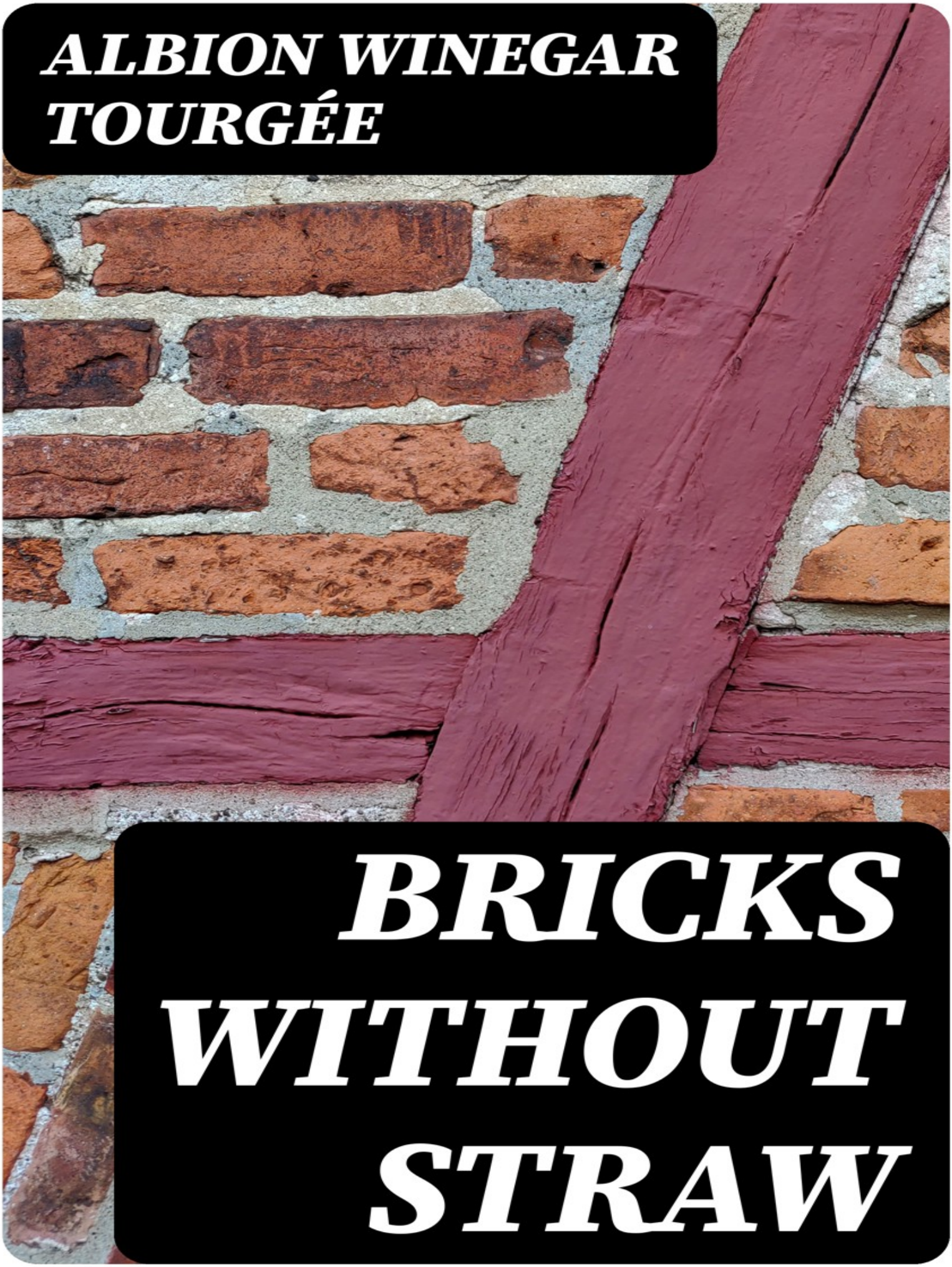
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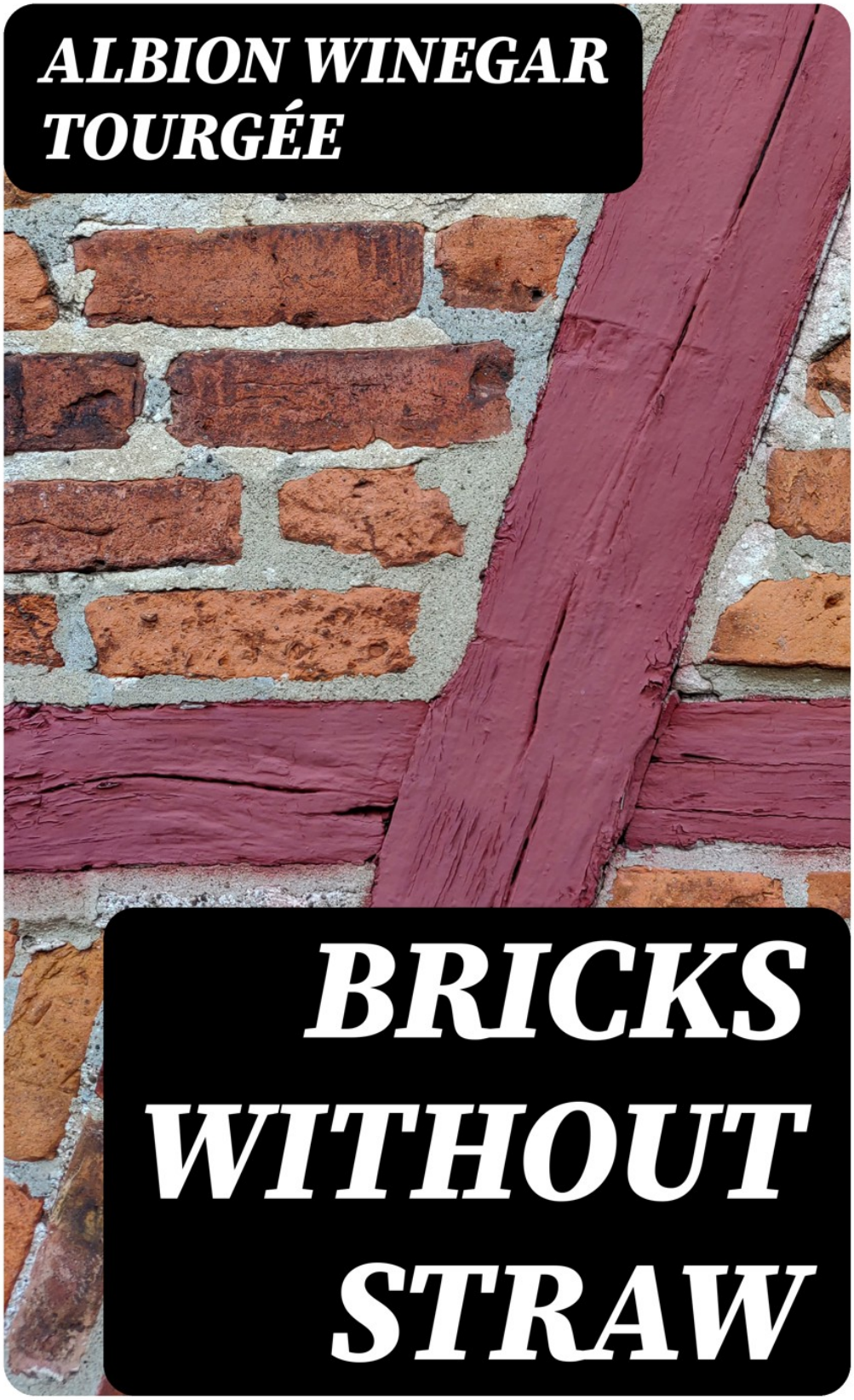

BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW

Albion Winegar Tourgée

Bricks Without Straw

A Novel

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CHAPTER I.

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TRI-NOMINATE.

"Wal, I 'clar, now, jes de quarest ting ob 'bout all dis matter o' freedom is de way dat it sloshes roun' de names 'mong us cullud folks. H'yer I lib ober on de Hyco twenty year er mo'—nobody but ole Marse Potem an' de Lor', an' p'raps de Debble beside, know 'zackly how long it mout hev been—an' didn't hev but one name in all dat yer time. An' I didn't hev no use for no mo' neither, kase dat wuz de one ole Mahs'r gib me hisself, an' nobody on de libbin' yairth nebber hed no sech name afo' an' nebber like to agin. Dat wuz allers de way ub ole Mahs'r's names. Dey used ter say dat he an' de Debble made 'em up togedder while he wuz dribin' roun' in dat ole gig 'twixt de diff'ent plantations—on de Dan an' de Ro'noke, an' all 'bout whar de ole cuss could fine a piece o' cheap lan", dat would do ter raise niggers on an' pay for bringin' up, at de same time. He was a powerful smart man in his day, wuz ole Kunnel Potem Desmit; but he speshully did beat anythin' a findin' names fer niggers. I reckon now, ef he'd 'a hed forty thousan' cullud folks, men an' wimmen, dar wouldn't ha' been no two on 'em hevin' de same name. Dat's what folks used ter say 'bout him, ennyhow. Dey sed he used ter say ez how he wasn't gwine ter hey his niggers mixed up wid nobody else's namin', an'

he wouldn't no mo' 'low ob one black feller callin' ob anudder by enny nickname ner nothin' ub dat kine, on one o' his plantations, dan he would ob his takin' a mule, nary bit. Dey du say dat when he used ter buy a boy er gal de berry fust ting he wuz gwine ter du wuz jes ter hev 'em up an' gib 'em a new name, out 'n out, an' a clean suit ob close ter 'member it by; an' den, jes by way ob a little 'freshment, he used ter make de oberseer gib 'em ten er twenty good licks, jes ter make sure ob der fergittin' de ole un dat dey'd hed afo'. Dat's what my mammy sed, an' she allers 'clar'd dat tow'rd de las' she nebber could 'member what she was at de fus' no more'n ef she hed'nt been de same gal.

