He is a good Indian soldier."

A little later, Tatanka crept rapidly forward to an outlying willow-bush where he quietly rose on his knees and fired. The bragging Indian jumped out of the grass and tried to run away, but he staggered and fell.

Then the Indian on the white horse came on a gallop to carry off the wounded man, but Tatanka fired again and the white horse fell dead, but the dismounted rider helped the wounded man to get out of range, before Tatanka could load and fire again.

While this had been going on, the two other mounted Indians had come racing along as if they would run straight into the copse, and both Tim and Barker fired at them. The trapper's mark reared and plunged for the open prairie, and the other rider also threw his pony around, for Tim's bullet had gone singing close over his head. When they had run some hundred yards, both Indians turned and fired, but as the defenders had kept well under cover, the balls flew wild among the thick poplars.

Indian warriors have seldom held out long against men who made a brave stand. When the Sioux saw that they were getting the worse of the fight, they all withdrew to the wagon and started westward.

Tatanka now ran out into the open, waved his blanket and shouted, "You are squaws. You are gophers. Run to your holes."

Then turning to Barker, he said, "Come, brother, we scare them."

Before the boys knew what Tatanka meant, the two men were racing after

the Indians as fast as the horses could go.

When the Indians saw them coming, they whipped their horses into a gallop and disappeared over a rise on the prairie.

Barker and Tatanka did not follow their routed enemies over the rise, but returned at once to their poplar fort.

After the four defenders had taken a drink out of Bill's well, they all sat down in the shade on the edge of the thicket where the poplar leaves rustled pleasantly in the summer breeze.

"Now, friends," the trapper said, "it is time for a little lunch. Here is a piece of cornbread left over from my breakfast. It isn't much, but we all get a bite. In the meantime, keep your eyes on the prairie and look out for Indian heads."

"I think we should stay here until dark," Tatanka suggested, "and then start for Shakopee or Fort Snelling. Indians do not fight during the night. The sky is going to be clear and we can travel by the stars. It is very dangerous to travel in daylight."

"You are right, my friend," the trapper replied, "but I am almost afraid to stay here. Our enemies may come back with more men to drive us out, or larger bodies of Indians may accidentally find us. Our horses have no water and we cannot leave the thicket if we are surrounded. I think we should find a better place, even if it is dangerous to travel by daylight."

CHAPTER V—THROUGH A DESERTED LAND

Before they left their hiding-place, Tatanka tied some small poplar twigs to his head and climbed the highest tree in the grove.

"I can see not a man nor horse," he reported. "Our enemies have left. Even if the men were hiding in the grass, I would be able to see their wagon and horses."

"The nearest places of safety are Fort Ridgely and New Ulm," declared the trapper. "Should we not try to reach one or the other?"

"They are not safe now," objected Tatanka, after a brief silence. "I have heard the young warriors brag that a thousand of them could easily rush both of these places. We could surely not get into either place on horseback. We might

crawl into them at night. If you try to go there on horseback, I shall not go with you."

"Perhaps you are right," granted the trapper. "I do not wish to lose my two fine horses. Let us try to reach the small lake and timber north of here. We can water our horses there and the patch of timber is large enough so that a small party can not surround us. And if the worst should happen, we can abandon our horses and slip away on foot after dark."

When they were ready to move, Bill found little Tim hunting about anxiously through the brush.

"I can't find the coon," he cried. "He was there before we sat down to eat our cornbread, but now he has chewed off the string I tied him with and he is gone."

The men laughed, but together with Bill they began to beat the brush and the weeds for the lost raccoon.

"Little gray Meetcha will be hard to find," commented Tatanka. "He may have gone back to the woods near the river. His kind does not love the prairie like Hoka, the badger, who digs the striped gophers out of their holes."

After some more searching Bill called out:

"Oh, come here, Tim. Here's your fool coon. He's washing a frog in my well."

By the time Tim arrived, Meetcha had not only washed but also eaten his frog.

"You little fool," Tim cried, as he gently boxed Meetcha's ears, "the Sioux will cut off your tail and boil you in the pot if you run away from us. Haven't you heard that war has begun?"

Meetcha snarled and struck at Tim with his short fore-paws, but Tim placed his pet in front of him on the saddle and men and boys started slowly for the small lake.

However, before they entered the woods, they halted the horses in an isolated thicket and Tatanka alone crept slowly through the grass and tall weeds into the woods.

"Where is he?" asked Bill, when Tatanka had gone a few rods. "I can't even see the grass move, except by the little puffs of wind."

"Of course you can't." Barker laughed. "Tatanka would not be a good scout if he could not vanish in the tall grass."

Black Buffalo was gone a long time and Bill and Tim began to think that he would not come back or that he had been killed. But the trapper only smiled and said: "You boys don't know what patience is. A good scout or a good hunter must be able to wait a long time, sometimes a whole day."

When Tatanka did return he came into the thicket from the other side and

was standing before them without either of the boys having seen him approach.

"Where did he come from?" Tim asked, his big blue eyes showing his surprise, but the trapper only smiled and said, "He's our scout, lads."

The scout reported that he had gone carefully through the whole patch of timber, and that neither in the timber nor on the lake shore had he seen any fresh sign of Indians or horses. "But I did see fresh deer sign," he concluded. "A buck lives in those woods, but I did not see him."

Feeling sure now that they would not fall into an ambush, the four friends rode into the woods to find a suitable spot, where they might conceal themselves till nightfall.

They first watered their horses, taking care to conceal them behind some overhanging linden branches, so that they might not be seen from the other side of the lake. Both the trapper and Tatanka agreed that it was not at all likely that any Indians would be in hiding on the shore of this small lake.

"They are scattered in all directions, killing people and making booty," Barker gave as his opinion. "But it would not surprise me if toward evening some of those marauding parties would come along to stop here for the night."

The afternoon furnished again a great trial of patience for the boys. For a while, the care of their horses and catching frogs for Meetcha occupied them. Then they picked a few choke-cherries, but these did not allay their growing hunger, and the trapper would not let them pick the laden bushes on the outside of the timber.

"It would be gross carelessness," he said, "to betray our presence in that way. The man who wishes to carry his scalp out of an Indian war must not take chances. I'm also afraid that you boys would get sick if you filled up on choke-cherries; you had better starve awhile."

As the heat of the day decreased, the mosquitoes became very annoying. Both lads were tired and sleepy from the excitement of the day, but there could be no thought of sleeping. They had to keep off the hungry insects with pieces of green brush.

The Indian and Barker had each gone to one end of the timber to watch for unbidden guests, while the boys were on guard in the middle of the margin of the timber.

When at last the sun was approaching the horizon, it seemed to the lads that it was several days since Mr. Barker had told them to roll up their blankets and come away.

When the sun was turning red, Tatanka came back from his watch and gave the call of Bob-White. The boys at once forgot all fatigue and ran to their horses.

"Indians, from the east," Tatanka whispered. "We must get away. I will take Mehunka's horse to him."

The trapper, although nearly sixty years old, sprang into the saddle like a young man, when his three friends met him at the western point of the timber.

Before they doubled a low hill, which would hide the lake from their view, Tatanka stopped behind some box-elder bushes.

"Look," he said as he pointed eastward, "there they are."

A dozen Indians, some on horseback and others on a stolen farm-wagon, were just stopping to make camp at the eastern end of the timber, a quarter of a mile away.

"Won't they follow us!" asked Bill. "They might easily find our trail."

"No," grunted Tatanka, with plain contempt. "See what they are doing."

One of the men was pouring something out of a jug and each took a drink out of a tin cup.

"See," continued the scout—"they have found a jug of whiskey. They won't see any trail. If they were in the Chippewa country, they would be scalped."

"Have they any white captives?" asked Barker.

"No, let the dogs alone," and with those words, he led the way around a low hill.

The four travelers rode slowly and silently over the prairie. The sounds of the summer night began to fill the air. Overhead a pair of night-hawks, swooping with a loud whirr close by the heads of the horses and uttering their harsh "Paint, paint," followed the riders. In the scattered groves which they passed, some little tree-frogs piped their monotonous trill, while the undefinable songs of crickets and grasshoppers filled the air, seemingly coming from everywhere and nowhere.

An hour they had been riding almost in silence, when there was a thud and a sprawl on the grass. Little Tim's eyes had closed in sleep and he had fallen off his horse.

"We must find a place to spend the night," said the trapper. "The little fellow is all in."

"No, I'm awake now," piped up little Tim, as he picked up Meetcha and climbed back in the saddle. "I can ride all right now, Mr. Barker."

The first house they reached had been burnt and the ruins were still smoldering.

Tatanka dismounted and examined the place for wounded or hidden fugitives, but there was only the silence of death and desolation.

A few miles farther, they came to a cabin in a small natural grove.

"That's Dickman's place," the trapper told his companions. "He has a fine field of corn and his wife is a good housekeeper. Let us see what we can find."

The door stood open and most of the windows in the two-room cabin were broken.

"Ugh," grunted the Indian, "the thieves have been here. We shall find noth-

ing to eat."

"Wait a minute," said Barker. "Let me look in the smoke-house in the hollow; perhaps the robbers didn't find it. Here, boys," he laughed, as he returned with a ham and a side of bacon, "this will help us out.

"Now, Tim, get some green corn and, Bill, you go and milk the two cows in the yard. They must have been in the woods when the Sioux raided the place. Tatanka may listen for bad sounds, but I think we are safe here and we shall soon have a real supper."

In a few minutes Barker had closed the door, hung a blanket over the two windows, lit a candle and started a fire in the kitchen stove. Soon the corn was boiling and slices of bacon sizzled in the pan. Bill came in with a pail of milk and Tatanka came in and reported, "No Dakotahs here."

No supper ever tasted so good to Bill and Tim, and the trapper-cook kept putting slices of bacon in the pan, while his hungry guests helped themselves as quick as the white slices curled and browned.

After supper the lads spread their blankets on the floor, tied Meetcha in the small woodshed and found a gunny-sack for him to sleep on.

After the two men had watered the horses at a near-by pond, tied them in the straw-shed, and provided them with plenty of hay, they sat down on the grass to smoke.

"The boys are asleep," remarked Tatanka, as he filled his pipe a second time with a mixture of killikinnick and tobacco.

"They are my boys now," replied Barker, "and I shall look after them. I can't understand that man Hicks. I declare if I don't almost believe he wanted the lads to get killed. I'd like to break his crooked old bones."

"He is a bad man," Tatanka assented. "He hides some evil plan in his heart, but I cannot tell what it is."

"He does have some evil plan," exclaimed the trapper as he struck the ground with his fist. "I reckon he will try to take the boys away from me, if he can find us."

"He is a coward," continued the Indian; "he will not come alone, he will bring other bad men to help him. We must be on our guard."

"Tatanka," said Barker, "I don't know yet what I shall do, but Hicks will not get these lads unless he can take them from me. Will you stand by me?"

"Tatanka never deserted a friend," the Indian replied.

"We must sleep now," said the trapper after a long silence. "We may have another fight to-morrow."

"I sleep in the shed with the horses," remarked the Indian, as he bade his friend good-night. "The Dakotahs might come and steal them, if we do not watch."

The trapper went into the house, set a strong pole against the door and spread his blanket near the boys.

CHAPTER VI—DANGEROUS TRAVELING

The Great Dipper had swung only halfway around the Polar Star when Tatanka rapped at the cabin door.

"My friend," he called, "I think we should saddle our horses and ride away. At daybreak the bands of Dakotahs will again start to kill all white men they can find and to burn their houses. We should travel a good stretch before the sun rises, and, may be, in that way we can leave behind us the part of the country to which the war has spread."

The trapper, like most men who have lived much alone in a wild country, was a light sleeper and was awake at once.

"Yes," he replied, "we should travel a good stretch by starlight. Perhaps we can thus avoid falling in with any more Sioux warriors.

"We must take these lads to St. Paul before that man, Hicks, can find out where we have gone, and try to overtake us. He will not hesitate to set the Sioux on our trail, if he learns which way we have gone."

Tim and Bill had to be shaken out of a sound sleep.

"Come along, lads," Barker told them; "before the sun rises the Sioux will again be scouring the country. We must travel by night as far as we can."

While the boys were getting ready, Tatanka and the trapper planned the day's journey.

"We should strike out northeast for Shakopee on the Minnesota River," advised Tatanka. "I used to camp and hunt there, when I was a boy, but it is now a white man's town, and I do not think that Little Crow's warriors will reach it. They will first try to take Fort Ridgely and New Ulm beyond the great elbow of the Wakpah Minnesota."

"It is a good plan," assented the trapper. "Our two guns are loaded with balls that carry a great distance. Let us put buckshot into the guns of the boys. If we are attacked, we will fire our own guns first and use the buckshot only if the

Sioux come close up."

"It is good," said Black Buffalo. "If all white people were prepared like we are, the warriors of Little Crow would not take many scalps."

The morning was chilly. The grass and flowers of the prairie were heavy with dew and the little voices of the night had all grown silent, only a lost dog, bereaved of his master, could be heard barking and howling in the distance. They passed a slough, where the tall rushes and grasses and the pools of open water were covered with a gray patchy blanket of fog, out of which rang the loud quacking calls of wild ducks and the low, retiring notes of hundreds of coots. From the blackbirds and swallows which the boys knew were roosting in the marsh by the thousand, came not a sound, but from the grass near the margin of the slough came the liquid, pebbly song of a marsh-wren.

"Listen, Bill," whispered Tim, "there's the little bird that never sleeps."

"Oh, I guess he sleeps, all right," replied Bill, "only he is so little that he can sleep enough in snatches."

"We must ride faster," said Tatanka. "The stars are getting small and the eastern sky will soon be gray, then the Dakotahs will come out of their camps."

The four travelers wrapped themselves in their blankets, and let the willing horses fall into an easy gallop.

The boys were glad, when, at last, a big red ball pushed slowly over the distant wooded bluffs of the Minnesota, but Barker and Tatanka reined in their horses and approached the crest of every rise with the utmost caution. After traveling an hour or more, in this way, Barker and Tatanka stopped and dismounted in a small grove of oaks on a high knoll, after they had made sure that no tracks led into the patch of timber.

"Here we eat breakfast," Barker told the boys.

"Why don't we hide in a hollow where we can't be seen?" asked Bill.

Tatanka laughed at this question. "In a hollow," he replied, "Dakotahs see us first; on a hill, we see them first."

To the surprise of the boys, the Indian even started a fire and on several green sticks began to fry slices of bacon and ham.

"Won't the Indians see the fire!" asked Tim.

"Not this fire," Bill told him. "Don't you see that Tatanka breaks from the trees only the driest sticks that don't make a bit of smoke!"

Tim and Meetcha were very hungry and Meetcha crept, with quivering nostrils very close to the hot slices of meat, which the Indian was laying down on some oak leaves, but Tatanka struck him a sharp blow with a switch and called, "Raus!" in a loud gruff voice, so the little raccoon scrambled away in a great hurry.

"What did he say!" asked the boys. "He talked German to Meetcha," Barker

laughed. "He learned it from his neighbors. It means, 'Get out.'"

"Meetcha must learn not to steal," said Tatanka, with a smile. "He is a little thief. Tim should let him run in the woods. He will make much trouble."

The four travelers enjoyed a hearty breakfast after their morning ride.

"Boys," remarked the trapper, "if we eat at this rate, we shall live on the smell of hambone to-morrow, unless we make Shakopee tonight."

There were no dishes to wash and Meetcha had to eat the scraps without washing them, although to the delight of both men and boys, he went through the motions with every piece he ate.

When the meal was over, Tatanka sat for a while and smoked in silence, while Barker and the boys scanned the prairie from the margin of the grove.

A mile to the south some dark objects were moving in the direction of the wooded knoll, but they could not tell what they were. The boys thought they saw Indians on horseback, but as Barker did not agree with them they called Black Buffalo. After he had looked a minute he said:

"Ox-team and white men. We must wait for them."

"How can they get away from the Indians on an ox-team?" asked Bill.

"They can't," explained Barker, "except by a lucky accident. If any Indians see them, they are lost."

When the ox-team came within half a mile of the knoll, Tatanka pointed to the west.

"Look," he said, "now we must fight."

Three Indians on horseback were coming across the prairie directly toward the white men, who tried to whip the oxen into a run so as to reach the wooded knoll.

"Get on your horses," commanded Barker, and the four riders threw themselves quickly between the team and the Sioux.

When the trapper fired a shot at the Sioux, the three Indians turned and then dispersed themselves around the team. They fired their guns, but the bullets all fell short.

On the wagon were two men and several women and children, and the party had been traveling all night.

The Indians followed the team for an hour, but as the party kept to the open prairie, the Sioux at last fell behind and gave up the pursuit.

In the middle of the afternoon, the party reached Henderson, where the owner of the team stayed with friends, while the four horsemen rode rapidly on to Shakopee, which they reached late in the evening.

The news of the outbreak had already reached the town and the people were much excited, although no hostile Indians had been seen in the neighborhood.

On the following day, Wednesday, August 20th, the four horsemen saw no hostile Indians. There were no telegraph lines in those days west and southwest of St. Paul, but the news of the outbreak had reached St. Paul by special messenger, on Tuesday, the day after it started.

Barker and his party did not follow the usual road from Shakopee to St. Paul, but traveled along old Indian trails and by-paths with which Barker was well acquainted. Near the old inn which stood just west of the Bloomington bridge across the Minnesota, they rested in the woods until evening, for it was Barker's intention to reach St. Paul after dark.

"I doubt not," explained the trapper to Tatanka, "that Hicks, if he is alive, is already on our trail. He is certainly going to look for the boys and myself at St. Paul, and he will most likely strike the road between this place and St. Paul. If we travel on this road in the daytime, we shall meet so many people that it would be an easy thing to follow us. Everybody would remember you and me and the small boy with the raccoon, so we must stay here, until after dark."

It was shortly after midnight on Thursday morning, that the travelers reached St. Paul. Old Joe, the hostler, at one of the outlying taverns, was not a little surprised to see his friend Barker appear at this hour of the day.

"Hello, Sam," he exclaimed, as he shook the old man's hand, "I'm powerful glad to see you. Only last night I was saying to the boys, 'This time they surely got Sam's scalp.' Mighty glad I am, they didn't."

The horses were soon put in their stalls and Meetcha was locked up in an empty grain-box with some kitchen scraps and a pan of water.

"He will wash bones, wash bones, until daylight." Tatanka laughed.

"Now, Joe," said Barker, as the men were seated in the small lobby of the tavern and after the boys had gone to bed, "here is a chance for you to show that you are my friend. Don't tell anybody that we are here. A lanky, squint-eyed cuss with a scar on his forehead may show up inquiring for us. Don't put him on."

"Old Joe is no sieve," replied the hostler. "You can depend on me."

Then the men exchanged the news of the Indian war and the war down South.

The news of the outbreak had reached St. Paul on Tuesday, Governor Ramsey had at once appointed Henry H. Sibley of Mendota, to assume command of a force of men to march against the Indians, and Sibley was already on his way with more than a thousand men.

Barker soon learned that a freighter, the *Red Hawk*, was due to start down river for Galena some time Friday evening. The boat could take but very few passengers, but through his acquaintance with the mate, the trapper arranged for passage for himself and the boys.

When he told Tatanka about his plans, the Indian did not seem to hear him, but his dark eyes wandered down the bend of the river, where the great stream sweeps southward in a magnificent curve, below the high white cliffs of the Indian Mounds and the long-lost Carver's Cave.

After a long silence, the impassive face of Tatanka lit up as with the fire of youth.

"I wish to go with you and the white boys," he said; "I wish to see once more the Great River, where my fathers fought the Ojibways, and the Winnebagoes. I wish to see once more the long shining Lake Pepin, and its bold high rocks. There I lived when I was a little boy, before the first fire-canoe came up the Great River. My father killed many deer and my mother caught great fish, many kinds of fish in the river.

"Wakadan, the bass, the alligator-fish, the big buffalo-sucker that has no teeth, but has strength to run through a net, Tamahe, the pickerel, that has sharp teeth and is the wolf among fish, and the large black paddle-fish, besides many, many little fish, black and golden, and silver, which were caught only by the small boys.

"My brother, you will need me and I will go with you and fight with you if the bad white man comes to take away your boys.

"And I will travel along the Great River and be happy as I was when I listened to the the waves of Lake Pepin many winters ago.

"There our people never went hungry and all were happy, but now the dark clouds hang over all my people. The soldiers will drive them away from the Minnesota to the Bad Lands of the West, where the timber and the grass are poor.

"Once more, I will travel on the Great River and then I will join my people far west, and my friends will bury my bones where the hungry wolves can not reach them."

CHAPTER VII—ON THE GREAT RIVER

The day before their departure south was a very busy one for both men and boys.

When Barker told the boys at breakfast that they would all start down the

river in the evening, it was only the strange place and people that kept the boys from shouting and turning somersaults.

"Are you going with us all the way to Vicksburg? And is Tatanka going?" Tim asked, big-eyed with suppressed excitement.

"We are both going," Barker told them, "if we can get through. We should not have much trouble until we get to Memphis. Below Memphis, the river is full of gunboats and the country full of fighting armies. I don't know how we shall manage there. We'll have to see, when we get there."

The four travelers could now take their horses no farther, and although they disliked to part with the animals there was nothing else to do. Old Joe, the hostler, paid them a fair price for the animals and again pledged his secrecy.

"There's a good market now for horses," he told his friends, "and I'll sell them in a few days. If any inquisitive gent comes around, I'll send him about his own business."

After dark the four friends went on board the *Red Hawk*.

"You lads keep quiet in your cabin," Barker told the boys, "till the boat has started. Tatanka and I will do a little scouting till we have cast off."

The two men took a position behind some boxes and bales of freight. The landing was lit by several glaring torches, so that the two scouts could see clearly every person moving about, but they could not be seen themselves from the landing.

The deck-hands were just throwing on the last sticks of cord-wood and carrying on board the last sacks of wheat, when a stranger appeared and spoke to the captain.

