

DOWN RIVER

By James B. Connolly

ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. C. YOHN



T was forenoon of a bright Sunday, and by and by the down-river boat came whistling and chugging around the bend to the landing.

The *Creole Belle* she was, bound to New Orleans. She tied up, lowered her stage, and onto the bank piled her roustabouts; and as they did so every waiting colored girl there began to roll eyes at them.

From the bank to the boat the chatter flew. "Whar yo'all been so long, Sammie?" "Min' now yo' brings me somet'ing f'm N'Awleans nex' time up—min' now, Ab'aham!" "Ain't yo'all nebber gwine stop off yer agin—ain't yo', Cyrus?"

And from the roustabouts, hustling cord-wood as they shouted: "I ain't been laid off yit, but any time yo' cares to tek a trip down ribber!" And "Huh, huh, Chloe, dere yo' is wid yo' laffin' mout'!" and "'Deedy yes, I's de man ain't never gwine to forgit yo', gal!"

I greeted Captain Joe, went aboard, and was watching things with Charlie Stuart from the cabin deck, when a pretty mulatto girl, with a bulging carpet bag, stepped onto the stage to the boat, just as one particular husky-looking rousta was loping down the stage to the bank.

"Mah soul, dis you, Dinah!" he grinned, and stopped dead to have a further word with her; but "You black Buzzard you, come on yer an' hustle this fire-wood!" barked Captain Joe from the bank.

"Mah Lawd 'n' soul, dis yer's a wear'-some world!" sighed Buzzard, and resumed his lope down the stage.

By the time we had taken on the fire-wood and shoved out into the stream, the mulatto girl was sitting on a canned-goods box next the boat guard, and Buzzard was sitting close by. "So you is sho' gwine down ribber dis time, Dinah?"

Diana eyed him haughtily. "You Buz-

zard—I has no time fo' you, man! I has bizniss on dis boat. I's gwine visit mah Aunt Lindy down to Layton's Landin'."

"Huh, huh!" cackled Buzzard, "an' I has a gran'mammy to Layton's Landin'."

"What-all I know 'bout yo' gran'mammy? Whar was yo' last Christmas week?"

No more of that conversation floated up to us, because the call to dinner came to the roustas below. A few minutes later the dinner bell rang for us.

We heard a commotion on the lower deck as we were sitting down to eat. "Excuse me, gentlemen," said Captain Joe, and went out. He was soon back. "That black nigger Buzzard was talkin' to that yeller wench come abo'd, the last landin', when that other big yeller nigger, Cyrus Larmie, comes along an' puts in a word. An' Buzzard didn't like it."

There was one other cabin passenger. Joe had already said of him: "If he was one o' them young ladies brought up in a convent, I don't reckon he'd be more backward." This passenger, Layton by name, asked timidly: "Did you stop them, captain?"

"I stopped them—after they had it out," said Captain Joe. "They c'n fight all they want to so they don't stop hustlin' freight when there's freight to hustle."

"How did it end?" I asked.

"There's only one endin' to a fight abo'd this boat when Buzzard turns hisself loose. After one or two or three or fo' minutes, Buzzard goes over to the guard, draws a bucket of water from the river, an' washes the blood off his hands. An' I tell the other nigger if he ain't over the stage at the next landin' I'll take it outer his time. He's sure a pow'ful nigger, that Buzzard. And a *good* nigger. An' that yeller wench had been comin' down to that landin' back yonder pretty reg'lar till along about a couple o' months ago, when she stopped. There was a no'-count white sto'keeper to that landin'

after her, an' I don't reckon she liked it. Buzzard ain't got too much sense, o' co'se, but the girl looks to have her share."

Joe stopped to peel a sweet potato. "It looks to me like she wants him. An' that's what he needs—some woman to come along an' present him with a fam'ly an' say: 'Here you, Buzzard, here's yo' chillen, an' time you quit yo' foolin' an' look after 'em.'"

It was still bright Sunday, but we had left Arkansaw well behind. The *Creole Belle* had been running along, working heedfully into the bends and around the shoals, but rushing the straight reaches at a good seventeen miles an hour.

Layton came out of his room, and in silence contemplated the river life as it slid past us. The shadows had settled on the Mississippi bank to the one hand and the sun gone down the Louisiana levee on the other, before he spoke. "All day long," he said then, and his face was the face of a pilgrim nearing his shrine, "I have been observing the life along the banks of this great river. It is just as my father told me. And the times he has spoken of these things! Of this very time of the year—too early to plough or plant—the fields with the dried-up cotton-plants and corn-stalks left over from last year's crops. And the sugar-mills and the gin houses, and the little cabins of the negroes peering up over the levees!"

The supper bell rang then; Stuart came up from the freight deck, bringing Captain Joe with him. Stuart was one who believed that a little drink now and then never hurt anybody, especially before meals. Automatically he led the way through the dining-room to the bar. Layton was about to sit down to the table alone, when Stuart spotted him. "Won't you join us," asked Stuart, "in a small libation to the god—or goddess—which-ever it is—of food?"

"I don't drink," said Layton, "but if I am not intruding and I may have a lemonade——"

"You may have a lemonade—or any other cooling compound you desire, sir. I prefer good Bo'bo'n whiskey myself."

The charm of Stuart, with two quick Bourbons under his belt, or perhaps his own two lemonades, loosened up Layton's

tongue. He went on to tell, as we ate, how his father had come originally from Louisiana; but a long time since he'd left there and gone North and made a fortune lightering cargoes on the water-fronts of the Great Lakes ports.

"What place in Louisiana'd yo' father come from?" asked Captain Joe.

"I don't know, captain. He would never tell me just where, but when he died—four months ago—I found this in a box where he kept his papers. I asked Mr. Stuart early this morning, but he could not help me. Possibly you gentlemen can help me to locate it."

