

CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

ORMOND; OR, THE
SECRET WITNESS.
VOLUME 1 (OF 3)

Charles Brown
Ormond; Or, The Secret
Witness. Volume 1 (of 3)

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INTRODUCTION

To I.E. Rosenberg.

You are anxious to obtain some knowledge of the history of Constantia Dudley. I am well acquainted with your motives, and allow that they justify your curiosity. I am willing to the utmost of my power to comply with your request, and will now dedicate what leisure I have to the composition of her story.

My narrative will have little of that merit which flows from unity of design. You are desirous of hearing an authentic and not a fictitious tale. It will therefore be my duty to relate events in no artificial or elaborate order, and without that harmonious congruity and luminous amplification, which might justly be displayed in a tale flowing merely from invention. It will be little more than a biographical sketch, in which the facts are distributed and amplified, not as a poetical taste would prescribe, but as the materials afforded me, sometimes abundant and sometimes scanty, would permit.

Constantia, like all the beings made known to us, not by fancy,

but experience, has numerous defects. You will readily perceive that her tale is told by her friend; but I hope you will not discover many or glaring proofs of a disposition to extenuate her errors or falsify her character.

Ormond will perhaps appear to you a contradictory or unintelligible being. I pretend not to the infallibility of inspiration. He is not a creature of fancy. It was not prudent to unfold *all* the means by which I gained a knowledge of his actions; but these means, though singularly fortunate and accurate, could not be unerring and complete. I have shown him to you as he appeared on different occasions, and at successive periods to me. This is all that you will demand from a faithful biographer.

If you were not deeply interested in the fate of my friend, yet my undertaking will not be useless, inasmuch as it will introduce you to scenes to which you have been hitherto a stranger. The modes of life, the influence of public events upon the character and happiness of individuals in America, are new to you. The distinctions of birth, and the artificial degrees of esteem or contempt which connect themselves with different professions and ranks in your native country, are but little known among us. Society and manners constitute your favourite study, and I am willing to believe that my relation will supply you with knowledge, on these heads, not to be otherwise obtained. If these details be in that respect unsatisfactory, all that I can add, is my counsel to go and examine for yourself.

S.C.
Germany

CHAPTER I

Stephen Dudley was a native of New York. He was educated to the profession of a painter. His father's trade was that of an apothecary. But this son, manifesting an attachment to the pencil, he was resolved that it should be gratified. For this end Stephen was sent at an early age to Europe, and not only enjoyed the instructions of Fuzeli and Bartolozzi, but spent a considerable period in Italy, in studying the Augustan and Medicean monuments. It was intended that he should practise his art in his native city, but the young man, though reconciled to this scheme by deference to paternal authority, and by a sense of its propriety, was willing as long as possible to postpone it. The liberality of his father relieved him from all pecuniary cares. His whole time was devoted to the improvement of his skill in his favourite art, and the enriching of his mind with every valuable accomplishment. He was endowed with a comprehensive genius and indefatigable industry. His progress was proportionably rapid, and he passed his time without much regard to futurity, being too well satisfied with the present to anticipate a change. A change however was unavoidable, and he was obliged at length to pay a reluctant obedience to his father's repeated summons. The death of his wife had rendered his society still more necessary to the old gentleman.

He married before his return. The woman whom he had

selected was an unportioned orphan, and was recommended merely by her moral qualities. These, however, were eminent, and secured to her, till the end of her life, the affection of her husband. Though painting was capable of fully gratifying his taste as matter of amusement, he quickly found that, in his new situation, it would not answer the ends of a profession. His father supported himself by the profits of his shop, but with all his industry he could do no more than procure a subsistence for himself and his son.

