

The Trail of the Good.

By Franklin Welles Calkins.

They had come out from the meeting-house of the new mission, where a lately arrived missionary had been preaching to the Oglalas in their own tongue. The brothers, Yellow Horse and Iron Arm, had listened to the good man's teaching with more awe than understanding.

They had led their ponies to a stream, and while the animals were drinking, Yellow Horse spoke his thoughts.

"Brother," he said, earnestly, "it seems that we should go to seek this Trail of the Good of which the White-One-Talking has told us. I, indeed, wish to live as the white people and to walk in their straight road."

Iron Arm took time for reflection before answering. The two had led their animals back to the grazing ground, and had driven their picket-pins when the younger spoke.

"It is very necessary," he said, after observing that no one was within hearing, "that we should find the white man's road and walk in it till we are become as they are. Ho, brother, I think that this Trail of the Good should be found in the sacred country which our people are talking of selling to the white ones."

"How, it is so," said the elder, with conviction. "Thither will we go to hunt for it. Let us picket our horses farther away, that we may take them secretly. Hunt ye for it in secret," said the White-One-Talking.

They repicketed their horses, saying nothing further, and shortly after midnight, having stolen away from their mother's lodge, they set out for the pine-covered hills, for which the Great Father's commissioners were at that time bargaining. This country, because of its hot springs, its mysterious rocks and colored earths, from which their sacred paints were made, the Sioux had long held as sacred ground. It was a wakan—holy country—and they did not pitch the teepee, fight or hunt among its hills.

At noon the brothers reached the Miniskanskan, or mysterious springs of hot water, which were known to be healing to many complaints of the body, and which were considered as gifts, direct to the Sioux, of the "Most Mysterious." In the neighborhood of these springs the young men thought that they might find the "Trail of the Good."

They were very much in earnest, these young barbarians. They had for two years been penned in with their tribe upon a reservation, all the freedom of the old life cut off because of their fightings. The Sioux now knew that they must come to the white man's way of living, or perish.

The missionary had been sent to instruct them in this way, and some of the young men, seeing the many things which their conquerors enjoyed, were eager to live with them. Yellow Horse and Iron Arm had grasped in a crude way the idea of a real trail, a well-defined road, as the "strait and narrow way" of life.

They hunted in vain near the springs for any trail save the crooked paths of the deer and other wild creatures. Then they passed on, going north near to the farther limits of their sacred country. Here they came suddenly upon a white man's road, straight across a plateau.

They were elated. "Hau! hau!" they exclaimed, looking at each other with shining eyes. "This must indeed be the Trail of the Good." For they had understood that these trails were in all countries, if the seeker would patiently and with a good heart endeavor to find such a road for himself.

The young Sioux did not know of General Custer's exploring expedition of the year before, save from vague report. So they little dreamed that they followed a road of the great trail-maker, the scourge of their people, whose impatient haste made all roads as straight as possible.

Soon they came out of the hill-country upon the plain, and it seemed certain that they had found the Trail of the

Good. They rode all day over a trail which, in their eyes, at least, was marvellously straight, and their hearts beat high with hope that at the end of this road they should find themselves in possession of all those things which white people enjoy.

They had been told that the Most Mysterious God of these people, and of all the world, would provide for their needs. They camped that night upon a stream, where they killed several sage-grouse and caught some fish.

Toward noon of the next day they were astonished to hear firing in front of them.

"It is to frighten us—to see if we are cowards," said Iron Arm. "Come, let us go on, as we were told, fearing nothing."

Presently they came upon a flat valley, which cut, like a huge, broad ditch, across the prairie and the trail, and from its heights they saw a number of horsemen riding back and forth, a small party on either side of a stream. These men were shooting at each other,

Although their coming had unquestionably been noted by both hostile bands, no attention was paid to them until they had ridden up to the circuit of the Gros Ventres. Then the leader of these Indians left his line and approached them.

"Ho! ho!" he shouted joyously, seeing they were Sioux. "Now, you two shall help us to beat off these carrion Crows. Come on, we've already killed one of the fellows. It's a good fight, and we are now like in number."

The brothers halted stiffly, and Yellow Horse spoke in a cold, level tone:

"We are no more at war with anyone. This is the white man's peace road—the Trail of the Good. No one should be fighting here."