"All he wanted ter know 'bout a nigger wuz jes his name, an' dey say he could tell straight away when an' whar he wuz born, whar he'd done lived, an' all 'bout him. He war a powerful man in der way ob names, shore. Some on 'em wuz right quare, but den agin mos' all on 'em wuz right good, an' it war powerful handy hevin' no two on 'em alike. I've heard tell dat a heap o' folks wuz a takin' up wid his notion, an' I reckon dat ef de s'rrender hed only stood off long 'nuff dar wouldn't 'a been nary two niggers in de whole State hevin' de same names. Dat *would* hev been handy, all roun'!

"When dat come, though, old Mahs'r's plan warn't nowhar. Lor' bress my soul, how de names did come a-brilin' roun'! I'd done got kinder used ter mine, hevin' bed it so long an' nebber knowin' myself by any udder, so't I didn't like ter change. 'Sides dat, I couldn't see no use. I'd allers got 'long well 'nuff wid it—all on'y jes once, an' dat ar wuz

so long ago I'd nigh about forgot it. Dat showed what a debblish cute plan dat uv ole Mahs'r's was, though.

"Lemme see, dat er wuz de fus er secon' year atter I wuz a plow-boy. Hit wuz right in de height ob de season, an' Marse War'—dat was de oberseer—he sent me to der Cou't House ob an ebenin' to do some sort ob arrant for him. When I was a comin' home, jes about an hour ob sun, I rides up wid a sort o' hard-favored man in a gig, an' he looks at me an' at de hoss, when I goes ter ride by, mighty sharp like; an' fust I knows he axes me my name; an' I tole him. An' den he axes whar I lib; an' I tole him, "On de Knapp-o'-Reeds plantation." Den he say,

"'Who you b'long to, ennyhow, boy?'

"An' I tole him 'Ole Marse Potem Desmit, sah'—jes so like.

"Den he sez 'Who's a oberseein' dar now?'

"An' I sez, 'Marse Si War', sah?'

"Den he sez, 'An' how do all de ban's on Knapp-o Reeds git 'long wid ole Marse Potem an' Marse Si War'?'

"An' I sez, 'Oh, we gits 'long tol'able well wid Marse War', sah.'

"An' he sez, 'How yer likes old Marse Potem?'

"An' I sez, jes fool like, 'We don't like him at all, sah.'

"An' he sez, 'Why?'

"An' I sez, 'Dunno sah.'

"An' he sez, 'Don't he feed?'

"An' I sez, 'Tol'able, I spose.'

"An' he sez, 'Whip much?'

"An' I sez, 'Mighty little, sah.'

"An' he sez, 'Work hard?'

"An' I sez, 'Yes, moderate, sah.' "An' he sez, 'Eber seed him?'

"An' I sez, 'Not ez I knows on, sah.'

"An' he sez, 'What for don't yer like him, den?'

"An' I sez, 'Dunno, on'y jes' kase he's sech a gran' rascal.'

"Den he larf fit ter kill, an' say, 'Dat's so, dat's so, boy.' Den he take out his pencil an' write a word er two on a slip o' paper an' say,

"'H'yer, boy, yer gibs dat ter Marse Si War', soon ez yer gits home. D'yer heah?'

"I tole him, 'Yes, sah,' an' comes on home an' gibs dat ter Marse
Si. Quick ez he look at it he say, 'Whar you git dat, boy? 'An' when
I tole him he sez, 'You know who dat is? Dat's old Potem Desmit!
What you say to him, you little fool?'

"Den I tell Marse War' all 'bout it, an' he lay down in de yard an' larf fit ter kill. All de same he gib me twenty licks 'cordin' ter de orders on dat little dam bit o' paper. An' I nebber tink o' dat widout cussin', sence.

"Dat ar, now am de only time I ebber fault my name. Now what I want ter change it fer, er what I want ob enny mo'? I don't want 'em. An' I tell 'em so, ebbery time too, but dey 'jes fo'ce em on me like, an' what'll I do'bout it, I dunno. H'yer I'se got—lemme see—one—two—tree! Fo' God, I don' know how many names I hez got! I'm dod-dinged now ef I know who I be ennyhow. Ef ennybody ax me I'd jes hev ter go back ter ole Mahs'r's name an' stop, kase I swar I wouldn't know which ob de udders ter pick an' chuse from.

"I specs its all 'long o' freedom, though I can't see why a free nigger needs enny mo' name dan the same one hed in ole slave times. Mus' be, though. I mind now dat all de pore white folks hez got some two tree names, but I allus thought dat wuz 'coz dey hedn't nuffin' else ter call dere can. Must be a free feller needs mo' name, somehow. Ef I keep on I reckon I'll git enuff atter a while. H'yer it's gwine on two year only sence de s'rrender, an' I'se got tree ob 'em sartain!"

