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CHAPTER IX

Red Lights

I think it was in the fall of '85 that we first made the acquaintance of the Sioux Indians in the form of a substantial hunting party from the Standing Rock Agency who camped in our vicinity for a few weeks. Heretofore, from all we could learn, they had been held closely to their, by this time, sadly attenuated Reservation, the western line of which, lay about seventy miles to the eastward of our ranch.

In the manner common to Indian Reservation boundary lines, it was contractile. Under the solemn treaty of April 29th, 1868, known as the "Black Hills Treaty," signed by Generals Taylor, Sherman, Harney, Sanborn, Tappah, and Augur, for the United States, and by Chiefs Iron Shell, Red Leaf, Black Horn, and others, for the Sioux Tribes; it had comprised the great area known as the "Sioux Country," including the Black Hills, the Bad Lands and the Bighorn Mountains. As it worked out, it was as if the boundary lines had been demarcated with green rawhide. For one thing, there was gold in the Black Hills, And when, we may ask, did the White Man, as a race, ever respect anything that stood between him and his yellow fetich? To him, the treaty was but "as a scrap of paper" when it suited his convenience to disregard it. To the Sioux Tribes, on the contrary, it meant something. They were basically honest because they were of the earth. Having passed / ²⁰² their word, they meant to live up to their obligations and expected the White Man to do likewise. Because he refused, the great Sioux war chief, "Red Cloud", properly went on the warpath. Hence the Sioux wars culminating in the tragic battle of the Little Bighorn, when the gallant Custer and his troops were annihilated, and the eventual penning up of these tribes within a restricted area bordering the Missouri River. By right of might, the White Man was in full possession of their land. Their staff of life, the buffalo, had been exterminated, their teeth drawn. They were helpless, in short.