Till his father's death young Dudley attached himself to painting. His gains were slender, but he loved the art, and his father's profession rendered his own exertions in a great degree superfluous. The death of the elder Dudley introduced an important change in his situation. It thenceforth became necessary to strike into some new path, to deny himself the indulgence of his inclinations, and regulate his future exertions by a view to nothing but gain. There was little room for choice. His habits had disqualified him for mechanical employments. He could not stoop to the imaginary indignity which attended them, nor spare the time necessary to obtain the requisite degree of skill. His father died in possession of some stock, and a sufficient portion of credit to supply its annual decays. He lived at what they call a *good stand*, and enjoyed a certain quantity of permanent custom. The knowledge that was required was as easily obtained as the elements of any other profession, and was not wholly unallied to the pursuits in which he had sometimes engaged.

Hence he could not hesitate long in forming his resolution, but assumed the management of his father's concerns with a cheerful and determined spirit.

The knowledge of his business was acquired in no long time; He was stimulated to the acquisition by a sense of duty; he was inured to habits of industry, and there were few things capable to resist a strenuous exertion of his faculties. Knowledge of whatever kind afforded a compensation to labour; but the task being finished, that which remained, which in ordinary apprehensions would have been esteemed an easy and smooth path, was to him insupportably disgusting. The drudgery of a shop, where all the faculties were at a stand, and one day was an unvaried repetition of the foregoing, was too incongenial to his disposition not to be a source of discontent. This was an evil which it was the tendency of time to increase rather than diminish. The longer he endured it the less tolerable it became. He could not forbear comparing his present situation with his former, and deriving from the contrast perpetual food for melancholy.

The indulgence of his father had contributed to instil into him prejudices, in consequence of which a certain species of disgrace was annexed to every employment of which the only purpose was gain. His present situation not only precluded all those pursuits which exalt and harmonize the feelings, but was detested by him as something humiliating and ignominious. His wife was of a pliant temper, and her condition less influenced by this change

than that of her husband. She was qualified to be his comforter; but instead of dispelling his gloom by judicious arguments, or a seasonable example of vivacity, she caught the infection that preyed upon his mind, and augmented his anxieties by partaking in them.

By enlarging in some degree the foundation on which his father had built, he had provided the means of a future secession, and might console himself with the prospect of enjoying his darling ease at some period of his life. This period was necessarily too remote for his wishes; and had not certain occurrences taken place, by which he was flattered with the immediate possession of ease, it is far from being certain that he would not have fallen a victim to his growing disquietudes.

He was one morning engaged behind his counter as usual, when a youth came into his shop, and, in terms that bespoke the union of fearlessness and frankness, inquired whether he could be engaged as an apprentice. A proposal of this kind could not be suddenly rejected or adopted. He stood in need of assistance; the youth was manly and blooming, and exhibited a modest and ingenuous aspect. It was possible that he was, in every respect, qualified for the post for which he applied; but it was previously necessary to ascertain these qualifications. For this end he requested the youth to call at his house in the evening, when he should be at leisure to converse with him, and furnished him with suitable directions.

The youth came according to appointment. On being

questioned as to his birthplace and origin, he stated that he was a native of Wakefield, in Yorkshire; that his family were honest, and his education not mean; that he was the eldest, of many children, and having attained an age at which he conceived it his duty to provide for himself, he had, with the concurrence of his friends, come to America, in search of the means of independent subsistence; that he had just arrived in a ship which he named, and, his scanty stock of money being likely to be speedily consumed, this had been the first effort he had made to procure employment.

His tale was circumstantial and consistent, and his veracity appeared liable to no doubt. He was master of his book and his pen, and had acquired more than the rudiments of Latin. Mr. Dudley did not require much time to deliberate. In a few days the youth was established as a member of his family, and as a coadjutor in his shop, nothing but food, clothing, and lodging being stipulated as the reward of his services.

The young man improved daily in the good opinion of his master. His apprehension was quick, his sobriety invariable, and his application incessant. Though by no means presumptuous or arrogant, he was not wanting in a suitable degree of self-confidence. All his propensities appeared to concentrate in his occupation and the promotion of his master's interest, from which he was drawn aside by no allurements of sensual or intellectual pleasure. In a short time he was able to relieve his master of most of the toils of his profession, and Mr. Dudley

a thousand times congratulated himself on possessing a servant equally qualified by his talents and his probity. He gradually remitted his attention to his own concerns, and placed more absolute reliance on the fidelity of his dependant.