"Can you carry another passenger?" Barker heard him ask. "I have blankets and can sleep on the deck."

[image]

"Walking is good, on you can ride on a log, the water is fine."

"Not another soul," replied the captain. "Get off the gang-plank, you're in the way."

"But I must get to St. Louis," the man argued.

"I don't care what you must do," the captain replied gruffly. "Walking is good, or you can ride on a log, the water is fine. Now get off the gang-plank. This boat leaves in five minutes."

"Hicks," whispered Tatanka. "Bad man Hicks," as the man slouched back up town. "I'd like to throw my ax at him."

"It's a good thing that I described Hicks to the captain," Barker chuckled. "The captain recognized him all right."

Then the *Red Hawk* gave a long whistle, the pilot pulled the bell at the engine, there was a great hissing of steam and the big stern-wheel noisily churned the brown water of the Mississippi. Slowly the heavily-laden boat backed into mid-stream, again the pilot rang the bell, and the boat made a half-turn and was headed down-stream.

The boys came out of their cabin.

"How can the pilot find his way?" asked Bill, "when the night is so pitch-dark?"

"A good pilot knows the river by heart," Barker told the boys. "He knows it by day and by night, and up-stream and downstream."

At the present time it is comparatively easy to pilot a steamboat on the Mississippi. Hundreds of wing-dams, built by the government engineers, keep the current in the same channel, and numerous guideboards and lights on shore tell the pilot where to steer his boat. In addition to this, the modern boats are all provided with powerful headlights and search-lights.

At the time of the Civil War wing-dams, guideboards, shore-lights, and search-lights were all unknown. The safety of the Mississippi steamers depended entirely on the pilots. Their accurate knowledge of the river, their skill in handling the wheel, their quick decision in moments of danger, brought every year hundreds of boats safely back and forth between the ports of St. Paul and St. Louis.

As the *Red Hawk* was gliding by the magnificent groves of cottonwoods, which begin to line the Mississippi just below the Indian Mounds at St. Paul, the trapper and his three friends were quietly sitting on the upper deck in front of the pilot-house.

There was little talk, for all were absorbed in the running of the boat.

Now the boat seemed to be headed into an absolutely black wall, which proved, however, to be only the dense shadow caused by the forest or by a high rocky bank. Had the pilot not had the nerve to steer straight into the black shadow, he would have wrecked his boat among the snags on a sandbar, where the safe channel seemed to run.

At the end of three hours the boat stopped at Prescott, at the mouth of the St. Croix, one of the two navigable tributaries of the upper Mississippi, near St. Paul and Minneapolis, almost two thousand miles from the Gulf of Mexico. Here the river grew wider and deeper, so that the pilot could pick his way with a little less anxiety, but to the four fugitives from the Sioux country, the mystery continued.

At one moment the boat was headed into a dark forest of tall cottonwoods

and maples, and a little later the boys felt sure she would crash against a solid wall of rock, and then suddenly the river seemed to come to an end.

"We've lost the river, we're in a big slough," Tim whispered as he held firmly to Meetcha.

But always just in time, the wheel turned just enough and the boat glided safely past trees and cliffs, past sandbars and snags, and around every bend and turn.

The four travelers began to feel a little more at ease now. Tatanka lit his red pipe, Barker treated himself to a cigar which his friend Joe had slipped into his pocket, while the boys began to feel sleepy.

The smokers had taken only a few puffs when a messenger came. "The captain," he said, "wishes you to smoke somewhere else. The light from your pipe and cigar bothers the pilot, so he can't see where he is steering."

"The boy is lying," Tatanka murmured.

"No, he is not," Barker dissented. "I have often heard the pilots say that on a dark night like this, the light from a pipe or cigar annoys them so much that they cannot steer right. We must find another place."

It was not long before all four of the friends sought their beds. The boat stopped for more freight at Red Wing; and at Lake City, at the head of Lake Pepin, it was delayed until noon by some necessary repairs on the engine.

The first mate who took charge of the boat at noon was in doubt whether he should wait for a threatening storm to pass before he started down the lake, but the captain was impatient.

"We have already lost five hours," he remarked. "Start her off, she is well built, a little wind won't hurt her. I am in a hurry with that war freight."

Lake Pepin is only a widened Mississippi. On account of long bars of silt and sand which the Chippewa River has thrown across the Mississippi, the river has backed up till it fills the whole valley, two miles wide, and twenty miles long. On this long, deep body of water, the wind and waves attain a terrific sweep, and many a boat, safe enough on the river, has met disaster on Lake Pepin.

While the *Red Hawk* was lying at Lake City, a strong wind had been blowing from the south toward great masses of clouds that were rising in the north. When she headed down the lake the wind died down, but half an hour later it broke with a gale from the north, carrying before it whirling clouds and sheets of swishing rain that hid from view the high bluffs on either side.

Almost at once, as if by the magic of a demon, the lake was in an uproar with a smashing sea of foaming, toppling white-capped waves, which together with the raging wind, threatened to throw the *Red Hawk* out of her course into the trough of the waves.

The pilot strained every nerve and muscle to keep her headed toward the

foot of the lake. He signalled to the engineer for full steam ahead, because a boat at high speed is more easily steered than one at low speed.

For a while, all went well. Then a sharp snap was heard at the engine. The wheel stopped turning at once, and the boat swung helpless into the trough of the sea, while big splashing waves began to break over the low sides of the vessel and into the hold.

"The Wakon, the bad spirit, will swallow the ship," Tatanka murmured. "We must all try to swim ashore."

One of the piston-rods had broken and one engine alone could not turn the big stem-wheel, but Captain Allen did not mean to give up his boat without a fight. In five minutes the carpenters were at work spiking together two long wide planks. A heavy rope, twice as long as the planks, was tied to each end of the planks. To the middle of this rope the ship's hawser was fastened, and the sea anchor was ready.

"Heave her over," commanded the captain, and within a few minutes the boat swung around with her bow to the wind.

It was high time. For the waves had put out the fires, and the pumps had stopped working.

A little longer and she would have filled and sunk in thirty feet of water. As it was, she drifted fast before the wind, and in a little more than half an hour she crashed against the rocks on the Wisconsin shore, where storm and waves broke her to pieces.

CHAPTER VIII—AFTER THE WRECK

Although the *Red Hawk* and her cargo were a complete loss, all on board reached land safely. With the wreckage of the boat, the men built a fire to dry themselves and from a box of bread and bacon which the waves threw ashore, they made a frugal supper. The four travelers for the South had saved their guns and blankets and all spent the night near a big fire as best they could.

The next day, Tatanka built a tepee, using blankets and canvas instead of the deerskins and buffalo skins he had learned to use when he was a boy. The

company was indeed much in need of some kind of shelter because little Tim was not at all himself. He tried bravely not to "lie down," as he said, but his head ached, his face was flushed and at times he had a high fever.

"I fear the boy will be sick," said Tatanka. "I will fix him a tea."

Tim had the dislike of most small boys for medicine, but he drank down a large cupful of hot tea made by steeping some green plants in hot water. Then Tatanka covered him up with several blankets to produce sweating.

"It is good medicine," the Indian remarked. "It is the way our women cure their children, and the missionaries also say it is good medicine."

After a few days, the four travelers moved to a permanent camp a little way below the foot of Lake Pepin and about a mile below Reed's Landing.

At this place were several stores, and the landing owed its existence to the fact that early in spring goods were delivered here and hauled by wagon to the head of the lake, where they were loaded on other steamers for shipment to St. Paul. For the ice sometimes remains in Lake Pepin two weeks longer than in any other part of the upper river.

Barker and Black Buffalo had intended to take the next boat to St. Louis, but Little Tim grew so sick that it was impossible to move him, and the men decided that they would have to take care of the sick boy as well as they could.

"He has the long fever," declared Tatanka, "and he will be sick a long time. May be till the Mississippi freezes over."

Tim did have a long sickness. He had no pain, he had no appetite, and his small body often burnt with a high fever.

If a doctor could have been consulted, he would have said that Tim had a fairly mild case of typhoid fever, but there was no doctor within fifty miles of Reed's Landing. Barker and Tatanka had both seen cases like Tim's and felt that in time the little fellow would get well again.

"We shall stay here till the Great River freezes over," said Tatanka, after a week had passed. "A sick boy cannot travel."

Tatanka built another tepee, which he and Bill occupied, while the trapper slept in the first tepee with the sick boy. The two men bought a boat of the trader and finished a canoe the trader had begun. They also built of logs and rough boards a shack for winter use, doing the work whenever they had plenty of time.

[image]

The two men bought a boat of the trader.

"A tepee," Tatanka said, "is a good house in summer and fall, but in winter it is too cold for white people, who are not used to it."

Both the trapper and Black Buffalo did all they could to make the sick boy comfortable. They gathered wild cherries and gave him the juice to drink; they made soup of prairie chicken, grouse, and wild duck.

"You must drink the good soup," said Barker, "for when the lake freezes up you and Bill must go skating and you must be big and strong when we get home to Vicksburg."

It was not difficult for the trapper and the Indian to secure enough food, for both of them knew how to gather the wild foods of woods, river, and marsh.

It was not getting to be the time when the great waves of bird life roll southward, and as the Mississippi and its grand winding bottoms are one of the great highways of the winged millions, there was an endless procession of flocks coming and going.

When little Tim had a good day and the weather was mild, the trapper carried the sick boy to a spot where he could see the shining river and the wooded bluffs, gorgeous in autumn colors, for no river in the world surpasses the upper Mississippi in the almost inconceivable profusion of autumn flowers and in the gorgeous effects of mixed and blended green, gold, orange, reds, and crimson, all painted on a canvas far too vast for any human artist and almost too grand for human eye to drink in.

And above all this beauty on earth, spread the blue sky, with fleecy white clouds floating eastward.

"Uncle Barker," the boy would ask, "what are the birds almost touching the clouds?"

"I can hear their call," the old trapper answered, glad that Tim was beginning to take an interest in things, "I think they are martins, the kind that nested in the hollow trees at Fort Ridgely and in the big house the soldiers had built for them."

Near the tepees stood an immense hollow elm. Around this tree a small flock of swifts gyrated in wide, noisy circles every evening.

"What are they doing!" asked Bill. "Where are they going?"

Tatanka smiled. "The Indian boys know," he answered. "If your eyes are sharp, you can tell."

Then Bill watched. Every time the swarm sailed, noisily chirping, over the big tree, some of the birds suddenly turned their wings against the air, and dropped into the dark hollow like so many stones. After half an hour the last bird had dropped to its sleeping-perch and Bill thumped the tree with his ax; he laid his ear to the tree and heard a great humming as of a hundred swarms of bees, and a few of the birds came out and fluttered about.

“Don’t disturb them, Bill,” the trapper urged. “They have been on the wing all day and we should let them rest. Some people say they have no feet, but they have, only they are very small and the swifts use them merely for clinging to walls of hollow trees at night. It is a queer way of sleeping, but the best they can do, for they never sleep in any other way.”

Nowadays not many swifts sleep in hollow trees, for most of these natural homes of the bears, raccoons, and swifts are gone, but the light-winged swifts have found other sleeping-places; they roost by thousands in chimneys of court-houses, churches, and schools. And before white men light their fires, when the days begin to grow cold, the swifts have assembled in great flocks on the Gulf of Mexico, whence they go to spend the winter in Central and South America.

Bill took great delight in bringing his sick brother a handful of the most beautiful flowers of the bottom forest, the scarlet lobelia, or cardinal flower. Tim was not alone in enjoying these dazzling red flowers. A flock of humming-birds soon found them and came to them several times every day. Within reach of the boys’ hands, the little bird gems hung motionless on invisible wings. ‘At times they perched, and preened their delicate plumage for ten minutes at a time. Tim laughed for the first time, when two of the midgets of the air had a fight. They squeaked like mice, as they threatened angrily to spear each other with their long sharp bills.

“They are funny little things,” Tim said, as he turned over and went to sleep.

“The boy will get well,” remarked Tatanka. “When a sick person laughs, he gets well again.”

One warm day rather late in September, the trapper proposed a new kind of hunting to Bill. “Let us go on a bee hunt,” he said; “Tatanka will stay with Tim.”

Bill had never heard of a bee hunt, and wanted to know what Mr. Barker wanted to do with the bees.

“We don’t want the bees,” the trapper explained; “we want to get some honey, and in order to do that we have to find the nest of a swarm of wild honey-bees.”

The trapper made a little box of bark and caught a bee, after it had worked for quite a while on a clump of goldenrod.

In an open place, he let the bee go. “Now, watch,” he said to Bill, “and point your finger in the direction it flies and run after it as far as you can follow it.”

Bill did not know why he should run after the bee, but he followed through grass and weeds until he tumbled over a hidden log.

Barker laughed when Bill picked himself out of the weeds.

“That’s fine,” he commented. “My eyes are getting a little dull on such small creatures and I can’t run as fast as I once could, so I took you along to do the spying and the running. You see, we know now that this bee goes east from

here to reach its home."

The two hunters now walked a few hundred yards in the same direction and then caught another bee. Again Bill saw the liberated insect make a straight line eastward.

In this manner, they proceeded until they came close to the bluffs on the Wisconsin side.

"We're on their line, all right," Barker expressed himself gleefully. "If it doesn't end at some settler's bee-hive, we ought to find our bee-tree pretty soon."

The next bee surprised Bill by going directly west; but the trapper clapped his hands and called: "We've passed the tree, so we'll just work back carefully and watch for a good-looking hollow tree. If we can't find it, we shall have to run a cross-line, which is sure to find it."

But they found the wild bees, at the next trial, without running a cross-line. "Here they are, here they are!" Bill called, as he stood under a big white-oak.

Hundreds of black bees were entering and leaving a knot-hole about six feet above the ground.

"It's a big swarm," Barker told the boy; "and they are in a good place for us. Sometimes they go into a hollow limb thirty feet high, where you can't get at them.

"To-morrow, we'll come back and get some honey. Now let's go home and tell Tim and Tatanka about our luck."

CHAPTER IX—HUNTING BEES AND DRIVING FISH

Tatanka was not enthusiastic about the prospect of a bee hunt.

"The Indians," he told his friends, "do not like the little black honey-flies. They call them white men's flies, because they came into our country with the white man. We like Tumahga-tanka, the big bumblebee, that builds his cells in an old mouse-nest on the ground. But Tumahga-tanka is like the Indians: he gathers only very little honey food, just for a day or two. Only our small boys hunt them and take their little honey in the evening when their wings are cold and stiff so they cannot fly on the naked body of the boys and sting them.

“The little honey-flies are like white men. They gather much honey for many days of rain and for all the moons of winter. They make a store in a big tree and fill it with honey, so they can stay at home and eat honey till the maple buds break and till the wild plums and wild strawberries hang out their white flowers. They are like white men, who work all the time and gather big houses full of corn and meat and make big woodpiles for the winter.

“Tumahga-tanka is like the Indian. He travels much, he often sleeps among the flowers at night, and he is always poor and hungry like the Indian.”

“Where do the bumblebees go in winter,” asked Tim, “if they do not gather enough honey to live on?”

Tatanka did not know. “Perhaps they sleep like Mahto, the bear, or like Meetcha, the bear’s little brother.”

“Will you go with us?” asked Barker, “when we go to get the honey?”

“Yes, I will go with you,” Tatanka promised. “But I do not like to fight the little black bees. They are as many as leaves on a tree, and they will get very angry and will sting when you come to rob them of their food.”

“Why shouldn’t we go at night, when they can’t see us and when it is too cool for them to fly much?” asked Bill.

“No,” said Barker, “we shall go in daylight, when we can see what we are doing.”

The sun was already several hours high, next morning, when the bee-hunters were ready.

Under a clump of sumachs Barker prepared himself for the raid. He tied a piece of mosquito netting over his hat and face. The sleeve of his hunting-shirt he tied firmly to his wrists, and he put on his buckskin hunting-gloves.

“Now, I’m ready,” he laughed. “You can sit down and watch me.”

With a saw, he had procured from the trader at Reed’s Landing, he rapidly made two cuts in the tree, one near the ground and the other just below the knot-hole entrance.

The bees came pouring out of the knot-hole. Hundreds and thousands of them buzzed madly about the trapper’s head; they crawled all over him, trying to find a spot where they could sting the robber of their treasure-house.

Some of the angry bees discovered the two spectators and Meetcha. Bill let out a yell and ran. Tatanka tried to fight them off, but some got into his hair. He gave a ringing Sioux warwhoop and tumbled after Bill in a most ludicrous manner. Little gray Meetcha had been watching the fun as if puzzled at the strange behavior of his master. But now a mad bee buzzed right into the hairs of his ear. Meetcha seemed to listen a second, then he began to paw his ears frantically and to roll in the grass. Now he sat up again, as if to listen. Some more bees were after him. Again he pawed his ears wildly, and rolled on the grass as if he were

performing in a circus. Then he scampered hurriedly after Bill and Tatanka.

When Barker had finished his cross-cuts with the saw, he began to use his sharp ax vigorously and with the aid of an iron wedge, such as wood-cutters use, he split a large slab out of the hollow tree.

There was the wild bee hive, full of great irregular combs of honey, white, yellow, and brown!

The hunter gave a yell. "Come on, boys," he shouted; "get your honey. We could fill a wash-tub full. The biggest lot of wild honey I ever saw."

The bees had almost stopped swarming about the hunter and had settled in black masses on the broken combs and were gorging themselves on the dripping honey.

Bill and Tatanka would not come near the tree.

"I am not afraid to fight the Chippewas," remarked Tatanka, "but I do not like the little black bees."

Barker filled a birch-bark bucket with honey and then put the slab again in place on the tree.

"I left them enough for the winter," he told his friends. "It would not be right to rob the little creatures of all, because it is so late in the season now that they could not gather another supply for the winter."

Little Tim enjoyed very much the story Bill told him of the bee hunt, and he laughed heartily when his brother told how Meetcha had fought the angry bees. However, although Tim was now well on the road to recovery, it was quite evident that he could not go on the long journey to Vicksburg before winter, and Barker and Tatanka made their preparations to winter in the river bottom below Lake Pepin.

The trapper had bought a gill-net about fifty feet long and on the first warm day after the bee hunt, he proposed a fishing trip to Beef Slough, one of the sluggish side-channels of the Mississippi.

One who has never seen the Great River is apt to imagine that, like smaller rivers, it has only one channel, but below the mouth of the St. Croix, it generally flows in one main channel and one or more side-channels. The steamboats naturally take the main channel, but hunters, canoeists, and fishermen often find their best sport on the side-channels, or sloughs, as they are often called..

Bill was in a flutter of excitement when he and Barker arrived at Beef Slough, for he had never fished with a gill-net. The trapper first cut two stout poles, to each of which he tied one end of the net. He next set the net across the slough so that it reached almost from side to side.

A gill-net really consists of three nets. The net in the middle has small meshes and is made of rather fine twine, the two nets on the outside have very large meshes, a foot or more square. When a fish runs against the middle net,

the fine meshes catch him behind the gills and hold him, or, if he is very big and strong, he makes a pocket of the small net in trying to push through it and thus gets tangled up and caught.

After Barker had set the net, he told his boy companion: “Now, Bill, we’ll make a big drive.”

Bill did not know what Barker meant by making a drive for fish. He had heard of the Indians driving buffalo, but he did not get much time to think about the new kind of drive.

“Take that long pole and get into the boat with me,” the trapper told him, as he paddled up the slough a little way.

“Now,” he ordered, as he turned around and started back toward the net, “beat the water with that pole and make as much noise as you can.”

Very soon the two men could see streaks in the smooth water. “Oh, I see,” exclaimed Bill, as he splashed the water to right and left, “we’re trying to drive them into the net. There, we’ve got one! See the float go down. There’s another one. Watch the big one! He isn’t going in. Look at him. See him run along the net. Look at him! He’s run around the net and is going down the river like a streak!”

“He is a big old buffalo-sucker,” the trapper laughed. “He is too wise to be caught in a gill-net.”

“Say, Mr. Barker,” the boy asked, “can fish think?”

“I reckon some of the old ones can,” Barker answered. “Well never catch that big fellow. I think he weighs fifteen pounds, I reckon his nose has touched a net before.”

The net was literally filled with fish of many kinds, suckers, pickerel, pike, bass, big sunfish, and fierce-looking gars.

“We don’t want those alligators,” the boy remarked, when the trapper threw several of the gars into the boat. “They have a long snout and are covered with horny plates just like alligators,” the boy continued. “They surely would be alligators if they had legs. I couldn’t eat them.”

“That’s all right,” Barker laughed. ”You needn’t. Most white men throw them away, but I learned from the Indians how to fix them. You pour boiling water on their plates and they come off in big pieces. Their meat has a fine flavor and they don’t have any sharp little bones like pickerel and most of the suckers. I think you’ll eat them after they are smoked or fried.”

CHAPTER X—CATCHING A MONSTER

Bill helped Tatanka and Barker to smoke the fish they had caught and then was ready for another trip.

"Can't we go again, before it gets too cold?" he asked. "Let us go again, Mr. Barker, this meat won't last long. I just wish Tim could go, too!"

The old trapper himself had also caught the fever. "I reckon, boy," he admitted, "we ought to make another haul or two, but the next time we'll take a seine. Did you ever fish with a seine! It is more fun than with a gill-net, but we must go soon, before the water gets too cold, for in seining, the fisherman gets as wet as the fish."

On the next warm day, Barker remarked at breakfast: "Bill, this looks like a good day. I guess we'll be off right away."

The two fishermen rode down stream to a place where a deep bayou or slough joined the main river. They started to seine half a mile up the bayou. One end of the seine was tied to a stout pole driven into the bottom of the bayou. The other end, they swung around in a half-circle, Bill rowing the boat and the trapper managing the seine from the stern of the boat. They caught all kinds of fish in the same manner that boys and fishermen catch minnows. Their troubles began when they started to make a haul in a strong current in deep water near the mouth of the bayou. The net caught on a submerged stump and could not be pulled off against the current.

