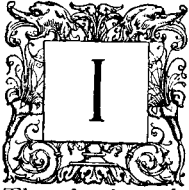


Jonas and the Tide

BY MARY ESTHER MITCHELL



It had been a golden evening and the radiance still lingered in a luminous west, while the brightest stars were already pointing the soft dusk overhead. The harbor lay in quiet reflection, broken only by the noiseless passing of an occasional dory, black against the mirrored light. There was a cool, salt fragrance in the air, and a low murmur of incoming tide.

Jonas Willy closed the shutters over the front windows of the store and hasped them. The side windows were sufficiently removed from prying eyes by their height from the ground, but those on either side of the door were provided with solid wooden blinds, and their closing was a part of the regular Saturday-night routine, conscientiously performed, not so much as a safeguard from possible depredation—few doors at the Point were provided with bolts or bars—but in decorous observance of the Day of Rest. The hasping was an unwonted addition to the usual ceremony, and Cora watched her father with an interrogation in her eyes which she did not put into words. Those who knew Jonas did not often ask questions of him, having learned to reserve their energy for profitable effort. All being made fast, Jonas dropped the key into his pocket and stepped from the worn, sagging boards which formed the platform abutting on the village street and serving not only as a means of approach, but as a convenient lounging-place for discussion and interchange of opinion. He walked deliberately, but with an easy swing which made little of the stony, uneven way. His tall, gaunt figure stooped and his arms dangled awkwardly. His iron-gray hair was unkempt, his beard untrimmed. Under his shaggy brows the blue of his eyes was veiled, unrevealing, even as the

azure of the sea permits no hint of its depths. The hard, brown skin of his face spoke of the open action of sun, wind, and driving mist. He had been a sailor in his youth, after the manner of his kind, shipping for short runs, with an occasional voyage to more distant ports on the coast. Now, the function of storekeeper did not hinder him from tending his own lobster-pots and laying his own trawls.

Cora followed her father at a little distance. She was his helper in the store and with the books, but, once outside, companionship ceased. She was a pretty girl, with gentle eyes, and with that delicacy of complexion which is often the heritage of coast-born children. A few years and the smooth fairness would disappear, the come-and-go rose fade or become hard and fixed; but just now no carefully conserved skin was more soft, fresh, or sun-defying than Cora's.

A little way up the road the two, always apart, stepped into a broad band of light, thrown full athwart the path from a large window on the opposite side of the street. Jonas Willy stalked on without apparent notice, but Cora turned her eyes to the source of the illumination. Even in the dusk she could make out the sign above the door, shining in fresh paint—THE POINT EMPORIUM. There was an air of prosperity in the clear, well-polished pane of the big window and in the attractively arranged wares. A brisk young man behind a counter, his shirt-sleeves gleaming white beneath the hanging-lamp, was laughing and chatting with a group of customers while he tied up parcels with quick fingers. Cora had a moment's glimpse, then she was in the dusk again. As she walked on, her father's black back looming before her, she pictured to herself the flapping salt fish and the sticks of dried herring which adorned the dingy windows of "Willy's," the dirty-gray peppermints and the

whity-brown chocolates of the hardening candies in the dusty, fly-specked little show-case, and she shrugged her shoulders in an impatience almost angry.

Jonas Willy was a man of the fewest words. "Seem 's if he wouldn't open his mouth fur fear somethin' might git out!" remarked his wife. "Land! I don't s'pose I oughter fuss; he's never give me a harsh word sence we was married."

"I dunno as that's sayin' much, seein' how few he's ever give you!" returned the neighbor to whom Mrs. Willy had addressed her confidence. "I guess I'd as soon live with a snappin'-turtle as a clam, when all's said an' done! Life's dull 'nough without goin' out o' yer way to make it duller."

Mrs. Willy shook her head doubtfully. "There may be somethin' in that," she admitted. "But I guess I'd ruther resk it with Jone."