Young Craig, that was the name of the youth, maintained a punctual correspondence with his family, and confided to his patron, not only copies of all the letters which he himself wrote, but those which, from time to time, he received. He had several correspondents, but the chief of those were his mother and his eldest sister. The sentiments contained in their letters breathed the most appropriate simplicity and, tenderness, and flowed with the nicest propriety, from the different relationships of mother and sister. The style, and even the penmanship, were distinct and characteristical.

One of the first of these epistles was written by the mother to Mr. Dudley, on being informed by her son of his present engagement. It was dictated by that concern for the welfare of her child befitting the maternal character. Gratitude, for the ready acceptance of the youth's services, and for the benignity of his deportment towards him, a just representation of which had been received by her from the boy himself, was expressed with no inconsiderable elegance; as well as her earnest wishes that Mr. Dudley should extend to him not only the indulgence, but the moral superintendence of a parent.

To this Mr. Dudley conceived it incumbent upon him to return a consenting answer, and letters were in this manner occasionally

interchanged between them.

Things remained in this situation for three years, during which period every day enhanced the reputation of Craig, for stability and integrity. A sort of provisional engagement had been made between the parents, unattended however by any legal or formal act, that things should remain on their present footing for three years. When this period terminated, it seemed as if a new engagement had become necessary. Craig expressed the utmost willingness to renew the former contract, but his master began to think that the services of his pupil merited a higher recompense. He ascribed the prosperity that had hitherto attended him to the disinterested exertions of his apprentice. His social and literary gratifications had been increased by the increase of his leisure. These were capable of being still more enlarged. He had not yet acquired what he deemed a sufficiency, and could not therefore wholly relieve himself from the turmoils and humiliation of a professional life. He concluded that he should at once consult his own interest, and perform no more than an act of justice to a faithful servant, by making Craig his partner, and allowing him a share of the profits, on condition of his discharging all the duties of the trade.

When this scheme was proposed to Craig he professed unbounded gratitude, considered all that he had done as amply rewarded by the pleasure of performance, and as being nothing more than was prescribed by his duty. He promised that this change in his situation should have no other effect than to furnish

new incitements to diligence and fidelity, in the promotion of an interest, which would then become in a still higher degree than formerly a common one. Mr. Dudley communicated his intention to Craig's mother, who, in addition to many grateful acknowledgments, stated that a kinsman of her son had enabled him, in case of entering into partnership, to add a small sum to the common stock, and that for this sum Craig was authorized to draw upon a London banker. The proposed arrangement was speedily effected. Craig was charged with the management of all affairs, and Mr. Dudley retired to the enjoyment of still greater leisure. Two years elapsed, and nothing occurred to interrupt the harmony that subsisted between the partners. Mr. Dudley's condition might be esteemed prosperous. His wealth was constantly accumulating. He had nearly attained all that he wished, and his wishes still aimed at nothing less than splendid opulence. He had annually increased the permanent sources of his revenue. His daughter was the only survivor of many children who perished in their infancy, before habit and maturity, had rendered the parental tie difficult to break. This daughter had already exhibited proofs of a mind susceptible of high improvement, and the loveliness of her person promised to keep pace with her mental acquisitions. He charged himself with the care of her education, and found no weariness or satiety in this task that might not be amply relieved by the recreations of science and literature. He flattered himself that his career, which had hitherto been exempt from any considerable impediment,

would terminate in tranquillity. Few men might with more propriety have discarded all apprehensions respecting futurity.

Craig had several sisters, and one brother younger than himself. Mr. Dudley, desirous of promoting the happiness of this family, proposed to send for this brother and have him educated to his own profession, insinuating to his partner that at the time when the boy should have gained sufficient stability and knowledge, he himself might be disposed to relinquish the profession altogether, on terms particularly advantageous to the two brothers, who might thenceforth conduct their business jointly. Craig had been eloquent in praise of this lad, and his testimony had, from time to time, been confirmed by that of his mother and sister. He had often expressed his wishes for the prosperity of the lad; and, when his mother had expressed her doubts as to the best method of disposing of him, modestly requested Mr. Dudley's advice on this head. The proposal, therefore, might be supposed to be particularly acceptable, and yet Craig expressed reluctance to concur with it. This reluctance was accompanied with certain tokens which sufficiently showed whence it arose. Craig appeared unwilling to increase those obligations under which he already laboured; his sense of gratitude was too acute to allow him to heighten it by the reception of new benefits.