The speaker was a colored man, standing before his log-house in the evening of a day in June. His wife was the only listener to the monologue. He had been examining a paper which was sealed and stamped with official formality, and which had started him upon the train of thought he had pursued. The question he was trying in vain to answer was only the simplest and easiest of the thousand strange queries which freedom had so recently propounded to him and his race.

CHAPTER II.

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THE FONT.

Knapp-of-reeds was the name of a plantation which was one of the numerous possessions of P. Desmit, Colonel and Esquire, of the county of Horsford, in the northernmost of those States which good Queen Caroline was fortunate enough to have designated as memorials of her existence.

The plantation was just upon that wavy line which separates the cotton region of the east from the tobacco belt that sweeps down the pleasant ranges of the Piedmont region, east of the Blue Appalachians. Or, to speak more correctly, the plantation was in that indeterminate belt which neither of the great staples could claim exclusively as its own—that delectable land where every conceivable product of the temperate zone grows, if not in its rankest luxuriance, at least in perfection and abundance. Tobacco on the hillsides, corn upon the wide bottoms, cotton on the gray uplands, and wheat, oats, fruits, and grasses everywhere. Five hundred acres of hill and bottom, forest and field, with what was termed the Island, consisting of a hundred more, which had never been overflowed in the century of cultivation it had known, constituted a snug and valuable plantation. It had been the seat of an old family once, but extravagant living and neglect of its resources had compelled its sale, and it had passed into the hands of its present owner, of whose vast possessions it formed an insignificant part.

Colonel Desmit was one of the men who applied purely business principles to the opportunities which the South afforded in the olden time, following everything to its logical conclusion, and measuring every opportunity by its money value. He was not of an ancient family. Indeed, the paternal line stopped short with his own father, and the maternal one could only show one more link, and then became lost in malodorous tradition which hung about an old mud-daubed log-cabin on the most poverty-stricken portion of Nubbin Ridge.

There was a rumor that the father had a left-handed kinship with the Brutons, a family of great note in the public annals of the State. He certainly showed qualities which tended to confirm this tradition, and abilities which entitled him to be considered the peer of the best of that family, whose later generations were by no means the equals of former ones. Untiring and unscrupulous, Mr. Peter Smith rose from the position of a nameless son of an unknown father, to be as overseer for one of the wealthiest proprietors of that region, and finally, by a not unusual turn of fortune's wheel, became the owner of a large part of his employer's estates. Thrifty in all things, he married in middle life, so well as nearly to double the fortune then acquired, and before his death had become one of the wealthiest men in his county. He was always hampered by a lack of education. He could read little and write less. In his later days he was appointed a Justice of the Peace, and was chosen one of the County Court, or "Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions," as it was technically called. These honors were so pleasant to him that he determined to give his only son a name which should commemorate this event. The boy was, therefore, christened after the opening words of his commission of the peace, and grew to manhood bearing the name Potestatem Dedimus [Footnote: Potestatem dedimus: "We give thee power, etc." The initial words of the clause conferring jurisdiction upon officers, in the old forms of judicial commissions. This name is fact, not fancy.] Smith. This son was educated with care—the shrewd father feeling his own need—but was early instilled with his father's greed for gain, and the necessity for unusual exertion if he would

achieve equal position with the old families who were to be his rivals.

The young man proved a worthy disciple of his father. He married, it is true, without enhancing his fortune; but he secured what was worth almost as much for the promotion of his purposes as if he had doubled his belongings. Aware of the ill-effects of so recent a bar sinister in his armorial bearings, he sought in marriage Miss Bertha Bellamy, of Belleville, in the State of Virginia, who united in her azure veins at least a few drops of the blood of all the first families of that fine-bred aristocracy, from Pocahontas's days until her own. The *role* of the gentleman had been too much for the male line of the Bellamys to sustain. Horses and hounds and cards and high living had gradually eaten down their once magnificent patrimony, until pride and good blood and poverty were the only dowry that the females could command. Miss Bertha, having already arrived at the age of discretion, found that to match this against the wealth of young Potestatem Dedimus Smith was as well as she could hope to do, and accepted him upon condition that the vulgar *Smith* should be changed to some less democratic name.

The one paternal and two maternal ancestors had not made the very common surname peculiarly sacred to the young man, so the point was yielded; and by considerable persistency on the part of the young wife, "P. D. SMITH" was transformed without much trouble into "P. DESMIT," before the administrator had concluded the settlement of his father's estate.

