

CEASE FIRING

The stately, leisurely steamers, the swan-like white packets, were gone from the river; gone were the barges, the flatboats and freight boats; gone were the ferries. No more at night did there come looming — from up the stream, from down the stream — the giant shapes, friendly, myriad-lighted. No more did swung torches reveal the long wharves, while the deep whistle blew, and the smokestack sent out sparks, and the negro roustabouts sang as they made her fast. No more did the planter come aboard, and the planter's daughter; no more was there music of stringed instruments, nor the aroma of the fine cigar, nor sweet drawling voices. The planter was at the front; and the planter's daughter had too much upon her hands to leave the plantation, even if there had been a place to go to. As it happened there was none.

Farragut, dressed in blue, ruled the river upward from the Gulf and New Orleans to Baton Rouge. Porter, dressed in blue, ruled it downward from Cairo to Grand Lake. Their steam frigates, corvettes, and sloops-of-war, their ironclads, tinclads, gunboats, and rams flew the Stars and Stripes. Between Grand Lake and Baton Rouge the river was Confederate, unconquered yet, beneath the Stars and Bars. They flew from land and water defences at Vicksburg, from the batteries up the Yazoo, from Natchez and the works on the Red River, and the entrenchments at Port Hudson. They flew from the few, few remaining grey craft of war, from the transports, the cotton-clads, the Vicksburg, the De Soto, the gunboat Grand Duke, the ram Webb. Tawny and strong ran the Mississippi, by the Stars and Stripes, by the Stars and Bars.

It had rained and rained. All the swamps were up, the bayous overflowing. The tiger, too, was out; now here, now there. That other tiger, War, was abroad, and he aided in breaking levees. On the Mississippi side, on the Louisiana side, bottom lands were brimming. Cottonwood, red gum, china trees, cypress and pine stood up, drenched and dismal, from amber sheets and eddies, specked with foam. The clouds hung dark and low. There was a small, chill, mournful wind. The roads, trampled and scored by eighteen months of war, were little, if any, better than no roads.

A detachment of grey infantry and a section of artillery, coming up on the Louisiana side from the Red River with intent to cross at