It might be imagined that this objection would be easily removed; but the obstinacy of Craig's opposition was invincible. Mr. Dudley could not relinquish a scheme to which no stronger

objection could be made; and, since his partner could not be prevailed upon to make this proposal to the friends of the lad, he was determined to do it himself. He maintained an intercourse by letters with several of those friends which he formed in his youth. One of them usually resided in London. From him he received about this time a letter, in which, among other information, the writer mentioned his intention of setting out on a tour through Yorkshire and the Scottish highlands. Mr. Dudley thought this a suitable opportunity for executing his design in favour of young Craig. He entertained no doubts about the worth and condition of this family, but was still desirous of obtaining some information on this head from one who would pass through the town where they resided, who would examine with his own eyes, and on whose discernment and integrity he could place an implicit reliance. He concealed this intention from his partner, and entrusted his letter to a friend who was just embarking for Europe. In due season he received an answer, confirming, in all respects, Craig's representations, but informing him that the lad had been lately disposed of in a way not equally advantageous with that which Mr. Dudley had proposed, but such as would not admit of change.

If doubts could possibly be entertained respecting the character and views of Craig, this evidence would have dispelled them. But plans, however skilfully contrived, if founded on imposture, cannot fail of being sometimes detected. Craig had occasion to be absent from the city for some weeks. Meanwhile a

letter had been left at his lodgings by one who merely inquired if that were the dwelling of Mr. Dudley, and being answered by the servant in the affirmative, left the letter without further parley. It was superscribed with a name unknown to any of the family, and in a hand which its badness rendered almost illegible. The servant placed it in a situation to be seen by his master.

Mr. Dudley allowed it to remain unopened for a considerable time. At length, deeming it excusable to discover by any means the person to whom it was addressed, he ventured to unseal it. It was dated at Portsmouth in New-Hampshire. The signature was Mary Mansfield. It was addressed to her son, and was a curious specimen of illiterateness. Mary herself was unable to write, as she reminds her son, and had therefore procured the assistance of Mrs. Dewitt, for whose family she washed. The amanuensis was but little superior in the art of penmanship to her principal. The contents of the epistle were made out with some difficulty. This was the substance of it: —

Mary reproaches her son for deserting her, and letting five years pass away without allowing her to hear from him. She informed him of her distresses as they flowed from sickness and poverty, and were aggravated by the loss of her son who was so handsome and promising a lad. She related her marriage with Zekel Hackney, who first brought her tidings of her boy. He was master, it seems, of a fishing smack, and voyaged sometimes to New York. In one of his visits, to this city he met a mighty spry young man, in whom he thought he recognized his wife's

son. He had traced him to the house of Mr. Dudley, and on inquiry discovered that the lad resided here. On his return he communicated the tidings to his spouse, who had now written to reproach him for his neglect of his poor old mother, and to entreat his assistance to relieve her from the necessity of drudging for her livelihood.

This letter was capable of an obvious construction. It was, no doubt, founded in mistake, though it was to be acknowledged that the mistake was singular. Such was the conclusion immediately formed by Mr. Dudley. He quietly replaced the letter on the mantel-piece, where it had before stood, and dismissed the affair from his thoughts.