He drew from a pocketbook a picture post-card such as tourists mail to folks back home. On it was printed:

OLD SOUTHERN MANOR HOUSE

And it was a fine specimen of one, setting up on a knoll with an avenue of moss-hung cypress-trees leading up to it.

Captain Joe looked at the picture side of the card, and then, with meaning, to Stuart. Again Joe glanced at it and turned it carelessly over. There was some writing on that side.

"Nothing private in the writing, captain," put in Layton, and showed Joe what it was:

Where I was bawn. G. W. L.

in a loose, scrawling hand.

"My father—George Washington Layton—he had not much education. While he was very young, his mother ran away from home with him. That was all he would tell me. I always imagined his mother had a bitter quarrel with his father. My father has a grand home in the South, but 'I don't want you to go there—never, boy. I want yo' to die respectin' yo' ancestors,' he said to me several times.

"Yo' ancestors," repeated Layton. "He talked like that. 'But I want you to be of the kind that can meet ladies and gentlemen when you grow up,' he often said to me, and when I grew older he sent me to an expensive school—where I never felt at home. That was after my grand-mother—his mother—died."

Joe was eying him sharply. "What did she look like—yo' grandmother?" he asked abruptly.

"My grandmother? I can barely remember her—a slim little black-eyed, black-haired woman who never went out."

After a while, nobody saying anything, Layton put his post-card back into his pocketbook and went out on deck. Nobody spoke a word for another while. Then Stuart lit a cigar, and Joe said: "Charlie, that's a picture of the old Layton house!"

"There are forty houses look like that in the South," said Stuart.

"Not with the double row o' cypress-trees leadin' from the landin' almost to the po'ch, there ain't, Charlie. And he said his father give his name as Layton. Now, Charlie, I been steamboatin' down river since I was a boy, an' I don't remember ever hearin' o' no son George that old Layton had. There was a son, but he died of a hemorrhage same's his daddy did, after a drunk in New Awleans. I remember the day he was buried."

Stuart made no answer. Joe looked inquiringly at me. "I never knew much of the Laytons, captain," was all I could say.

"No," retorted Joe, "but you've lived long enough in the South to know about some things." He turned back to Stuart. "Charlie, you don't reckon——"

Stuart stood up. "Joe, all day long I been reckonin' rates and freights and discounts and bills o' lading and sight drafts and a heap mo' things that nature never intended me to, and right now I'm goin' out on deck to smoke a seegar in comfort."

It was an hour or so after supper, and on the lower deck most of the roustas were dozing among the freight. There was one trying to play on a jew's-harp, and a dozen or so had found a clear space and were shooting crap. Over by the guard-rail was the slim mulatto girl, alone; and streaming out from the fire-box was a great blaze of light, which shone onto the girl's figure. Presently two tall, muscular figures emerged from the recesses of the freight into the glow of light.

"All I has to say to yo', Cyrus Larmie," came in a heavy, rich, guttural voice

from one, "is jess dis one word. Ah beat yo' up dis fo'noon once. An' Ah's gwine beat yo'all up agin, an' two an' t'ree an' fo' times agin, ef yo' don' quit bodderin' dat yaller gal. Yo'all's got a woman wid chillen b'longin' to yuh in N'Awleans, an' I is a unmah'd man. Yo' hear me, nigger?" Cyrus faded back into the shadows, and Buzzard passed on through the valley of light to the guard-rail.

I made my way to the cabin deck, and came up behind Stuart, with his chair tilted back against a stanchion and his feet up on the cabin rail.

"Night," he was chanting to himself, "night and early spring in the South-land. Stars and the scent of jasmine. And a river a mile wide rolling from northern snows to tropic coral reefs."

Layton was standing under the cabin-deck lights, listening like a man entranced. "If this river could talk!" he uttered fervently.

The sound of his voice shook Stuart out of his reverie; he peered up and saw Layton. "Oh!" said Stuart, and Layton shrank, as might a faithful dog before the not quite pleased voice of his master.

Layton could not understand—and who could tell him there?—that Stuart, wakened suddenly out of a dream, was a Stuart of other days—of old days—slave-owning, well-to-do, self-approving days. Knowing Stuart, I knew that. But in another moment the mood was gone; Stuart was now of the living day.

"Yes, Mr. Layton, if this old river could talk," he said, "she'd speak more than one piece—that's sure. Won't you sit down, sir?"

Layton smiled delightedly, and sat down.

"Yes, Mr. Layton, if this old river could talk! Of the old days, say, when planters would come aboard these boats with half a season's cotton crop, ready to gamble away in one night over the card-table some of 'em—and gamble away a bunch o' slaves besides, sometimes."

"And the steamboats of those days, Mr. Layton! I recall my grandfather telling of a race up river, and how they tore the doors off her saloon, so the air could blow through without checkin' her speed. And how three or four young bucks of 'em threw a consignment of hams to a

German firm in Saint Louis into the fire-pan to keep her steam up.

"Afterward," continued Stuart, "they paid a fine price for the hams. But can't you see 'em, Mr. Layton—the planters who owned their ten thousands of acres an' thousands o' slaves, and young people travellin' with 'em, with not a care in the world except to find mo' pleasure in it? Can't you see 'em on one o' those river boats of the old days—a string orchestra inside and the voice o' the old Mississipp' singin' outside?"

"They must 've had some hours worth livin'! But now—" With a sigh Stuart heaved himself out of his chair, and with another sigh let himself down. "There's a million dollars in Confederate money in my daddy's old safe at home—and nothing else. And I'm a cotton buyer, competing with men that don't know, some of 'em, what the Civil War was about, but they know how to get the money—and nothing else. And if I don't watch out that's about all I'll know before I die. Yo, yo! but I feel like havin' another drink o' Bo'bo'n every time I think of it."