As they were talking, the fighting stopped, and the men of both bands sat at ease, looking at them.

Yellow Horse's calm manner and his voice of authority astonished the Gros Ventre, who inquired further into the matter. He was enlightened according to the best of the brothers' understanding. When at the end the Sioux declared that they were about to ride on, regardless of any fighting, the chief, knowing that the Crows were enemies of all Sioux, called together his men. These, when the matter was explained, agreed with him that there should be

several sharp turns among the river bluffs, and was no longer the safe Trail of the Good.

At the top of the bluffs, with the Crows pressing them hotly, but out of sight for the instant, they wheeled to the right, dashed in at the head of another coulee, and like a pair of foxes, doubled on their tracks.

It was a cunning manœuvre, cunningly executed, and what with those Gros Ventres on the heels of the enemy, ought certainly to have succeeded. But the foremost Crows, knowing the lay of the ravines, had divined what they would do. Three of these had turned off the road, climbed swiftly to the crest of a ridge, and now came plowing down upon them recklessly in a tempest of dust and loose stones.

Too late the brothers saw these foes coming down the steeps. They could only rein in their horses to avoid collision. The foremost Crow was almost upon them when his pony stumbled, and its mad rider was flung nearly to the bottom of the gulch, where his lifeless body lodged against the trunk of a small pine.

The brothers had but one gun between them, Iron Arm's carbine, which they carried for the killing of small game. Iron Arm aimed at the second rider's horse and fired. The pony turned a somersault, landing its rider among some rocks, and the Crow was so badly hurt that, in attempting to rise, he pitched forward helplessly upon his face.

The third rider attempted to turn his horse up the gulch, and so escape, but fatality attended the Crows. This animal also lost its footing, and the rider, losing his weapon from his grasp, was rolled to the bottom of the gulch.

The brothers dismounted and sprang upon him. The Crow made a fierce struggle, but the wiry young Sioux got him down and tied him fast.

They rose, panting, to look and listen for further enemies. But they saw no one, and heard only the whoops of the exultant Gros Ventres, chasing the Crows upon the prairie above.

When these sounds fell away, they turned their attention to their captive, only to find that the man had suffered a hemorrhage at the mouth, and had died at their feet. In his terrific struggle with them he had burst a blood-vessel.

They looked at each other, awe and wonder in their faces. "Hau! hau!" they said. "It is the doing of the Most Mysterious of all—the white man's God!"

Their enemies lying dead or helpless, themselves unscathed, all this comported with what the missionary had said of those who truly seek the Trail of the Good.

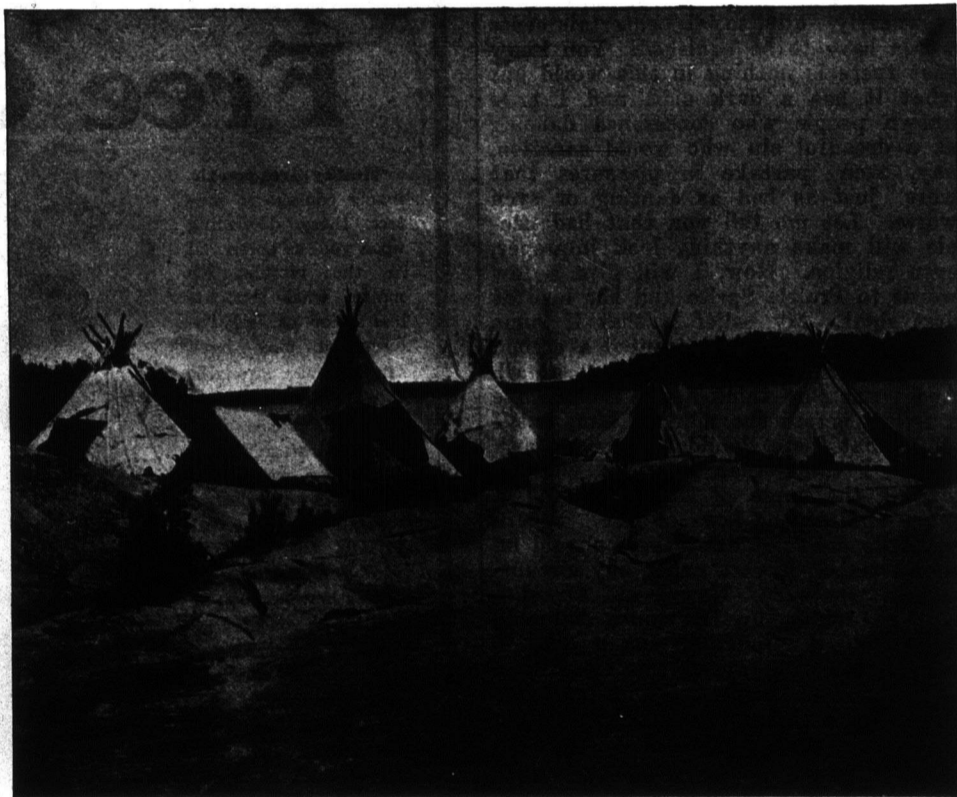
They now went to the relief of the injured rider, whose back was hurt so that he could not stand. They made him understand that they were his friends, not his enemies; that they no longer wished to fight with anyone.