Thus inured to taciturnity, Mrs. Willy detected nothing unusual in the silence of her spouse on this particular evening. She always had a cup of hot tea awaiting him on the nights when the store was kept open. He drank it now, sitting at the kitchen table, while Cora foraged for herself in the pantry. Jonas finished leisurely, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, rose, and stood in the doorway, gazing into the dark as he smoked his pipe. Then he went to bed. Mrs. Willy and Cora cleared the table and brought out their sewing, their chairs drawn close to the glass lamp with its bright, flowered shade. The woman thrust her needle in and out with short, quick jerks; in her own domestic provinces she was a leader and decisive. Cora's movements were languid and made with apparent effort; her soft, round shoulders drooped and she bent her head until the light fell directly on her fine, waving hair, touching it with gleams of red-gold. Her mother looked at her anxiously.

"Yer tuckered out," she said. "Yer better be gittin' yer beauty sleep. I guess yer can pull through another Sunday without a new gown."

Cora smoothed the tinted folds which lay across her lap. "I'm all right, mother. There ain't much to do and there's going to be a sociable at the vestry Monday night."

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"When I was your age a gown lasted me fur best a hull season—white fur summer an' cashmere fur winter, an' glad 'nough I was to git 'em. Who you goin' with?"

Cora's color deepened. "Preston."

"Well," returned Mrs. Willy, "yer better not let yer father git holt of it."

There was silence while the two women sewed steadily. When Mrs. Willy spoke it was with an evident effort to appear casual.

"Many in to-night?"

"Old M's. Oliver."

"Huh! Yet father never got a cent outer her. He's a fool to keep her on the books. That all?"

Cora nodded.

"Did yer come home by the road?"

"Yes, mother."

"Was—was there many in the Emporium?"

"Quite a lot."

Mrs. Willy bit off her thread with a fierce little gesture. "I declare it seems jest like stealin', comin' here an' takin' yer father's trade that's be'n his twenty year or more. I don't see how yer can hev anythin' to do with that Preston Ripley, Cora!"

Cora's head bent lower. "I guess he's got to earn his own livin', like anybody else."

"He might 'a' gone in with yer father."

"Nobody couldn't go in with father."

"Well, I know what I think o' folks that go back on him arter tradin' all their lifetime. He's allers dealt fair, yer father has. He'ain't never charged a cent that warn't righteous. An' now that somebody fancy has set up, the P'int all go cacklin' at his heels!"

Cora lifted her head with sudden determination. "If father won't keep what folks want, they'll go somewheres else soon's a chance comes. Father wouldn't get a bunch of bananas the other day because the last one went so quick. 'They're gone 'fore I can turn round,' he said. 'Tain't worth gittin' them.' And that's the way right along. If I was buyin' I'd go where things was clean and fresh!"

Mrs. Willy let her work fall into her lap. "Well, Cora Willy, I never looked to hear yer turn ag'in' yer father!"

The quick blood rushed to the girl's cheeks and her eyes filled. "I ain't turning against him, mother, and it's the first time I've spoke out; but I can't help seeing how things are going, handling the books as I do."

Mrs. Willy had no ear for the wistful note in her daughter's voice. "Yer father run that store 'fore you was born, Cora, an' it don't stan' to reason you're wiser 'n he is. His trade has been took outer his mouth, so to speak. If yer don't see it, it's 'cause yer bewitched with the one who's took it."

Cora sat for a few moments in silence; then she folded up her work with trembling hands. "I'm going to bed, mother," she said. "I guess I don't care about wearing it to-morrow. Good night."

Mrs. Willy's eyes were still stern, but when she heard her daughter's footsteps overhead she took the dress from the cupboard where Cora had laid it and, sitting alone by the lamp, she finished it.

