

# THE VINE OF SIBMAH

## CHAPTER I

"NICHOLAS DEXTER: Stand to the bar."

The voice of the crier rang through the high-raftered court room, like the crying of a trumpet — fit summons to rouse a soldier from his meditation. I sprang up sharply, and fixed my eyes upon the bench.

The Chief Justice sat between two puisne judges, and peered at me with little eyes which shone in his swollen countenance. With his left hand he grasped the false hair which surmounted his furrowed brow, as if the better to fix his gaze; and, to support his heavy frame, he placed his elbows upon the narrow table which held his writing materials.

"Set the prisoner to the bar," he cried, with the temper of a dog.

I advanced through the throng of gazers, and long-robed men of the law, until I stood at the bar, and met my judges face to face. Silence was made.

"What is your name, and what is your quality?" the Chief Justice enquired, as he bent his brows upon me.

"You have heard my name. If you demand my quality, I am called Captain, because I was captain of Troop Sixty-Seven, Company of the Ironsides, raised in Fen Drayton, in the Hundred of Papworth, for the Eastern Association and the Army of the Parliament."