

he, 'I couldn't 'a' believed it,' says he; 'you're the smartest hand I got.' And so I be. Dunno what I *couldn't* do, if it warn't fer gittin' a *leete* mite out the way now and den. It takes time, ye see. Dat's why I couldn't go 'long with Mars' Clayty and Colonel Barton. Mars' Clayty mustn't feel hard on me; Miss Ma' must member my 'spects to him when she goes back, and to de old Gin'ral, too. I allers thinks so much o' my own folks; but 'bout dat 'ere pay-party; I was gwine fer to hev beans and bacon; would Miss Ma' hev beans and bacon?"

"That would be a very substantial dish."

"So I tell Marty, and Mother Honner: my, she's high on beans and bacon! Miss Ma' ben to see Mother Honner, yit?"

"No; I only came last night, Ed."

"Be sure! so Miss Ma' did! Den ye an't seen him yit, nor ye an't heerd him, and ye won't hear him when ye do go!"

"Hear whom, Ed?"

"Why, de hawg, Miss Ma'! Mother Honner's hawg! She's got de enlightendest hawg dat ever was raised on de West Shore! Same as a watch-dog, he is. Ef he hears siffin' comin' by de woods or 'cross de swamp, Lor', he'll grunt and grunt till de fambly's all roused up. Never grunts at de quality. When Mars' Lennie comes dat way, or Mis' Calvert's takin' de air, he lies down quiet and 'spectable wid his nose in de straw, like a hawg oughter; but when dem Squaw Neck niggers comes round, he'll snuff 'em half a mile off, and 'pears like he'd grunt husselt to pieces! Never grunts at de quality. Ef he did, I'd cut him ober myself! I won't take no disrespect for my folks! I think a heap o' my folks, Miss Ma': think a heap o' Mars' Clayty and o' Miss Ma', too, and Mars' Lennie and Mis' Calvert and Mis' Calvert's chillen. Ben a-tryin' to move away sommers, but don't pear to make up my mind to leave 'em. Thought mebbe I'd git higher wages; roof leaks like a riddle, too; wants shinglin'; that's what Marty's gwine to hev that party fer. Think the folks would like some plums, Miss Ma'? I'd kind o' sot my mind on gwine plummin' the day afore the party. Ef it's putty soon, I'll go plummin' for blueberries, and ef it's bumble, I'll go plummin' for high-briers. Miss Ma' hke high-briers?"

"Very much."

"Gwine to pick her a peck someday; a peck of wild strawberries, too."

"Those are past Ed; there won't be any till another year."

"Want ter know: an't that too bad! Wal, the fust kind o' broken day I git, I'll go high-brierin' for Miss Ma'. Don't bodder Miss Ma' a-talkin', do I?"

"Not at all."

"If I an't bodderin' ye, will ye gib me some 'vice 'bout that 'ere pay-party, Miss Ma'?"

"Certainly."

"Wal, the way I meant to write my letter was to 'rite 'em to a sail, and then buy a sheep, and whilst they 'se a-cruisin' round on de bay, me and Mother Honner'll roast the sheep and git the table sot out. Marty must go 'long, too, and fetch de chillen! Marty must; she's a good gal, and she works smart. I married her up to 'Napols, gwine on six year ago. She used to work to Mis' Judge Nottingham's when I was to be de old Gin'al's. De way we got acquainted, Miss Ma', was dis 'ere way. I was a-gwine fer to see" — but just here a soft voice called Ed from the corner of the house nearest the kitchen, and Ed obediently uncoiled himself. "I reckon Marty wants me to hist on dat 'ere big dinner-pot," he said, "but Miss Ma' 's so kind, I'll come up ag'in, and git her 'vice 'bout dat pay-party."

It was true that Ed had tried more than once to move away from the old place, and had failed. Others had tried it, too. Cesar moved away one week, and moved back the next. Pomp had tried it. Ben, the surliest, sulkiest fellow on the whole place, had tried it, and was successful, indeed, eminently successful, for he moved away seven times, and at last gave it up as an aimless excursion and settled down in the spot where he was born.