I left Stuart to his memories and to Layton, and moved to the after end of the cabin deck. Here two forms—a man's and a young woman's—had climbed up onto the top tier of the piled-up cotton. From the cabin deck I could have reached over and touched their heads. The man was Buzzard, the girl Diana.

"Now I's yer, what yo' brought me yer fo'?" said the girl.

"Ah tuk yuh up yer whar dere's no rowdy roustas to be listenin', to 'splain 'bout dat Christmus week. An' 'twas disaway. Ah save mah money fo' eight weeks, an' Ah leave it wid Cap'n Joe. Ah say, 'Cap'n Joe, please don' gib me fo' not eben one drink o' whiskey tell Christmus week.' Is yo' listenin', Dinah?"

"I's listenin', but y'aint tol' me yit."

"Ah's gwine tell yuh, gal. Come Christmus week, an' Cap'n Joe he han' over to me—oh, one-dollar, an' two-dollar, an' fi'-dollar, an' ten-dollar bills, an'—Ah 'membah heem—one twenty-dollar bill. I ain't no ejcated mahn, Dinah, but Ah sho' has a good eye fo' dem numbers on dem money bills. An' such a heap o' money! An' Ah mek up mah min' what

to do—Ah's gwine git somebuddy write a letter to say I's acomin', Dinah, an' when Ah's lookin' 'round, come Ab'aham Cosson an' Cy Larmie, an' dey say: 'Ain't yo' gwine buy a mahn a drink an' all dat money in holiday week, Buzzard?' Dey don't save dere money for no one gal laik I do, Dinah, an' Ah know dat. But Ah buy dem a drink o' whiskey, an' anodder drink o' whiskey, an' bimeby dey say, 'Yo' sho' is one spo't, Buzzard,' an' evver one in dat barroom say I is a great spo't, an' den Ah say Ah gwine be de bes' spo't of a nigger in all N'Awleans. An' Ah buy one o' dem raw-aidged hats like Cap'n Joe wear fo' one fi'-dollar bill, an' Ah buy mahself a pair o' patent-leather shoes. Dey have a time fittin' me, Dinah, but Ah busts into 'em finely—seben dollars dey was. An' Ah buy mahself a green silky shirt fo' fo' dollars, in de best buckra mahn's sto' in all N'Awleans. An' Ah buy mahself a red necktie an' yaller gloves an' a high white collar an' white stockin's. An' den Ah put dem clo'es an' mahself inside a cream-colored overco't an' a checked suit o' clo'es dat de buckra mahn who sells 'em to me says dere ain't nuttin' like dem 'tween here an' Memphis. An' Ah buys mahself a cane. An', Dinah gal, ef yo'all 'd ever seed me den, yo' sho' seed a black gen'man step-pin' down a lane.

"An' Ah buys one o' dem new yaller suit-cases. Ah don' have nuttin' to put in it, but Ah buys one, an' Ah goes up to dat Ab'aham Limkum Hotel fo' cullud gen'men, an' I has one o' dem hot baths I done hear white folks talk about—outer a white coffin laik I has dat bath, an' den Ah goes blissful to baid. An' when mawnin' come, Ah has mah breakfus brung to me in baid. An' dat sho' was spo'tin' life fo' a ribber rousa! An' Ah slep' awhile mo', an' I git up feelin' rested an' content, an' Ah'm havin' mah dinner in de dinin'-room quiet to mahself, when dere's a li'l' puckery yaller nigger to de nex' table, an' he says up to de ceilin' laik: 'How-come dese yer rough roustas f'om de river boats to be 'lowed in yer?' An' Ah look over hees way, an' Ah say, quiet an' mod'rate: 'Look yer, mahn, does yer call me a river rousa?' And he say, 'Is yo' a river rousa?' an' Ah say, 'Yass, dat's what I is—a river rousa. But lem-

me tell yo' somet'ing, li'l' mahn—lemme tell yo' somet'ing, li'l' boy. I is a rousta, yass, but I's a mahn—a mahn, yo' hear me?—an' Ah mak mah money doin' a mahn's wuhk. Why, yo' aig of a alligator f'm out de bayou mud, Ah done took a bale o' cotton las' trip down ribber—yo' hear me? Ah say, "Whar dat bale, Cap'n Joe?" when he done bet a hund'ed dollar wid a buckra mahn f'm Memphis, an' Ah tak mah cotton-hook in mah lef' hand an' anodder cotton-hook in mah right hand—for I's a two-cotton-hook rousta, I is—an' "Show me dat bale," Ah say, an' Ah hooks into de biggest bale dey ever done see in de Arkansaw Bend—six hund'ed pounds he weigh—an' Ah tote heem on mah back up dat bouncy stage to de deck o' de *Creole Belle*. I does a mahn's wuhk, I say, 'an' Ah don' have to mak up no baidis in no sleepin'-cyars laik a chembermaid, an' Ah don' have to be runnin' 'round a dinin'-room wid no fried aigs on no platter to mek mah livin'. No, *suh*, Ah does a mahn's wuhk, li'l' mahn—

"Doggone, but some folks has a heap to say for deirselves," he say.

"Does dey?" Ah says. "Den Ah'll say no mo' fo' mahself," an' Ah picks heem up wid de fo'finger an' one thumb to hees naik, an' Ah picks up anodder li'l' mahn who's wid heem atween de odder thumb an' de odder fo'finger, an' I hustles 'em across de dinin'-room flo' an' drops 'em bot' down a place where dey is no stairs. An' dere's mebbe fo' or fi' mo' has a min' to say a word. An' dey does, an' Ah bust deir haid togedder, an' den de polees poke deir haid in, an' nex' mawnin' in co't de jedge tek what Ah done have lef' o' dat roll o' money fo' to pay mah fine. An' I is dat shamed Ah nebber has nobody fo' to write yo'all, Dinah gal."

