

# The Story of My Life by "Billie Button"

CHAPTER I. *The author tells of his ancestry and pedigree, with side-lights on the habits of the care-free clam.*

IN telling my story, I, Billie Button, must go back to the time long before I was I at all. Come with me, kind reader, to the Mississippi River, somewhere between Iowa and Wisconsin. Take a peep beneath its waters a little way off shore. Clams—Clams—Clams—millions of them, waiting in a "bed" a mile or more long, with their faces turned upstream and their mouths open, for the clam "toils not, neither does he spin," but waits for the big river to bring his food right down into his jaws. Not the clams that make your mouth water at the famous Clam Bakes of Long Island Sound, but their cousins, the Fresh-Water-Clams.

High-sounding names they have in the mouths of the scientific gentlemen who write Fisheries Bulletins and Zoologies. Take a long breath before you tackle them: *Lampsilis Adontonoides*, *Anodonta Corpulenta*, *Plagiola Donaciformis*, *Quadrula Pustulata*, and a lot of others that sound like the combatants in a Sicilian vendetta. Your clammer and longshore urchin, though, don't bother with scientific terminology, but dub them Slop Bucket, Nigger Head, Mucket, Pig Toe and other expressive if inelegant nicknames.

Ask that clammer over there to show you what his "crow foot" has brought up. Look carefully at the dozen or so specimens he dumps into your boat. Maybe they'll be all of one family, or just as likely every one will be different in appearance and name.



Pick up one and rip off its shell ruthlessly. (What's a clam's feelings to the pursuit of knowledge?) If it's breeding time and you have chanced on a mother clam, you will find the gills doing double duty, for besides performing their natural breathing functions they will be distended (wholly or in part) with a jelly-like mass containing thousands of tiny eggs, becoming what the scientists call the "marsupium" or brood pouch. If your specimen answers to the name of Paper Shell or *Lampsilis Laevissima*, these eggs will be pale or colorless. If it chances to be a *Quadrula Ebena*, they will be pink or bright red.

