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THE CONSTITUTION--THE UNION--AND THE ENFORCEMENT OF THE LAWS.

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CHAPTER I.

The Cape Fear bank was one of the old and solid institutions of the South for many years prior to the late civil war; in fact, its stability was not only proverbial in the old town of Wilmington, but throughout the entire country.

Its president, Alvin DeRosette, was a man who added to the youth of the rising generation as one whose career was to be emulated.

The bank president was getting well in years, in 1857; nor was he destined to see the termination of that year, as the reader will soon learn.

On the 15th of August, and in vigorous health, save from a rheumatic affection of long-standing—he had in the manner of former occasions celebrated his birthday—this time his 67th—by having gathered round the festive board at Oak Hall a large number of his personal friends.

To them it was a pleasure to drink to the toast that had run in almost twenty previous years, "The Cape Fear Bank," and that which pertained to it was dear to his heart—particularly so was its president, whom he had helped to elect a quarter of a century before, and under whose management the institution had flourished.

That the bank might flourish until the end came was the ardent desire of Uncle Alvin.

That Alvin DeRosette and himself might live to see the cash capital of the concern a round million dollars was his earnest wish—so in his toast he always coupled Alvin and the bank together.

He felt that he should have included his own name, as he was virtually a part of the bank, and that Alvin and Alvin should round up his toast in a satisfactory manner, so his words on these occasions were these: "The Cape Fear bank and its president; may they live long and prosper."

"And may the bank's worthy attorney live long to guide them clear of breakers," were the words added by Uncle Alvin.

Now this was to be Alvin's last toast at midday on the 15th of August, 1857.

At 3 o'clock on the 22d, only seven days later, all that remained mortal of Alvin DeRosette was consigned to the grave; and now it will be necessary to revert to the 18th day of August, the third day following that of Alvin DeRosette's 67th birthday.

The weather was intensely warm, and the banker was seated in an armchair near an open window in his private office at the bank. He held in one hand a folded document. It was his will, and had been drawn six months before this time.

"Strangely," he said suddenly, "both the witnesses to this document dead; sailed for Europe on the Goshmore and went within sight of the British coast.

Only thirty saved, if I remember, of over two hundred souls, and poor Loyd and Elliot were not among the thirty."

"I should have other signatures now, as witness to my will; but I have DeRosette in a friend to-morrow, and have him sign—but for that matter, there was no particular necessity of the document, anyway. Where there is an only child, and the mother dead, there can be no question as to who would inherit; but then it is better."

He wished also to leave no question as to what his intentions were regarding Herman Craven. I had no desire to leave him a fortune. True, he is my nephew; but I have left him fully enough to dissipate, and enough, if he has the disposition, to form the nucleus of a fortune."

"Strange," sister Mattle would marry Stephen Craven when the whole family told her how worthy he was, and pleaded with her to receive him. When she would not listen; she became the wife of a blackguard and a gambler, and in three short years died of a broken heart, leaving behind a child—who has grown up an exact counterpart of his father. Now, if either had died when Herman was an infant, I might have had him; but coming to me with the information that his father was dead, at twenty-two years of age, his character formed, and it a treacherous one if I am a judge, I have felt that I was standing over a mine of sin. And yet he has been there these years, never ill, never good, well, but he is scheming—scheming, sir!"

"Well, I can watch him while I live. The death of Toombs made it necessary that I name a new cashier; I named my nephew, and have regretted it ever since. Every dollar of his salary goes, and I am told he is hand-in-glove with a gambler, etc. I have done my duty by him in my own course, if he inspires more confidence by his conduct, I may add a cushion in the future."

"Fair will and testament! So advanced and wise, I shall probably outline him. And yet he has been there these years, never ill, never good, well, but he is scheming—scheming, sir!"

"What is it, Duke?"

"Mars Alvin," replied a coal black negro, who had opened the door between the reception room of the bank and the banker's private office. "Young Mars Robert Campbell would like to see you."

"Ah," ejaculated the banker, and an amazement filled over his features.

Herman Campbell was of near Herman's size—tall, well formed and of athletic build, fair complexion, sandy hair and mustache, and deep blue eyes. There was an unmistakable air about him that proclaimed him a descendant of an aristocratic family, and he was the son of the man who was assassinated by the son of the man who had killed him.

"And under no conditions would she become your wife should I be called away," thought the banker as the young man left his presence. "She has a just appreciation of you, if I mistake not, and besides, I think her heart is in the keeping of her father."

"She is," was the answer, "for you would not to-day be the master of this bank; but you have been warned. Now, you have been warned. You are an inmate of my own house; in a manner a companion of my daughter and myself when there. My roof shall not shelter a gambler, or a trickster. You are young. I have placed you where you have every opportunity of proving yourself a man; but under no conditions could you wed my daughter. That is all."

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