"I reckon we're stuck," said Barker, as he found it impossible to move the seine either one way or the other.

"Let me dive in and fix it," begged the boy, as he began to strip. Barker thought the water was too cold, but Bill said he wouldn't mind it, and it wouldn't take long to try it.

Bill splashed some water over himself and then swam quickly to the spot where the net was caught. He dived, opened his eyes and could see clearly every mesh of the net as it was held fast by the current over a sharp stump. He lifted

it off quickly and threw it over the stump down stream and struck out for shore. His skin was blue and his teeth chattered as he hurriedly got into his clothes. Then he ran back and forth on the sand a few minutes to get warm.

"Now, Mr. Barker," he said, "let's make the haul and see what we get out of this deep hole. There ought to be some big ones in it."

Both men slowly pulled the seine through the deep hole, where by means of small leads attached to the lower edge of the seine, the big drag-net swept the bottom, driving all deep-water fish before it.

As the bag-like middle part of the seine slowly crept into shallower water on a rising sandbank, there was a great stir in the enclosed pool. Big fish of several kinds came to the surface. Some showing a silvery flash for just a moment, dived again to the bottom in their attempt to escape, others, bolder or made more desperate, shot with a loud splash over the seine back into free water.

Bill pulled as he had never pulled on anything before.

"Pull, Mr. Barker, pull!" he shouted. "We've got a wagon-load of big ones, but they're breaking away."

The old trapper pulled as hard as Bill, but he didn't hear what Bill called to him, for the fish in their last desperate effort to escape made a deafening confusion and noise with splashing, jumping and flapping about. The big bag was alive with a wildly struggling mass of fish of all sizes; and so heavy was the catch that the two fishermen could not move the net another inch.

"Drop the rope," commanded the old man, "and throw them out on the sand."

As Bill sprang into the shallow water, a big flopping fish, the like of which he had never seen before, got between his legs and laid him sprawling flat on his stomach amongst the madly struggling fish. In a moment Bill was on his feet again.

"Help me, Mr. Barker, help me," he called. "I can't hold him; he'll get away!"

"Grab him in the gills!" the trapper shouted, as much excited as his boy friend.

The black giant was just splashing into open water when Bill threw himself forward and caught him firmly in the gills.

"Catch him, Mr. Barker, catch him!" Bill spluttered as he blew the water out of his nose and mouth. "I can't lift him."

By their united effort, they dragged the monster on shore.

"We've caught a whale, a real whale," Bill shouted, and danced around like a wild Indian. "What is it, Mr. Barker! Is it a whale?"

"It is a paddle-fish, but sure a big one, I reckon," the trapper told him as he dragged the ungainly monster into the grass. "He must weigh a hundred pounds, and he measures six feet, if he measures an inch."

Sorting the fish and loading them into the boat took some time, and when the work was done, the two fishermen could not help laughing at each other. Their clothes were dripping wet and covered with mud and fish-scales all over, but they had a boat-load of fish.

"That's all a part of fishing," Barker remarked, with his quiet smile. "It is a saying among us trappers that dry fishermen and wet hunters have had poor luck. I guess our luck was worth getting soaked for."

Before they started for camp all small fish or fish not wanted were put back in the water. Bill had already learned the maxim of the old trapper: "Never waste any of God's wild bread and meat. What you do not need to-day, you may want badly to-morrow."

"I have seen the days," the old man had often told the boys, "when I was mighty glad to dip a mess of minnows out of a spring-hole in winter, and I have many times thanked the Good Lord that porcupines can't run as fast as deer.

"One winter while I was trapping in upper Michigan I lost my gun while crossing a treacherous stream, and if I could not have killed porcupines, fool-hens, and snowshoe rabbits with a club, I should have had to pull out of the country and leave my traps and furs."

When they arrived at camp, Tim was wild at the sight of the giant paddle-fish, and the boys found that the odd paddle-shaped snout of the fish was almost half the length of the fish.

"What does he do with his big paddle?" Tim wanted to know. But neither the Indian nor the trapper could answer the question.

"Have they a paddle when they are just hatched?" Bill asked, but neither Tatanka nor Barker had ever seen a paddle-fish less than a foot long.

The life of the paddle-fish or spoonbill is a mystery to this day, and little more is known of it now than was known to Indians and whites when Bill and Tim camped on Lake Pepin.

The armor-plated gars and paddle-fish are found only in the Mississippi and its tributaries, while bass and pickerel and eel are found in most waters flowing into the North Atlantic, both in America and Europe.

Both gar and spoonbill are still caught in Lake Pepin. A European fish, the German carp, has become naturalized in the Mississippi basin and many carloads of it are shipped to Eastern markets every year. However, the game fish of the old days are still all there and will never become scarce, if good fish and game laws are wisely administered.

In the days of Barker and Tatanka, fishing with any kind of net or tackle was lawful, but to-day both commercial fishermen and anglers have to observe the laws, or our lakes and streams will become fished out; for the resources and gifts of nature are not inexhaustible, and the number of men and boys who go

fishing increases each year.

For fishing, camping, and canoeing, for grand scenery, for house-boating, motor-boating, for trees, flowers, and birds and for all kinds of water creatures such as clams, crayfish and muskrats, the Mississippi, the "Everywhere River" of the Chippewa Indians, has no equal on the northern hemisphere and is surpassed only by the Amazon of South America.

In the Itasca Forest of Minnesota, the Mississippi begins as a tiny stream, which sometimes loses itself in a tamarack swamp, and which the beaver people, the little animal engineers, can easily dam with mud and brush. When it leaves Itasca, it is large enough to carry a canoe. But the rippling little creek grows rapidly by receiving the water from many lakes and streams and long before it reaches Minneapolis, where it furnishes power to grind the wheat grown over half a continent, it is a stately navigable river, whose enormous volumes of flood-water only the most skillful engineer can control.

CHAPTER XI—AFTER WILD GEESE

Late in October, when one of the last boats was stopping at Reed's Landing, Barker and Tatanka were watching the boat from a small window in the store.

"Look, brother," the Indian whispered; "there is the bad white man."

On deck stood Hicks with two companions talking and gesticulating. Hicks evidently wanted to get off the boat, but the other two men persuaded him to stay on board.

The steamer stopped only a few minutes to take on cargo and passengers before it proceeded on its way to St. Louis.

"He has hunted for us in Minnesota a long time," Barker laughed. "Now, I think we are rid of him for a while. I suppose he has made up his mind that we have gone on to Vicksburg and he is going to follow us. Well, let him go. By this time the parents of the boys must have the letters which the boys and I sent them through a friend in a Missouri regiment, and they will not be worried by any lies Hicks may tell them. But I would just like to find out why he was so anxious to keep these boys in Minnesota and expose them to the scalping-knives of the

Indians."

After the men had completed their purchases, they returned to their camp, but they said nothing to the boys about Hicks and his companions.

The southward flight of ducks and geese and other water fowl was now at its height, and the campers had added a liberal supply of wild ducks to their store of smoked fish.

The first ducks to go south were the blue-winged teals, small birds which whizzed over the camp in immense flocks at the rate of sixty or more miles an hour. A little later, the northern ducks, blue-bills, and mallards had come down in immense flocks. But Tatanka and Barker were waiting for still larger game.

"We ought to get some geese," the Indian suggested, and one evening as they were watching the flight of a long line of great honking geese, they saw two or three hundred of them settle on a long sandbar a mile below their camp. "Yon and Bill must rise early," said the Indian. "Perhaps you can get some of them."

Long before daybreak next morning, Barker awakened the soundly sleeping boy.

"Get up, Bill!" he called. "We'll have a cup of coffee and then we'll try our luck at the geese."

Very quietly, without waking Tim, the two hunters slipped out of camp and got into their boat.

Soon they glided silently down stream. A mist was hanging over the river and large drops of moisture were falling off the trees along shore. Bill was shivering with cold and excitement.

"My, but it is dark and the water looks awfully cold and gloomy," whispered Bill. "I would be afraid to go down the river alone. Listen!" he said under his breath, "I think I heard a wolf howl."

"No," the trapper quieted him, "the big wolves have left this country. Listen again."

The sounds were nearer now. "Oh, it is a big hoot-owl. Several of them. They are answering each other.

"They make a noise like ghosts," he continued, as a deep guttural, "Whoo-who-whooo," came from a maple thicket close by. "My hair is trying to stand up under my cap, though I know they never attack anything but rabbits and woodchucks."

The two hunters were now paddling along a side-channel which entered the main river near the point where they expected to find the geese.

"Be very quiet," Barker cautioned the boy. "Geese not only have sharp eyes, but their hearing is very acute. If they hear any suspicious sounds there will be a grand flapping of wings and the whole flock will be off to some other place."

The wind was coming from the south, and for that reason the hunters had

landed north of the sandbar.

"Mr. Barker," asked the boy, "can geese and ducks smell the hunter!"

"I don't know," replied the trapper. "I never thought of it and never heard it said that they could. Moose and deer and wolves can smell a man a mile off, and they can hear a man's talk a quarter of a mile away; but I don't think that birds are guided by scent at all."

"Do the sleeping geese put somebody on guard!" the lad inquired.

"I don't think they have any system of guards, but some of them are always standing with their heads up, and the old ganders are most watchful. If one goose becomes alarmed, they all go.

"You must only whisper now. I think we are getting pretty close to them. Step carefully, so you don't break any sticks. All wild creatures take alarm at the snapping of sticks. I suppose they think a wolf or some other beast of prey is after them."

The trapper went cautiously to the edge of the timber and looked down stream.

"I can't see the sandbar yet," he told his companion. "We must creep along a little farther. We have to be ready at daybreak, for soon after they will all go to feed on some shallow water, or most likely on some stubble-field beyond the bluff.

"These Canada geese feed much like tame geese, they like to pick the ears of grain out of the stubble and they like all kinds of young green stuff. In early spring they are very fond of grazing on young winter wheat and rye."

"Couldn't you tame them?" asked the boy.

"Yes, very easily," the trapper told him, "but they don't breed till they are at least two years old, and they will fly away in the fall unless their wings are clipped.

"Mallard ducks are easily tamed, too, but they will also fly away in fall if their wings are not clipped. I think most of our tame ducks came from wild mallards, a long time ago."

"Is it true," the boy wanted to know, "that ducks and geese cannot fly in August?"

"Yes, that's no foolish tale. Ducks and geese lose all their big wing-feathers at the same time, so that for about two weeks in August they cannot fly. I have come upon a flock of a thousand ducks that spattered about like mud-hens. But their big feathers grow very fast, and they have remarkably strong muscles. I think at this time of the year, in October, they can fly a thousand miles without resting."

For some time, the hunters continued to pick their way slowly and silently, now through the tall dripping sawgrass, then in the dark shadow of dense river-

bottom maples.

Again the trapper crept out into the open, while Bill held his breath waiting for the return of his friend.

"I can't see them yet," the old man reported, "but I can hear them cackle. We had better wait here till it is light enough to shoot."

Daylight seemed a very long time coming, but at last the stars began to fade behind the Wisconsin bluffs, while the woods on the Minnesota hills began to stand out like long black streaks.

"Now," whispered Barker, "look at your gun. It is time to begin our stalk. Don't shoot blindly into the flock, but aim at your bird and take it from below or behind. We must not drop any bird crippled, and let it get away. That is poor sportsmanship."

Without another word, the two hunters crept along for a hundred yards. Barker stepped slowly behind a willow-bush and motioned the boy to follow him.

A large flock of big dark birds were sitting and standing within easy range. Many were still asleep with their heads under-their wings, some were preening their feathers and half a dozen stood watchful with their long necks erect.

One big old gander became restless. He seemed to be looking and listening in the direction of the hunters. He stood still a few seconds. Then he uttered a loud honk and with a great thunderous flapping of their big wings, the while flock rose in the gray morning air.

Both hunters fired twice, and four of the big birds dropped before they could get under way. Three fell on the sand dead, but the fourth turned and fell into the brush some hundred yards below them.

"Mark the spot," ordered Barker, "and load your gun. Be quick, or we'll lose it."

They hurried to the spot where the goose had dropped into the bushes. A few scattered feathers were there, but no bird.

"Now we must circle around to find that goose," Barker told his companion. "It can't have gone far."

For half an hour they searched the whole neighborhood with the greatest care, but not a trace did they discover of the wounded bird.

"I reckon we have to give it up," the trapper said at last. "It beats me how a wild creature can hide itself. Perhaps the goose got back into the water and is now swimming down the river.

"I have known a wounded duck to dive and bite itself fast to some bottom weeds and die without coming up."

Tatanka had a big breakfast ready when the hunters reached camp and after breakfast Bill and Barker dressed and smoked their game.

"We had better keep this meat for winter," the trapper suggested, "for until

it freezes up, we can get all the fresh meat we want."

Tim, who used to amuse himself for hours at a time by playing with Meetcha, was in great anxiety, because the pet raccoon had once more mysteriously disappeared.

Bill and Barker and the Indian looked in every place, where Meetcha was accustomed to dig for grubs or hunt for frogs, but he was not to be found.

"He has gone to find a sleeping-place for the winter," Tatanka told his friends. "He feels that it is growing cold."

Tatanka's guess proved true, for on the second day, Meetcha was found curled up and fast asleep in a hollow log a quarter of a mile from camp.

"We'll fix him," said Tatanka, as he cut off the branches of the hollow basswood.

Meetcha woke up, but recognizing his friends, did not come out of the log.

"Now help me carry the log home."

Tim clapped his thin hands with joy when the three coon-hunters arrived at camp and laid the log down in a sheltered spot.

One end of the log was naturally closed, and Tim filled the other end with dry leaves. In this way Meetcha followed the custom of his tribe and went into winter quarters.

On warm days he came out again, but whenever the weather turned cold and stormy, he crawled back into his hollow log.

CHAPTER XII—IN A WINTER CAMP

The last days of October were cold and windy and it seemed as if the north wind drove all wild birds before it. Thousands of robins and little yellow-patched birds, the hardy myrtle-warblers, filled the timber on the river islands. Long dark clouds of different kinds of blackbirds passed southward, great whitish gulls came drifting along from somewhere, and the black terns, dull colored in summer, had donned their white autumn plumage.

"I believe I saw 500,000 ducks to-day," said the trapper as he returned to camp one evening with all the mallards he could carry.

"The birds are going fast, and it will soon be winter. We must cut a lot of wood and pull our boats up to a high place, so they will not freeze in. These woods may be under water next spring and we may need our boats in a hurry."

Early in November came one of those cold rain-storms that mark sharply the end of Indian summer which often prolongs the warm season far into autumn.

It was the first day that all four campers stayed in the shack, which the trapper and the Indian had during the preceding week transformed into a real cozy cabin. Chunks of ash, elm, maple, and cottonwood slowly burning in the old sheet-iron stove which Barker had set up in the middle of the room kept the cabin dry and warm, while the large spattering drops of rain beat a tattoo on the roof.

The few stray leaves that had until now adhered to their branches were swept away. The river-bottom trees assumed their sharp, undraped silhouettes of winter, and from the bluffs all the bright autumn colors had vanished.

The summer birds had gone. Only a few hardy chickadees, woodpeckers, and nuthatches that defy even the coldest northern winter had remained behind the migrating hosts.

By the middle of November the lake was frozen over.

With the beginning of cold weather little Tim's health rapidly improved. Soon he was strong enough to go sliding on the ice; and when Barker had a blacksmith at the landing make a pair of skates for each of the boys the joy of the lads was unbounded.

They skimmed lightly over the frozen sloughs, where the trees and banks sheltered them from the wind. From these trips they returned with flushed cheeks and ravenous appetites and many stories of what they had seen.

They had chased pickerel and other fish under the clear ice, they had seen a muskrat swim along with an air bubble attached to his nose, and they had watched clams slowly plowing their furrow in the sand as they withdrew from the shallower banks into deep water.

The Mississippi and its tributaries harbor a large variety of clams whose shells are now used for pearl buttons. The boys were curious about the habits and life of these quiet creatures that were always nearly buried in mud and sand and moved about by queer little jerks. When Tim was still too weak to move about much, he had amused himself for hours dropping clams, which Bill had caught, back into the water, and watching how each shell, slowly opening, put out a sort of white, fleshy foot; slowly righted itself, and crawled away into deep water.

"What do clams eat and how do they spawn?" the boys wanted to know, but on these questions neither trapper nor Indian had any information.

Clams do indeed lead a strange life. They cannot run after their food, so

they just open their shells a bit to allow the water to run through, in order to catch any small particles of food the water may contain.

The young clams just hatched are so small that the naked eye can scarcely see them. They have no shell at all and swim about very actively. As soon as possible they attach themselves to the gills of several kinds of fish. The fish do not like it, but they have no way of escaping from the very minute creatures. Embedded in the gills of fish the young clams live for some weeks looking like small pimples. When they have grown a tiny shell they drop to the bottom of the river or lake and begin to live in the usual way of clams. That is the curious life-history of the river clam.

While the skating lasted the boys were well occupied. The camp was run on the plan of two meals a day. Barker and the Indian set a few traps for muskrats and minks, tidied up the cabin, cooked the meals, washed dishes, and cut wood. In all these occupations the lads gladly took a hand. At times they went the round of the traps with the men. When the weather was fine they went on skating trips up and down the glassy ice of the sloughs, which reflected like a mirror the boys at play and the trees on shore.

One who has skated only on artificial rinks and ponds does not know the thrill of traveling on a smooth winding river or on the transparent expanse of a frozen lake.

Tim tired very easily, but he grew visibly stronger every day. His fever had entirely disappeared.

Their Cousin Hicks, the boys seemed to have forgotten, at least they never spoke of him. They were happy and content in the care of their two friends.

The trapper, on the other hand, had become so attached to the lads that he once remarked to Tatanka: “I don’t see how I can ever tear myself away from these lads. It would be hard for me to give them up to their parents, but if that man Hicks ever shows up to claim them, I tell you I’ll fight him to a finish.”

“Where do you think, my friend, that bad white man has gone?” Tatanka asked.

The old trapper thought a moment. He had often asked himself the same question. “Down-river,” he replied then. “He will inquire about us of steamboat men and hotel men. And he is likely to go clear down to Vicksburg. He has some evil design on the lads, but I’ll be hanged if I can figure out what it is. I can only think that for some reason he wants to keep them away from Vicksburg.

“He lost our trail at St. Paul or he would have been upon us long ago. I was on the lookout for him every day until we saw him go down-river lately. For the present we are rid of him, but he has some very strong reason for wanting possession of those boys, and I think we’ll fall in with him somewhere after we start south.”

About the Indian war in Minnesota, the boys and their friends were well informed. Barker and the Indian had in no way exaggerated the danger. The enraged Sioux had killed about eight hundred white people, and if the trapper and Tatanka had not taken the boys away, the lads would surely have lost their lives. At the beginning of winter, the Indian war was over. The whole Sioux tribe had been driven from the State of Minnesota. A good many Indians had been captured by General Sibley and all white captives had been released.

It was much more difficult for Barker and the boys to get a clear idea about the war on the Mississippi River near Vicksburg. They had received no letters from Vicksburg since they had camped at the foot of Lake Pepin, and all they really knew was that Grant was trying to take Vicksburg.

The city of Vicksburg lies under a high bluff on the east bank of the Mississippi. By December, 1862, the Confederates had lost control of the Mississippi River, except for a stretch of two hundred miles between Vicksburg and Port Hudson, both of which points they had strongly fortified. By holding this stretch of the great river, they controlled the mouth of the Red River and could secure large supplies and thousands of men from Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas.

The lowlands of the Mississippi at Vicksburg are about forty miles wide, and many streams and bayous wind this way and that way through vast marshes and forests.

In December, 1862, Grant tried to attack Vicksburg from the north by way of the Mississippi Central Railway, but the bold Confederate cavalry commander, Van Dorn, destroyed all his supplies at Holly Springs, and Grant was compelled to give up this plan.

After this plan had failed, Grant tried several others, his object being to secure possession of the wooded hills directly east of Vicksburg. For the present he was baffled by the geographical character of the country, which was excellently suited for defense by resolute men who knew every channel, but which presented almost insuperable obstacles to an invading army.

CHAPTER XIII—FISHING THROUGH THE ICE

As is usually the case in Minnesota, the fine outdoor skating came to a close toward the end of November through storms and snow-falls.

If the lads had not lived in company with such men as the trapper and Tatanka, time would have hung heavily on their hands. On many days the weather was very cold and the snow had become so deep in the woods that traveling was very difficult.

After they had been shut up in the cabin for three days by a bad storm, Tatanka one morning began to carve something out of a piece of soft basswood.

"What are you making?" Tim asked.

"Watch and see," said Tatanka, as he continued slowly to cut away small white shavings.

Soon the boys saw that Tatanka was making a wooden fish about six inches long. When the figure was ready, the Indian cut small pieces of tin out of a tobacco-can and these he tacked to his wooden minnow to serve as fins.

"There, my little brothers," he uttered with a smile, "you have a good minnow. He will fool the pickerel and the bass when they are hungry. I put a little piece of lead on him and you pull him up and down in the water, and pickerel and bass think he is a real fish. They come to eat him. May be you catch them."

After Tatanka had made two more wooden minnows he and the lads went to a deep quiet place in a slough to fish.

At first they cut a small hole in the ice. Then, by the aid of a few poles and some blankets, Tatanka built a small dark tent over the hole.

"Now, then," he said, "we go in and fish. May be we catch them, may be not. If the fish don't come, we go home. May be they come to-morrow."

The tent was entirely dark, but the boys were surprised to find that after their eyes had adjusted themselves to the darkness in the tent the water did not appear dark, but was pervaded by a soft light, enabling them to see clearly even insects and small fish which swam past, and they could plainly see their decoy minnow to a depth of four feet.