The vigor with which the young man devoted himself to affairs and the remarkable success which soon began to attend his exertions diverted attention from the name, and before he had reached middle life he was known over almost half the State as "Colonel Desmit," "Old Desmit," or "Potem Desmit," according to the degree of familiarity or respect desired to be displayed. Hardly anybody remembered and none alluded to the fact that the millionaire of Horsford was only two removes from old Sal Smith of Nubbin Ridge. On the other hand the rumor that he was in some mysterious manner remotely akin to the Brutons was industriously circulated by the younger members of that high-bred house, and even "the Judge," who was of about the same age as Colonel Desmit, had been heard more than once to call him "Cousin." These things affected Colonel Desmit but little. He had set himself to improve his father's teachings and grow rich. He seemed to have the true Midas touch. He added acre to acre, slave to slave, business to business, until his possessions were scattered from the mountains to the sea, and especially extended on both sides the border line in the Piedmont region where he had been bred. It embraced every form of business known to the community of which he was a part, from the cattle ranges of the extreme west to the fisheries of the farthest east. He made his possessions a sort of self-supporting commonwealth in themselves. The cotton which he grew on his eastern farms was manufactured at his own factory, and distributed to his various plantations to be made into clothing for his slaves. Wheat and corn and meat, raised upon some of his plantations, supplied others

devoted to non-edible staples. The tobacco grown on the Hyco and other plantations in that belt was manufactured at his own establishment, supplied his eastern laborers and those which wrought in the pine woods to the southward at the production of naval supplies. He had realized the dream of his own life and the aspiration of his father, the overseer, and had become one of the wealthiest men in the State. But he attended to all this himself. Every overseer knew that he was liable any day or night to receive a visit from the untiring owner of all this wealth, who would require an instant accounting for every bit of the property under his charge. Not only the presence and condition of every slave, mule, horse or other piece of stock must be accounted for, but the manner of its employment stated. He was an inflexible disciplinarian, who gave few orders, hated instructions, and only asked results. It was his custom to place an agent in charge of a business without directions, except to make it pay. His only care was to see that his property did not depreciate, and that the course adopted by the agent was one likely to produce good results. So long as this was the case he was satisfied. He never interfered, made no suggestions, found no fault. As soon as he became dissatisfied the agent was removed and another substituted. This was done without words or controversy, and it was a well-known rule that a man once discharged from such a trust could never enter his employ again. For an overseer to be dismissed by Colonel Desmit was to forfeit all chance for employment in that region, since it was looked upon as a certificate either of incapacity or untrustworthiness.

Colonel Desmit was especially careful in regard to his slaves. His father had early shown him that no branch of business was, or could be, half so profitable as the rearing of slaves for market.

"A healthy slave woman," the thrifty father had been accustomed to say, "will yield a thousand per cent upon her value, while she needs less care and involves less risk than any other species of property." The son, with a broader knowledge, had carried his father's instructions to more accurate and scientific results. He found that the segregation of large numbers of slaves upon a single plantation was not favorable either to the most rapid multiplication or economy of sustenance. He had carefully determined the fact that plantations of moderate extent, upon the high, well-watered uplands of the Piedmont belt, were the most advantageous locations that could be found for the rearing of slaves. Such plantations, largely worked by female slaves, could be made to return a small profit on the entire investment, without at all taking into account the increase of the human stock. This was, therefore, so much added profit. From careful study and observation he had deduced a specific formulary by which he measured the rate of gain. With a well-selected force, two thirds of which should be females, he calculated that with proper care such plantations could be made to pay, year by year, an interest of five per cent on the first cost, and, in addition, double the value of the working force every eight years. This conclusion he had arrived at from scientific study of the rates of mortality and increase, and in settling upon it he had cautiously left a large margin for contingencies. He was not

accustomed to talk about his business, but when questioned as to his uniform success and remarkable prosperity, always attributed it to a system which he had inexorably followed, and which had never failed to return to him at least twenty per cent. per annum upon every dollar he had invested.

So confident was he in regard to the success of this plan that he became a large but systematic borrower of money at the legal rate of six per cent, taking care that his maturing liabilities should, at no time, exceed a certain proportion of his available estate. By this means his wealth increased with marvelous rapidity.

The success of his system depended, however, entirely upon the care bestowed upon his slaves. They were never neglected. Though he had so many that of hundreds of them he did not know even the faces, he gave the closest attention to their hygienic condition, especially that of the women, who were encouraged by every means to bear children. It was a sure passport to favor with the master and the overseer: tasks were lightened; more abundant food provided; greater liberty enjoyed; and on the birth of a child a present of some sort was certain to be given the mother.

The one book which Colonel Desmit never permitted anybody else to keep or see was the register of his slaves. He had invented for himself an elaborate system by which in a moment he could ascertain every element of the value of each of his more than a thousand slaves at the date of his last visitation or report. When an overseer was put in charge of a plantation he was given a list of the slaves assigned to it, by name and number, and was required to report every month the condition of each slave during the month

previous, as to health and temper, and also the labor in which the same had been employed each day. It was only as to the condition of the slaves that the owner gave explicit directions to his head-men. "Mighty few people know how to take care of a nigger," he was wont to say; and as he made the race a study and looked to them for his profits, he was attentive to their condition.

Among the requirements of his system was one that each slave born upon his plantations should be named only by himself; and this was done only on personal inspection. Upon a visit to a plantation, therefore, one of his special duties always was to inspect, name, and register all slave children who had been born to his estate since his previous visitation.