For the male population of the Point, Sunday was a day of rest from labor. The harbor beach was deserted, the boats rocked, lazy and empty, on the tide, and the fish, untroubled, swam the deep. True, time hung rather heavy as the afternoon wore on, and little groups gathered on the wharves or on the platforms of the two stores, while the young people went for long walks on the shore or through the fragrant woods. The women found plenty of occupation, for the day was one of feast as well as worship, the men folk were a bit underfoot and the children's best clothes offered constant need of admonition. The turkey or chicken of New England Sunday-dinner tradition took the form of lobster at the Point, and the pot boiled in every home. Yet, busy or idle, the Sabbath brought wholesome change from the week's routine; there was the chance to sit still in church, a pleasing air of general cleanliness and peace, and the gratifying sense of one's best. Also, there was the walk home, with its opportunities for greeting and gossip, the rare indulgence of an afternoon nap, and the decorous "dropping in" of neighborly custom.

Mrs. Willy, flushed by her morning's exertions and the responsibility of her

Sunday hat, watched her husband with wifely solicitude as he steered the long pole of the contribution-box from pew to pew. "Hangs onter it 's if it was an oar!" she said to herself. "Wisht to goodness he'd let me take the shears to his hair; I do favor a slick head." Cora, pink and virginal in her new frock, kept her eyes demurely cast down until her father had passed along the aisle; then she raised them until they rested on the broad shoulders and well-set head of a young man in one of the front pews. She liked the look of the small, shapely ears and the line of hair where it met the strong, brown neck. On the crown the short, virile crop stood up like silky, black plush; Cora felt an impulse to press it back and let it spring up under her hand. She grew pink at the thought, as if it were open to the eyes of the congregation, and, confused, fell to examining her hymn-book.

Jonas walked home with his family, stopping for the usual Sunday amenities, which, on his part, took the form of a nod, a "How are ye?" or some such non-committal salutation. His wife was more voluble. "It's jest as well I ain't a talker," Jonas once remarked. "The air wouldn't git no rest 'twixt us two."

After dinner Jonas removed his best coat, filled his pipe, and sat down on the side porch to smoke. He tilted his chair against the clapboards, crossed his long legs, and puffed steadily, his eyes fixed vacantly on the horizon. After a while his wife came out and took the rocking-chair beside him. She had a clean white apron over her silk dress, and her hands were still red from dish-water.

"Cora's gone out with some of the young folks," she volunteered. She swayed gently in her chair, her restless black eyes straying over the little patch of garden bloom. "Them petunies done wonderful," she remarked, with satisfaction. "They're the finest on the P'int. To my mind there ain't nothin' han'somer 'n a mess o' purple-an'-white petunies. Good sermon we had to-day," she went on. "If I was the minister's wife I wouldn't think it fittin' to wear them danglin' ear-rings to meetin'."

Jonas's only response was a puff of

smoke, and the conversation flagged. There was a long pause before Mrs. Willy began again.

"Jone, do yer know I'm gittin' kinder anxious 'bout Cora's takin' up with that Ripley feller. She's goin' to the sociable with him to-morrer night."

Jonas's little grunt might have been given almost any interpretation; it conveyed no intimation of opinion. Mrs. Willy tried once more, this time putting the question direct. "What yer think 'bout that Ripley feller, Jone?"

For a moment Jonas made no sign; then he took his pipe from his mouth. "I dunno as I'm thinkin' anythin' 'bout him."

Mrs. Willy gave it up; with a little sigh she let her head fall upon the high back of the rocker, and her enjoyment of the radiant afternoon passed from a confusion of wandering thoughts to half-conscious glimpses of bright flowers, flooding sunshine, and a blue line of water, all broken by intervals of complete oblivion.

Monday morning Jonas Willy lingered long at his breakfast. His wife kept an uneasy eye on the clock.

"It's gittin' on ter harf parst seven," she reminded him at last.

Jonas stretched out his hand and took a doughnut.

Presently Cora came into the room. "Ready, father?" she asked.

Jonas put half of the crisp circle into his mouth and took a long drink of coffee.

"I ain't goin'," he said, when he could speak.