Diana sighed. "I knows yo' is a pow'-ful fightin' mahn, Buzzard, but yo' musen' 'low yo' tempah run 'way wid yo' dataway."

"Tempah, Dinah? Why, I's de mos' peace'ble mahn!"

"Huh!"

"O' co'se, when some o' dem low black 'n' yaller niggers begins fo' to crowd me, Dinah, why—"

"Yo' done tol' me dat. When is yo' gwine to give up yo' crap-shootin' an' yo'

fightin' ways? Dat's what yo' ain't tol' me, Buzzard."

"Dinah, ef yo' don' git off at no Layton's Landin'—ef yo'all keeps on down ribber to N'Awleans wid me, den Ah quits afightin' an' agamblin' right yer. An' yo' say de word, gal, an'—"

Three long whistles sounded from above us.

"Listen to it, gal! Doggone! A mahn's mekkin' ready to enjoy hisself, an' one o' dese yer landin's has to bust in! Dis yer's sho' a wear'some world!"

From the forward end of the cabin deck I could see a light swinging across the night. A bell rang below, our paddles ceased turning, our search-light was switched on; stumps, snags, overhanging trees flashed into relief. We rolled up little waves as we neared the shore; chunks of earth dropped into the yellow eddies under the bank.

There was a dying fire on the bank; and beside the fire a man with a lantern; a moment later the search-light lit some baled cotton and beyond the fire a great pile of cotton-seed in sacks.

Under a cluster of incandescent lights hanging from the jack-staff, Captain Joe now took his stand. Both hands were in his waistcoat pockets and his feet wide apart; and from under his felt hat-brim only his flowing mustache, a half-chewed cigar, and his broad jaw could be seen distinctly.

"Out, you roustas—out, you niggers!" barked Joe. "Take hold that after-stage guy and stand by the capstan! Stand by, I say—by the falls—by the *falls*—by the FALLS, I said! An' blast yer black hides to everlastin' perdition, come arunnin'!"

From shadowy corners of the deck they came arunnin' and began to lower the stage to the bank.

Stuart leaned over the cabin rail and hailed: "How many, Jeff?"

The man on the bank held a slip of paper up to the light of his lantern. "Two hund'ed an' fo'ty bales o' cotton 'n' 'bout eight thousand sacks o' seed, Mister Charlie."

"Eight t'ousand sacks!" came a wail from up under the cabin rail. "Doggone, dat'll sho' be tell sunrise!"

"You Buzzard you, get tuh hell out yer an' work!" barked Captain Joe.

"Law-w-dee!" groaned Buzzard. "Dat Cap'n Joe, he got a eye like a owl for seein' a nigger in de black dark. Dinah, don' yo' move, gal, f'om whar Ah c'n see yo' while Ah'm wuhkin'." As he went bounding down the stage he threw up both hands. "Mah soul, niggers, look at dem piles o' seed an' den tell me, somebuddy, why-all was we-all ebber abawned!"

Buzzard loped onto the bank and across the clearing, where two darkies, standing by the pile of cotton-seed, tossed the first sack onto his shoulders. That first sack weighed 160 pounds, but Buzzard loped easily across the clearing and up the stage and to the after end of the boat's deck with it.

It may have been easy to Buzzard, but it was heavy toil to most of them. They shuffled after Buzzard across the clearing and up onto the 60-foot stage that bridged the bank and the steamer's front deck. They loped close to the ground till they made the stage; when, their weight and the weight of the sack hitting the long stage together, the stage began to spring and to swing. Up and down and sideways it went, swinging and springing; the loaded men went swinging and springing with it.

We watched it from the cabin deck for perhaps an hour. "Pack-mule work," said Layton with a shudder.

"Pack-mule work?" echoed Stuart. "No. Any self-respecting mule would take one good look at that heap o' sacks, and then he'd roll over, lie down, and die. Wouldn't he, Joe?"

Joe had left the jack-staff and was standing on a tier of seed sacks with his head all but on a level with the cabin deck. He looked up at Stuart. "Charlie, you know the company pays 'em three dollars—some of 'em, like Buzzard there, three-fifty—a day and their grub; an' ev'ry minute this steamer lies here, pay 'n' grub 'n' other expenses are goin' right on, but freight don't. I have to drive 'em. Lemme stop drivin' 'em for just one lone minute, an' the next minute you'd see 'em all settin' around like strawberries on ice, afannin' theirselves."

Another hour went by, and around and around they were still coming. Across

the clearing, up onto the bounding stage, and always at the same stiff-legged lope. Across the firm footing of the clearing, and then the length of the springy stage, from which they dropped suddenly, for the length of the deck, into the soft footing of the sacks already piled up.

The man on the bank was keeping tally. One thousand, two thousand, three thousand, we heard him call out. Tough roustas they were, but beginning to show signs of distress. One staggered after dumping his sack, leaned up against a stanchion, and, taking a red handkerchief from around his neck, wiped the globes of sweat away.

"Well, nigger!" barked Joe.

"Cap'n Joe, I mus' stop fo' a drink—I sho' mus'."