Tatanka took the string of the decoy in his left hand. In his right hand he held a spear, and the three fishermen seated themselves on a log.

"You sit still," Tatanka told them. "Don't jump. Fish have no ears, but they can feel every little noise in the water."

It seemed a long time to the boys before anything happened. Then Tatanka bent over quickly, thrust his spear into the hole and brought up a large flapping pickerel.

"May be we caught him," he spoke with a laugh. "Now, Bill, you catch him. This is the way Indians catch plenty fish in winter when they cannot find deer."

Again Bill waited a long time. At last he saw some big fish. With a beating heart he dropped his spear and would have lost it, if it had not been tied by a

string to his arm, but he caught no fish.

Tatanka laughed. “You get much excited,” he said, “like white man. Keep cool like Indian. May be you catch him next time.”

The next time Bill showed that he could keep cool, and he brought up a fine large bass. The fish were getting more numerous and Bill added another and another to his catch. Sometimes several fish or even a small school of them came together. Very soon Bill could tell when a school was coming, because their bodies shut out a part of the light before they reached the hole and made the water look dark, as if a cloud were passing over.

After Bill had fished a while, Tim also learned to fish like an Indian and brought up several fine fish.

“Now we go home,” Tatanka suggested, after a while. “I think Tim is hungry.”

That night each man ate for supper a big bass, which Barker had fried in bacon fat and corn meal.

After this day, the boys often went fishing by themselves and supplied the camp with all the fresh fish the four men cared to eat. They found that all the fish, bass and pike, pickerel and suckers, tasted remarkably good, for all fish are good if they have been caught in cold, clear water.

One warm morning, the genial old trapper took down the gill-net.

“You lads come with me,” he said. “I can catch more fish in a day than you and Tatanka can catch in a week. Yesterday you fished all day and caught one little sunfish.”

“No, Mr. Barker, it was a big one,” Tim piped out.

“It was only a poor sunfish,” Barker replied. “We’ll starve if I don’t help you catch fish. Take both axes and our shovel.”

When they arrived at the spot Barker had selected, he stepped off a line and told the boys to shovel the snow from half a dozen spots, while he and Tatanka began to cut holes through the ice. The first hole he cut about eight feet long and then he cut smaller holes about ten feet apart, but all in a straight line.

When the holes were cut, he asked the boys to shovel the slush out of them as much as possible, while he went and cut a long straight pole.

“I know, I know how he is going to do it,” Tim exclaimed. “But we’ll have to make all the holes longer, so they will run together.”

“You wait,” said Bill. “I won’t cut any more holes.”

When the long pole was ready, Barker tied one end of the net to it and pushed pole and net into the first long hole and under the ice toward the second hole.

To the other end of the net a rope was attached.

“There,” he told Bill, “you take hold of this rope and see that the net does

not get tangled."

When Bill had taken charge of his end of the net, the trapper pushed the pole under the ice to the next hole and in the same manner he pushed and pulled it along to the last opening. Here he pulled the pole out and drove the end of it into the soft bottom.

"Now, Bill," he suggested, "you had better tie your rope to a log, so they can't run away with your end of the net. You know there are some big fish in the Mississippi."

As the men had nothing to do for a while, they sat down under a warm sunny bank, where Barker built a fire, under the dry stump of a stranded cottonwood.

"White man's fire," Tatanka muttered good-naturedly, as he backed away from the growing heat.

"Yes, white man's fire is what we want to-day," the trapper replied. "The Great River furnishes us plenty of big wood, but the little dry sticks are buried under the snow."

Then to the delight of the boys the trapper drew a small tin pail out of his pack-sack, together with some cornbread and a big piece of bacon for each one.

"There, lads," he said, "you warm the cornbread and fry the bacon while I make tea."

It took some time before enough snow was melted for tea, for even on a big fire snow and ice melt very slowly.

"I forgot to dip water out of one of our net-holes," the trapper remarked, "but we have plenty of time to melt snow and ice."

The boys cut some green maple twigs, and on these as an improvised grate they heated the bread and fried the bacon.

"I'm glad you brought something to eat, Mr. Barker," Tim remarked thankfully. "I was getting very hungry. You called us so early this morning."

"I did," replied Barker, "because the fish run most during the warm part of the day."

"Do they know when the air is warm!" asked Bill. "How can they know down in the water?"

"Can't tell, lads," Barker smiled. "You lads ask a lot of hard questions. I reckon they can tell whether it is storming or whether the sun is shining."

After the meal, Tatanka smoked in silence, with a far-away look on his face.

"What is it our brother is thinking of?" Barker asked him in Sioux. "His face is sad and his eyes heavy."

"I was thinking of my people," Tatanka replied, after a few moments of silence. "Not long ago they lived on this great river. Now they are driven away from their river, Minnesota, where deer used to be plentiful, and where elk, ducks,

and geese live still in great flocks, and the muskrats build many little houses.

"But my people will never come back. They must now live in the country of short grass and small trees on the River Missouri. A few more years they will hunt buffaloes, but the white people are fast killing all the buffaloes and making robes out of their skins.

"When the buffalo are gone, we shall starve or become beggars, or we must learn to live like white men.

"A spirit tells me I ought to return to my people."

"You cannot return now," Barker told him in Sioux. "We need you. If the bad white men find us, they may steal the boys and kill me, if you leave us. You must stay with us and go with us to the city, where the white people have the big war."

"I shall stay with you," Tatanka promised, after a pause, "but I'm homesick for my people."

A flock of chickadees had been attracted by the smoke and the fire. They hopped boldly on the ground and picked up the crumbs of bread, and one even took a bath in a little pool of snow-water collected under the bank by the combined beat of the fire and the sun.

"The little birds bring good luck," remarked Tatanka. "May be the big guns will not kill us, when we go south," he added pensively.

When the fishermen approached their net, they saw by the movement of the poles that they had made a good catch. The net was fairly alive with pickerel, pike, bass, and suckers, but they caught no gars or paddle-fish.

"Why don't we catch some of those queer fish?" Bill asked.

"Don't know," replied the trapper. "You never see those in winter. May be they go south to live in warmer water."

In the evening, the men dressed all the fish they had caught. They did not smoke them as they had done with the fish caught in warm weather, but they placed them on frames of sticks in a brush shed. This shed was their store-house. The brush protected the frozen fish from thawing in the sun, and in this way the men kept a good supply of fresh fish always on hand.

CHAPTER XIV—SIGNS OF SPRING

Winter held on obstinately until the middle of March.

At last, one fine morning, Tatanka announced, “I smell spring. The little nuthatches and the little woodpeckers are calling and I saw two crows flying north. That means spring is coming and the ice will soon float down stream in big white blocks.”

The boys found another sign of spring. The flowing of the sap. Tatanka called it the bleeding of the trees. At the time when the frost is not yet out of the ground, when spring has not quite conquered winter, soft maple, box-elder, birch, and sugar-maple begin to bleed; that is, the sap begins to drip out of some fresh wound. A squirrel may have cut the bark, a bird picked a bud, snow or wind or the falling of dead branches may have bruised the bark or torn away some twigs. It is from these wounds that the sap begins to drip.

Sharp eyes can find these drippings in the forest, and it is easy to discover small dark patches of sap on city streets and walks.

“Mr. Barker,” the boys asked, “can’t we make some sugar and syrup?”

“Go ahead with it, laddies,” the old trapper encouraged them. “A can of maple syrup and some real maple sugar would taste good to me.”

The boys had grown up in a country where the sugar-maple, a northern tree, does not grow and had only the vaguest idea about sugar-making; so they asked Tatanka to show them how to make maple-sugar, a bit of woodcraft which white men have learned from the Indians.

Each boy took a tin pail and Tatanka took two big pails and an ax. Tim soon found a large box-elder and Bill sighted a big soft-maple, a river-bottom maple, from which the sap was dripping. But Tatanka laughed at them saying, “No good, no good; ’most all water. Good sugar trees grow on high land.”

Tatanka knew the trees in winter as well as in summer, and when the three sugar-makers had reached the Minnesota bluffs he soon found two big sugar-maples. Into each tree he made an upward cut and put a chip into the cut. The sap began at once to run along the chips and dripped into the pails below. In an hour the small pails were filled and Tatanka replaced them with his large buckets.

“Now you build a fire and boil your sap,” he told the boys. “Slow, over Indian fire; no white man’s fire.”

The boys were surprised to see how much of the sap boiled away before they had a thick sweet syrup. Tatanka from time to time poured some more sap into their pails so that each boy at last had a pailful of maple-syrup.

About noon the boys were hungry, but Tatanka would not hear of going to camp for lunch.

“When you make sugar, you make sugar all day. You drink sap, you eat syrup, and sugar. That is the way the Indians make sugar, plenty good sugar. We go home when it gets cold, then the sap stops flowing.”

They did stay all day, and the lads helped Tatanka boil his sap down to a good thick syrup.

In the evening Mr. Barker's biscuits and Tatanka's maple syrup made the best supper the lads had ever eaten. After the meal, Tatanka made some real maple-sugar by boiling down the syrup in a big frying-pan, but little Tim fell asleep before the syrup began to sugar and Bill was disappointed because he could eat only a few small pieces, although Barker and Tatanka told him that he might eat the whole panful if he cared for it.

"It's the same as with the honey," Bill mourned. "I thought I could eat a piece as big as Mr. Barker's fist, and then I could only eat a spoonful."

A week later, about the first of April, the ice below Lake Pepin began to move.

There is something mysterious in the spring break-up of a big river. A warm, south wind begins to melt the snow. So rapidly it vanishes from open fields and from south-facing bluffs that you wonder where it went. But in the woods the white covering lingers for weeks. After several days of warm weather, the unbroken ice on the river is covered with a few inches of water, but there are no signs of a break-up. Still the slush and water on the ice is the sign that the sleeping river is awaking.

Over night the creeks have become swollen, their turbid floods rush into the river, whose icy covering although still two or three feet thick has lost the brittleness and strength of winter. The creeks and brooks and countless bubbling, gurgling rills creep under the ice. With a slow, but resistless power, the power of a hydraulic press, they lift the frozen mass from its moorings on shore. The sleeping river yawns and stretches itself; the ice begins to move, slowly at first, then rapidly. The river is awake, alive once more. In a day or two, the great rafts and masses of ice have passed south, the river is open; it is spring.

"Friends, it is time to move," Barker observed next morning. "In a day or two our camp will be flooded."

Within a few hours everything was packed. Barker and Tatanka each handled a paddle, Bill took his seat in the stern to steer, while little Tim, wrapped in an Indian blanket, watched for hidden snags from his seat in the bow. Meetcha, who had come out of his log about two weeks before, was allowed to remain with his four-footed friends in the woods. Tim had become convinced that they could not take him along any farther.

When evening came, they had left the long lake far behind them and now carried their large canoe up on high land at the mouth of a spring brook several miles below the quiet little river town of Minneiska, White Water.

There was no time to set up a tent. The travelers raked together a bed of dry leaves, spread their blankets over them, rolled themselves into other blankets,

and used their tent-canvas as extra covering.

"Boys, make a night-cap out of your handkerchiefs," Barker advised the lads, "for the morning will be biting crisp."

While they were eating breakfast next morning, they saw a flock of cranes, real cranes, not the common blue herons of our marshes, rise from a sandbar. With a spiraling noisy flight, they arose against the face of the high bluff and disappeared over the timber, six hundred feet above the river.

"Where are they going?" asked Tim. "Why don't they fly north up the river!"

"They have gone to feed on the young winter-wheat of the settlers on the upland," the trapper informed them, his eyes kindling with the fire of the pioneer hunter. "If you are willing to climb the high bluffs we may be able to find them."

Tatanka, like a real Indian, was willing, and the boys, like all real boys, were eager to go.

"Each man take a blanket," ordered Barker, as he put a day's rations into his pack-sack, and in addition to his gun he also took an ax.

"What's that for!" asked Bill, with his usual curiosity.

"To chop their heads off," Tim spurted. "Bill, you ask lots of fool questions."

The men laughed aloud. "One string to this crane hunt," the old trapper told them. "The fellow that asks one of those 'tarnal botheration questions hikes back to the river and watches the boat till the rest of us come back.

"Keep your eyes and ears open, but your mouths shut tight. That's the rule for a crane-hunt. Now walk slow. Those hills are higher than they look."

For a little while they traveled up the ravine of one of those small streams which run in large numbers into the west banks of the Mississippi. On the upper river, from St. Paul into Iowa, the hills and bluffs on the west bank are densely wooded, while those of the east bank are covered with a scrubby growth and show many patches covered only with grasses and other prairie plants, which are fitted to endure intense sunlight, great heat and long spells of drought. Some patches of prairie, however, are also found amongst the bluffs on the west bank.

It was on one of those bare patches of hillside that the lads, with great joy, picked their first spring flowers, the wild crocus, or pasque flower, of the Prairie States.

From Illinois to Montana, and northward far into Canada, the wild crocuses spring out of the sear grass or the burnt prairie, while ice and snow still linger in shaded spots. Like millions of living amethysts, scattered broadcast over a continent, but far more beautiful than dead stones, they smile at the sky and the sun before the drought and hot winds of summer can wither their petals, and before rank grasses and weeds can cut off the sunlight.

When the robins have come back and the crocuses are out, the boys and

girls of the Prairie States and Provinces know that spring has come.

The prairie crocuses do not take time, like most other flowers to grow leaves first. The brown woolly buds push out of the soil as soon as the snow is gone. After a few warm days they cover the bare patches of dry river bluffs and all the stony ridges and moraine hills, which the great glaciers left behind many thousand years ago. They make early flower-gardens along the right-of-way of the railroads, although the section men burn the grass and the prairie flowers every fall. Fires cannot harm the sleeping roots and buds of the crocuses in the ground.

When the prairie grasses begin to grow in May and June, the crocuses find time to produce large whorls of pretty cut-up leaves, and the winds of summer scatter their long seeds.

They are not really the first flowers of the Northern States; that honor belongs to the dark purple spathe-like sheaths of the skunk-cabbage, which grow in the black muck near brooks and spring-holes, under the tasseled alders and red killikinnick. But it takes a sharp-eyed naturalist to find these strange underground flowers.

Many different trees the lads also discovered in these upland woods. There were the trees of the large fragrant buds, shellbark and pig-nut hickory, black-walnut, and butternut; and from the dead rustling leaves the lads picked many a well-seasoned nut, which the squirrels, gray and red, had lost or forgotten. There were several kinds of oaks, bur-oaks, black oaks and white oaks; and from the dark oaks the trunks of canoe-birches stood out in pure white. In the river bottom the lads had often cut for their evening camp-fires the slender trunks of the river birch with its tousled curls of light brown bark, but of this curious birch they did not find a tree in the upland woods.

After the four men had followed the little stream for half a mile, they struck off to their right up a steep slope; where they often became entangled in vines of wild grape and bitter-sweet. Tim was soon out of breath and had to rest.

"Mr. Barker," asked Bill, "did you say the bluffs were six hundred feet high! They must surely be a mile high."

"Keep still," Tim urged him; "you'll have to go back to the boat."

After much hard climbing, they came to a wide ridge, which sloped gently upward toward the river and they followed it in that direction. The ridge was covered with great spreading white oaks two or three hundred years old. Bold gray squirrels were chasing one another along the big horizontal boughs. A woodchuck that had been feeding on a patch of new grass sat up to look at the invaders of his solitude and then hurried into his hole. From a distance came the strange drumming of a grouse, while a woodpecker sounded his peculiar rattle on a dead branch.

At the edge of the woods, they came to a bare spot, which ended abruptly on the top of a hundred-foot cliff.

"Don't go too near the rim," Barker warned the boys, as they ran ahead. "If you go over, you'll get smashed on the rocks below.

"Here we're going to camp for the night," the trapper said, as he and Tatanka placed their packs on the ground.

"When are we going to hunt cranes?" Bill almost blurted out, but he checked himself just in time.

"It wouldn't be any fun to sit alone all night at the boat," he whispered to Tim, "with the rest of you camping on the grandest spot I have ever seen. I think Mr. Barker has some fun up his sleeve, but I can't figure out what it is."

CHAPTER XV—AT INSPIRATION POINT

"I can't look over, I get dizzy!" Tim said to Bill. "Look at the river. It surely looks a mile below."

"Lie down," Bill told him. "Then you can't tumble off."

The boys amused themselves by dropping stones over the cliff and counting the seconds till they struck amongst the trees below. Tim claimed he could throw a stone into the river.

"Ah! you can't do it, Tim," Bill objected. "The river is a quarter of a mile away as the crow flies."

"I'll pick a good sailer-rock," Tim persisted, "and you'll see."

But although Tim did his best, his rock seemed to come sailing back to the sloping bluff.

"Guess you are right," admitted Tim, a little crestfallen; "the rivet is pretty far away."

Tatanka stood gazing in silence over the sublime panorama. The river appeared to come like a broad glassy channel out of the blue hazy distance in the north. Just below the point it was half a mile wide and Tatanka could easily distinguish the deep dark channel from the light brown sandbars near shore.

Like a wonderful picture the valley spread out below the hunters. Dark

groves of elms stood out clearly from long stretches of cottonwood in light gray. The swelling and bursting buds of the bottom maples showed great dashes of a dark ruddy red, while vast stretches of gray and brown marshes were dotted with brighter patches of orange willow and of bright red killikinnick.

"My people once lived here," said Tatanka, at last. "They loved this land. It is rich and beautiful, and at that time many red deer and elk and black bear lived in these woods. The big game is gone now. The white settlers have too many guns and too many dogs. They drive the deer away.

"It is good that Manitou gave wings to the ducks and the geese, so the white hunters can not kill them all.

"Our people will never come back to this land. Our trails will grow over with weeds, and the graves of our fathers will be forgotten. Our people must learn to plow the field and raise cattle and horses like white men!"

The old trapper also was carried back to his boyhood as he stood gazing over the river, the bayous, and islands, and to the hills two miles away on the Wisconsin side.

"I used to think," he said to his friend, "that the Wabash and the Illinois were great rivers, but they are just little crawling creeks compared with the Mississippi, and they can show no great woods and grand hills and cliffs like the Mississippi. If these woods were mine, I would build my house on this point and every morning I would see the sun rise over the hills yonder. In the winter I would watch the snow-storms rush down the valley; and in the sultry summer nights I would watch the lightning play between the hills, over the river and among the tree-tops, and hear the thunder roll and echo from bluff to bluff."

"Are you not afraid of thunder and lightning?" asked Tatanka. "My people are afraid of it and will not travel in a storm."

"I used to be afraid, when I was a boy," Barker continued, "but since that time I have lived so much alone in the forest and on the rivers that I no longer fear a thunderstorm; but I never make my camp near tall trees."

White people who go down the Mississippi in boats do see some fine scenery, but the real grandeur of Mississippi River scenery is revealed only from good vantage-points on the crest of the bluffs. For those sufficiently strong and Venturesome to climb to those points, nature spreads out her grandest panoramas found in the inhabited part of the globe.

Many Americans have made long trips to see the beauties of the Rhine and the Danube; the far grander beauty of the Mississippi is to our own people still an unexplored country. There are awaiting those who would go and see a thousand Inspiration Points on the upper Mississippi and ten thousand miles of semi-tropical wilderness, cane-brake, forest, lakes, and bayous on the lower river and its southern tributaries. Most Americans know the Mississippi only as

a crooked black line on the map.

When Barker and Tatanka had finished drinking in the landscape, as they called it, the trapper told the lads that they might run about as they pleased till four o'clock.

"At that time," he added, "the hunting will begin."

"What are we going—?" Bill started, but he checked himself just in time, to the great delight of Barker and Tatanka.

"Come on, Tim," he sang out, "Let's take a hike to the prairie. I'll be sent home, if I hang around here all day."

"Don't chase any geese or cranes, boys," Barker called after them. "If you see any on the fields, don't disturb them."

The boys discovered that from the place, where they started, the open prairie was only about half a mile away. As they carefully skirted along the edge of the timber, they saw several large flocks of geese and cranes feeding on open fields of young winter-wheat. On one field they could distinguish a boy who had evidently been told to drive the cranes off the wheat-field. He was a small boy and was having a sorry time of it. He had no gun, but tried to scare them away with a stick.

"I bet his mother wouldn't let him take a gun," remarked Tim.

"May be his people are too poor to buy a gun," suggested Bill. "Settlers in a new country don't have much money and they need all kinds of things for a new farm."

The boy walked from one end of the field to the other. When he arrived at the east end, the cranes flew to the west end, but the boy could not make them leave the field.

The longer the boy tried to drive them away, the bolder they became.

"I'll bet they know the boy hasn't a gun," Tim exclaimed.

Now a very big crane defied the boy altogether. He walked boldly toward the boy, spreading his wings and uttering a loud croak.

"Look, look," exclaimed Tim, "he's going to bite the boy. Let's run and help him."

"No, we mustn't," argued Bill. "Mr. Barker said we shouldn't scare the cranes. If that kid runs away from a crane, he deserves to be bitten."

"I would run," Tim acknowledged, "if I had no gun."

The boy was now actually running away with the crane after him, but falling over a furrow and seeing that he could not run away from the fighting crane, he picked up his stick and went hard at his pursuer. At this unexpected attack, the crane ran away, napped his wings and arose to join the flock at the other end of the field.

The boy started for home, looking back from time to time as if afraid that

the big bird might be after him again.

"I wouldn't herd cranes," said Tim, "if they didn't give me a gun."

The boys returned to camp in good time and about four o'clock the hunting actually began, for the big Canada geese began to fly over the timber to their resting place on a long sandspit below Inspiration Point.

"One rule," Mr. Barker called, "about this hunt. Don't fire at any bird that is too far off. We don't want to leave any wounded birds in the woods. Tim, you come with me. I'll tell you when to fire."

The hunters walked back half a dozen rods, so they would not drop any birds below the cliff, and placed themselves about fifty yards apart on a line parallel to the crest of the bluff.