There was something more than mere love of home in the spell that brought them all back; there was an undying power that never loses its hold on those, either high or low, who have once become its bondmen. Poets sing and orators discourse of the love which the mountaineer feels for his upland home; but it is a languid emotion compared with the passionate attachment cherished for their birthplace by those who are born on the shores of the ocean, or of its vast estuaries. Mysterious influences are welded into heart and brain, and bone and fibre. Destiny may carry them to other scenes and carve for them brilliant careers, but nothing ever seems to them so fair and desirable as the old life by the sea. Fortune may smile upon them, and Fame sing to them with her siren tongue,

and they shut their eyes and ears to all, to brood over fond memories of that enchanting spot to which they will fly when the chance opens, again and again and again. The world is everywhere, but the earthly Paradise only there. In health, the hunger is great enough, but in sickness it becomes a famine, known only to the sea's own children. They turn from every comfort and luxury that can be given, to long with a wordless, inexpressible longing that devours their very hearts,—an inexorable, unappeasable longing,—for one sight of the sapphire sea, one sound of its deep-mouthed, motherly murmur, one breath of its heavenly sultness; till, lacking these, they feel in their wild homesickness that they might better turn their face to the wall and die.

The well-disciplined, church-going, average Marylander desires to live in peace and gentleness with all mankind! but ah me! the strain and tug on every moral fibre, when certain well-meaning persons with froward hearts and darkened eyes come down to our beatific old West Shore once in a while, and, looking about in a lofty manner, pronounce it deplorably flat! Flat, say they? We want it flat. We love it flat. We praise the Creator for having made it flat. To be flat means to be fresh, free, adorable, wide-eyed, large-lunged, it means a vast range of vision from one far-off, limitless horizon to another; it means a blue, unbroken dome of heaven, with no officious projections lifting up presumptuous heads against its serene majesty. But they are more to be pitied than blamed, poor things! they deserve tender commiseration; they have been born in strong cities, in family prisons twenty-five feet by sixty, or in far-away land-locked depressions, still more remote and slow, and they know nothing of the freedom and the fascinations of our rare, amphibious life. They have not wandered countless times in among the odorous pines, and thrown themselves on the slippery matting of discarded needles beneath them, while the wind sung its faint, unearthly song above, and the cadences came filtering down through myriad leafy wires, mere sprays, at last, of quivering intonations. They have not waded and plashed in those wonderful, limpid brooks whose crumpled crystal stream ripples on over sand and pebble and floating weed till it reaches an armlet of the sea, where the tide sends volumes of salt water up into its freshness, while the brook rolls back floods of sweet water into the brine: a mile or two up, speckled trout asleep in cool pools, or glinting among the water-cresses; a mile or two down, shoals of salt-water minnows, darting through thickets of eel-grass.

But our poor people had far more practical reasons than any of these for liking to live where they did. That which "makes the pot boil" lay in profusion, dry and brittle, on the ground of the oak and pine woods, and that which alone can give the boiling a satisfactory result was to be had in plenty by all except those who were absolutely too lazy to pick up their food. They could set their nets in deep water and catch as many fish as they chose; or paddle up the creeks and stake their eel-pots to secure a haul next morning; or, for quicker effects, spear the eels in the mud at night by torchlight. If they wanted clams, they needed only to run out upon the flats with their spade and basket when the tide was out, and if they desired oysters, the beds were prolific and the rakes in the boats. Then there were crabs to scoop and ducks to shoot, and always, besides, the enchanting possibility of catching a "torop," for by this contumacious name do they designate that portly, aldermanic personage who presides at lord mayor's feasts and other destructive pageants.

These sea-turtle, at certain seasons, come clawing clumsily up the margins of the sandy coves to lay their eggs on the shore, and go blundering back again without further parental inquietude, superbly indifferent as to whether the sun hatches them or not.

One of these rare prizes had fallen into Ed's lucky hands a day or two before his interview with Cousin Mary, and he would certainly have arrived eventually at the narration of the grand affair, if Marty's wifely repression had not nipped him untimely. He had seized the ungainly creature as it was returning to the water, and its tortuous track led him back to the newly made hollow in the sand where it had concealed its quantity of ugly eggs. Ed put it in a crawl sunk on the edge of the creek, hoping to save it till the momentous party should take place, when it would properly figure as the prime feature of the *fete*; and the eggs were carefully covered with an armful of wet seaweed, to keep all vivifying sunbeams from taking even a peep at them, for nectar and ambrosia are less delectable in some people's eyes than the contents of those vellum sacks. Ed and Sammy made delightful diurnal excursions to the crawl; they pulled out the turtle and poked it about the head to make it snap its jaws together in rage; turned it over on its back to see its flippers work, and lifted it cautiously back again by its short,