

CHAPTER I

THE two o'clock express from Redlands to Forestville, Georgia, had been proceeding with the languid placidity of the river whose banks it skirted for more than two hours. But, unlike the river, it had stopped frequently; sometimes at recognised stations and villages, sometimes at the apparition of straw-hatted and linen-coated natives in the solitude of pine woods, where, after a decent interval of cheery conversation with the conductor and engineer, it either took the stranger on board, or relieved him of his parcel, letter, basket, or even the verbal message with which he was charged. Much of the way lay through pine-barren and swampy woods which had never been cleared or cultivated; much through decayed settlements and ruined villages that had remained unchanged since the War of the Rebellion, now three years past. There were vestiges of the severity of a former military occupation; the blackened timbers of railway bridges still unrepaired; and along the line of a certain memorable march,