Then in their rude way they banded the man's body, stiffening his injured spine, got him up on his horse, and set out for home. They dared not leave the Crow, for they were now certain that the Gros Ventres would be able to chase his fellows out of the country, if they did not kill them.

So, slowly, caring for the injured man, they made their way to the home reservation. When their story was told to the missionary, he talked to them long and earnestly, giving them instruction direct and personal; and at last they understood that, in refusing to fight their enemies, in nursing and caring for a once-bitter foe, they had indeed set their feet firmly upon the Trail of the Good.

"How! how! how!" they assented, when the truth had dawned upon them, and their eyes shone with a new light.

Yellow Horse is now an ordained preacher to his people, and Iron Arm is an earnest and effective teacher in a Government school.



An Indian Encampment

having apparently met upon the trail and fallen to fighting.

For many minutes, sitting their horses in indecision, the Sioux watched the two small bands of Indians fighting. The brothers knew the strange warriors for Indians because of their spotted ponies and their manner of riding and fighting. Presently they saw a rider on the opposite side of the stream pitch off his horse and lie still upon the ground.

After this they heard shrill yells of triumph from the band nearest them. The shouts of these Indians determined their tribal identity. The brothers knew them for Gros Ventres, friends and old allies of the Oglalas.

"How!" said Yellow Horse, looking with deep inquiry into his brother's eyes. "I think that we ought to inform these people that they should quit fighting and killing."

"No harm can come to us if we keep to the Trail of the Good," answered Iron Arm. "So said the White-One-Talking."

Although they were young men, the younger not yet twenty years old, both had taken part in the wars of their tribe, and were proud of the fearlessness of Oglala soldiers. They rode down a steep ravine and out upon the flat land, sitting very stiff, and with a solemn dignity which was certainly in marked contrast to the eight or ten yelling Gros Ventres, who were skurrying to and fro across their trail, hanging to their horses in all sorts of positions.

no more firing until they had seen what would happen to the Oglalas.

The brothers now rode on, and crossed the creek, keeping to the trail with as much unconcern as if no tribal enemies were in front of them, awaiting their approach. "No harm can befall you so long as your feet keep to the Trail of the Good," so the missionary had told them.

A little way off the road the Crows sat looking at these unconcerned riders. When they were opposite, they hailed the brothers, demanding in the sign language to know who they were and what was the nature of their errand. The brothers answered by making signs of mystery, holding their hands aloft and waving them spirally, and signifying by other motions that their mission was holy or mysterious. The brothers avoided answering as to who they were, and had gone by out of certain shooting range before the Crows had decided that they were enemies.

The wild fellows acted promptly enough upon decision, and charged after the daring pair, yelling, "Sioux! Sioux!"

Yellow Horse and Iron Arm gave the quirt to their ponies, and looked behind to see the Crows racing upon their heels, and behind them the Gros Ventres in chase of the Crows.

It was quickly evident to the brothers that the enemy had better mounts than themselves, and that they must fight or dodge. And somehow the trail they were riding upon seemed suddenly to have become very crooked. It made

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