Next day Craig returned from his journey. Mr. Dudley was employed in examining some papers in a desk that stood behind the door in the apartment in which the letter was placed. There was no other person in the room when Craig entered it. He did not perceive Mr. Dudley, who was screened from observation by his silence and by an open door. As soon as he entered, Mr. Dudley looked at him, and made no haste to speak. The letter, whose superscription was turned towards him, immediately attracted Craig's attention. He seized it with some degree of eagerness, and observing the broken seal, thrust it hastily into his pocket, muttering at the same time, in a tone betokening a mixture of consternation and anger, "Damn it!" – He immediately left the room, still uninformed of the presence of Mr. Dudley, who began to muse with some earnestness on what

he had seen. Soon after, he left this room, and went into another in which the family usually sat. In about twenty minutes Craig made his appearance with his usual freedom and plausibility. Complimentary and customary topics were discussed. Mrs. Dudley and her daughter were likewise present. The uneasiness which the incident just mentioned had occasioned in the mind of Mr. Dudley was at first dispelled by the disembarrassed behaviour of his partner, but new matter of suspicion was speedily afforded him. He observed that his partner spoke of his present entrance as of the first since his arrival, and that when the lady mentioned that he had been the subject of a curious mistake, a letter being directed to him by a strange name, and left there during his absence, he pretended total ignorance of the circumstance. The young lady was immediately directed by her mother to bring the letter, which lay, she said, on the mantle-tree in the next room.

During this scene Mr. Dudley was silent. He anticipated the disappointment of the messenger, believing the letter to have been removed. What then was his surprise when the messenger returned bearing the letter in her hand! Craig examined and read it, and commented with great mirth on the contents, acting all the while as if he had never seen it before. These appearances were not qualified to quiet suspicion; the more Dudley brooded over them the more dissatisfied he became. He however concealed his thoughts, as well from Craig himself as his family, impatiently waiting for some new occurrence to arise by which he might

square his future proceedings.

During Craig's absence Mrs. Dudley had thought this a proper occasion for cleaning his apartment. The furniture, and among the rest, a large chest strongly fastened, was removed into an adjoining room which was otherwise unoccupied, and which was usually kept locked. When the cleansing was finished, the furniture was replaced, except this trunk, which its bulk, the indolence of the servant, and her opinion of its uselessness, occasioned her to leave in the closet.

About a week after this, on a Saturday evening, Craig invited to sup with him a friend who was to embark on the ensuing Monday for Jamaica. During supper, at which the family were present, the discourse turned on the voyage on which the guest was about to enter. In the course of talk the stranger expressed how much he stood in need of a strong and commodious chest, in which he might safely deposit his cloths and papers. Not being apprized of the early departure of the vessel, he had deferred till it was too late applying to an artizan.

Craig desired him to set himself at rest on that head, for that he had in his possession just such a trunk as he described. It was of no use to him, being long filled with nothing better than refuse and lumber, and that, if he would, he might send for it the next morning. He turned to Mrs. Dudley and observed, that the trunk to which he alluded was in her possession, and he would thank her to direct its removal into his own apartment, that he might empty it of its present contents, and prepare it for the service of

his friend. To this she readily assented.

There was nothing mysterious in this affair, but the mind of Mr. Dudley was pained with doubts. He was now as prone to suspect as he was formerly disposed to confidence. This evening he put the key of the closet in his own pocket. When inquired for the next day, it was, of course, missing. It could not be found on the most diligent search. The occasion was not of such moment as to justify breaking the door. Mr. Dudley imagined that he saw in Craig more uneasiness at this disappointment than he was willing to express. There was no remedy. The chest remained where it was, and next morning the ship departed on her voyage.

Craig accompanied his friend on board, was prevailed upon to go to sea with him, designing to return with the pilot-boat, but when the pilot was preparing to leave the vessel, such was this man's complaisance to the wishes of his friend, that he concluded to perform the remainder of the voyage in his company. The consequences are easily seen. Craig had gone with a resolution of never returning. The unhappy Dudley was left to deplore the total ruin of his fortune, which had fallen a prey to the arts of a subtle imposture.

