

THE MERCHANT OF MOUNT VERNON

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The merchant of Mount Vernon by John Leonard Smith

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JOHN LEONARD SMITH

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MOUNT VERNON**

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By
John Leonard Smith

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CALIFORNIA

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UNIVERSITY
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Preface

The main object of this book is to reunite a mother and daughter, if the mother is still living.

The mother left a home of luxury in England to share her lot with a poor Englishman. The marriage was bitterly opposed by the parents of the lady, who cast her off, and together the pair came to Toronto, Canada, and a short time later a baby girl was born.

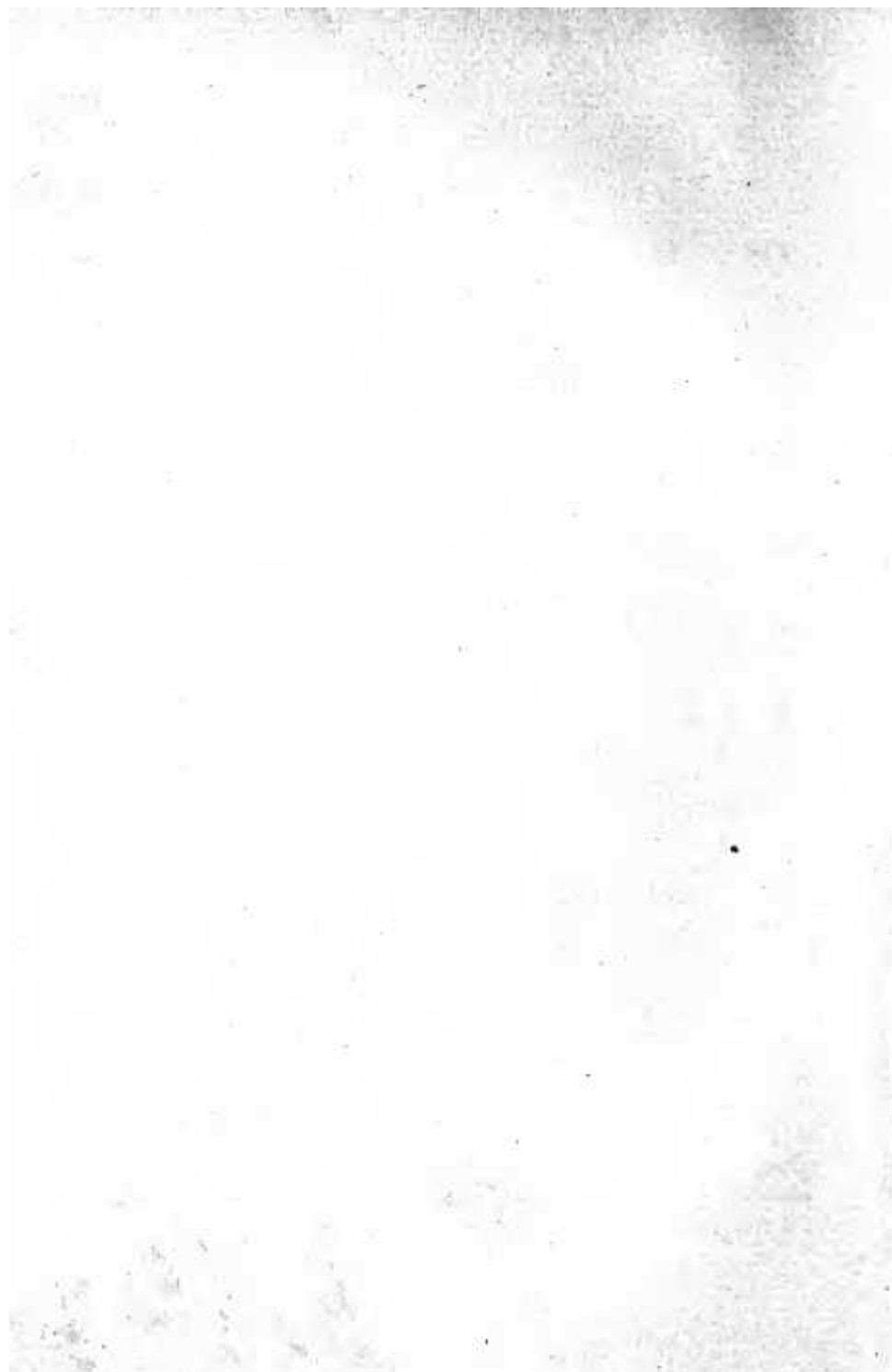
The young husband went on the road as a commercial traveler, and was killed in a railway wreck. The mother, reared in the lap of luxury, was unable to care for herself and babe, and left her at the home of a wealthy lady, who had given her employment on several occasions.