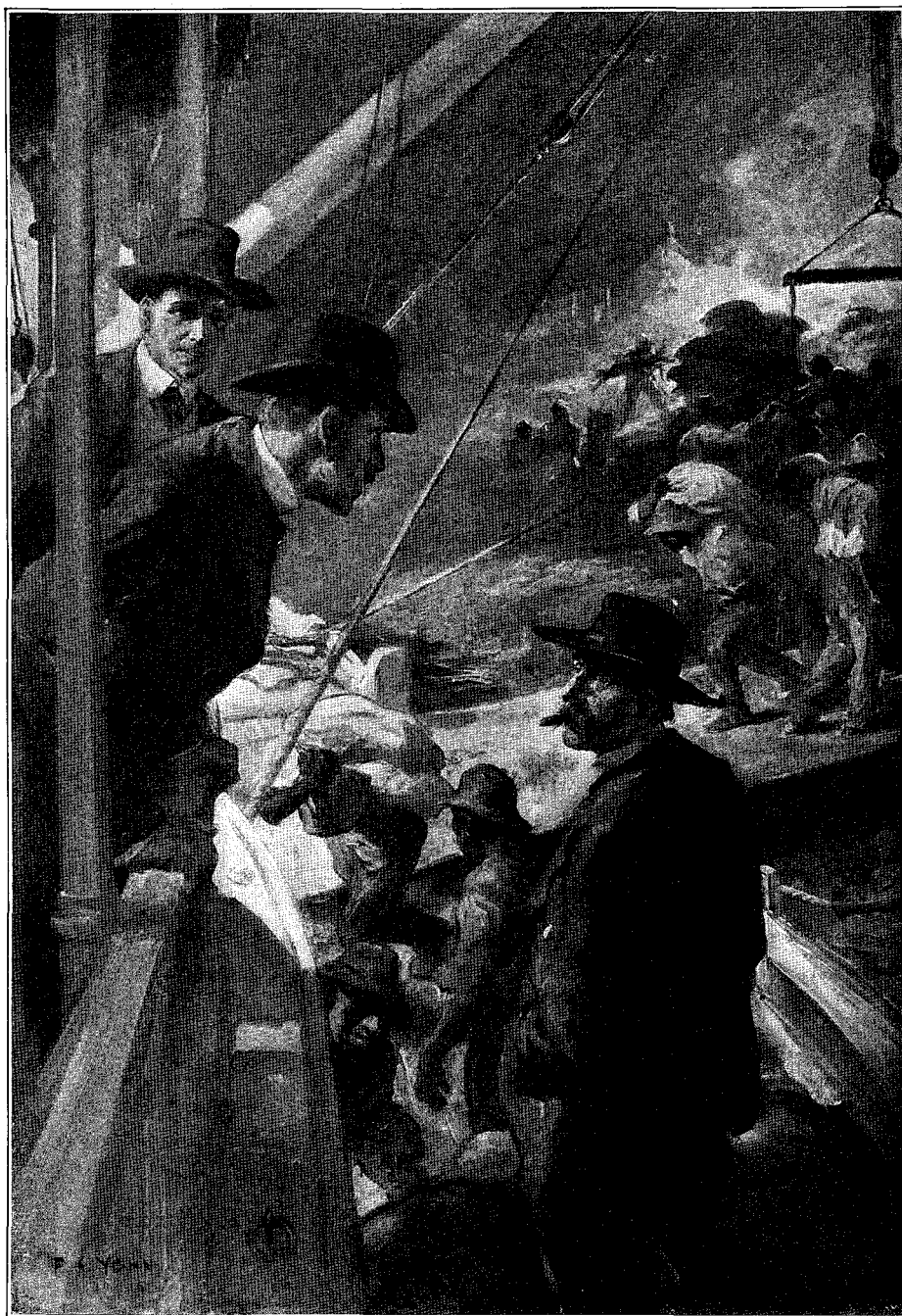
"Order yo' drink, then. An' don't be all night about it."

He turned to the bar boy, who was standing in readiness. "Hi, boy, gemme a drink o' liquor! Hear me, boy—a drink!" He is a picked river hand, his time valuable, and he knows it. Exhausted as he is, there is arrogance, contempt in his voice for the underling of a bar boy. "Nex' time 'round, min', boy!"

And next time around, after he had dumped his sack, there was the bar boy waiting for him with a glass of whiskey filled to the brim. And he grabbed it, snapped his head back, gulped it, tossed the glass back to the boy, and, almost without stopping, was on his way loping down the stage.

Across the clearing, up the stage, along the deck and back again; across and up and along, and back again; and always with that shuffle-footed lope. Round and round, sagging at knees and haunches, they kept it going. One stopped for a drink of water, but was too long over it. Joe eyed him, allowed him perhaps ten seconds of grace, and then w-r-rup—"Well, nigger, goin' to drink the river dry?" brought him back jumping to his work.

Round and round they go. Another dumps his sack and leans against a stanchion. He looks as if he would fall if he hadn't. "Dis yer's what I call a mis-er-ee!" he says softly. "Yes, suh, dis sho' what yo' might call a mis-er-ee. Gemme a drink, boy—quick!"



Drawn by F. C. Yohn.

"There's no half white—a man's a nigger or he's a white man."—Page 314.

The orders for whiskey became more frequent. One time around they would order; next time around grab it—the thin glass filled till it ran over—and g-l-l-p—down their throats as straight and quick as ever they could throw it into the river. One gulp, one sweet, sad smack of the lips, and they are back to that everlasting shuffle.

And, shuffling, they keep up a running, wordless chant, not much more than a vibration of the lips. Now and again one breaks into articulate words:

"Oh, tek me bahk whar yo' tuk me f'om—
O my niggers, roll dem bales!
Ah b'longs 'way up in Ar-kan-saw—
Bully niggers, stow dem bales!"

The air of it, floating across the dying fire on the bank, up the staging, down the deck and out onto the water of the great river—it was immeasurably melancholy.

"There is something in that," said Layton suddenly, "which grips me here." He put his hand on his heart. "It's like an echo, too, in my ears, as though I'd heard it somewhere before."

