

4

and the most turbulent of the Sioux chiefs had hidden their villages, and were preparing their forces/page 384/ for a grand raid. To prevent this raid was the object of the campaign.

Generals Terry and Gibbon joined forces near the mouth of the Tongue River, and took measures at once to ascertain the whereabouts of the Indians, who were supposed to be somewhere near the Little Big Horn. Gibbon was to march by one route and Custer by another, and attack the Indians at different points and at the same time. Custer left camp on the 22d, and early on the 25th of June, 1876, discovered what he was in search of,—the camp of Sitting Bull.

This cunning savage had for years baffled every effort of the government to chastise or persuade him and his band to come upon a reservation, and through his many successful raids and great popularity as a warrior, gathered under his leadership the most formidable savage horde that ever existed on this continent. They were not only armed with the latest improved weapons and well supplied with ammunition (for years of successful trade with the British posts had made them rich), but they were composed of the most skilful warriors of the savage Sioux bands, whose equal for ferocity as well as dexterity in the use of weapons and horses, the world has never produced.

Custer's sudden appearance on the bluffs overlooking the Little Big Horn was a complete surprise to the Indian village. The village was a very large one for a hostile band of Indians—it extended for three and a half miles up the valley, and is estimated to have contained at least five thousand people.

Custer, as had always been his custom, divided his command in three parts: one division under Major Reno, one under Captain Benteen, the third commanded by himself. Reno was ordered to charge the lower end of the