Half a dozen geese soon came flying just above the tops of the old oaks.

"Aim at the last one," Barker told Tim. "Take it from behind!"

Tim brought down a large fat goose.

"Good work!" exclaimed the trapper. "Your shot went right in between the feathers. If you had fired at the bird from in front, the shot might have glanced off the heavy coat of feathers. 'Always aim at a single bird,' is also a good rule in wing-shooting. If you just fire wildly at the whole flock, you are likely to miss them all."

Barker at once took up Tim's goose, saying, "That will just furnish us a good supper with some bacon and corn bread."

After the goose had been picked and drawn, he put a slender green pole through it, which he laid on two forked sticks close to a hot fire. When one side was partly cooked, he turned the other side to the fire. In this way he prepared a savory meal of wild goose roasted on the spit.

When it grew too dark to shoot, the hunters came in with six geese. Bill had had the bad luck of merely winging a bird, so that he was compelled to follow his game for nearly an hour. A wild goose is so protectively colored that among dead leaves and brush it can make itself almost as invisible as a sparrow.

When Bill finally captured his bird, it was almost dark and he had forgotten to watch the direction to camp; he was lost.

He fired two shots in quick succession.

"There is Big Boy," Tatanka laughed. "He is lost, Tim; shoot twice, so he can find home. He is hungry."

Two shots fired close together means, "I'm lost," to hunters and woodsmen.

Of course Bill was not far from camp and he came home in time for supper.

"Bill," his younger brother teased him, "the next time you run after a goose, hang a cowbell on your neck, so we can tell where you go."

Barker and the Indian had built a lean-to and a warm camp-fire with backlogs of green oaks. For the fire itself they had cut a big pile of green white-birch.

"Look here, boys," Barker told them after supper, "we sleep between the log-fire and the lean-to. Any man that wakes up puts a few logs on the fire. In that way I think we'll keep warm."

They sat late around the camp-fire and when, at last, they were ready to roll in, Tatanka walked out to the point, below which river and valley spread out in a strange light.

"Look, my friend," he called. "The whole sky is burning. It is growing daylight. The world is burning up."

As they stepped away from the fire, they all saw the strange appearance of the sky. It was indeed growing daylight, although it was still before midnight.

Great streamers and bundles of whitish and reddish light were shooting up from all points on the horizon toward the zenith. Some streamers flickered, swayed and died out, but others took their places and for half an hour it was light enough to read. The river, the bottom forest, even the Wisconsin bluffs could be plainly seen. The men could even see their canoe amongst the willows below.

"The world is coming to an end," Tatanka muttered, overcome by his superstitious fears.

"No, it isn't," Barker explained to him. "We are seeing a grand display of northern lights, the greatest I have ever seen, although I have seen them many, many times. This is something many city people never see, because they are always cooped up in houses."

In an hour it was dark again, and the tired hunters rolled up in their blankets before the fire.

"Make a night-cap out of your handkerchiefs," Barker advised the boys. "The night is going to be chilly and your heads and ears will get cold if they are not covered."

Early in the morning they started for the field, where the boy had herded the cranes. The birds were there again, and it was not hard to get within range, although they were much more wary of the hunters than they had been of the small boy with his stick. When the great birds arose, all four fired and each man brought down his bird.

As Bill ran to pick up his game, the trapper called to him, "Look out, Bill; he isn't dead!"

But Bill was too eager to take warning. The bird suddenly straightened out his long neck and shot his sharp beak right into Bill's face.

The young hunter staggered and cried out with pain and surprise. The crane had cut a deep gash in Bill's cheek and the blood ran freely down his face.

At first his three friends laughed at him, but when they saw how badly Bill was wounded, Tatanka quickly chewed a handful of choke-cherry twigs and put them on the wound to stop the bleeding.

Thus ended the crane-hunt near Inspiration Point.

CHAPTER XVI—SMELLING THE STORM

Inspiration point was the first camp at which the lads had enjoyed the magnificent panoramic view of the great river and its valley and where they had tasted the joy of roaming about freely through upland forests and fields.

Some camps one finds so attractive that it is hard to break away, and after one has at last rolled up tents and blankets, memory involuntarily returns to the scene.

The lads enjoyed the camp at Inspiration Point so much that they begged Mr. Barker to stay there at least another night.

"I don't know, boys," the old man objected mildly. "It may not be so pleasant to-night. I think we are going to have rain."

"Where can the rain come from?" the boys questioned. "There isn't a cloud in the sky."

"Not yet," the old trapper admitted, "but clouds will come soon enough. I sort of feel and smell rain in the air."

The boys laughed, "Ah, you're just fooling us," they insisted. "You can't smell rain like you smell flowers or skunks."

They ran over to Tatanka who, leaning against an old oak, was gazing down the valley where a large, high, rocky island arose like a flat-topped mountain.

"I climbed to an eagle's nest on that mountain when I was a boy," he told the lads. "The eagle was the totem of our village. I brought down a big young eagle and the other boys and I caught fish for him and he grew very tame. When he grew older and could fly well he flew away, but he often came back and sat on our tepee poles."

"Tatanka," the boys questioned, "is it going to rain to-night? Mr. Barker says he can feel and smell rain. Do you believe he can smell rain?"

Tatanka smiled and gazed into the hazy distance. "Yes, I think it will rain," he answered, "after a while."

"Can you smell it?" the lads asked eagerly.

“May be I can smell it, may be I can feel it. White trappers and Indians can smell many things other people can’t smell.”

“We can smell deer and buffalo and porcupines. I can smell the river now.”

“Yes, I think it will rain to-night. And may be there will be thunder and lightning.”

The boys ran back to the trapper.

“Mr. Barker,” they argued, “our lean-to will shed the rain if we pile on some oak brush with the leaves still on it.”

“That lean-to,” the old man laughed, “will leak like a sieve. In five minutes the wind will shake your ears full of big cold drops, and you wouldn’t sleep a wink all night.

“You fellows can stay here overnight, but I reckon Tatanka and I will go down to the boat and set up our tent. I don’t care to sit up all night in the rain. I have done that often enough.”

But after a little more coaxing, the old man consented to stay another night on the point.

“Now I tell you what you can do,” he suggested to his young friends. “You gather a lot of bark, big pieces, of oak or basswood, anything you can find, and we’ll put a roof on our shed.”

“But the bark doesn’t peel yet,” Tim objected.

“No, no, I don’t mean green bark. Get big pieces of bark from the old dead trees. That will do well enough for one night.”

The boys soon had a stock of dead bark piled up.

“Looks as if you were going to start a tannery,” remarked the trapper.

“Now go and find a lot of strings so we can tie it on.”

“Where can we find strings!” the boys wanted to know.

“You go and ask Tatanka. He can find them.”

Tatanka was not troubled about finding strings. Some he made by shaving the bark off young shoots of basswood. Others he found by twisting the fiber of dead Indian hemp and wild nettle into strong cords.

“The woods are full of good ropes,” he murmured, “but white men don’t know how to find them and make them. They can only buy them in the stores.”

The boys were going to tie the bark crosswise; but the trapper would not have it that way.

“Tie them running up and down,” he said. “Alternate them with rough side up and smooth side up, so they overlap, making a lot of little troughs running to the ground. Then tie them to three strong poles fastened crosswise over the lean-to.

“There! It is a rough-looking shelter. Not nearly so neat as a Chippewa bark-house, but it ought to shed the rain if the wind doesn’t blow it over and if

the wind doesn't come from the wrong side.

"Now get some wood, boys. Tim, you gather a lot of dry sticks for our cooking fire. Bill, you cut some green birches for the camp-fire. Tatanka and I will cut some green oaks for back logs."

"Mr. Barker, why can't I gather dry branches for the camp-fire? There are plenty of them lying around," Tim asked eagerly.

"You may, Tim," the old man replied good-naturedly, "but you will have to sit up all night to feed the fire."

"Mr. Barker," Bill asked, "isn't oak just as good as birch for our camp-fire. I have to carry the birch a long way."

"No, Bill. Oak is no good when you can get birch. Green oak alone burns too slow. Dry oak is too hard to cut and burns too fast. Hickory and tamarack crackle and throw sparks into your blanket, so you wake up with your bed on fire.

"Birch is best for an all-night fire. It burns not too fast and not too slow, and it never shoots sparks into your bed."

Tim soon had enough sticks and dead branches to last several days, so he helped Bill to carry the billets of birch to the fireplace. They were almost five feet long and about six inches in diameter.

"They will burn pretty slow, I fear," the trapper remarked, "because the sap is in full flow and the wood feels soggy. Birch is most sappy at this time of the year."

The night started well enough. It was warm and clear and the campers sat around the fire after supper and saw the stars come out, a few bright ones first and then the host of smaller ones and very small ones. From their high camp the boys could see the larger stars reflected in the river like faint streaks of trembling light. The river continued to rise and the bottom began to appear like a series of long winding lakes separated by long islands of dark forests. The lads gazed in wonder from the river to the sky and from the sky to the river. The Great Dipper stood out clearly.

"When does it rise and when does it set?" Tim asked.

"It is always there," Tatanka answered. "It never rises and never sets, but the sun puts it out in the morning."

The boys looked questioningly at the trapper. "That is true," he confirmed Tatanka's answer, "all the stars near the Polar Star never rise and never set. You can see them in the evening as soon as it is dark enough, and they shine till the rising sun makes them invisible. They just go round and round the Polar Star."

Many faint chirping sounds were heard as the four campers sat near the camp-fire. The green birch burnt very slowly so that Tim had to put some of his dry sticks between the logs to keep a good steady fire. At all other times green

birch starts quite readily from a small fire of dry sticks and then burns with an even glow. The ends sizzle with escaping moisture but the wood does not crackle and does not throw off any sparks.

The boys wanted Tatanka to tell them what the Indians knew and believed about the stars and the moon, but the trapper urged them all to go to bed.

"Tatanka," he said, "can tell you about the moon and stars some other time. We must make an early start to-morrow. If we keep on loafing among the hills, as we have been doing, we shall not get to Vicksburg all summer.

"How far do you think it is to Vicksburg?" he asked the boys.

They did not know.

"I talked to Ryerson at the store," Barker continued. "He is an old river man. He told me it was five hundred miles from Lake Pepin to St. Louis and a thousand miles from St. Louis to Vicksburg. It will take us two months to get there, if we average twenty-five miles a day."

"We can go faster than that, Mr. Barker," the boys protested; "we can make fifty miles a day."

"You boys do big talking," the trapper laughed at them. "We want to rest on Sundays. It is going to rain some days, and on some days the wind is going to be strong against us. Then we shall sometimes make only short trips in order to stop at good camping-places, and sometimes we shall stop to fish."

All four were soon fast asleep.

About midnight the boys woke up. A glaring flash of lightning followed by a loud crashing and echoing thunder made them sit up startled.

"There," Barker remarked with a friendly laugh, "what did Tatanka and I tell you? Bill, crawl out and put some more sticks and green billets on the fire or the rain will put it out."

Soon the rain came down pattering on the bark roof and the four campers had to sit hunched up under their shed.

"How did you know, Mr. Barker," Tim asked, "that the rain would come from the west?"

"I did not know it," the trapper acknowledged; "but I know from experience that most of the showers in this region come from the west, so I faced our shelter to the east."

The lads sat in awed silence as the lightning played back and forth between the Minnesota and Wisconsin bluffs and lit up the river and the woods as with great flashlights, and the thunder rolled and rumbled and echoed from east to west and from the high island to the south.

The lean-to shed the water perfectly, for the trapper had seen to it that the rough bark shingles overlapped well and that all pieces with knot-holes were rejected.

When the violent lightning and thunder had passed eastward, the lads ran out and took a shower-bath in the rain and it was not long before all four were again sound asleep under their warm blankets in front of the slowly burning fire.

CHAPTER XVII—SOUTHWARD AT LAST

When the lads arose next morning, their eyes gazed with joy and wonder on the valley below, tinted with the rosy light of an ideal morning of early spring. The river was no longer a big stream held by well-defined banks.

"Look, Bill," Tim exclaimed, with wondering eyes. "Lake Pepin has run over. All the woods are under water."

The river was indeed almost two miles wide, overflowing in the forests, covering marshes and meadows, from bluff to bluff. Like a fiery red ball, the sun came creeping over the eastern bluffs, and a soft red tint was reflected from the great flood below the camp.

The campers found their canoe on high land where Barker had turned it over, but the flood had almost crept up to it.

In a very short time the travelers were off.

"Keep your eyes peeled for snags and driftwood," the trapper cautioned Bill. "We have only one canoe and cannot afford a wreck and a spill."

"You can depend on me," Bill replied. "The water is much too cold for swimming. I want to stay in the canoe."

Tatanka and Barker plied their paddles vigorously and Tim did his share, with a short light paddle.

At noon they made only a short stop for a cup of hot tea and a very light lunch, wishing to go as far as possible before camping.

About three in the afternoon, the trapper told the boys to look out for a good camping-place.

"We want to stop at a good spring," he said; "this river water isn't so bad, but good spring water is much better."

"How can we find a spring!" the boys wanted to know. "We don't know the country."

"If you are wise campers you can always find a spring," the old man instructed them. "Look for places where the high bluffs come down close to the water edge."

Within an hour a high bluff came into view a mile down the stream, and the lads, who were getting both hungry and tired, expected to find a good campsite. In this hope they were disappointed. The current surged along past the tree-trunks where rafts of driftwood and rubbish had collected, while masses of dirty white foam were held by the dead wood and rubbish. The place did not look in the least inviting, and the boys looked in vain for a clear bubbling spring.

"Where are the springs, Mr. Barker?" Tim asked timidly.

"Well, my boy," the old man replied, "I reckon they are covered by the flood."

"What shall we do for a camping-place?" Bill asked.

"Go on until we find one that suits us."

"But if we don't find one?"

"Then we camp at a place that does not suit us," the trapper replied dryly. "Traveling down-river isn't like living in town. We'll just take things as they come."

About five o'clock they came to a place where a small creek came in from the west.

"Bill, you had better steer into this bay," the trapper suggested. "We'll camp there for the night."

"It isn't a good place, Mr. Barker," Tim ventured to say. "Look at all the dirty driftwood and the willow-bushes. We are getting into a swamp where there can't be any springs."

The trapper smiled. "May be," he said to Tim, "we'll find a good place and perhaps a spring, too. Everybody go slow now. Look out for snags, Bill, and let us land near the foot of that big ash."

Within a few minutes all heavy packs were taken out of the canoe and the craft itself was turned over in a dry spot high above the water.

There was not only one spring, there were several coming out of the hillside and running into the small flooded creek.

"I knew we would find good water up this creek," the trapper told the boys.

"How could you tell!" the lads wondered. "Have you ever been here?"

"No, I have never seen this place before, but I have seen many groves of black-ash and they only grow in cold, springy ravines. Wherever you see the slim gray trunks and the short spreading branches of black-ash you can find springs. Sometimes the flow is small and you have to dig out a little pool for your well, but good cool water always seeps and flows around the roots of the black-ash."

Like every good leader, Barker had each man assigned to some special camp duty.

He himself was cook and baker. The Indian set up the tent and made the bed. Bill brought water and cut wood for the camp-fire, while Tim gathered dry brush and sticks for the cooking-fire and set out the dishes, which consisted of a tin cup and plate, knife, fork, and spoon for each man.

"We don't need the tent," Barker said to Tatanka. "It is not going to rain to-night and the miserable mosquitoes haven't come yet. Just make a good bed on plenty of dry leaves and grass. The boys are very tired and we are all a little bit soft after our rather lazy winter."

"What are we going to do if it rains?" Tim asked.

"Pull the canvas over our heads," the old man answered with a serious face, "and if it rains hard, we'll get wet. But it isn't going to rain."

The lads wondered how he could know, but they asked no more questions.

In half an hour the trapper called out, "Supper! All hands fall to."

And they all fell to, for all were ravenously hungry, and bacon, corn-bread, and roast goose hurriedly vanished in large quantities. The goose had been roasted the day before and had just been heated on a spit.

After supper Tatanka and Bill arranged the packs under the canoe while Barker and Tim washed the dishes, for the trapper insisted that it is just as easy to keep clean in camp as to live with a lot of dirt.

The place of their camp was a few miles below the town of Winona. They had, however, not landed there for several reasons. They felt that they had no time to lose if they would reach Vicksburg before the end of summer, and before Grant could take the Confederate stronghold of the Mississippi. They had no recent letters from Vicksburg, and on their trip they could of course receive none. Barker and the lads had written to the boys' parents that they might expect them in Vicksburg sometime in June or July. "That is," the letter closed, "if at that time, we can get in."

"If Grant has made up his mind to take Vicksburg," the trapper had told the boys, "I reckon he'll stick around and fight till he gets it. No matter how big and how many the swamps are that protect it. If he cannot get at the city from the north, he will get at it from the south. If he cannot keep a base of supplies in his rear, he'll do without a base and will make his army live on the country, till he can establish a base."

Another important reason for their not stopping at many towns was that they felt that Hicks was certainly trying to discover their whereabouts.

"The bad man is surely looking for us," Tatanka declared. "He has hired scouts to let him know when we pass. We must not stop at the towns."

On the following evening they passed the Iowa State line and they were now traveling between the States of Wisconsin and Iowa.

The scenery all along had been wonderfully grand. It showed the same

high wooded bluffs and steep bare rocks they had so much admired at their camp on Inspiration Point.

This grand striking scenery continues some hundred miles into Iowa.

A large region in southern Minnesota, southern Wisconsin, and northern Iowa has never been glaciated and is known as the driftless area. In this region the great river and its tributaries have cut deep valleys through layers of limestone, dolomite, and sandstone. The sides of the valleys have never been rounded off by creeping glaciers, and the cliffs of dolomite stand up straight and bold like the well-known Maiden Rock and Sugar Loaf near Winona.

This stretch of the Mississippi from St. Paul and Minneapolis to Dubuque, some four hundred miles long, is the greatest scenic river highway in the world. Every American should travel over it before he goes to see the rivers of Europe, most of which are insignificant streams compared with the Mississippi. The whole navigable distance on the Rhine is no greater than the great scenic course of the Mississippi, and this course is less than one-fifth of the whole navigable length of our great American river. He who has not traveled on the Mississippi has not seen America.

Even several great tributaries of the Mississippi, like the Missouri and the Ohio and the Red River, are larger than any river in Europe.

The boys soon learned to find good camping-places, and vied with each other in selecting the best ones.

As far as they could, they camped a few miles above the larger river towns. The supplies they needed they bought of farmers or in small towns, two men generally going after the supplies and the other two staying at the camp. Many interesting incidents occurred to them all, but it would make our story too long to tell of them.

The river now became alive with all kinds of steamboats, some carrying passengers and merchandise, others guns, ammunition, and soldiers, and it often taxed Bill's skill to avoid danger from the swell of the big boats.

Spring was advancing apace. When they reached the northern boundary of Missouri, about the first of May, it was summer. The trees were green, birds were in full song, and the woods were full of flowers.

Spring advances up the river at the rate of something like fifteen miles a day. About the first of March poplars and hazel hang out their pollen-laden catkins at St. Louis; while at the Twin Cities, the first spring flowers appear about a month later, but as the party was rapidly traveling southward, the season to them advanced three or four days in twenty-four hours.

At the well-known river port of Hannibal, Missouri, they placed their canoe and baggage on a steamer and took passage for Cairo at the mouth of the Ohio. At the great busy port of St. Louis they kept quiet on the boat. The next evening

they landed at Cairo.

Below Cairo, the mighty stream grows to its full grandeur. It has received its two greatest tributaries, the Missouri and the Ohio, besides such streams as the Wisconsin, the Des Moines, the Iowa, and the Illinois, all of them fine rivers for the canoeist, the fisherman, and the sight-seer.

Cairo was the most northerly point, where the great struggle for the possession of the Mississippi began between North and South.

The four travelers had now reached the scene of the Civil War on the Mississippi.

CHAPTER XVIII—IN THE SUNKEN LANDS

It was a mellow summer evening about the first of June, when the party arrived at the small town of Hickman in Kentucky.

Ever since they had left the upper river, their birch-bark canoe had been an object of curiosity to all who had seen it, because the white-birch or canoe-birch does not grow on the lower river.

At Hickman, the four travelers went into a store to replenish their supplies. In front of the store, sitting on a cracker-box, a man greeted Barker with, "Hello, Sam! Where on earth do you come from? Haven't seen you since you were trapping coons and hunting wild turkeys on the Wabash."

"And what brings you into this little river burg, Dick Banks?" the trapper asked, equally surprised.

"Oh, I just drifted down the Wabash and the Ohio to this old river. You know I always wanted to see the Mississippi, when we were boys. Well, I'm working on a steamboat between New Madrid and St. Louis."

After a while Banks took Barker aside.

"Say, Sam," he spoke in a low voice, "it seems sort of strange, but I reckon there was a fellow here looking for you just this morning. He asked whether we ones had seen a white man with an Indian and two boys traveling down river?

"Hadn't the faintest idea you could be the man he referred to. You hadn't any beard and gray hair when I saw you last, but sure as I'm Dick Banks, his story

fits your party exactly. Fellow seemed to be mighty set on finding you. Told us you had kidnapped his two nephews and stolen two horses of him 'way up in Minnesota. Said he was going to swear out a warrant and have you arrested."

"That dirty pup," exclaimed Barker, with his eyes flashing. "My Indian and I saved those lads from being murdered by the Sioux. The lads rode away on our own horses and we didn't even take a blanket of the dirty bootlegger. The old squint-eyed scoundrel deserted the lads. Dern his soul! I always believed he wanted them to get killed. He doesn't want them to get back home for some reason. My Indian and I are going to take them home to Vicksburg. I knew Hicks in Indiana. He always was a blackguard."

Dick Banks puffed vigorously at his corncob pipe.

"Sam," he replied, "I'll tell you something. You used to be some scrapper back in Indiana. I figure you could handle that friend of yours all right, but you might as well go back with me to St. Louis. You can't get into Vicksburg."