The chest was opened, and the part which Craig had been playing for some years, with so much success, was perfectly explained. It appeared that the sum which Craig had contributed to the common stock, when first admitted into partnership, had been previously purloined from the daily receipts of his shop, of which an exact register was kept. Craig had been so indiscreet

as to preserve this accusing record, and it was discovered in this depository. He was the son of Mary Mansfield, and a native of Portsmouth. The history of the Wakefield family, specious and complicated as it was, was entirely fictitious. The letters had been forged, and the correspondence supported by his own dexterity. Here was found the letter which Mr. Dudley had written to his friend requesting him to make certain inquiries at Wakefield, and which he imagined that he had delivered with his own hands to a trusty bearer. Here was the original draught of the answer he received. The manner in which this stratagem had been accomplished came gradually to light. The letter which was written to the Yorkshire traveller had been purloined, and another with a similar superscription, in which the hand of Dudley was exactly imitated, and containing only brief and general remarks, had been placed in its stead. Craig must have suspected its contents, and by this suspicion have been incited to the theft. The answer which the Englishman had really written, and which sufficiently corresponded with the forged letter, had been intercepted by Craig, and furnished him a model from which he might construct an answer adapted to his own purposes.

This imposture had not been sustained for a trivial purpose. He had embezzled a large share of the stock, and had employed the credit of the house to procure extensive remittances to be made to an agent at a distance, by whom the property was effectually secured. Craig had gone to participate these spoils,

while the whole estate of Mr. Dudley was insufficient to pay the demands that were consequently made upon him.

It was his lot to fall into the grasp of men who squared their actions by no other standard than law, and who esteemed every claim to be incontestably just that could plead that sanction. They did not indeed throw him into prison. When they had despoiled him of every remnant of his property, they deemed themselves entitled to his gratitude for leaving his person unmolested.

CHAPTER II

Thus in a moment was this man thrown from the summit of affluence to the lowest indigence. He had been habituated to independence and ease. This reverse, therefore, was the harder to bear. His present situation was much worse than at his father's death. Then he was sanguine with youth and glowing with health. He possessed a fund on which he could commence his operations. Materials were at hand, and nothing was wanted but skill to use them. Now he had advanced in life. His frame was not exempt from infirmity. He had so long reposed on the bosom of opulence, and enjoyed the respect attendant on wealth, that he felt himself totally incapacitated for a new station. His misfortune had not been foreseen. It was embittered by the consciousness of his own imprudence, and by recollecting that the serpent which had stung him was nurtured in his own bosom.

It was not merely frugal fare and a humble dwelling to which he was condemned. The evils to be dreaded were beggary and contempt. Luxury and leisure were not merely denied him. He must bend all his efforts to procure clothing and food, to preserve his family from nakedness and famine. His spirit would not brook dependence. To live upon charity, or to take advantage of the compassion of his friends, was a destiny far worse than any other. To this therefore he would not consent. However irksome and painful it might prove, he determined to procure his bread by the

labour of his hands.

But to what scene or kind of employment should he betake himself? He could not endure to exhibit this reverse of fortune on the same theatre which had witnessed his prosperity. One of his first measures was to remove from New York to Philadelphia. How should he employ himself in his new abode? Painting, the art in which he was expert, would not afford him the means of subsistence. Though no despicable musician, he did not esteem himself qualified to be a teacher of this art. This profession, besides, was treated by his new neighbours with general, though unmerited contempt. There were few things on which he prided himself more than on the facilities and elegances of his penmanship. He was besides well acquainted with arithmetic and accounting. He concluded therefore to offer his services, as a writer in a public office. This employment demanded little bodily exertion. He had spent much of his time at the book and the desk: his new occupation, therefore, was further recommended by its resemblance to his ancient modes of life.

The first situation of this kind for which he applied he obtained. The duties were constant, but not otherwise toilsome or arduous. The emoluments were slender, but by contracting, within limits as narrow as possible, his expenses, they could be made subservient to the mere purposes of subsistence. He hired a small house in the suburbs of the city. It consisted of a room above and below, and a kitchen. His wife, daughter, and one girl, composed its inhabitants.

