

THE MARCH OF VILLASUR—1720

Sunshine shone upon the market in the city Santa Fe,
Where the traders came to traffic and the padres came to pray;
Shone and glinted on the breast plate, on the helmet and the spur
Of a valiant Spanish army under Colonel Villasur.

"Go," said Governor Valverde, "Cross the bison-haunted plains,
Bring the Otoe Chief and Pani back to Santa Fe in chains.
Go and plant the Spanish banner by the Jesus San Maria,
Plant the Spanish hacienda from the mountain to the Sea."

So they crossed the bison plains, marched 300 leagues and more
From the hills of Santa Fe, mailed and armed for the fray,
With an army of three score valiant Spanish cavaliers;
With a thousand red allies, eager for the enterprise,
And a train of muleteers;
Sheep and cattle with the band, plows and harrows for the land,
Spades and mattocks for the mines and for other dark designs.

And they reached the river shore, River Jesus San Maria,
Wonder-eyed the Spaniards saw, full of islands—wide and free—
Called by Otoes "Ne-brath-ka," called by Frenchmen "Riviere Platte,"
Shining in the summer sun, in a prairie land of plenty
Anno seventeen hundred twenty,
From the far off Rocky mountains, fed from snow's eternal
fountains.

Cried the Colonel Villasur, riding to the river's bank,
Pricking with his golden spur on his jaded horse's flank,
"Spanish I will make this land, from the river where we stand
To the far off Rio Grande,
From this very August day,
"Adelante! Nombre de dios; Por El Rey!"

So he camped upon the river, wide and shallow, with his men;
Lit their campfires by the river they would never light again;
In the grasses and the willows of the river's silver shallows
As the night grew gray with morning, stealthily amid the dawning,
Crept the river-land's red warriors, crept the Otoe and the Pani.
Rushing sudden without warning, Spanish mail and musket scorning—
Swift the arrows from their quiver, swifter than the flowing river
Fell the Spaniard—fled the ally, in the San Maria Valley,
Fell the Spanish flag forever by the far Nebraska river,
All the Spanish hope and glory an old-time forgotten story!

—Addison E. Sheldon.