She never returned for the babe, and her fate is unknown.

Full information concerning names, dates, watch and locket may be obtained by applying to the author,

JOHN LEONARD SMITH.

Los Angeles, California.



THE MERCHANT OF MT. VERNON.

CHAPTER I.

Off for the War

James Vernon was the leading merchant and president of the Savings Bank of Mt. Vernon, Michigan. At the time the principal events of this tale began to take place it was the chief lumber center of the lower peninsula, and had a population of about six thousand and five hundred souls. The supplies of all the lumber camps in the central part of the State were purchased there, and it bore the reputation of being the most important lumber and commercial city of its size in the lower peninsula.

Mr. Vernon was a shrewd, far-seeing man, who went there when the place was a forest, and by dint of hard work and perseverance had changed the place from a wilderness of trees to a bustling little city, with noisy mill wheels and screaming steam whistles.

The city is situated on the banks of the Chippewa River, about seventy-five miles west of Saginaw Bay.

The river at this point forms over a mile of rapids, and Mr. Vernon's practical eye saw the excellent opportunities to use the water power for manufacturing purposes in the future, and, with this end in view, purchased six hundred and eighty acres of land bordering on the river front, which afterward became the site of Mt. Vernon.

It is here quite appropriate to give the reader a short history of James Vernon's early life. Born in Culpepper, Virginia, in 1843, he was a descendant of one of the oldest and proudest families of that grand old State noted for its beautiful women and chivalrous men.

His father used to point with pride to the records of his illustrious ancestors and their deeds of heroism in the Revolutionary War under the leadership of that glorious man, General Washington. But he was destined to have the counsel of that noble Christian father but a short time. His birth was the cause of his mother's death, and his father followed her when James was but a child, scarcely twelve years of age.

Upon the death of his father, James was left under the guardianship of his uncle, Thomas Mansfield, who was his mother's younger brother.

The uncle proved false to his trust; the fine old plantation which had been the home of his ancestors since the Declaration of Independence, was heavily mortgaged; the funds in the bank dwindled down to a mere pittance, and the best of the stock was disposed of in various ways while James was attending a northern college.

It was here that James first began to learn the ways of the world, and many things which had transpired in the past had seemed all right and proper at the time, but now assumed an entirely different aspect, and a vague suspicion of wrongdoing entered his mind for the first time.

Old Colonel Green, whose plantation adjoined that of the Vernons, had been his father's closest friend, and upon the death of the latter he filled the place of father toward the orphan boy as near as he could, and it would have been much better had he been appointed James' guardian instead of his uncle Thomas.

It was to this kind friend that James now turned for counsel and assistance, and accordingly wrote him a long letter, telling him of his suspicions.

The Colonel was a fiery, hot-tempered old fellow, very pronounced in his likes and dislikes, and always spoke his mind wherever he happened to be, utterly regardless of whom he might offend, and as a result he had several times got into trouble in his younger days. But he was a famous athlete,

an expert swordsman and a dead shot; consequently the other man in each case had got the worst of the argument.

He had long had his doubts of the good intentions of Mr. Mansfield toward the orphan boy, and, with the characteristic bluntness of his nature, had accused him of bad faith.

This, as a matter of course, caused a breach in their friendship, and they had never spoken to each other since.

On receiving the young collegian's letter the peppery old Colonel went straight over to see Mr. Mansfield, but, on reaching the home of that gentleman, a darkey informed him that the master was away on business, and would not be back for several months. Bottling up his wrath, he fairly tore back home, vowing that he would have an explanation from the rascally uncle the moment he set foot in the neighborhood, and some pretty lively times were promised sleepy old Culpepper when Mr. Mansfield returned.

When it became noised around the neighborhood that trouble was brewing between the Colonel and Mr. Mansfield, it was freely hinted by the wiseacres that Mr. Mansfield was afraid and cleared out.

The affection of the Colonel for James was well known, and it was the general impression of everyone that the latter would some day marry Colonel Green's beautiful granddaughter, Jessie Hamilton.

The two had been sweethearts from childhood, and it was the dearest wish of Colonel Green's heart that they should be united in marriage.

The Colonel was never known to yield a particle to anyone when they crossed his will, and when his only daughter married Joseph Hamilton against his most express wishes, he never forgave her or saw her face in life again.

The young couple went north to live, and both were killed in a railway wreck in Boston while returning home from a musical entertainment.

They had been married two years when the accident occurred, and they left a little blue-eyed baby girl behind.