"And why can't I get in?"

"You haven't seen as much of the war as I have seen. I have been clear down to Haynes Bluff a little way above Vicksburg. Grant and his men have got the place bottled up. You can't get in. Gunboats, big ones, little ones, the whole river is full of them. Guards and soldiers everywhere. Don't try it, Sam. They might think you were a spy and hang you. Those army courts aren't as good-natured as our old Indiana juries."

"No, Dick," the trapper argued. "I can't go back with you. I'm going to take those boys home. I'll either fight Hicks or give him the slip. We're going to Vicksburg. May be I can get a pass through the lines."

"All right then, Sam; I've said my say. Get a pass? Why, man, Abe Lincoln himself couldn't get a pass! You're as set on having your way as you were as a kid.

"Now don't hurry that Vicksburg campaign of yours. Better paddle about in the swamps and bayous for a few weeks. They say in about a month the town will have to surrender. You can't get a pass into Vicksburg. They've been shut up two weeks now."

That evening the four travelers had a good supper on board of Dick Bank's boat and Dick also fixed beds for them on board the steamer, and at daylight before the town was awake, they paddled their light craft into a small winding channel which led into one of the most mysterious lakes of North America, Reelfoot Lake, a lake made by the great earthquake of 1811, generally known as the earthquake of New Madrid.

Tatanka was especially happy to be on this small winding stream.

"It is like the winding Minnesota River," he said, "and it is beautiful like the small rivers that join the Mississippi above Lake Pepin. For a long time they

follow their own winding trail in the bottom woods, as if they were afraid to go near the great Mississippi in which all big and little rivers lose themselves."

"The trees are different here," Bill remarked. "We never saw any cypress on the Minnesota."

They spent nearly all day on this winding channel, and it was not until an hour before sunset that they came in sight of the strange waters and scene of Reelfoot Lake.

"I will not go there," said Tatanka, when, at last, the Lake of the Sunken Lands spread out before them. "It is a spook lake, a lake of bad spirits. We must not camp on it. My brother, you told me that a bad spirit shook the earth and trampled down the farms to make the lake.

"Look, the water is very black and very many dead trees grow out of it."

"Tatanka," exclaimed Barker, "you are forgetting what the missionaries have taught you. Haven't they told you many times that there are no spook lakes, no bad medicine lakes? Those dead trees didn't grow dead. They died, when the water rose around them. There are no bad spirits in the earth. The earth just shook and sank. You have been a scout for the white soldiers, and you have to forget your Dakotah superstitions."

Tatanka was silent a while, and stopped paddling.

"The missionaries," he admitted, "are our friends and I believe they tell us the truth. They do not want our land and they do not cheat us as some of the traders do. They say our beliefs in spook lakes and bad medicine are superstition, but it is hard to forget our beliefs, because our fathers have taught them to us for many generations.

"My father once took me along on a buffalo hunt far west and he showed me a spook lake. The hunters camped on the shore of the lake, but none of them would have been brave enough to paddle a canoe on its waters. Some of them would not even gather the dead wood on its shore, but my father told us boys to gather the wood and we did. Our women used the wood to smoke and dry the buffalo meat, and we boys watched for the bad spirits to fly out of the wood.

"I did not see the spirits, but some of the boys told me that they heard the spirits whistle and howl and rise with the smoke after the sun had gone down, and they said that Katinka, the medicine man, saw them, too."

"Where is that spook lake?" the boys asked, also forgetting to paddle.

"That spook lake," Tatanka continued, "lies far west on the plains, which the white men call Dakotah. No trees grow on the plains, but trees and bushes grow on the lake shore and many dead trees and stumps grow in the water. Our people call it the Lake of the Stumps. The water was so bitter that we could not drink it, but our horses drank it."

Bill and Tim dipped a handful of the brown water from Reelfoot Lake.

“It isn’t bitter,” both exclaimed at once. “This isn’t a spook lake.”

“Did your horses die, after they drank out of Stump Lake?”

“No, they liked the water.”

“Then it wasn’t a haunted lake,” both of them argued.

“But why did the trees die?” Tatanka objected.

“May be the outlet became choked and the trees were drowned,” Barker explained. “You know that white trappers always catch plenty of mink and muskrats and find good fish in the lakes which the Indians say are haunted.”

Tatanka began to paddle again, but looked as if he were not convinced but had given up arguing against all three of his friends.

The scene spread out before them looked indeed weird and almost forbidding. A dead forest of tall straight cypress spires arose like tree specters from the dark waters of the lake. The gray trunks had long ago been stripped of bark and branches; a few bald eagles and fish-hawks sailed in spirals over the dead pointed poles and uttered a shrill, piercing cry at the intruders of their solitude.

“It is a forest of ghost trees,” Tatanka murmured. “We should not stay here.”

[image]

“It is a forest of ghost trees,” Tatanka murmured.

“Ghost trees nothing,” the old trapper exploded impatiently. “Those trees were drowned forty years ago. The bark and branches have rotted away. It is a wonder the trees are still standing.

“Tatanka, you’re a hopeless old heathen. If you don’t quit scaring the boys with your spook lakes and ghost trees, I’m going to send you home on a gunboat, and I’ll hire a coal-black negro to help us paddle the canoe. Here, fill your red calumet pipe and don’t be afraid of harmless dead trees.”

A row of turtles plunged into the water from a log, a pair of ducks arose out of some rushes and a large fish jumped out of the water and fell back with a loud splash. Then the channel wound about amongst white water-lilies and patches of the large, beautiful wild lotus or wankapin lilies.

Tatanka had lit his pipe and looked about him in silence.

“There,” Barker encouraged him. “Doesn’t that look like a Minnesota lake? Ducks and turtles and fish and acres of water-lilies. Just like the marshes on your wonderful Minnesota, only the lotus doesn’t grow there.”

“Yes it does,” Tatanka claimed. “My mother and I gathered the big seeds on a lake below the mouth of the Minnesota and in a few other places where wankapin grows in our country.”

“Well, at last you are convinced that we are not on a bewitched lake. But now it is high time we look for a camping-place.

“Bill, steer straight for shore. We’ll make a good soft bed in that cane-brake.”

There are two kinds of cane growing in the South, the small and the large. The small cane, in which the travelers were camping now, grows about a dozen feet high and forms vast thickets on waste lands as far north as Kentucky. These cane-brakes were the home of deer and bear and other wild animals, but large areas have now been made into cotton-fields.

The big cane grows only on wet lands near the rivers from the White River southward. It reaches a height of thirty feet. At the age of about thirty or forty years, the big cane flowers and produces an abundance of rich nourishing grains for stock and game. After flowering, the old canes die and new plants spring up from the seed. The young shoots are known as mutton cane, because deer and bear and stock grow fat on them.

“This cane,” said Tatanka, after they had eaten their supper, “is like the pipe-stem reeds of the Sioux Country. The Indian boys called them spear-grass, and we threw the reeds at each other when we played war.”

The campers remained a week on Reelfoot Lake, and they still found much evidence of the great earthquake half a century before.

The great cracks in the earth, formed at that time, could still be seen in many places. Some of the fissures were filled with sand, which had come up from below; in others, young trees had grown up, while many of the old trees, still alive, were leaning over the partly filled fissures.

It was a strange lake indeed on which the travelers found themselves. Most of the lake, about ten miles long and two miles wide, was covered with water-lilies, lotus, and many other kinds of water plants. Along the margin and on half a dozen low islands grew the sombre cypress, its odd, fantastic, knee-like roots projecting above the water. On the higher lands also, many trees not growing on the upper river had appeared. Sycamores, or buttonwood, mulberry, gum-trees, and catalpas.

The campers met an old man, who had lived near Reelfoot all his life and who told many stories of the great earthquake.

“I was born the year of the earthquake,” the old man related, “and my father told me many stories about it.

“The first shock came a little after midnight on December 16th. My father and two other men were on the river at the time. They were going to New Madrid and were going to start very early, so they could return the same day. Their boat was tied near a very big sycamore. All at once they heard a great thundering underground. The big tree began to sway like the tow-head willows in the storm.

Then the whole bank broke loose and crashed into the river. First the water in the river seemed to rise like a big wall, the next moment it rushed down stream with a roaring current.

"My father was thrown out of the boat and would have drowned if he had not gotten hold of the branches of the big sycamore. How he did it, he did not remember. He yelled for help, and after a long time the men came back with the boat and took him off.

"They were all so scared they couldn't talk; they thought the world was coming to an end.

"They hurried to the highest land they could find to spend the night, but none of them expected to see the sun rise. Again and again the earth rolled and shook as if it were a blanket. Big trees crashed and snapped like bean-poles, and whole acres of forest crashed into the river. The air smelled of burning sulphur, or some such gases as come out of a sulphur spring.

"Father and the two men crept into a thicket of small brush because they were afraid to stay in the big timber, and father always claimed that in a few minutes it grew as dark as if they had been sitting in a cellar at night.

"Every little while, a dozen times or more, they felt the earth shaking and heard the deep rambling underground and the roaring and rushing of the river.

"When daylight came they hurried home and when they found that father's family had not been injured they decided to go on to New Madrid, thinking that they might be of some help to sufferers or to shipwrecked boatmen.

"They hardly recognized the river. It was full of landslides, trees, and all kinds of debris, and one good-sized island and its tow-head had entirely disappeared. They found the town of New Madrid in ruins. The land had sunk ten feet or more. About thirty boats in the harbor had been wrecked or carried down stream.. One large barge loaded with five hundred barrels of flour was split from stern to bow and left high and dry on the bank.

"The people had all fled and were camping on high land away from the river."

The old man paused as if for breath.

"Did the people ever go back?" asked Tim.

"No, they didn't. The fact is they couldn't. The river washed the whole town away. The present town is built a little farther up the river.

"The whole country, my father said, was changed by the earthquake. Many good farms sank and many others were covered with sand. Where the lake is now, Bayou de Chien and Reelfoot Creek used to run through a dense forest of cypress trees. You can follow their channels in your bark boat, because there are no stumps or dead trees in the old channels.

"Some of our neighbors were so frightened that they moved away. Father

was also going to leave. He was going into Arkansas, but mother would not move. She said she had traveled in an ox-wagon from Pennsylvania to Indiana and from Indiana to Tennessee and that was enough. If the end of the world was coming, Arkansas wouldn't last any longer than Tennessee."

Thus ran the story of the old farmer of Reelfoot Lake. He spoke in a quaint Southern dialect, in which Bill and Tim were quite at home, but which compelled Barker to pay very close attention, while Tatanka lost most of the tale.

The story of the old pioneer has been corroborated by the testimony of many reliable men.

At the time of this great catastrophe, Captain Nicholas Roosevelt was taking the pioneer steamer *New Orleans* from Pittsburgh to New Orleans. The steamer was on the Ohio when the earthquake occurred, but when the boat reached the Mississippi, the pilot became much alarmed and said he was lost. The shores had changed and large islands had disappeared.

The naturalist, Audubon, felt the earthquake in Kentucky and wrote an account of it in his journal.

The shocks were most severe over a distance of about one hundred miles from Cairo to Memphis and over a width of about fifty miles. They were felt at St. Louis and New Orleans, Detroit, Washington, and Boston. They were undoubtedly felt as far up the great river as St. Paul and Minneapolis, but that region was at the time still an unsettled Indian country.

Although the earthquake was one of the most severe in the United States, few lives were lost. The country around New Madrid was at that time thinly settled and most of the houses were small and built of wood. It is, however, not surprising that many settlers left the country, for the shocks continued from time to time until the early part of May, 1812.

CHAPTER XIX—PAST ISLAND NUMBER TEN

Below Cairo the mighty river becomes still mightier and winds with countless curves and bends this way and that way through rich lowlands from ten to forty miles wide. On a stretch of three hundred and fifty miles, twice as far by river,

only three large cities, Cairo, Memphis and Vicksburg, offer large and convenient ports. Very often the great river does not touch the high land for a hundred miles or more, but glides along through endless marshes and through forests of oak, elm, sycamore, walnut, gum, cypress, and other Southern trees, while numberless bayous, tributaries, and oxbow lakes give variety to the vast flood-plain of swamp and forest. Where the land is high or protected by dikes, rich plantations have been cleared, but many hundreds of square miles are subject to overflow and remain wild to this day.

When the travelers reached Hickman again they met once more their friend, Dick Banks.

“We just ran up to Cairo,” he told them. “Now we are going south to bring up a load of wounded soldiers. Old Grant is fighting the Johnnies as hard as he knows how. The Johnnies say he can’t take Vicksburg, but I reckon he will. He’s got them in a trap and he’ll starve them out, if he can’t drive them out.”

“Have you seen Hicks again?” Barker asked.

“Never a hair of him, Sam. I reckon he’s gone down to Haynes Bluff or some place near Vicksburg, where he expects you-uns will show up. The scoundrel never got a smell of your presence in this river burg.

“When you pass Island No. 10, look out for sunken boats. The Southerners had a big fort there. And you had better go past New Madrid after dark. The town is full of soldiers and the river full of boats. The commander is a pretty cranky sort. He might ask you for papers and if you haven’t got them, he might put you in the pen. You know you’re a suspicious looking outfit with your Indian and birch-bark dugout.”

“Great Heavens, Dick, do you call that a dugout!” exclaimed Barker. “It’s a canoe. Haven’t you ever seen one before! No dugout for me. We can portage this ship wherever we wish to go.”

“You needn’t worry about portages, Sam. The river is high all the way to Vicksburg. Just see you don’t get lost in those endless swamps and forests.

“You don’t have to go by way of Island No. 10. You can go by way of Bissell’s Channel and Wilson’s Bayou, and cut off about six miles. The channel may be dry now, but you say you can carry that bark tub of your’n.”

“Dick,” Barker replied, laughing, “if you ever again call our canoe a dugout or a tub, I’ll swat you one. See if I don’t!”

“Tatanka, and I made it ourselves and it is the best and safest birch-bark afloat on all this river.”

“May be she is pretty steady,” Banks took up his banter again, “but she is not much of a snagboat, and a mighty poor ram. Better let me stow you all away on the *Grey Hawk* and take you safely down to Haynes Bluff, that is as far as we are going. From there you can walk to Vicksburg, if the Boys in Blue will let you,

but I know they won't."

"No, Dick, thank you for your kind offer. The boys want to see Island No. 10, and I want to see it myself, but we may meet you at New Madrid."

"All right, Sam. If you are not afraid to show your outfit at New Madrid. We'll be there day after to-morrow."

Tatanka, although he saw and heard everything about the earthquake and the sunken lands with close attention, was happy when Barker had said:

"Let's get back to Hickman and the Old Mississippi. I reckon Hicks has lost our trail by this time, if he really ever found it.

"Boys," he continued, "I must tell you something now. That Cousin Hicks of yours is a bad case. There may be a fight if we ever run across him. If there is, you keep out of it. Tatanka and I will handle him.

"Never mind," he cut the boys short when they wanted to know more, "I tell you he is a bad egg. Now you know enough. I ran across him long ago in Indiana."

"He is a skunk," Tatanka grunted, with an angry face and with eyes flashing. "If we catch him, we shall throw him into the river like a worthless cur.

"I am glad we shall go away," he continued. "I never was afraid to fight our enemies, the Chippewas, but I am afraid of spook lakes, of earthquakes, and of big guns. All Indians are afraid of them."

The Mississippi River contains a very large number of islands. Below the larger islands often lie long low bars grown over with small willows, and these brush-covered bars are known as tow-heads.

Between Cairo and New Orleans, the Mississippi River Commission has numbered about one hundred and thirty islands, while many large ones have names. From time to time old islands disappear and new ones are made, when the river washes out a short cut across a bend.

The travelers found Bissell's Channel about half-way between Island No. 8 and Island No. 9, as Captain Banks had told them. But it was not a channel at all; as the boys had expected. It was a road of stumps about two miles long, and the boys wondered how it was made and what it was for.

The four travelers arrived on Island No. 10 in good time, for the distance was only twenty-five miles down stream from Hickman.

They made their camp inside the deserted Confederate works and they looked with awe upon the big portholes in the logs through which the cannons had swept the river.

"How did the Union soldiers take the island!" the boys asked.

"I don't know," Barker told them. "I think two of their gunboats ran past the guns of the island on a very dark night. You had better ask Captain Banks about it.

"I reckon we'll go to Vicksburg on the *Grey Hawk.* It will take us all summer to paddle the five hundred miles the way the river runs. You see, if we get there after Vicksburg falls, your people may not be there any more and we might not be able to find them. So I think we had better go with Captain Banks."

Next morning early they carried their canoe out from under the big sycamore and cottonwoods on Island No. 10 and started north on a big bend of the river.

At noon they reached New Madrid, at that time a lively, hustling town, as Captain Banks had told them.

The *Grey Hawk* had already arrived and as Captain Banks vouched for his four friends, the commander was willing to let them go along to Vicksburg.

After supper, as they all sat on deck chatting with the captain, the lads begged the old river captain to tell them about Bissell's Channel and about the fight at Island No. 10.

"That channel," the captain began, "was cut by the Engineer Regiment of the West, and it was a great piece of work. It was done more than a year ago in March and April, 1862.

"You see, the Confederates held a strong fort with big guns on Island No. 10, and they had also planted guns on the left bank of the river above and below New Madrid, but we held New Madrid.

"Colonel Bissell's men built large rafts for men to work on, for the water was very high at the time. At first they cut the trees about eight feet above the water. Then they rigged a frame and a long saw to the stump and four men, two at each end, pulled the saw and cut the stump about four feet and a half under water.

"The small trees were easy, but we had an awful time with some of the big elms that grow a kind of braces near the ground. On some of those we worked two hours, but Captain Tweedale, who was saw-boss, always figured out what was wrong when the saws began to pinch."

"What did you want the channel for!" asked Bill, not a little puzzled by the whole strange plan.

"Well, General Pope," the captain explained, "wanted gunboats and transports to attack Island No. 10 and cut off the Confederates below the island, but Commander Foote of the river fleet did not think that his boats could run the island. So Colonel Bissell was ordered to dig a canal above the island and thus cut off the bend of Island No. 10 on which you came. If that could be done we could place guns, boats, and men and transports above and below Island No. 10, and the Confederates would have to get out.

"We did some great work. We had four steamboats, six coal-barges and four cannons. You see, we were ready to fight as well as work. Besides the Engineer

Regiment, we had about 600 fighting men ready for battle.

"But things moved faster than we expected. On the night of April 4th Commander Henry Walke of the *Carondelet* ran the guns of Island No. 10.

"It was a very dark night and a storm was passing over the river. The *Carondelet* had been protected in vulnerable parts with coils of hawsers and chains, and a coal barge, loaded with hay, had been lashed to its port side.

"The pipes for the exhaust steam had been led into the wheel-house at the stern, so the puffing of the steam could not be heard.

"About ten o'clock, Commander Walke gave the order to cast off. By the time the *Carondelet* came opposite the Confederate shore batteries, the flashes of lightning were so vivid that the boat was discovered and the roar of the batteries and the crack and scream of the balls soon mixed with the roar of thunder. But during the pitch-dark moments, between flashes of lightning and in the rain, the Confederate gunners had not time and could not see to aim their guns. They had to fire almost at random.

"So close ran the *Carondelet* to the island that the men on board could hear an officer shout, 'Elevate your guns.'

"Away the *Carondelet* steamed down the black river. No lights on board, except the roaring fire under her boilers, which twice set the soot in her smokestack on fire. She raced past the shore batteries, past the formidable island batteries, past the floating battery below the island. Dozens of cannon-balls were fired at her. One struck the coal-barge and one was found in a bale of hay.

"About midnight, Commander Walke arrived at New Madrid with every man on board safe. What hundreds of men had believed impossible, he and his volunteers had done.

"On the 7th of April, Commander Thompson, of the *Pittsburgh*, also ran the island in safety.

"About the same time we finished our channel and ran boats through it to New Madrid."

"But, Captain Banks," the lads asked eagerly, "what happened to the men on Island No. 10?"

"Well, you see," the captain explained, "they were cut off and had to surrender. Only a few of them got away in dugouts and boats through the swamps on the Tennessee shore."

"Why didn't they all march away into Tennessee!" Tim asked.

"Boys, they couldn't," Barker explained to them. "Only a little way east of Island No. 10 lies Reelfoot Lake, so they couldn't march away in that direction. They held the island just as long as they could."

"Time to go to bed for you lads," the captain took the word again. "I have told you all I know about Bissell's Channel and the fight at Island No. 10."

The lads were soon fast asleep in their cabin, dreaming of Spook Lake, of monster battle-ships, and of their home in Vicksburg.

The men continued talking for some time, Captain Banks telling his friends about the dramatic river battle of Memphis on June 6, 1862.

"Captain, I want to ask you one thing," Barker said. "Why can't the Union gun-boats do any good fighting down-stream, why do they have to do all their heavy fighting headed up-stream?"

"Because," explained the captain promptly, "they are just a pick-up lot of boats, all, I think, stern-wheelers. Only their bow is protected with plates and railroad-iron. Their engines are weak, and if maneuvered down-stream they will drag their anchors in the muddy bottom and are hard to control. They are real fighting-ships only when they point their noses up-stream."

When at last Barker invited Tatanka into a cabin, the Indian smiled. "No," he said, "Indian cannot sleep in a box. I sleep in my blankets outside, with plenty of air around me."

CHAPTER XX—ON TO VICKSBURG

The steamer *Grey Hawk* cast off from the New Madrid landing at dawn of day.

The years just preceding the Civil War and the years of the war were the great days of steamboating on the Mississippi and its tributaries.