"Poor humans," said Stuart, "they're surely not having the best of life."

"Humans!" spluttered Joe—his head was rising nearer to us at the cabin rail with the increasing height of the sacks of seed. "They're niggers, jest niggers, and you, Charlie—your father owned hundreds of 'em—you ought to know."

"Some of them are half white," said Layton, leaning over the rail to see them better.

"Half white!" The sneer in Joe's voice straightened Layton up again. "There's no half white—a man's a nigger or he's a white man. And one drop o' black blood in a man makes him black. Leastways, that's how we reckon it down this country. O' co'se, up North there's some of 'em passes for white. But not down yere."

I could feel Layton shrinking from Joe's voice.

"Joe," said Stuart, "there's Buzzard stealing time on you."

Buzzard had just dumped his sack and, noting Captain Joe's absorption, stopped to look around. "Dinah!" he called softly. "Dinah! Whar is yo', Dinah?"

"You black——"

"Mah Lawd, yes, suh! Comin', Cap'n Joe—Ah's acomin'! Doggone!" Buzzard's legs and arms were convoluting like a galvanized wire as he hopped back to the stage.

A dozen cackled at his discomfiture. "Don' yo'all know better dan try dat on Cap'n Joe? Hah, Buzzard, don' yo'?"

The next time around Buzzard had a sight of his Dinah. She had come out from the deck shadows and perched herself up where he could see her; whereat he smiled widely, "Dere yo' is, hah, gal!" and tossed his heavy sack lightly from him and began:

"De Creole Belle am ahaided down-stream—
Hustle dem sacks, hustle dem, boy!
But dis yer wuhk ain't what I dream—
Hustle dem sacks, boy, hustle dem sacks!"

So Buzzard chanted, and went loping down the stage; and a score of others droned it with him, and went loping down the stage and across the clearing after him.

"Seven thousand," I heard the tally clerk call, and came out of my nap.

The roustas were still shuffling and droning and sagging under their loads; and Stuart was still sitting there, chair tilted and feet on rail, looking down on them; Captain Joe was forward under his cluster of electric lights, driving his roustas.

"'Bout this time o' night—just before dawn," explained Stuart, "it's right hard to keep some of 'em awake."

By and by Joe crossed the front deck and came up to the cabin rail. He peered past us, plainly with something on his mind.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"Layton?" said Stuart. "I told him he'd better go to bed so's to be up early and not miss any daylight along the river."

"Huh! Y'ought to let him stayed awhile." Joe looked at Stuart as if expecting a retort. Stuart said nothing.

"I've taken a couple o' good looks at him to-night, Charlie, an' it's sure plain enough to me. I've an idee for somethin' in the mornin'—for him—him tryin' to pass for somethin' he ain't!"

"Joe," said Stuart slowly, "you surely don't admire that work—telling a man anything like that?"

"I won't have to tell him, Charlie. We'll be here till daylight. Then all I'll have to do will be to take him out on the bank, when there's no brush in the way, an' say: 'This yer's Layton's Landin', an' that big house yo' see beyond that double row o' cypresses yonder—that's the picture on yo' post-card where yo' father said he was bawn.'"

"And then what, Joe?"

"And then, Charlie, he'd go up an' begin to look around an' talk, an' in about five minutes Buzzard's old grandmammy, who's takin' care o' that house—her that's black as coal an' half-sister to this man's grandmammy that run away Nawth—she'd soon tell him who he was. Him an' Buzzard's half-cousins, Charlie—an' look at Buzzard there an' what do yo' see?"

"Why, what do I see, Joe, but a poor, hard-workin' human who is strong as a horse and doin' the work of a horse for what wages he gets. And nothing ahead of him in life but just that—a river rousta."

"It's all he's good for. And what better could he ever hope fo'? An' what in hell, Charlie Stuart, does anybody want to come winchin' in where they ain't wanted? You an' me, we wouldn't go in where people didn't want us to, would we?"

"I don't know. Suppose, Joe, we were born to believe that there were people better than ourselves on this earth, and we wanted to put—not ourselves, but our children after us—in among 'em, so's the best would be theirs, Joe?"

"Charlie Stuart, I'm not agoin' to listen to yo'! I'll tell this man in the mawnin'."

Stuart sat up. "Joe, hold up for one minute. I've been sittin' here to-night lookin' down on your roustas doin' the work of dumb animals."

"Somebody's got to do it, Charlie."

"That's right, Joe. But, as it happens, they're doing it, not you and I—and through no great virtue of you and me. Somebody happened to forelay for us, Joe. And sitting here to-night, Joe, and looking down on those beasts of burden, and thinking of that man from the North

inside there in his room, I couldn't help thinking of that yellow girl who was half white, and the many nights she must have sat nursing her little baby that was three-quarters white, Joe, and nursing that baby and watching roustas just like these slaving like pack-mules—and how she must have said to herself at last that her little baby, nor his after him, wasn't agoin' to slave like that. The instinct for stevedoring which later made her baby—this man's father—rich along the Great Lakes ports, was possibly what he soaked in with his mammy's milk, while maybe his mother sat out on that very landing there and watched some first-class river mate like you, Joe, load a steamboat. But can't you see her, Joe, thinking things over and over till she couldn't stand it any longer, and one night jumping out and flying to the far, strange, cold country? And her fighting her way in that far, strange, cold country? She was only a little slip of a girl, mind, and not many things she could do. She sure must have spent many a hungry day and many a freezing night, and the little boy, this man's father, with her. It must have been so, for, hard as she must've worked, she wasn't able to give her boy an education. But she put the spirit to struggle into him, and he struggled till he was well-to-do; and when he was well-to-do, there was no putting herself and her comfort in the way of his going ahead. Do yo' remember him, Joe, speaking of her as a little, old, dark woman who never went out? And why didn't she go out, Joe? You and I, Joe—and so would anybody who ever lived in the South—we know why she didn't go out."