It was in the summer of 1840 that a traveler drove into the grove in front of the house at Knapp-of-Reeds, in the middle of a June afternoon, and uttered the usual halloo. He was answered after a moment's delay by a colored woman, who came out from the kitchen and exclaimed,

"Who's dah?"

It was evident at once that visitors were not frequent at Knapp-of-Reeds.

"Where's Mr. Ware?" asked the stranger.

"He's done gone out in de new-ground terbacker, long wid de han's," answered the woman.

"Where is the new-ground this year?" repeated the questioner.

"Jes' down on the p'int 'twixt de branch an' de Hyco," she replied.

"Anybody you can send for him?"

"Wal, thar mout be some shaver dat's big enough to go, but Marse War's dat keerful ter please Marse Desmit dat he takes 'em all outen de field afore dey can well toddle," said the woman doubtfully.

"Well, come and take my horse," said he, as he began to descend from his gig, "and send for Mr. Ware to come up at once."

The woman came forward doubtfully and took the horse by the bit, while the traveler alighted. No sooner did he turn fully toward her than her face lighted up with a smile, and she said,

"Wal, dar, ef dat a'n't Marse Desmit hisself, I do believe! How d'ye do, Mahs'r?" and the woman dropped a courtesy.

"I'm very well, thank ye, Lorency, an' glad to see you looking so peart," he responded pleasantly. "How's Mr. Ware and the people? All well, I hope."

"All tol'able, Mahs'r, thank ye."

"Well, tie the horse, and get me some dinner, gal. I haven't eaten since I left home."

"La sakes!" said the woman in a tone of commiseration, though she had no idea whether it was twenty or forty miles he had driven since his breakfast.

The man who sat upon the porch and waited for the coming of Mr. Silas Ware, his overseer, was in the prime of life, of florid complexion, rugged habit, short stubbly hair—thick and bristling, that stood close and even on his round, heavy head from a little way above the beetling brows well down upon the bull-like neck which joined but hardly separated the massive head and herculean trunk. This hair, now almost white, had been a yellowish red, a hue which

still showed in the eyebrows and in the stiff beard which was allowed to grow beneath the angle of his massive jaw, the rest of his face being clean shaven. The eyes were deep-sunk and of a clear, cold blue. His mouth broad, with firm, solid lips. Dogged resolution, unconquerable will, cold-blooded selfishness, and a keen hog-cunning showed in his face, while his short, stout form—massive but not fleshy—betrayed a capacity to endure fatigue which few men could rival.

"How d'ye, Mr. Ware?" he said as that worthy came striding in from the new-ground nervously chewing a mouthful of home-made twist, which he had replenished several times since leaving the field, without taking the precaution to provide stowage for the quantity he was taking aboard.

"How d'ye, Colonel?" said Ware uneasily.

"Reckon you hardly expected me to day?" continued Desmit, watching him closely. "No, I dare say not. They hardly ever do. Fact is, I rarely ever know myself long enough before to send word."

He laughed heartily, for his propensity for dropping in unawares upon his agents was so well known that he enjoyed their confusion almost as much as he valued the surprise as a means of ascertaining their attention to his interests. Ware was one of his most trusted lieutenants, however, and everything that he had ever seen or heard satisfied him of the man's faithfulness. So he made haste to relieve him from embarrassment, for the tall, awkward, shambling fellow was perfectly overwhelmed.

"It's a long time since I've been to see you, Mr. Ware—almost a year. There's mighty few men I'd let run a plantation that long without looking after them. Your reports have been very correct, and the returns of your work very satisfactory. I hope the stock and hands are in good condition?"

"I must say, Colonel Desmit," responded Ware, gathering confidence, "though perhaps I oughtn't ter say it myself, that I've never seen 'em lookin' better. 'Pears like everything hez been jest about ez favorable fer hands an' stock ez one could wish. The spring's work didn't seem ter worry the stock a mite, an' when the new feed come on there was plenty on't, an' the very best quality. So they shed off ez fine ez ever you see ennything in yer life, an' hev jest been a doin' the work in the crop without turnin' a hair."

"Glad to hear it, Mr. Ware," said Desmit encouragingly.

"And the hands," continued Ware, "have jest been in prime condition. We lost Horion, as I reported to you in—lemme see, February, I reckon—along o' rheumatism which he done cotch a runnin' away from that Navigation Company that you told me to send him to work for."

"Yes, I know. You told him to come home if they took him into
Virginia, as I directed, I suppose."

"Certainly, sir," said Ware; "an' ez near ez I can learn they took him off way down below Weldon somewheres, an' he lit out to come home jest at the time of the February 'fresh.' He had to steal his way afoot, and was might'ly used up when he got here, and died some little time afterward."

"Yes. The company will have to pay a good price for him. Wasn't a better nor sounder nigger on the river," said Desmit.

"That ther warn't," replied Ware. "The rest has all been well. Lorency had a bad time over her baby, but she's 'round again as peart as ever." "So I see. And the crops?"

"The best I've ever seed sence I've been here, Colonel. Never had such a stand of terbacker, and the corn looks prime. Knapp-of-Reeds has been doin' better 'n' better ever sence I've knowed it; but she's jest outdoin' herself this year."