Mrs. Willy almost dropped the dish she was carrying to the sink. "Ain't goin'! What yer mean?"

"Jest that—I ain't goin'." Jonas imperturbably helped himself to another doughnut. There was an amazed and bewildered silence.

"You bain't sick, be ye, Father?" asked Mrs. Willy, anxiously.

"No, I bain't."

"You want me to go over and open up?" inquired Cora.

Jonas pushed his plate away. "No," he said, "I don't."

"Why on earth can't yer speak out, Jonas Willy?" cried Mrs. Willy.

Jonas shoved back his chair, rose,

and stretched himself with slow deliberation. He sauntered to the door, but on the threshold he turned.

"'Cause there ain't nothin' to say," he answered. "I'm goin' fishin'." Then he went out.

Mother and daughter stared at each other.

"S'pose father's crazy?" asked Cora.

Mrs. Willy shook her head. "Yer 'ain't seen nothin' that p'int's that way?"

"I reckon not," returned Cora, doubtfully. "Saturday night he hasped the shutters. I never know him to do that before."

"I dunno as that looks like losin' yer mind," concluded Mrs. Willy. "I guess yer father ain't the kind that goes crazy; he's sotter 'n a ground-fast rock, but that don't lead to flightiness. Yer don't s'pose he's breakin' up, do yer? He et a reel hearty breakfast."

Cora, in unaccustomed leisure, helped her mother about the house. The two said little on the subject which occupied their thoughts. Now and again Mrs. Willy stopped her work to gaze across the water to the far-off speck of Jonas's little boat.

"I can't git holt of it!" she repeated.

Jonas, sitting at ease as his dory dipped with the gentle swell, was entirely content. He fished leisurely, as if he would not hurry the quiet and freedom of the sunny day. "Must be kinder peaceful down in Fish Town," he thought, whimsically, as his line slipped through his hard, bent fingers. "Never a word betwixt 'em. They don't even squawk when they're hurt." He came home to dinner. His face was serene and he ate with relish. In the afternoon he rowed over to Smoothbay and disposed of his catch.

There followed a long spell of fair weather and Jonas lived in his boat. He started a small but steady trade in fish, catering to the hotels and summer cottages within reach of his oars. As the weather grew cooler and resorts closed, he dealt with the local market in Smoothbay, thus diverging from the custom of the Point, which shipped directly to the large cities. The nine days' wonder set astir by the closing of the store soon subsided, after the

fashion of wonders the world over. Speculation got no farther than the conclusion that "the old man couldn't stan' up ag'in' Ripley." As regarded the wasted stock, the baffled Point had but one word—"shiftless!"—the final condemnation of New England judgment. Jonas's calm silence served as more than a mantle; it was an armor which turned aside the slings and arrows of curiosity or disapproval. His placidity was undisturbed. Mrs. Willy, however, found herself against a wall. She was loyal to Jonas and hedged valiantly, but to Cora she acknowledged her mortification.

"I'm pritty apt with my tongue," she said, "but yer might as well try to git a p'int o' cream outer a dried cod-fish as to find out anythin' frum yer father. It's a dreadful shamin' not to know the least thing about yer own husband's affairs an' to hev to say so."

Cora dimly perceived that from her father's point of view this might be an advantage, even a reason sufficient, but she did not say so. Hearing of a vacancy in the Smoothbay school, she obtained the position and left home. "Sure you won't need me when you open up?" she asked her father when she told him.

Jonas did not let anything slip out in his reply. "Yer needn't worry 'bout that," he said.

"I'm glad yer goin' outer sight o' that Ripley feller," said Mrs. Willy. "Yer won't be no daughter o' yer father's if yer so much as look at him."

"I guess he was in his rights," urged Cora. "There ain't nothing unfair in competition."

"Competition!" Mrs. Willy's voice was scornful. "The P'int ain't big 'nough to hold even the name. If yer take up with Preston Ripley, arter all that's be'n an' done, it 'll jest kill me. I can't stan' it to hev yer turn ag'in' your father. He's queer as old Tilly, but he's yer father an' he's be'n a good one."

