

"Now you talk sensibly. I respect a woman who is mistress of herself. What is the use of crying when you have a pair of hands? There is at least a living in the old land, and the garden and dairy and poultry ought to be better looked after. But you can do nothing without Ray's authority. When he returns from this trip get it, then I will tell you what to do."

Madam's co-operation was necessary in order to prevent her opposition, and Cassia felt the first successful step to her project had been taken. Unfortunately for Cassia, John was not at home to advise her. He had entered into some new plan for preserving fresh beef, and the interests of the concern took him frequently to the gulf coast, and not unfrequently very far west, in order to buy cattle for the purpose.

So Cassia passed the days as contentedly as she could with her children. From prayer she gathered hope, and they who live in hope breathe the sweet air of futurity. As near as it was possible, she also endeavoured to reach the goal of an existence in which she would speak much oftener to God than to the world; for she had already apprehended that life's great secret of peace is to avoid the feverish contact of mankind.

As for Ray, he was at this time very happy. The life upon which he had entered had all the charm of novelty. The sales were unusually good; he very nearly realized all that Dacre had anticipated. And, as he was returning with such a large sum of money, he had an escort from a cavalry company until he met a body of "rangers," who again rode with him until he reached the settlements. Ray's previous ideas of life were thoroughly unsettled, and he looked back upon the prosaic business of planting corn and cotton as intolerably stupid and monotonous.

On his return he was quite willing to resign the care of the plantation to Cassia and madam. He had great faith in madam's abilities; and he felt that he had fully done his duty when he insisted that if any emergency arose he should be appealed to and allowed to meet it. But Cassia was determined such emergencies should never come; she would keep the expenses far below their usual level, and she would refuse every luxury of food, dress, or appointments which the income from the plantation did not warrant. In Dick Ratcliffe's money neither herself nor children should have part or portion.

She had, however, assumed a very difficult task. The servants, conscious that Ray was not at home, nor likely to interfere with them if he was at home, robbed and wronged her. She was compelled, in sheer self-defence, to be constantly changing "hands, and for this very reason got an ill name she by no means deserved.

As time passed on, she often felt the pinch of that cruel poverty which must be borne and concealed. She had to work