"Haven't you got anything to drink, Ware?"

"I beg your *parding*, Colonel; I was that flustered I done forgot my manners altogether," said Ware apologetically. "I hev got a drap of apple that they say is right good for this region, and a trifle of corn that ain't nothing to brag on, though it does for the country right well."

Ware set out the liquor with a bowl of sugar from his sideboard as he spoke, and called to the kitchen for a glass and water.

"That makes me think," said Desmit. "Here, you Lorency, bring me that portmanty from the gig."

When it was brought he unlocked it and took out a bottle, which he first held up to the light and gazed tenderly through, then drew the cork and smelled of its contents, shook his head knowingly, and then handed it to Ware, who went through the same performance very solemnly.

"Here, gal," said Desmit sharply, "bring us another tumbler. Now, Mr. Ware," said he unctuously when it had been brought, "allow me, sir, to offer you some brandy

which is thirty-five years old—pure French brandy, sir. Put it in my portmanty specially for you, and like to have forgot it at the last. Just try it, man."

Ware poured himself a dram, and swallowed it with a gravity which would have done honor to a more solemn occasion, after bowing low to his principal and saying earnestly, "Colonel, your very good health."

"And now," said Desmit, "have the hands and stock brought up while I eat my dinner, if you please. I have a smart bit of travel before me yet to-day."

The overseer's horn was at Ware's lips in a moment, and before the master had finished his dinner every man, woman, and child on the plantation was in the yard, and every mule and horse was in the barn-lot ready to be brought out for his inspection.

The great man sat on the back porch, and, calling up the slaves one by one, addressed some remark to each, gave every elder a quarter and every youngster a dime, until he came to the women. The first of these was Lorency, the strapping cook, who had improved the time since her master's coming to make herself gay with her newest gown and a flaming new turban. She came forward pertly, with a young babe upon her arm.

"Well, Lorency, Mr. Ware says you have made me a present since I was here?"

"Yah! yah! Marse Desmit, dat I hab! Jes' de finest little nigger boy yer ebber sot eyes on. Jes' you look at him now," she continued, holding up her brighteyed pickaninny. "Ebber you see de beat ub dat? Reg'lar ten pound, an' wuff two hundred dollars dis bressed minnit."

"Is that it, Lorency?" said Desmit, pointing to the child. "Who ever saw such a thunder-cloud?"

There was a boisterous laugh at the master's joke from the assembled crowd. Nothing abashed, the good-natured mother replied, with ready wit,

"Dat so, Marse Kunnel. He's *brack*, he is. None ob yer bleached out yaller sort of coffee-cullud nigger 'bout *him*. De rale ole giniwine kind, dat a coal make a white mark on. Yah I yah! what yer gwine ter name him, Mahs'r? Gib him a good name, now, none o' yer common mean ones, but jes' der bes' one yer got in yer book;" for Colonel Desmit was writing in a heavy clasped book which rested on a light stand beside him.

"What is it, Mahs'r?"

"Nimbus," replied the master.

"Wh—what?" asked the mother. "Say dat agin', won't yer, Mahs'r?"

"Nimbus—*Nimbus*," repeated Desmit.

"Wal, I swan ter gracious!" exclaimed the mother. "Ef dat don't beat! H'yer! little—what's yer name? Jes' ax yer Mahs'r fer a silver dollar ter pay yer fer hevin' ter tote dat er name 'roun' ez long ez yer lives."

She held the child toward its godfather and owner as she spoke, amid a roar of laughter from her fellow-servants. Desmit good-naturedly threw a dollar into the child's lap, for which Lorency courtesied, and then held out her hand.

"What do you want now, gal?" asked Desmit.

"Yer a'n't a gwine ter take sech a present ez dis from a pore cullud gal an' not so much ez giv' her someting ter remember hit by, is yer?" she asked with arch persistency.

"There, there," said he laughing, as he gave her another dollar.

"Go on, or I shan't have a cent left."

"All right, Marse Kunnel. Thank ye, Mahs'r," she said, as she walked off in triumph.

"Oh, hold on," said Desmit; "how old is it, Lorency?"

"Jes' sebben weeks ole dis bressed day, Mahs'r," said the proud mother as she vanished into the kitchen to boast of her good-fortune in getting two silver dollars out of Marse Desmit instead of the one customarily given by him on such occasions. And so the record was made up in the brass-clasped book of Colonel Potestatem Desmit, the only baptismal register of the colored man who twenty-six years afterward was wondering at the names which were seeking him against his will.

697—Nimbus—of Lorency—Male—April 24th, 1840—Sound—Knapp-of-Reeds.

It was a queer baptismal entry, but a slave needed no more—indeed did not need that. It was not given for his sake, but only for the convenience of his godfather should the chattel ever seek to run away, or should it become desirable to exchange him for some other form of value. There was nothing harsh or brutal or degraded about it. Mr. Desmit was doing, in a business way, what the law not only allowed but encouraged him to do, and doing it because it paid.