Winter came and Jonas never turned even an eye storeward. The season proved to be one of frequent and violent storms. Snow in the evaporating salt wind seldom lasted long at the Point, but now the drifts piled up and the intense cold drew a thick vapor over

the sea. The little store walk was unshoveled and untrodden, while Jonas braved the weather and went out in his boat when it was possible. Mrs. Willy spent many anxious hours, but she ceased to ask even tentative questions. It was a hard winter for her. Jonas, in his capacity of storekeeper, had been forced to more or less social intercourse; now he took his own way, which for the most part lay along the solitary path of silence. Mrs. Willy, thrown more than ever upon herself at home, found little of her usual genial pleasure in her neighbors. She dwelt in the idea that her friends had failed her in her hour of need. She grew to believe that her husband had been driven out of business by the disloyalty of the Point. Suspicion, always ready to sprout, thrives well in fertile soil. Mrs. Willy walked apart and brooded. Jonas kept his own counsels and she dared not press them. She had never seen her husband lose his temper, always had he been mild, but as untroubled waters give the impression of depth, so Jonas's calm hinted of a certain potentiality which seemed unwise to disturb. Mrs. Willy's mind was anything but analytic; she did not know what she feared in Jonas, but she knew that she feared.

In the spring Jonas took a mortgage out on the little house. "Jone is a good pervider," his wife had often boasted, and he did not abate open-handedness. He was serene, but he did not share the visions of the realm in which he dwelt. Life passed before him in a series of shadows as of dreams. Out in his boat, his eyes cleared to his surroundings; they missed no ripple of sea, no tint of sky, no note of the ocean wind.

When the warm weather had fairly come, Mrs. Willy made one more attempt. "Jone, don't yer think I better go over to the store an' clean up a bit? Things will be in an awful mess."

"Things git over their own messes if yer let 'em alone long 'nough," was Jonas's reply.

Cora came back from her teaching. She looked tired and unhappy. She was of old-fashioned New England stuff and possessed a conscience bigger than her common sense; therefore she kept out of the reach of Preston Ripley.

Days and weeks went by; seasons came and were gone. For six years "Willy's" stood as it had been left that Saturday night when for the first time the owner had turned the key in the shutter padlocks. The high side windows acquired their own curtains of inside dust and outside deposit of salt. The planks of the platform rotted and fell and the village gossips were forced elsewhere. The silent building, as unrevealing as Jonas, had become an accepted fact, as little noticed as the boulder in the field or the tree stump by the way, too familiar to be even seen.

The shock of the war sent its concussions to the Point. The young men away, the older members of the little community strained every muscle, that the catch might not be lessened. Shut off from open traffic, its one tiny steamer withdrawn, the nearest railroad some eighteen miles away, the Point suffered from the difficulty of obtaining supplies. The Emporium no longer offered an attractive window; its stock dwindled and its prices soared. The sugar-supply failed. The women, with their inherited methods of cooking, made sad work of syrups and substitute flours. Summer peopled stayed away from a coast so remote, and the hotels were empty. Hard times had come to the Point, but to Jonas, in his boat, the sea was never more blue nor the hours more golden.

One summer morning, at breakfast, Jonas spoke in a casual tone: "I reckon we'll go over to the store pritty early. It'll take some time to red up."

The two women gave little gasps as they looked at each other, but they held their peace. When Jonas was ready they were awaiting him.

For the first time in six years the sun shone in through the unshuttered windows of the store. The women caught their breath as the long-imprisoned air choked their lungs. They crossed the threshold cautiously, as though entering the heart of a mystery. Dust blanketed the floors and counters. The spiders in their undisturbed revel had strung their wires everywhere. The odors of decay had long since been sweetened by time. Perishable articles had gone beyond the stage of offense and remained as harmless stains or dried

deposits to be scrubbed out or brushed away.