Hundreds of boats, large and small, ran on the main stream, on the Ohio, the Missouri, the Illinois, the Minnesota and other rivers of the great Mississippi basin. The average life time of a Mississippi steamer was only five years, because countless snags, ice, fires, and other dangers were the bad medicine to navigation on all the streams. None of them were improved, none had any system of lights or signs; the pilots had to know the rivers, whose currents and sandbars and snags were constantly shifting. But the business was so profitable that the trips of one season often paid for the boat. Settlers were rushing into the western country and they and all their goods went by steamboat, for no railroads had yet crossed the Mississippi. On the turbulent Missouri the steamers ran to the mouth of the Yellowstone and beyond, taking up settlers, soldiers, general freight and goods

for the Indian trade, and bringing back loads of buffalo-skins and other fur from the Rocky Mountain country. On the Minnesota small steamers ran two hundred miles beyond St. Paul into the newly opened Sioux country to market the first wheat of the new settlers. A few small boats plied on the upper Mississippi above St. Paul and Minneapolis, where the lumber industry and flour-mills were just developing.

The Civil War proved a fatal blow to river traffic. Both the Federal and the Confederate government commandeered a large number of vessels for war purposes, and many of those were wrecked and sunk or burnt in battle.

Immediately after the war, railroads began to parallel the Mississippi and its navigable tributaries. The steamboat traffic lingered for a number of years, but it never again attained its former glory, and soon sank into its present insignificance.

Moreover, the great movement of traffic in North America is east and west, while the trend of our great navigable river system is north and south.

Barker and Tatanka, as well as the boys, found life on a Mississippi steamer very attractive.

The broad main channel and bayous, sloughs and oxbow lakes; the high bluffs and the lowland forests, had all in turn lured them on to much hard traveling and many interesting side-trips. But just now they all felt that they had had enough of traveling by birch-bark, enough of camping wherever a good place invited them, and enough of eating whatever they could secure.

Below Cairo the low lands widen. There are no distinct hills or bluffs on the west side, while the Chickasaw Bluffs which stretch from Cairo to Memphis are in places ten miles from the river.

A long time ago the Gulf of Mexico extended probably as far north as Cairo, and the great flood-plain from Cairo to the Gulf is land, which was made by the Mississippi. From the Alleghenies, from the Rocky Mountains, from the Black Hills, the Ozarks, and the prairies of Minnesota, the streams are ever bringing down fine, fertile soil into the Mississippi, which spreads it at times of high water over fields, forests, and swamps and carries some of it into the gulf. So great is the amount of fine soil carried by the great river that every year it would make a vast block a square mile in area and four hundred feet high.

Of all the travelers on the *Grey Hawk*, Tatanka took the keenest interest in everything around him; for he had, before this trip, never seen the Mississippi farther south than La Crosse in Wisconsin. “Why do the white people need so many ships?” he wondered. “What will they do with all the big guns they have, and where are all the soldiers going to fight!”

“My friend,” Barker told him, “wait till we reach Vicksburg. There you will see soldiers and guns.”

“Where do all the black people live?” he asked. “Do they live in the woods and come out to work in the fields of cotton that we have seen?

“If our young men could have seen all the soldiers and ships and guns and towns of the white people, they never would have made war against them.”

The second day on the boat was a Sunday and the pastry-cook did his best to furnish a wonderful collection of cakes, pies, and jellies.

Barker and the boys could not help being amused at the way Tatanka looked furtively at the sumptuous Sunday dinner. The variously colored jellies served in tall glasses, especially excited his-curiosity and suspicion.

“Is it medicine or is it to eat?” he whispered to Barker.

“It’s all to be eaten,” Barker informed him. “Don’t think again of bad medicine on this boat.”

“If the Sioux chiefs were here,” Tatanka remarked with a smile, “they would have to carry away many glasses of food, for it is the custom of the Indians to take away with them whatever they cannot eat at a feast.

“Captain Banks must be very rich to have so many dishes on his ship.”

The pilot of the *Grey Hawk* did not know the river well enough to run after dark, so the passengers saw the whole distance by daylight.

At night a group of colored deck-hands appeared as minstrels for the entertainment of the passengers.

“The black men have big white teeth and big white eyes, and they can sing and dance,” Tatanka remarked, “but they couldn’t give the Sioux war-whoop.”

About the 20th of June the steamer tied up at Haynes Bluff on the Yazoo River.

Tatanka, who had wondered at the soldiers and ships at New Madrid, was here simply bewildered. Ships, teams, mule-teams, ox-teams, horse-teams, and soldiers and more soldiers everywhere; infantry, cavalry, and terrible artillery. Tatanka, with the observant eyes of an Indian scout, saw everything, but hardly spoke a word all day.

Grant had by this time about 70,000 men, an army about ten times as large as the whole Sioux nation. From Haynes Bluff southward his lines were stretched out and entrenched over a distance of fifteen miles.

Over hills, through ravines, through woods and cane-brakes ran the sheer endless line of rifle-pits, trenches, parapets, and batteries. And in front of the Union works, rose in grim defiance the lines and pits and batteries of the Confederates. The lines of the two armies ran about three miles east of Vicksburg over wooded hills which rise about two hundred feet above the river. For one month since the 19th of May the Confederate army under General John C. Pemberton and the city of Vicksburg had been besieged, by the Union army, while the Union fleets held the river above and below the city.

General Pemberton, now in command at Vicksburg, was the same man, who two years ago had taken his battery from Fort Ridgely to La Crosse on the *Fanny Harris*.

Grant had at first attempted to take the city by assault, but had found that the Confederates were so strongly entrenched and defended their lines so stubbornly that the Northern army had to settle down to a regular siege with the object of starving their opponents into surrender.

Many Northern people came to visit their friends in Grant's army. They brought with them turkeys and chickens and ducks as gifts to the Boys in Blue, but for once the soldiers did not appreciate these delicacies. While they were maneuvering and fighting to get into their present position on the hills in the rear of Vicksburg, Grant had boldly cut loose from his base of supplies. Foraging parties had scoured the plantations for anything they could find, and the army had largely existed on poultry.

"Give us bacon and bread!" was now the cry. "We are sick of anything that crows or quacks or gobbles; we are sick of all meat with wings. Give us bacon and bread!"

Once while Grant was riding along the lines, a soldier recognizing him called in a low voice, "Hardtack." In a moment the cry ran along the whole line, "Hardtack! Hardtack!" Grant assured the men that a road had been built for the distribution of regular commissary supplies such as bread, hardtack, coffee, sugar, bacon, and salt meat. The men at once gave a ringing cheer, and on the next day full rations were issued to the whole army.

The four travelers from the North had plenty of opportunity to watch the operations of a great siege, and Barker met several men whom he had known in Indiana and Minnesota.

There was little fighting now, but much digging of pits and trenches and some mining and counter-mining.

"We are just camping here," an old acquaintance told Barker, "and the digging is good. No rocks in these hills as in the hills of New England and New York.

"If the Johnnies weren't camping so blasted close to us, it would be a fine life. As it is, the man who shows his head above the parapets is done for. The sharpshooters get him.

"I just got through digging and sitting in a pit twenty-four hours.

"Three men from our company were detailed to dig an advance rifle-pit. We started after dark with picks and shovels. Two men with picks scratched up the dirt, the third man threw it out. We made no noise; a mole couldn't have worked more silently. Heavens, how we scratched and dug! By daylight, our pit was deep enough to shelter us. It had to be or we wouldn't have come back. But

it was not deep enough for us to stand up. All day we sat and lay in that hole. At noon the sun almost roasted us brown, although we crouched against the shaded wall.

"In the afternoon it began to rain and some of our dirt washed back into the pit.

"'Mike,' I said to my Irish fellow-digger, 'I guess we'll have to swim or surrender.'

"'By me faith,' Mike replied, 'I'll wait till the water runs over me gun-muzzle. We can't surrender because our shirts are too dirty for white flags.'

"We agreed that Mike was right, and sitting in the sticky mud, we ate the rest of our bread and bacon before the rain could spoil it.

"After the rain was over, some sharpshooters began to practice on our pit. They couldn't hit us, and we were right glad that they gave us something to think and talk about.

"After dark three other men relieved us and we had a chance to stretch our bones."

"What did these men have to do?" the boys wanted to know.

"Deepen the pit," the soldier told them, "and widen it to right and left in the direction of two other rifle-pits. You see in that way we push our lines closer and closer to the enemy.

"In many places we are so close now that the men can talk to each other."

Quite often the Union soldiers who were short of tobacco would barter bacon or bread for tobacco, because the Confederates at this time were beginning to feel the shortage of food.

All through the Civil War the men in both armies showed a fine spirit of chivalry to the enemy, whenever duty and the stern law of war would permit acts of courtesy and kindness.

At one time in the Vicksburg siege a dead mule between the lines became unbearably offensive to the Confederates.

"Heh, Yanks!" a soldier shouted, "we've got to bury that mule. He's smelling us out."

"All right," the Yankee boys replied. "We smelled him yesterday. Send out three men, and we'll send three. Say, Johnnies, better stick up a white rag, when you're coming out, so our boys don't make a mistake!"

The mule was covered with dirt. The The soldiers exchanged various little articles and swapped some yarns and jokes.

"Yanks, when are you coming to town?" the Southerners asked.

"We'll be there on the Fourth. By that time your grub will be gone."

"Like thunder you will," the Boys in Grey returned the banter. "Why, men, we've got enough grub to last till winter. If you Yanks stick around long enough,

we'll invite you to a Christmas pudding."

"Many thanks," the Northerners came back; "you can't fool us on mule-meat and river-soup. We'll bring our own rations when we come in."

A moment later the men had returned to their lines.

"Look out for your heads," the call rang out. "We're going to shoot."

The men who had just enjoyed a friendly visit, were again facing each other in the life-and-death struggle for the control of the Mississippi.

Tatanka and the boys were just having the time of their lives with all the new and exciting things they heard and saw. Barker was as much interested, but he kept his eyes open for the one enemy he must either elude or defeat. He felt sure that if Hicks were still alive he was not far from Haynes Bluff and the Union lines.

CHAPTER XXI—WHEREIN OLD ENEMIES MEET

Barker, through the influence of Captain Banks, had found quarters for his party in a vacant corner of an old warehouse. Other rooms were not procurable and in these secluded quarters, he felt safe from annoying and curious visitors, and from various camp-followers always found in the rear of an army.

He was most anxious to get the boys into Vicksburg and start for home with Tatanka, who had so loyally shared all the dangers and hardships of the long journey.

But how to get into Vicksburg was a puzzle. Securing a pass seemed out of the question and any other way that he could think of looked either impossible or extremely dangerous, because sentinels and patrols of both Grant's and Pemberton's armies watched the river day and night.

He feared that in the confusion and excitement of surrender, even if it did come soon, he might fail to find the parents of his boys. Between this anxiety and the possibility of again meeting Hicks, he lay awake, thinking a good part of the night.

The next forenoon the four men from the North accompanied a train of wagons with rations and ammunitions for the soldiers east of Vicksburg.

The boys were again in high spirits. They felt sure that they would soon be at home, and there were so many new things to be seen that they had no time to feel sad. The horrors of war were but little visible, because there had been no active fighting for a month.

Barker, however, walked along in thoughtful silence.

"I must get the lads into town and I must kill or capture Hicks, if we set eyes on him again," were the thoughts ever in his mind.

About the middle of the forenoon the long line of wagons halted on account of some obstruction ahead. Barker was chatting pleasantly with a number of teamsters, "mule-skinners," as the soldiers called them. He had told them that he wanted to get the lads into Vicksburg and he had told them about the man, who for some reason, was bound to keep the boys in the North even at the risk of having them killed by the Sioux. The men became much interested, for even the roughest of men are quickly stirred in their sympathy by injustice and cowardly crime.

Three horsemen came slowly along the side of the road. They stopped as they reached the group of teamsters.

The foremost of them dismounted, walked slowly up to Barker, reached out his hand and said with suppressed excitement: "Hello, Barker, I'm glad to see you."

"Hello, Hicks," replied the trapper, returning the salute without offering his hand. "I can't say that I'm glad to see you."

"Where are the boys?" asked Hicks.

"My boys are back a way," Barker spoke firmly, the color rising in his cheeks and his gray eyes flashing, "and you and yours aren't going to touch them."

Hicks turned white and made a movement as if to draw a pistol.

Without a word from Barker three husky men sprang upon him and several pistols covered the other two men, who were ordered to dismount.

"Search him!" said Barker. "He is the man. I want to know why he wants possession of the boys."

Hicks tried to tell the lies about kidnapped nephews and stolen horses, but the teamsters shook him into silence.

"Close up," one of the men ordered. "You're too late; we know all about you."

A soiled piece of paper was found on Hicks.

> "The bearer of this," it read, "is to receive $10,000 if no heirs of Col. Henry P. Deming are found before January first, 1864.
>
> "John C. Chesterton."

"What does it mean?" demanded Barker.

"I don't know," protested Hicks. "I didn't know I had the rag and don't know where it came from."

"All right!" said the spokesman of the teamsters. "Boys, tie him to that gum-tree.

"Hicks, you have just five minutes to explain that paper and say anything else you may want to say.

"Take a look at your pistols, boys!"

Hicks began to tremble.

"Let me go," he groaned, "and I'll tell the truth."

"Tell the truth!" shouted the men, "and we'll see."

"Colonel Deming," Hicks began, "is the boys' grandfather. Their mother married against his wishes. He disinherited her, and made a will that Chesterton, a distant relative, should fall heir to the Deming plantation, which is very valuable, if no children of his daughter were found before January 1st, 1864.

"Chesterton learned about the two lads and hired me to keep the two boys out of sight. I didn't mean to harm them."

"Like blazes you didn't!" cried the spokesman. "You deserted them when the Indians broke out.

"Boys, get a rope; the fellow is too rank rotten for our bullets!"

An officer with a patrol came along and inquired what all the row was about, and the teamsters told him the story, which was corroborated by Barker.

"I don't want him hanged," Barker added, "but I don't want to see his face again.

"Hicks," he spoke calmly, turning to the prisoner, "I'll shoot you on sight, if you ever cross my trail again!"

The officer thought a minute.

"Let him go, men," he decided. "Don't soil your hands on him.

"Here," he ordered two soldiers, "take him out of our lines to that open field. He is to trot straight for the timber east. If he stops running, you shoot him.

"Hicks, if you ever show your face inside our lines again, we'll find a tree for you pretty quick. March!

"My regiment can make good use of these three horses."

[image]

"Take him out of our lines to that open field."

"What about these two fellows? Can we hang them? We've got the rope

all ready." The men asked their questions half in earnest and half in grim jest.

"They were partners of Judas Hicks."

The two prisoners protested their innocence, claiming that they had believed the story of Hicks about kidnapped nephews and stolen horses.

"Give us a chance to go back north or put us to work here. We're innocent of any crime."

"That sounds good," said the officer, "the transport *Northern Star* leaves for St. Louis to-night or to-morrow. She is short of men. Restler and Stone, take these men back to Haynes Bluff and turn them over to the captain of the *Northern Star*. Tell the captain he will furnish me a good dinner when he returns from St. Louis."

When the officer and his patrol had left, Barker turned to the group of teamsters.

"Men," he said, with a choking voice, "you have done me a great service for which I can never repay you, but if you ever come north to Minnesota, I'll show you the finest land the Lord put down on this earth."

"Will it grow cotton and sweet potatoes?" drawled one of the men.

"No, it won't do that, but it will grow everything else. Corn and wheat, fish and game, and great straight pines."

The teams of wagons ahead began to move. The drivers cracked their whips and called: "Good-bye, old man. You'll never see Hicks again. We'll come north after we get through at Vicksburg."

Barker went back and soon found Tatanka and the boys.

The three were much stirred by the news about Hicks and his two friends.

Tatanka did not try to conceal his disapproval of the escape of Hicks.

"The mule-drivers were right," he growled. "Hicks was all bad and should hang. I would have killed him and scalped him, too."

"No, you red heathen," Barker laughed at him, "you wouldn't, you are not in the country of murderous Little Crow. You are in the lines of Christian soldiers.

"You had better be careful with your big talk or the soldiers will put you in the guardhouse."

"I would be glad to live in the guardhouse, if I could first scalp Hicks."

"You wouldn't live in it very long. They would take you out and shoot you."

"They could," Tatanka persisted angrily, "if I had killed Hicks. A Sioux is not afraid of death."

"You black-souled Indian," Barker chided him good-naturedly. "I'm glad you didn't see him. Now, we'll all walk back to town. It'll be dinner-time when we get there. Tatanka, you'll feel less revengeful after you have filled your ribs with pumpkin-pie and bacon.

"After dinner you can scout for Hicks and if you find him, you may scalp

him, but if he keeps going the way he went across that field, he'll be in Alabama to-night."

In the afternoon the boys took a swim in the river and introduced Tatanka to the ways and manners of a dugout. The lads had often traveled in a dugout before they went to Minnesota, and they soon convinced Tatanka that a log canoe was as safe as a birch canoe. In fact they claimed it was much safer, "because," they said, "you can ride on either side of it. You don't have to keep it right side up."

Barker also went down to the Yazoo River and took his first lessons in handling a dugout, but he soon returned to town to see if he couldn't find some way of getting into Vicksburg.

An old fisherman to whom Barker broached the subject, carefully, gave him this advice:

"Stranger," he said, "there be a fellow in the Union army somewhere. His name is U. S. Grant. Ye may have heard of him. They say he is much set on getting into that town. May be if ye and he put your heads together ye can find a way to get in."

"Look here, my friend," Barker replied, somewhat angered, "I have a very good reason for wanting to get into Vicksburg."

"I reckon ye have that," the old fisherman replied, testily. "I reckon ye are a Confederate spy or a Federal spy. If ye are, ye'll have to find your own way into town. Ye cant get me into trouble. Two of my sons are in General Pemberton's army, if they haven't been killed. I'm too old to fight, and I won't mix up with spies. Ye're the third stranger this week that's talked to me about getting into Vicksburg, so ye'll have to pardon me, if I'm a bit techy. I tell them all my boat's not running."

Barker protested that he was neither a Confederate nor a Federal spy.

"Well, if ye aren't a spy, ye can't get in. It's only birds and fish and spies that can get in. We can't even smuggle in a side of bacon for our boys. I hear they're eating rats and mules with young cane for vegetables."

Barker was silent. His sympathy went out to the old man, whom like thousands north and south the great war had made sad and lonely.

"If ye ain't a spy," the old man took up the conversation again, "I'll give ye a bit of advice. Don't ye talk to anybody about getting into Vicksburg. It's a bad subject for conversation just now at this place.

"The Union men would turn ye over to the soldiers, and there are still men here whose hearts are filled with hatred against the North.

"When the war began I hated Lincoln and all men north. I have seen enough of the men from the North that I hate them no more, but I am sad and lonely and I pray that the war may soon end."

CHAPTER XXII—THE OLD TRAPPER'S SECRET

The next day the boys and Tatanka again traveled in a dugout up and down the Yazoo River. Barker himself also went in a dugout within a mile or two of the point where the Union line touched the Mississippi.

He returned after the boys and Tatanka had gone to bed, but they were still awake, because Tatanka had been telling them how many years ago, he and five other men had gone on the warpath against the Chippewas, the hereditary enemies of the Sioux.

The Chippewas used to come down in canoes on the Mississippi and fall upon an unsuspecting Sioux camp. After taking a scalp or two they would leave their canoes and return north across the forest. The Sioux would follow them, but they could seldom accomplish anything because they were always in danger of being ambushed by the retreating Chippewas. It was one of those stories Tatanka had just told with much detail.

"Where have you been, Mr. Barker?" the lads asked.

"I have been scouting," the old man answered, apparently in high spirits. "I have taken a look at the rivers and the country and have visited with soldiers and officers and other men.

"I have also sent a letter to your parents."

"How did you do that!" the boys inquired eagerly.

"One of our soldiers tied it to a piece of green wood and threw it over the Confederate breastworks.

"It may not be delivered, but I took a chance at it."

The boys asked many other questions, but the old man would not talk and told the boys it was high time to go to sleep.

In the morning he told them that they were all to walk down toward the mouth of the Yazoo.

"We may camp there somewhere to-night," he said, "and we may come back.

We'll put plenty of lunch in our pockets, but we leave all our stuff right here."

They did not have to walk all the way. Various conveyances were going in their direction. It turned out that Barker didn't really want to go to the mouth of the Yazoo; instead he took his party several miles farther close to the bank of the Mississippi, about a mile above the place where the Union line touched the river. Here they made camp under a clump of low trees and Barker went to a neighboring farm house for a jug of water.

"We might as well eat," Barker suggested when he returned. "You boys must be hungry as wolves after our long tramp this afternoon."

"May we build a fire?" the boys asked.

"No, I think we had better not," the old man replied. "It might attract some visitors that we don't want to-night."

In the far North, the midsummer twilights last a long time. Along the international boundary one can read in the open until nine o'clock, but in the South, daylight passes quickly into night.

When the four travelers had finished their supper it was dark.

"Mr. Barker," asked Tim, "are we going to stay here all night? It will soon be pitch-dark."

"Yes, it will be very dark. It is cloudy and it looks as if we might have a storm," admitted the trapper.

The lads were mystified by Barker's answer, but Bill felt that the trapper did not wish to answer any questions and that he had some secret plan to carry out.

But little Tim was less discreet. "Shall we build a lean-to?" he asked.

"No, Timmy," the old man answered, smiling. "I reckon we won't. If the good Lord sends us a shower to-night, I reckon we'll just get wet. The rains in this country are warm and it will not hurt us to get wet.

"Let's go down to the river and see the water run by."

The trapper led the way under tall trees, and the other three followed in silence. If Tatanka knew anything about Barker's plan, he did not betray his knowledge by either word or gesture.

At the foot of a large sycamore Barker stopped. It was now so dark that the trees across the river were not visible, but as the boys looked over the steep bank they could just see the bulk of a large dugout swaying in the current under some overhanging branches.

"Oh, Mr. Barker," Bill whispered, "somebody keeps his boat here. Can you see it?"

"Yes, boys," the old man replied in a whisper. "I know about it. It's our boat. I bought it yesterday.

