

**STEPHEN  
THE BLACK**

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Stephen the black by Caroline H. Pemberton

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**CAROLINE H. PEMBERTON**

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# Stephen the Black



BY  
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*"Look not upon me because I am black,  
Because the sun hath looked upon me!  
My mother's children were angry with me;  
They made me the keeper of the vineyards;  
But mine own vineyard have I not kept."*

—SONG OF SOLOMON.





# Stephen the Black

## *CHAPTER I*

ONE Sunday morning in April, Wesley Anderson sat as usual before the door of his cabin under the shade of a fragrant China-berry tree. A hazy cloud of gnats which shared with him the sweet odors and the pleasant shade did not disturb his meditations. This black field hand of an Alabama plantation was enjoying an hour's retrospection, much as a New England farmer enjoys his weekly newspaper. The events of the past thirty-three years lay open before him, and he recalled them deliberately, as one reads from a newspaper the occurrences of the past week.

These memories were made up mostly of national events, in which his own personality was lost in the great issues of American history. His long, black, knotty hand clasped a

worn and greasy Bible firmly by the cover, and the other lay spread out on its open page, as if to draw inspiration through contact. But Wesley's eyes were fixed on the great expanse of ploughed land that lay before him, nearly all of it bearing the marks of his own toil. The impress of his plodding feet in the wet earth was observable at close range, for they had trudged behind the plough immediately after a recent heavy rain. His eyes were gazing into space and saw not the field, or the deep furrows, or the tiny, sprouting leaves of the cotton plant just beginning to show between the furrows, or the fringe of dark woods beyond, which met a range of soft white clouds on the edge of the horizon.

He saw, instead, soldiers in blue and grey; dashing horsemen, fire, flame, smoke and ashes; houses burning, women and children fleeing, while screams, groans, cheers, curses, bugle calls and merry marches rang in his ears.

With solemn enjoyment he recalled many an incident in his personal experience. He remembered his week of terrible anxiety in the

swamp back of "Old Massa's" plantation, where he lay concealing twelve mules by his master's orders while Wilson's troops were passing through the country like avenging angels. This military event is officially recorded as a vigorous raid planned by General Sherman during the siege of Atlanta, but in the annals of the blacks of that neighborhood it has crystallized into folk-lore as "Wilson's rage,"—that hero having been unable, it was supposed, to suppress any longer the violence of his splendid, righteous anger.

Wesley recalled the day when he left the swamp to get fodder for his mules, and met a scouting party of Union soldiers as he was climbing a fence that separated his master's fields from the public road.

A short colloquy took place, every word of which was engraved on his memory. Although he had repeated it many hundred times since, not a word nor an accent had been changed from the original dialogue:

"Hallo, John, you know the roads between here and Selma?"