"Fur the land sake!" exclaimed Mrs. Willy. "Think o' that hull bucket o' eggs bustin' all by theirselves an' goin' off like pistol-shots I'll be bound. An' eggs at eighty-five this blessed minute!"

All that day the man and the two women worked. When things were fairly clean Jonas and Cora took account of the salable stock. In spite of the hand of time, much was left.

"Only needs a good bleachin'," remarked Mrs. Willy, eying a bolt of yellowing cotton cloth. "An' gingham's forty-five a yard," she added, significantly.

Jonas said nothing, but his wife's mind leaped to the profit.

"I guess Jone ain't so much of a fool as some might think," she thought. "But how on earth did he know there was goin' to be a war?"

Together they wiped the crockery and the lamps. For once the glass of the tiny case which held the candy shone bright and clear, revealing the hard and colorless lumps beneath.

"They kin be melted up fur sweetenin'," said Mrs. Willy. But when she saw three barrels of hardened but unhurt sugar which Jonas rolled up from the dry cellar her delight knew no bounds. "Lord, Jone!" she cried. "Yer kin git dollars off'n them!" Her faith in her husband returned augmented. "My, ain't he a cute one!" she thought.

The stock of needles was rusted beyond the help of any emery, but the pins and the hooks and eyes and the buttons were as good as new. Mrs. Willy pulled a piece of elastic; the rubber was dead and worthless.

"We'll cut off all them garter clasps an' sew 'em outer fresh," she remarked, thriftily. "Yer can't sell them brooms fur green, but brooms has tripled an' you'll make a lot outer jest them. The flour looks kinder doubtful, but that m'lasses'll melt down good's new."

Golden visions took possession of Mrs. Willy. "I wouldn't 'a' believed Jone was so clever," she thought. "Seems 's if he had second sight." She saw the mortgage raised; it had been a sore and unexplained thorn in her side. She saw

comforts to which she had not before aspired. She saw the admiration of the Point. "They can't p'int their fingers at Jone now!" she thought, triumphantly. "He has 'em all beat if it did take six year to do it!" That night, tired as she was, she laid awake and planned. "I'll git a new coat over to Smoothbay—mabbe a suit. Jone 'll be able to charge 'most anythin' fur them goods, an' he never grudged me a cent when he had it, which is more 'n you kin say o' most." Her spirits rose like a spring released. Her moment was at hand and she would make the most of it.

The next morning "Willy's," bright and shining as it seldom had been in the old days, was open to trade. It had not long to wait; custom was stimulated by curiosity. The men exchanged comment as they gathered on the platform, stepping warily lest the planks should give way beneath their heavy shoes. The women counted their ready money and congregated.

"There's sure to be somethin' that ain't sp'iled," said one.

"Dried currants and sech, an' mabbe a bit o' sugar," returned another.

"We'll hev to pay fur them!"

"Seems 's if I'd pay 'most anythin' in reason fur a pair o' stockin's that wouldn't shed dye in fust washin'," remarked the first speaker, dolefully. "Don't seem 's if anythin' was the same as 'fore the war!"

"Tain't," declared the other succinctly. "I guess Mary Willy 'll hold her head up now. My man says Jonas 'll run the prices right up an' clear a big pile."

Jonas Willy stood behind the counter with the undisturbed air of never having left that point of vantage.

"Mornin'!" cried out one facetious arrival. "My wife wants a barrel o' sugar!"

"I'll sell yer two pounds, 'cordin' to orders," returned Jonas, when the laugh had subsided. "Five cents per."

Mrs. Willy, eager for the day's possibilities, had come over to the store to witness the financial triumph. She was moving about with the gracious and aloof air of one who had foreseen occasion and laid the train of circumstance. For once her man had done the shrewd

and practical thing, and she, publicly at least, would not give all credit to chance. Suddenly her husband's last remark struck her ear.