"Charlie Stuart, my own daddy owned slaves, an' yo' granddaddy owned a thousand slaves in his day, an' yo' talk this-away!"

"Joe, I sometimes wish 'twas some other man's granddaddy owned 'em. It spoiled them and it spoiled me for real work."

"But you're not agoin' to let this man, Charlie, go back and live among white people without tellin' him what he is?"

"I reckon the race will be able to stand it, Joe. They've stood for more than that," smiled Stuart. "Joe, we can't go on fashioning people to our own image

and then say: 'You're none o' mine—go 'way!' He's one of ours, Joe, if he wants to claim it."

"Claim it! Tell him an' he won't claim it!"

"His father and his father's mother claimed it for him, Joe. And after what they went through for him, it would be a crime, Joe, to tell him. And I'm not goin' to do it; nor you, either, Joe. Let the poor fellow make what he can of life. He can't make much of it—'t isn't in him, Joe. His grandmammy and his father lived in the shadows, Joe, and now he blinks in the sun. He's got the weaknesses of the Laytons, Joe, who had more good living than was good for 'em—with-out any of the big, strong body of Buz-zard's there. To strike him down—it would be like striking a child, Joe."

Joe beat the cabin rail. "I oughtn't never told yuh. I had a feelin' you'd bluff me out. You oughtn't be buyin' cotton, Charlie Stuart—you ought to be in politics or somethin' else, separatin' people from their votes or their honest beliefs. Good Lord, you c'n pull arguments down out o' the air fo' yuhself!"

He jumped down to the lower deck, waving his arms in disgust; and "you splay-footed, ganglin'-legged, slab-sided, double-jointed—" was the next thing we heard. "I'm back on a job I know somethin' about!" he called up to Stuart. "Come an' run me out o' this, too, will yuh! An' you, boy—blast you, hurry an' bring me a cup o' coffee!"

His coffee came, and with it the sun.

Joe drank his coffee, and Stuart passed him a cigar. Joe lit it—before this he had been chewing his cigars—and began to smoke. After a few puffs he took the cigar and sniffed it. "Doggone, Charlie, but this sho' a good seegar!" He stuck it back into his mouth; and then: "Let him do what he damn pleases, Charlie! He bought a cabin passage to New Aw-leans, an' maybe it ain't any o' my funeral, anyway!"

A few minutes later the last of the seed was stowed, the stage hauled in, the boat backed off, and once more the *Creole Belle* was pointing down-stream.

And it was full morning—a cool, crisp morning, with the sun above the levee on the Mississippi bank, and a little breeze

putting life into the yellow, rolling waters. Not too much breeze; just enough to make it airy and comfortable up on deck, and to cause the sweated, exhausted roustas lying around on the cotton-seed to open their mouths and breathe in great gobs of it thankfully.

Stuart went inside the cabin. Soon I could hear him knocking on some one's door; and presently calling out: "Full daylight, sir. Time to get up—unless you-all want to miss things along the bank."

Soon Layton came out on deck, with his post-card picture in his hand. But we were too far down-stream then for him to make out the double row of cypress-trees and the house on the knoll beyond.

For three days and three nights the *Creole Belle* had been coming down-stream; and now, loaded to the guards, she was nearing New Orleans.

In that three days and nights she had made one hundred landings; and now her roustas, snatching what sleep they could between landings, should have been pretty tired; and most of them were, but not so tired that they did not come bounding up to the cabin deck when Captain Joe passed the word to line up and be paid off.

Ten, fifteen, twenty were paid off, Cap-tain Joe identifying each rous-ta as he stepped to the pay window.

"Cyrus Larmie!" called Joe.

"Cyrus Larmie," repeated the clerk. "Six days at three-fifty—twenty-one dol-lars, less a bar bill of eight sixty-five—twelve thirty-five," read the clerk.

"Check," said Joe.

Cyrus took his money, and peered through the grill. "Cap'n Joe," said Cy-rus, "Ah gives yo' notice Ah's done wid roustaboutin' on dis long river."

"That so? What you goin' to do now, Cyrus?"

"Ah's gwine tak dis yer money, Cap'n Joe, an' when Ah done rest mahself laik a gen'man, Ah's gwine find a easy job some-where in New Awleans."

"All right. Move on."

Cyrus, jingling his silver, skipped down to the freight-deck bar, laid down a loose dime, and had a quick drink of whiskey; then he hopped over to where in the one



Drawn by F. C. Yohn.

She must have said to herself at last that her little baby, nor his after him, wasn't agoin' to slave like that.
—Page 315.

clear space on the freight deck three crab-boards had been set up.

A bunch of howling, yelling, husky roustas were there before him. Cyrus was a husky one, too; but even after he had butted his way to a place, there wasn't much room for action; which annoyed Cyrus.

"Mahn, mahn!" he bellowed, driving his elbows into the ribs of those either side of him. "Mahn, gib a mahn a chance to see how he lose hees money. How much am it? Two dollars a roll? O' co'se I's in for two dollars."

He laid down two silver dollars; and two more silver dollars; and—however, six times Cyrus saw the dice roll at two dollars a roll—and six times only.

He backed wearily away from that board. But—he had twenty-five cents left. At the second board he was allowed to roll for twenty-five cents. One roll there and he was done.

"Doggone!" said Cyrus, and rubbed his kinky hair, and after a period of rumination came slowly back to the cabin stairs, went up to the grill, peeked through, and when Captain Joe had done paying off, said: "Cap'n Joe, please Cap'n Joe, Ah'd laik to wuhk one mo' trip up river wid yo', Cap'n Joe."

