

"Used to be lots, eh?"

"I don't want to tell you about 'em, stranger," replied the pilot, sighing heavily.

"Why?"

"'Cause you'd think that I was a-lyin' to you, and that's sumthin' I never do. I can cheat at keerds, drink whiskey, or chaw poor terbacker, but I can't lie."

"Then there used to be lots of 'em?" inquired the passenger.

I'm most afraid to tell ye, mister, but I've counted 'leven hundred allygators to the mile from Vicksburg cl'ar down to New Orleans. That was years ago, afore a shot was ever fired at 'em."

"Well, I don't doubt it," replied the stranger.

"And I've counted 3,459 of 'em on one sand bar," continued the pilot. "It looks big to tell, but a Government surveyor was aboard, and he checked 'em off as I called out."

"I haven't the least doubt of it," said the passenger, as he heaved a sigh.

"I'm glad o' that, stranger. Some fellers would think I am a liar, when I'm telling the solemn truth. This used to be a paradise for alligators, and they were so thick that the wheels of the boat killed an average of forty-nine to the mile!"

"Is that so?"

"True as Gospel, mister! I used to almost feel sorry for the cussed brutes, 'cause they'd cry out e'en most like a human being. We killed lots of 'em, as I said, and we hurt a pile more. I sailed with one Captain who allus carried a thousand bottles of liniment to throw over the wounded ones!"

"He did?"

"True as you live, he did. I don't 'spect I'll ever see another such a kind Christian man. And the alligators got to know the Nancy Jane, and to know Captain Tom, and they'd swim out and rub their tails agin the boat an' purr like cats, an' look up and try to smile!"

"They would?"

"Solemn truth, stranger! And once when we grounded on a bar, with an opposition boat right behind, the alligators gathered around, got under her stern, and jumped her clean over the bar by a grand push! It looks like a big story, but I never told a lie