"Jone!" she cried, heedless of listeners. "Jone! Sugar's twelve this minute!"

She spoke to the wind. Jonas did up the sugar and handed out the change. The purchaser hesitated a moment. Then he leaned across the counter and spoke in a whisper.

"Lord knows 'tain't fur me to wish yer prices up, Jonas Willy, but you've allers be'n a good friend to me, an' I'll tell yer it strikes me that yer drawin' up empty nets outer a full sea. People are willin' an' lookin' to pay high fur things yer've got in this store."

"I'm chargin' 'cordin' to what I paid," returned Jonas, imperturbably, and without lowering his tone. "I reckon that's fair. I ain't in the profiteerin' business."

Trade was brisk after this announcement, but Mrs. Willy had to retire to the back room to shed a few tears of disappointment and wrath. "All that gingham goin' fur a third o' what they're chargin' at Smoothbay!" she wailed in Cora's ear. "An' brooms at thirty-five! It's downright mean! Yer father's crazy, an' now I know it!"

The whole population of the Point turned out to "Willy's" that day. To the feminine heart it was not only a time of huge enjoyment, but of reminiscence.

"You notice that muslin third frum the top o' the pile," exclaimed one. "I took a patron off it fur Nellie, the very week Jonas closed. Now it's gone to the rags an' Nellie's in her grave. That piece 's be'n layin' right there as if there warn't no sech thing as change. Well, well!"

"I'm goin' to buy up some o' them glass lamps," declared another. "They're kinder old-fashioned, but they're goin' fur forty-five to the Emporium's one ten. It's the charnce o' our lives, Hannah Legget!"

Hannah was interested elsewhere. "Fur the land's sake! look at that ready-made cotton! How'd we ever git 'round in them narrer skirts? Them sleeves be'n out I dunno how long. I

guess Ripley 'll be mad when he finds out how he's undersold."

At noon Jonas was alone in the store. He tipped back his chair comfortably and smoked his pipe. Presently the door opened and Preston Ripley came in.

"Hello!" he said. "I thought I'd run over and see if any of my customers had got mislaid! I 'ain't seen one to-day."

Jonas laughed easily. "That's all right, Ripley. 'Twon't last long. I'm unloadin' an' it's my last trip."

"By what I hear, you might be making a better haul."

"I might jine the pirates!"

"They have it you're getting back on me."

The front legs of Jonas's chair struck the floor sharply. "Now, what fur, I'd like to know?"

"Well," went on Ripley, a little awkwardly. "I've never felt quite easy about your giving up. I didn't want to drive you out. I calculated there was plenty of room for both."

"So there was; so there was!"

"Wish I'd known you felt that way, Mr. Willy."

Jonas's blue eyes regarded the speaker with mild astonishment. "There warn't no other way to feel, as I see. Business is business, an' one fisherman don't git mad 'cause another's struck cod while he's gittin' sculpins."

Preston Ripley hoisted himself up on the edge of the counter. "Mr. Willy, if I didn't drive you out, why did you close up? You ain't a man that talks much, but I'd like to have it from you straight."

Jonas stretched back in his chair and took his pipe from his mouth as if preparing for an unwonted effort. "Well, young feller, I can't say yer didn't hurt my trade some. Yer got better stock an' yer kep' it up. But I take it a leetle honest competition 's a good thing. If I'd helt up my end I guess we'd both be'n goin' now an' none the wuss." Jonas paused a moment and then resumed. "I turned it over in my mind, an' I saw it warn't wuth it. 'Twould 'a' be'n nip an' tuck the hull endurin' time, an' a darn sight o' trouble. I'd 'a' be'n racin' to keep ahead an' I might 'a' got ranklin' feelin's, an' they ain't com-

fortable things to harbor. I take it, life's fur livin' an' not fur fightin'. When I was in my boat, drawin' fish outer the sea, I warn't takin' nothin' from nobody. It was all peaceful out there on the water, an' pritty as a picter. There warn't no hustlin' to be fust."