"Just slip down as quietly as you can and lie down in the middle of it.

Tatanka and I will do the paddling.

"And no matter what happens, you boys keep quiet. We are going to Vicksburg."

"Mr. Barker, did you get a pass?" Tim whispered anxiously.

"Never mind, Tim," Barker ordered, "you just lie still and keep quiet now. Don't move and don't speak till I tell you."

Sitting low in the bottom of the craft, Barker and the Indian paddled the large dugout into midstream, where both shores were lost. For a little while they paddled without making the slightest noise, as if they were hunting moose or deer on their northern streams. Then Barker lifted his paddle out of the water.

"Down!" he whispered. "Lie flat and drift."

For some time the dugout drifted like a dead log swinging around to right and left with the current. The boys lay absolutely still, hearing their own hearts beat and listening to the low sound of the current against the sides of the dugout.

Barker rose up slowly. "Paddle," he whispered; "we are drifting into the timber."

Again they paddled in silence.

A flash of lightning threw a gleam of light over the dark water. A dugout shot out from under the timber on the west bank.

"Who goes there? Halt!" a low deep voice called, and the four travelers heard the click of two guns.

"We are friends," Barker replied.

"Pull in here!" the order came from the other craft.

Barker steered toward the shore and found himself alongside of two Confederate dugouts, with two men in each.

The leader flashed a lantern at the travelers.

"Who are you and where are you going?" he demanded. "Get out; we have to search you."

The searchers found a piece of fresh beef and two loaves of bread and some coffee.

"That's rich pickings," the leader commented. "We haven't had any beef between our teeth for two weeks.

"Come back in the woods a way and we'll roast some of it, right away. But we can't build a fire here. The Yanks have a lot of ammunition to waste and they might shoot some Minié balls at our camp-fire."

Their four captors seemed hungry, for they ate all the bread and meat and drank the coffee as if they had been crossing a desert.

"That was good of you," the leader remarked. "Wheat-bread, beef, and coffee are rather scarce in our town just now. We've been living on corn-meal and mule-steak.

"Now, Stenson," he continued, "you take this bunch down to the guardhouse and they can tell their story to the provost marshal in the morning. I reckon they don't care to be shot before daylight."

"Mr. Barker," Tim asked, after they had been locked in a small room, "do you think they will shoot us?"

"Don't worry, boys," Barker said kindly. "We haven't done anything they can shoot us for. Just lie down and go to sleep. Thank God, we're in Vicksburg at last."

The examination next morning was not very formidable. It was easy for Barker to prove that he and his company were not Northern spies; moreover the meeting of the boys with their parents convinced the military authorities that Barker had told them the exact truth.

"But how did you get past the Union gunboats?" one of the officers inquired. "Did you get a pass?"

"If you please, gentlemen," the old trapper replied with a shrewd smile, "you see we got by and I reckon as long as we don't want to pass them again, it really makes no difference how we did it."

The officer was satisfied, but one of his colleagues took up the inquiry.

"My friend," he said, with a suppressed smile, "you have shown some ability as a blockade-runner, but your naval architecture is peculiar. Why did you nail that sheet iron to the inside of your ship? Don't you know that it is customary to put the iron on the outside?"

At this question everybody laughed good-naturedly and with a broad grin, the old man replied:

"Well, you see, gentlemen, I had undertaken to deliver those lads alive in Vicksburg, and I was afraid that some of your men might fire at us before we had time to surrender. I was in a bit of a hurry when I converted that dugout into an iron-clad and I was afraid that she wouldn't navigate well if I nailed the iron to the outside, because I was too much rushed to make a good job of it."

"Well," the presiding officer decided, "I guess we'll have to let you stay. It would be cruel to send you back. Those Yankee gunners might start practicing on you. Too bad you couldn't smuggle in a little more fresh beef and coffee and white bread."

"Should have been mighty glad to do it," the trapper assented, and at that the court adjourned.

The parents of the lads had received most of the letters the boys and Barker had sent, including the one thrown over the Confederate parapets.

Of Hicks they had neither heard nor seen anything, and by his silence he stood condemned.

Like most people in Vicksburg during the siege, the Fergusons lived in a

cave, where they were fairly safe from mortar shells and Parrott shells which the Union gunboats and batteries threw into the city every day.

For the sum of fifteen dollars two negroes dug a cave for Barker and Tatanka. Cave-digging had become a profession in Vicksburg and many of the colored men made good wages at it.

Barker and his party had heard a great deal of shooting and cannonading but now they were in the city at which the guns were aimed.

The mortar-boats, anchored below the city, did most of the bombarding. The mortars were short guns throwing large shells. They had to be aimed high and the shell fell almost vertically or with a great high curve.

This vertical fire did not do very much damage, but it drove practically the whole civilian population into caves in the high clay-banks. The civilians who had remained in Vicksburg had done so against the wishes of General Pemberton, and they were now living in constant terror of the shells, although very few people were injured or killed.

On the second day of Barker's stay in Vicksburg, the bombardment, beginning at daylight, was especially heavy. Many of the people of Vicksburg had become so accustomed to the rushing and exploding of the shells that they gathered at various high points to watch the shells fly and drop.

Barker tried to induce Tatanka to go with him to Sky Parlor Hill, a high point where a good many people had assembled, but Tatanka would not come.

He sat in front of his cave and whenever he saw or heard a shell, he ducked into the cave as the boys expressed it.

"No, my friend," he said to Barker. "If you said I should fight Chippewas on Sky Parlor Hill, I would come, but of the big roaring shells I am afraid."

It was in vain that Barker and the boys explained to him that the mortars were not shooting at Sky Parlor Hill, and that the big guns could not aim at any one person. He wouldn't leave the entrance of the cave.

"You go and come back and tell me," he said. "I like this place better than Sky Parlor Hill. May be I shall go with you to-morrow."

At night the mortar shells with their fuses made a wonderful display of grim fireworks. After the shells rose to the greatest height, they fell so rapidly that a trail of fire seemed to be following them. Generally when a shell struck the ground or a building, it exploded, but some remained dead, owing to imperfect fuses, like a fire-cracker that does not go off.

A district in which the shells fell was at once deserted; and some caves sold very cheap, because their owners did not consider them safe.

The Parrott shells fired from the besieging batteries were more feared and did more damage than the mortar shells thrown by the fleet. One of those came with a horrid shriek and buried itself in the ground in front of the cave in which

the boys and their parents were eating their supper. Although the shell did not explode, Tatanka was so scared by it that for the rest of the evening, he would not leave his cave at all.

The next morning, through the courtesy of an officer, Barker received permission for himself and his company to visit the quarters of the officer, a few hundred yards in the rear of the Confederate fortifications.

Here the ground was everywhere strewn with fragments of shells, and with flattened and twisted Minié balls which had struck the trees before they had dropped as spent balls. Among the broken shells the ground was peppered with the bullets from exploded shrapnels.

The quarters of the officer were practically a cave, or rather what the early settlers on the Western plains called a dugout. It was built on the same plan on which boys build their little caves to play Indian or Robinson Crusoe, only it was larger and more commodious. Its opening faced west, away from Union and Confederate lines. Its roof of logs and earth was strong enough to afford perfect protection against rifle fire and shrapnel, and it was so located that heavy shells were not at all likely to strike it.

In this place the officer received and made his reports, and here he rested or slept, when he was off duty. However, his hours of rest and sleep were very few, because the Confederate regiments were so shorthanded both in officers and men that there was little time for rest and sleep.

The Confederate soldiers had orders not to fire unless they were attacked, because they were short of ammunition, but from the Union lines a more or less constant fire of small arms, shrapnel, and heavy guns was kept up day after day.

A pouring rain came up while the four friends were at the quarters of the officer. A torrent of muddy water broke through the roof, a big lump of wet dirt fell on the bed, and mud and water covered the floor. The four guests fell to and piled bed, chairs, and table in the dryest corner and protected the clothes and blankets of their host as well as they could, but the place looked as if it could never be made fit to use again. But when Captain Dent arrived, he just laughed at the whole mess, as he called it.

"It's just one of the little accidents of war," he added. "My man, Harris, will put this cabin in good shape before dark. This is nothing at all. Just think of our starving boys in the rifle-pits. They often have to stand and lie in the mud all day.

"If you gentlemen will lend me a hand, we'll deepen the trench around this mansion and stop the leak in the roof.

"You must all stay for supper," the captain insisted, when the work was done. "I have invited three young officers. You'll enjoy the company, and if you Northerners are not too particular, you can have plenty to eat."

Harris, the colored man, began cooking, while Captain Dent showed his visitors around and told them of many interesting incidents connected with the siege.

Then the guests came and Harris announced supper.

"Captain," one of the young men asked, "what's this savory dish your man is serving us?"

"That," the captain asserted, without changing a muscle on his weather-browned face, "that's moose-tongue; moose-tongue from Minnesota. My friend here brought it down."

"Tied him behind your boat, I suppose?" queried the second guest.

"Oh, no; not at all," Barker promptly entered into the spirit of the company. "We used him as motive power. He pulled us clear into town."

The third guest and the boys looked a little puzzled.

"You see," the trapper quickly explained, "he was a Chippewa moose and dreadfully scared of a Sioux. My friend, Tatanka, here, is a Sioux. Had an awful time getting the beast to stop for camp. Was bound to keep going as long as Tatanka was sitting behind him."

A ringing laugh went around the table.

"Sir Barker," the captain took up the conversation, "how many tongues did he have?"

"Well, sir," the trapper drawled out, "from the noise he could make, I should say about six, sir. He was sure a wonderful beast. We were going to exhibit him in town, but the Quartermaster General took such a liking to him that we had to give him up."

Again a peal of laughter went around the table.

"Harris," said the third guest, "you've garnished that moose-tongue with green asparagus. Looks almighty appetizing. Where did you get it?"

"Wai, massa, I tell you. I cut it myself in de cane-brake in de nex' ravine. De Good Lord hab started a 'sparagus plantation dere, sure 'nuf," and a broad smile spread over Harris's face like sunshine. He had really done his best to prepare a feast for his master and now he was happy because his master was pleased.

"Gentlemen, fall to," the captain urged. "We have here the very best dinner Vicksburg has to offer. The Planters Hotel could not beat it, if President Davis himself was the guest of the city."

By this time the boys had recovered from their embarrassment because they saw the men all acting like happy boys. They had never suspected that their fatherly friend, Barker, was so much of a boy, who could laugh and cut up.

They fell to as heartily as all the older boys, although the scene of Old Harmony's team of six rolling down the bluff at Fort Ridgely flashed through their minds.

“It tastes just like beef-tongue,” Tim remarked to Bill.

For the present, both host and guests forgot the dangers, the sufferings and the horrors of war. They were all just boys at dinner.

When the company one after the other, began to sniff at the odor of coffee, Captain Dent called aloud for Harris.

“Look here, you black rascal,” he accosted the surprised cook, “what are you making that smell of coffee with? There hasn’t been any coffee in town for a week.”

“Massa, dat coffee smell is sure no ghost. Dat hunter geman from de North gib it to me and some sugar, too.”

“Where did you get it?” the officers asked with one voice.

“Trapped it, just trapped it. I caught the coffee, and Tatanka crawled up on the sugar.”

A loud boyish laugh rang around the table.

“Three cheers for Barker and Tatanka. May they hunt long and prosper,” the oldest officer proposed, and Bill and Tim joined heartily in the cheers.

“Mr. Barker,” cried the captain, “you and Tatanka paddle your iron-clad up the river and crawl up on some more coffee and sugar.”

How much little gifts of luxuries brighten the life of soldiers in the field can perhaps only be appreciated by those who have for weeks or months been reduced to the barest necessities of life.

After dinner, both host and guests opened their treasure-troves of stories, serious and comic. Then the young officers formed an impromptu trio and many songs, sprung up during the great siege, rang through the warm summer night, new words set to old tunes.

“’Twas at the siege of Vicksburg,
Of Vicksburg, of Vicksburg.
’Twas at the siege of Vicksburg,
When the Parrott shells were whistling through the air.
Listen to the Parrott shells,
Listen to the Parrott shells,
The Parrott shells are whistling through the air.”

Shortly after ten the young officers bade farewell to their host and friends, for at eleven they, as well as Captain Dent, went on duty with their men, behind the parapets and at the batteries.

For a few brief hours they had forgotten sorrow and hunger and the oppressive gloom of probable surrender, which like a hideous specter seemed to come creeping a little closer every day.

They might attempt to cut their way out, but the loss of life would be enormous and the sacrifice would most likely be utterly useless.

Barker and Tatanka with the boys returned to town on a dark winding road.

Down the river they could again see the mortar shells draw their fiery curves and after the rise and fall of the fire trail, as Tatanka called it, came the deep booming of the explosion.

Like the officers, they also were thrown back into besieged and bombarded Vicksburg, after a few happy hours of jovial company.

"We should sleep in the woods to-night and not go back to town," Tatanka suggested.

"White men can't sleep in the woods without blankets," the trapper replied. "We'll go back to our caves. If we didn't, the father and mother of the boys would be worried."

"I think," Tatanka pointed out, after he had watched a shell drop, "some day a big fire-ball will shoot through the roof of our cave and kill us all. We should live in the woods."

"My friend, we can't live in the woods." Barker tried to instruct and calm his fears. "Shrapnel and rifle fire from the Union lines sweep the woods everywhere. We would have to dig a cave there.

"If the mortars or Parrott guns begin to drop shells near us, we will move to another place. Until they do, we are safe. Now, don't be a squaw, Tatanka. Chippewas and hostile Sioux have fired at you many times. Those big shells hardly ever hit anybody; all they do is to bury and bust themselves in the clay."

"All the same," the Indian persisted, "I don't like them. I can't fight them back. I wish we were home in Minnesota. I would not be afraid of fighting Chippewas or bad Sioux. Are we going back soon?"

"We can't start back until after the siege," Barker explained, somewhat impatiently.

"Couldn't we slip out at night?" Tatanka asked.

"We are not going to try it. The gunners on the boats would sink us or shoot us as spies or blockade-runners. I'm all-fired glad that we got in without being sunk or shot. We're not going to try to get out."

"How long is the siege going to last?" Bill asked.

"It can't last much longer, because there is but little food left. The men are all weak and live on half-rations."

"Couldn't they cut their way out!" Tim asked timidly.

"They can't do it. Grant has twice as many men as Pemberton, and Grant's men are all strong and have plenty of food and ammunition."

CHAPTER XXIII—THE LAST DAYS OF VICKSBURG

It had taken Grant a whole year to place his army in position on the hills in the rear of Vicksburg, but he had stuck to the campaign with the tenacity of a bulldog.

At first he had tried to move his army south by rail from Memphis, but Van Dorn had destroyed his supplies and cut the railroad.

He had tried to get his army below Vicksburg through various channels and bayous on the west side of the great river, but had found this plan impossible.

He had tried to come down by way of the Yazoo and other water-courses on the east side of the Mississippi, and had had a narrow escape from disaster. The Confederates had felled trees across the narrow channels and had built Fort Pemberton of mud and cotton-bales, which the Union men found they could not pass, and in the end they were glad to get out of the maze of water-courses and endless swamps and forests.

Then he had dug a canal across a neck of land below Vicksburg, but the river had risen and had filled the canal with sand and mud.

At last, Admiral Porter's gunboats and transports had rapidly run the batteries of Vicksburg on a dark night. Grant had marched his army past Vicksburg on the west side of the river. He had crossed the river at Bruinsburg and in a most daring manner he had cut loose from any base of supplies. With five days' rations in their knapsacks his men had for nearly three weeks lived on the country, had quickly turned from one hostile army upon the other and defeated them in detail. They had driven Pemberton into Vicksburg. They had built two lines of fortifications, one facing west against Pemberton in Vicksburg, and one facing east against Johnston, and since the nineteenth of May they held Pemberton in the wooded hills two miles east of Vicksburg.

Grant's army, consisting of only about 40,000 men at first, had now been strengthened to more than 70,000 men. Since the middle of June, Vicksburg was so closely besieged that not even a rowboat could get in or out.

On the twenty-second of May, Grant had tried to take the town by assault, but the Confederates put up such a stubborn defense that the attempt failed. Since that time, the Union army had carried on a regular siege with the intention of starving Vicksburg and the Confederate army into surrender.

The Northern soldiers had destroyed the railroad east of Vicksburg, so that Johnston could not quickly move upon them and soon the Union army was so strong that Grant could have fought Pemberton and Johnston at the same time. The Union army had now plenty of food and ammunition and was strongly entrenched, while the fall of Vicksburg and the surrender of Pemberton's brave army seemed only a matter of time.

By the first of July, it became evident that Johnston would not be able to relieve either the city or the garrison.

Provisions were nearly gone and the men were exhausted by continuous duty and watching and through the incessant bombardments by the Union troops.

On the third of July, Generals Pemberton and Grant met between the lines for a brief conference.

On the Fourth, the white flag floated over Vicksburg. The Gibraltar of the Mississippi had surrendered and 31,000 brave Confederate soldiers had become prisoners of war.

Grant treated the prisoners with every consideration. Rations were issued to them by their captors, and the men who for months had faced each other as enemies became friends. The prisoners were not sent north, but men as well as officers were paroled and turned over to Major Watts, Confederate Commissioner for the Exchange of Prisoners.

There was no cheer or taunt from the Federal soldiers, who stood at arms as the prisoners marched out of the city; they seemed to feel sorry for the fate of their late enemies. Haggard from the hardships of the siege, the men marched out in silence. Sad and silent the officers rode away on tired and dispirited horses, that had for weeks fed on nothing but mulberry leaves.

In the city also, friendly relations were at once established between the Union soldiers and the inhabitants, nor was there a lack of comic and funny incidents.

A negro servant, overcome by his desire to shine, rode about the city on his master's silver-mounted saddle. After an hour, he returned with a very long face and a very old saddle.

"George, where is my saddle!" asked his master.

"I met a big Yankee soldier and he says to me, 'You get off dat horse. I's gwine to hab dat fine saddle.'

"I wa'n't gwine to git off, but he pointed his pistol at me, and he says, 'You

black nigger, you git off,' and I got off, and he gives me dis old saddle."

The fall of Vicksburg was an important event in the Civil War. A few days later, on the ninth of July, Port Hudson, the last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi, also surrendered, giving the Federals complete control of the great river and cutting the Confederacy in two by detaching Arkansas, Texas, and Louisiana.

The Civil War settled a great question which had grown so vexing that no man or party was great enough to settle it, without appeal to arms. It brought untold sadness and suffering to thousands of homes, both North and South, but the South suffered much more than the North.

It taught a great moral lesson and set a great example to the world, not merely of bravery and self-denial—that other nations have shown and are showing now—it showed to the world the greatest example of speedy reconciliation after the war. Had Lincoln lived through the painful days of reconstruction, the bitterness and hatred caused by the war would have vanished even sooner. But even with the Great Captain passed away, the best men North and South set earnestly to work, as soon as the war was over, to bind up and heal the nation's wounds.

A few years ago the Veterans in Blue and the Veterans in Grey met in a friendly reunion on the once blood-drenched field of Gettysburg. It was the greatest example of reconciliation the world has ever seen, an example, a living sermon, which a war-torn world will sadly need in the near future.

Barker and his boys did not remain long in Vicksburg. As Jacob of old was persuaded by his sons to travel to distant Egypt, so old Seth Ferguson was led by his sons to the balmy fertile prairies of the Sky-tinted River.

In peace and happy reunion the Ferguson family with Barker and Tatanka as guides, traveled up the Mississippi River by steamboat, and the boys never tired of pointing out to their parents the spots where they had camped and the cliffs and bluffs they had climbed.

In the bottoms of the upper river, great masses of asters fringed the brown sandbars. When the party reached Fort Ridgely, the Minnesota prairie was ablaze with goldenrod, sunflowers, and purple stars, and the blackbirds were gathering in great flocks on the marshes in anticipation of feasting on the crops of wild rice, for which they have a great liking.

After having spent almost a year on the Great River, the lads found their weather-beaten shanty spared by the furors of war, but the wild prairie had already begun to reclaim its own, as if impatient of human intrusion.

In the boys' garden patch, concealed by great rag-weeds and rich-scented milkweeds, a woodchuck had dug his den. A jungle of velvet-leaved false sunflowers almost barred the way to the cabin door. In a corner under the boys' bunk,

a family of chipmunks had established themselves and with mumpsy-looking cheeks were racing back and forth laying in a store of wild hazelnuts and long rice-like grains of speargrass.

"You are lucky," Tatanka remarked, "that Manka, the skunk, has not made his tunnels under your house. He would be hard to move."

Seth Ferguson filed on the claim on which the boys had lived.

The woodchuck was allowed possession of the garden-patch until next spring, but Bill and Tim harvested an abundant crop of the wild fruit of the land—butternuts, hazelnuts, wild grapes, chokeberries and rich sweet plums.

Barker did not return to following the trail of minks and foxes, but like the Fergusons broke up the virgin prairie to raise wheat and corn. When he grew too old to walk behind the plow, he gave his farm to his boys, Bill and Tim, who, a few years later, carried him to his last resting-place on the bluff overlooking the winding Minnesota River.

Tatanka, with some other friendly Sioux, was assigned land on the Redwood River, where his descendants live to this day.

The great war in the South, and the bloody tragedy of Minnesota are seen to-day through the mellow light of history. There is no longer bitterness and hatred between white men and red men, between North and South.

On the Fourth of July, the bright Stars and Stripes float over North and South, over the Indian settlement on the Redwood, and over the white men's towns around them. The tomahawk has been buried forever, but the Indian youths meet the white lads from farms and towns, all armed with bats and mitts, in the great American national game, the game that is destined to conquer the world with the gospel of vigor and good will.

The Minnesota, Sky-tinted Water, and the Mississippi, the Everywhere River, wind their way to the Gulf as of yore, in beauty and grandeur.

And here ends our tale of two wars and of the Lure of the Great River.

THE END.

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