

CHAPTER III.

ONCE committed to a project, Col. Clayton was full of energy. Leaving the house he hurried to the stables, where his nephew was ingratiating himself with an obstreperous filly.

"See heah, Hub," said the Colonel, "we'h goin' to tackle a trip on the great lakes. Flops and you' aunt have set the'h heads, and you, bein' of the same stock, know what that means. I want you to make one of the pa'ty."

Hub demurred, but was met with the oft-repeated threat that he was going to be disinherited anyhow, if he didn't marry, and had better make the most of his opportunities. He assented with a smile that was as welcome as a caress to the warm-hearted, hot-blooded old uncle.

Then the Colonel mounted a horse, rode to the family lawyer and told of the plans for the summer.

"Pity you didn't make your arrangements earlier," said the legal adviser. "The Peytons, the Marshalls, the Johnsons and several other families started for the same trip two weeks ago."

"It's none of my doin's, suh. Flops and Kate cooked up the whole thing. Besides, theh' wouldn't be any comfo't in goin' with such a crush. I'll get off at the fi'st landin' if the boat's crowded."

"Colonel, you must have in mind one of those old stern wheelers that used to paddle up and down the Mississippi when you and I were boys. They tell me there are no finer steamers in the world than they have on those northern lakes. There'll be a place to sleep and plenty of room to move about."

"Don't you believe everything you heah. I reckon we'll have to rough it some, and I don't mind it if I can only teach Flops the folly of backin' heh ideas against a man of the world like me. She and Hub make a stubbo'n lot and I'll disinhehit them as soon as you get time to draw up a new will."

Here the legal oracle of the Claytons laughed merrily, for this threat of the Colonel was as old as his precious wards, and enough has been gathered of his enviable character to know that he would no sooner disinherit them than he would willfully dishonor the name he bore. Like many a man with the strongest and tenderest sympathies, he sought to conceal them under a brusque exterior.