CHAPTER III.

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THE JUNONIAN RITE.

"Marse Desmit?"

"Well?"

"Ef yer please, Mahs'r, I wants ter marry?"

"The devil you do!"

"Yes, sah, if you please, sah."

"What's your name?"

"Nimbus."

"So: you're the curer at Knapp-of-Reeds, I believe?"

"Yes, sah." "That last crop was well done. Mr. Ware says you're one of the best hands he has ever known."

"Thank ye, Mahs'r," with a bow and scrape.

"What's the gal's name?"

"Lugena, sah."

"Yes, Vicey's gal—smart gal, too. Well, as I've about concluded to keep you both—if you behave yourselves, that is, as well as you've been doing—I don't know as there's any reason why you shouldn't take up with her."

"Thank ye, Mahs'r," very humbly, but very joyfully.

The speakers were the black baby whom Desmit had christened Nimbus, grown straight and strong, and just turning his first score on the scale of life, and Colonel Desmit, grown a little older, a little grayer, a little fuller, and a great deal richer—if only the small cloud of war just rising on the horizon would blow over and leave his possessions intact. He believed it would, but he was a wise man and a cautious one, and he did not mean to be caught napping if it did not.

Nimbus had come from Knapp-of-Reeds to a plantation twenty miles away, upon a pass from Mr. Ware, on the errand his conversation disclosed. He was a fine figure of a man despite his ebon hue, and the master, looking at him, very naturally noted his straight, strong back, square shoulders, full, round neck, and shapely, well-balanced head. His face was rather heavy—grave, it would have been called if he had been white—and his whole figure and appearance showed an earnest and thoughtful temperament. He was as far from that volatile type which, through the mimicry of burnt-cork minstrels and the exaggerations of caricaturists, as well as the works of less disinterested portrayers of the race, have come to represent the negro to the unfamiliar mind, as the typical Englishman is from the Punch-and-Judy figures which amuse him. The slave Nimbus in a white skin would have been considered a man of great physical power and endurance, earnest purpose, and quiet, self-reliant character. Such, in truth, he was. Except the whipping he had received when but a lad, by his master's orders, no blow had ever been struck him. Indeed, blows were rarely stricken on the plantations of Colonel Desmit; for while he required work, obedience, and discipline, he also fed well and clothed warmly, and allowed no overseer to use the lash for his own gratification, or except for good cause. It was well known that nothing would more surely secure dismissal from his service than the free use of the whip. Not that he thought there was anything wrong or inhuman about the whipping-post, but it was entirely contrary to his policy. To keep a slave comfortable, healthy, and good-natured, according to Colonel Desmit's

notion, was to increase his value, and thereby add to his owner's wealth. He knew that Nimbus was a very valuable slave. He had always been attentive to his tasks, was a prime favorite with his overseer, and had already acquired the reputation of being one of the most expert and trusty men that the whole region could furnish, for a tobacco crop. Every step in the process of growing and curing—from the preparation of the seed-bed to the burning of the coal-pit, and gauging the heat required in the mud-daubed barn for different kinds of leaf and in every stage of cure—was perfectly familiar to him, and he could always be trusted to see that it was properly and opportunely done. This fact, together with his quiet and contented disposition, added very greatly to his value. The master regarded him, therefore, with great satisfaction. He was willing to gratify him in any reasonable way, and so, after some rough jokes at his expense, wrote out his marriage-license in these words, in pencil, on the blank leaf of a notebook:

MR. WARE: Nimbus and Lugena want to take up with each other. You have a pretty full force now, but I have decided to keep them and sell some of the old ones—say Vicey and Lorency. Neither have had any children for several years, and are yet strong, healthy women, who will bring nearly as much as the girl Lugena. I shall make up a gang to go South in charge of Winburn next week. You may send them over to Louisburg on Monday. You had better give Nimbus the empty house near the tobacco-barn. We need a trusty man there. Respectfully, P. DESMIT.

So Nimbus went home happy, and on the Saturday night following, in accordance with this authority, with much mirth

and clamor, and with the half-barbarous and half-Christian ceremony—which the law did not recognize; which bound neither parties, nor master nor stranger; which gave Nimbus no rights and Lugena no privileges; which neither sanctified the union nor protected its offspring—the slave "boy" and "gal" "took up with each other," and began that farce which the victims of slavery were allowed to call "marriage." The sole purpose of permitting it was to raise children. The offspring were sometimes called "families," even in grave legal works; but there was no more of the family right of protection, duty of sustenance and care, or any other of the sacred elements which make the family a type of heaven, than attends the propagation of any other species of animate property. When its purpose had been served, the voice of the master effected instant divorce. So, on the Monday morning thereafter the mothers of the so-called bride and groom, widowed by the inexorable demands of the master's interests, left husband and children, and those fair fields which represented all that they knew of the paradise which we call home, and with tears and groans started for that living tomb, the ever-devouring and insatiable "far South."

CHAPTER IV.

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MARS MEDDLES.