Jonas gave a comprehensive sweep of the hand which held the pipe.

"This world's a mighty sightly place an' full o' good moments fur thinkin' an' enjoyin'. You can't see the best o' it when you're hagglin'. Mornin's, when I'd short-cut through Brown's paster to the store, the leetle drops o' water 'd be shinin' over everythin', jest as if they was laughin'. The air 'd smell like a nosegay, an' the sea'd call an' call. Then I'd hev to git in behind that counter with the dried herrin' an' the hake an' the price o' soap. There wouldn't be no peace; the minute I'd begin thinkin' in 'd come a customer an' spile it all. It seemed like sinnin' ag'in' nater, an' the Lord's work. I guess I'm tellin' yer more 'n I ever told human bein', but I want yer to see I 'ain't got nothin' ag'in' yer." Jonas leaned forward and dropped his voice to a note of confidential and solemn unction. "Pres Ripley, I'll give yer the truth right frum the shoulder. I never felt freer or more tickled in my life 'n when I hasped them shutters six year ago!"

There was a long s'lence. Finally Ripley asked:

"Why didn't you sell out, then?"

"I considered that p'int. I reckon I wouldn't 'a' made so much as I'd lost if I'd got red o' the bunch on a forced sale. Hurry don't do no good. Yer can't wrastle with the tide. It 'll go out, however hard yer hang onter it. If yer wait long 'nough it 'll turn. I waited."

Jonas resumed his pipe. Presently Ripley spoke.

"Mr. Willy, I've loved Cora ever since I came here. She cared for me, but she wouldn't have me. She said she would never marry any one that had injured her father. She and her mother held that you were against me. That was six years ago. My tide ain't turned yet." The young man gave a hard little laugh.

"There's some folks that don't know whether the tide's ag'in' or favorin'. You hev to do more 'n look; currents is deceivin'. If yer rest on the speech o' women you'll never git anywheres. Why didn't yer sail in, head on?"

"They wouldn't listen to me."

"Lord! boy, talkin' ain't no good! There ain't a argyment that 'll hasten the leettlest chicken's hatchin'. Yer ain't so spry in yer courtin' as yer be in yer tradin', Ripley!"

The young man let himself down from his perch. "Mr. Willy," he said, "I want to marry Cora as much to-day as I did six years ago."

"Well," returned Jonas, "why don't yer?"

That evening was clear and soft; somewhere on the fragrant shore Preston Ripley and Cora Willy sat beneath the stars which had suddenly become stars of promise. On the porch of the little house Jonas smoked, his wife by his side.

"Jones Willy!" abruptly broke forth Mrs. Willy; "the worm will turn, an' I've got to that p'int!"

Jonas brought back his mind from some sweet and remote distance. "Well, Mother," he said, patiently, "what is it?"

"The hull P'int's talkin'. Some hev it yer foresee the war an' helt onter yer goods."

Jonas threw back his head and laughed. "Scott! Mother, it's as much as I kin do to look forrerd to the end o' my nose, though that's consid'able!" he added.

"There's jest one question I want'er put, Jonas Willy, an' then I hope I'll never feel called to ask another; it's like haulin' a sled over bare ground. Whatever do yer keep so mum fur? Why don't yer speak out yer idees?"

Jonas took a long, fortifying puff. "What's the use o' talkin'?" he said. "Words breed words an' breath makes feathers fly!"

The River Bank

BY MARY PYNE

MY heart aches, and I press it to the grass
Where slender, purple hare-bells grow around,
But all the trees and flowers blow in the wind,
Nor can they draw their peace from out the ground.

O winds that toss the grasses to the air,
O soft mysterious waters moving nigh,
O questing birds that wheel beyond my sight,
O stubborn clouds forever floating by,

When will the sighs of all your seeking cease,
And when will silence wrap you to your rest?
'Til then the earth 's but sister to my pain;
And swoons to me as we lie breast to breast.