

THE ROAD TO VIDALIA

5

sang Edward —

"As I have heard it said,
That was the fattest ram, sir,
That ever had a head —"

The cypress wood ended. They came out into vast cotton-fields where the drowning bolls, great melancholy snowflakes, clung to the bushes, idle as weeds, careless of famine in mill-towns oversea. The water stood between the rows, rows that ran endlessly, cut from sight at last by a whirling and formless grey vapour.

"The fl ace that grew on that ram, sir,
It grew so mighty high,
The eagles built their nest in it,
For I heard the young ones cry.
And if you don't believe me,
Or think I tell a lie,
Why, just look down to Derby
And see as well as I!"

The land was as flat as Holland, but the rank forest, the growth about the wandering arms of bayous breathed of another clime. The rain came down as in the rainy season, the wind was mounting, the wings of the dusk flapping nearer.

"Get on, men, get on! We're miles from Vidalia."

"The horns that grew on that ram, sir,
They grew up to the moon,
A man went up in December
And did n't come down till June!

"Look out, Artillery! There's water under those logs!"

The horses and the first gun got across the rotting logs roofing black water, infantry helping, tugging, pushing, beating down the cane.

"Shades of night, where are we anyhow? Cane rattling and the moss waving and water bubbling — is it just another damned bayou or the river? . . . And all the flat ground and the strange trees . . . My head is turning round."

"It's Bayou Jessamine," volunteered an artilleryman. He spoke in a drawling voice. "We are n't far from the river, or the river is n't far from us, for I think the river's out. It appears to me that you Virginians grumble a lot. There is n't anything the matter with this country. It's as good a country as God's got. Barksdale's men and the Washington Artillery are always writing back that Virginia