

them. And this would have been very unfortunate indeed ; for, if the name of Mary Rivers had been even remotely hinted as the cause of such trouble, the colonel would have locked himself in his library, read a chapter in the family Bible, called for his saddle-horse and shot-gun, and gone cantering up the big road on business connected with the plantation.

But these rival lovers were bosom friends. There were points about each that attracted the other. When Preston was with Miss Mary he lost no opportunity of praising the good qualities of Colston, and Colston made no concealment of the fact that he considered Preston the salt of the earth, as we say in Georgia.

All this was very pleasant and very confusing. Mary was in love with one of them, but she never admitted the fact, even to herself, until a curious episode compelled her to acknowledge it. Even her mother confessed that she had been unable to discover Mary's preference until the fact fluttered out before everybody's eyes, like a startled bird from its nest. For a while the mother would think that her daughter preferred Preston. Then