Captain Joe eyed him sardonically. "What was it yo' said 'bout ten minutes ago?"

"What Ah say, Cap'n Joe? Don' yo' know, Cap'n Joe, I ain't never gwine quit yo' an' de *Creole Belle*, don' yo', Cap'n Joe?"

Joe laughed. "Yo'll never change, Cy. Here!" He passed him a ticket through the grill.

"T'ank yo', Cap'n Joe. Yo'sho' is one gen'man."

Cy did not look at Stuart, but he did say in a melancholy voice in passing: "Not eeny, weeny cent lef' fo' one li'l' drink out o' all mah money!"

Stuart threw him a silver dollar; by this time we were into New Orleans and tied up to the levee. "Whoop-ee!" said Cyrus, and skipped below, left the steamboat, mounted the levee, and loped straight across the street to a saloon.

"There's the river rousta," said Joe. "No mo' sense than a mule."

"If he had sense," said Stuart, "do

y' reckon, Joe, you'd be driving sixty of them so easy like?"

A couple of carriages were on the levee waiting for possible passengers; soon the mess boy brought out Layton's baggage and stowed it into one of the carriages.

Layton, following his baggage, stepped over to where we were. Joe saw him, but he continued being intensely interested in the actions of the levee roustas who were hustling the freight ashore. Layton did not disturb him. He shook hands with Stuart, then with me, and turned to Stuart for a parting word.

"Mr. Stuart, from all that my father had told me, I came gradually to picture his idea of a Southern gentleman; and when I saw you, it was as if he were speaking to me again. But there is something in this life which leaves me sad. And now I am thinking here that there was something more in my father's warning not to look up his old home than he could put into words. I am going to take a train straight home and never come back."

It was while looking after Layton's carriage driving off that we took notice of the girl Diana. She was sitting with her carpet bag on a sack of cotton-seed up on the levee. She had been sitting rather limply, but we saw her all at once straighten up, pat her hair, feel to see if her brass earrings were in place, glance down at herself to see if otherwise she was presentable. We looked below to see what had stirred Diana so.

It was the superb figure of Buzzard which emerged from our freight deck, and he was wearing all the wonderful clothes he had bought Christmas week—big soft hat, green shirt, checked trousers, yellow-colored vest, bright red tie, socks, patent-leather shoes; in one hand he was swinging a suit-case, in the other hand was a cane, and over that arm the new cream-colored coat.

"Doggone, but look at Buzzard! Mah soul, but will yo' look at de style o' dat nigger! Has yo' de money to go wid dem clo'se, Buzzard?"

"Has I?" He let his teeth shine to their full. "Yes, I has de money to go wid dem clo'se. See yer, nigger"—he had set down the suit-case and pulled a handful of money from a trousers pocket



Drawn by F. C. Yohn.

He with an ear bent heedfully down to hear a lot of very earnest talk.—Page 320.

—"see yer—nineteen dollars jess come to me!"

"Is yo' gwine buy a few rolls o' de bones, Buzzard?"

He hesitated. He looked over to the crap-board. "M-m——"

"Buzzard!" came a strong soprano voice from the bank.

Buzzard turned away from the crap-board; a chorus of guffaws went out from the roustas; and remarks went with the guffaws.

Buzzard's foot was on the stage; he paused and looked back; and there was one man whose looks he didn't like—a big yellow one. Buzzard looked toward him, smiled, and he said: "Sim Chadwick, Ah's done promised I ain't gwine to fight no mo'—Ah done gib mah wuhd to mah promised wife, an' I ain't gwine to fight an' roll dem bones no mo'. Ah wants to be a peace'ble mahn, but lemme tell yo' somet'ing"—he laid down his suit-case, laid his coat on that, and his cane—carefully—on the coat; and he ran his fingers between his white starched collar and his neck, and he took one step forward on his toes, and one more step on his toes, and he smiled gently on Sim Chadwick. "Ef yo' had any idee, Sim Chadwick, dat I kaint beat yo' up laik Ah done once befo', den Ah wants to say right yer now——"

"Ah don' want no truck wid yo', Buzzard," came hurriedly from Sim.

"Oh, yo' doesn't! Den is dere any odder——"

"Buzzard!" came the voice from the

bank again. "Buzzard, is we gwine to be mar'd dis evenin' or is we?"

"Is we?" Buzzard grabbed up his cane, his coat, his suit-case, and bounded over the stage to the levee. "Jes' havin' a li'l' fun wid dem niggers. Yo' know, honey, Ah wouldn't——"

He led the way to a waiting carriage and was for bargaining for a passage, but she drew him away; and up onto the street they walked, he with an ear bent heedfully down to hear a lot of very earnest talk.

Joe turned to Stuart. "Some of 'em has sense, Charlie. And the mo' I think o' that little yaller grandmammy, the mo' I can't help thinkin' she was a great little one."

"To my mind," said Stuart, "that one going up the levee with Buzzard is a greater one. Diana could 'a' gone either way—white or black—and there is what she picked."

"Huh! Probably don't know any better," grunted Joe.

"That not knowing any better is sometimes a knowing so deep down in 'em that they can't bring it up in a hurry for explanation purposes. Her children, and Buzzard's, won't be born of any ruling race, Joe, but they'll be able to look the sun in the eye."

"Who the devil," exploded Joe, "wants to ruin his sight lookin' the sun in the eye!"

"Some of us," retorted Stuart, "sometimes stay too long in one spot. What d'y' say if we-all go ashore and forget the river for a while?"

SALUTAMUS

By Margaret Sherwood

AUGUST for aye in courage without flaw,
Crowned with the best that mortal lot may give,
O soldiers dead, in envy we, and awe
Salute you,—we who are about to live.