As long as his mind was occupied in projecting and executing these arrangements, it was diverted from uneasy contemplations. When his life became uniform, and day followed day in monotonous succession, and the novelty of his employment had disappeared, his cheerfulness began likewise to fade, and was succeeded by unconquerable melancholy. His present condition was in every respect the contrast of his former. His servitude was intolerable. He was associated with sordid hirelings, gross and uneducated, who treated his age with rude familiarity, and insulted his ears with ribaldry and scurrilous jests. He was subject to command, and had his portion of daily drudgery allotted to him, to be performed for a pittance no more than would buy the bread which he daily consumed. The task assigned him was technical and formal. He was perpetually encumbered with the rubbish of law, and waded with laborious steps through its endless tautologies, its impertinent circuities, its lying assertions, and hateful artifices. Nothing occurred to relieve or diversify the scene. It was one tedious round of scrawling and jargon; a tissue made up of the shreds and remnants of barbarous antiquity, polluted with the rust of ages, and patched by the stupidity of modern workmen into new deformity.

When the day's task was finished, jaded spirits, and a body enfeebled by reluctant application, were but little adapted to domestic enjoyments. These indeed were incompatible with a temper like his, to whom the privation of the comforts that attended his former condition was equivalent to the loss of life.

These privations were still more painful to his wife, and her death added one more calamity to those tinders which he already groaned. He had always loved her with the tenderest affection, and he justly regarded this evil as surpassing all his former woes.

But his destiny seemed never weary of persecuting him. It was not enough that he should fall a victim to the most atrocious arts, that he should wear out his days in solitude and drudgery, that he should feel not only the personal restraints and hardships attendant upon indigence, but the keener pangs that result from negligence and contumely. He was imperfectly recovered from the shock occasioned by the death of his wife, when his sight was invaded by a cataract. Its progress was rapid, and terminated in total blindness.

He was now disabled from pursuing his usual occupation. He was shot out from the light of heaven, and debarred of every human comfort. Condemned to eternal darkness, and worse than the helplessness of infancy, he was dependant for the meanest offices on the kindness of others; and he who had formerly abounded in the gifts of fortune, thought only of ending his days in a gaol or an almshouse.

His situation however was alleviated by one circumstance. He had a daughter whom I have formerly mentioned, as the only survivor of many children. She was sixteen years of age when the storm of adversity fell upon her father's house. It may be thought that one educated as she had been, in the gratification of all her wishes, and at an age of timidity and inexperience, would have

been less fitted than her father for encountering misfortune; and yet when the task of comforter fell upon her her strength was not found wanting. Her fortitude was immediately put to the test. This reverse did not only affect her obliquely, and through the medium of her family, but directly, and in one way usually very distressful to female feelings.

Her fortune and character had attracted many admirers. One of them had some reason to flatter himself with success. Miss Dudley's notions had little in common with those around her. She had learned to square her conduct, in a considerable degree, not by the hasty impulses of inclination, but by the dictates of truth. She yielded nothing to caprice or passion. Not that she was perfectly exempt from intervals of weakness, or from the necessity of painful struggles, but these intervals were transient, and these struggles always successful. She was no stranger to the pleadings of love from the lips of others, and in her own bosom; but its tumults were brief, and speedily gave place to quiet thoughts and steadfast purposes.

She had listened to the solicitations of one not unworthy in himself, and amply recommended by the circumstances of family and fortune. He was young, and therefore impetuous. Of the good that he sought, he was not willing to delay the acquisition for a moment. She had been taught a very different lesson. Marriage included vows of irrevocable affection and obedience. It was a contract to endure for life. To form this connection in extreme youth, before time had unfolded and

modelled the characters of the parties, was, in her opinion, a proof of pernicious and opprobrious temerity. Not to perceive the propriety of delay in this case, or to be regardless of the motives that would enjoin upon us a deliberate procedure, furnished an unanswerable objection to any man's pretensions. She was sensible, however, that this, like other mistakes, was curable. If her arguments failed to remove it, time, it was likely, would effect this purpose. If she rejected a matrimonial proposal for the present, it was for reasons that might not preclude her future acceptance of it.

Her scruples, in the present case, did not relate to the temper or person, or understanding of her lover; but to his age, to the imperfectness of their acquaintance, and to the want of that permanence of character, which can flow only from the progress of time and knowledge. These objections, which so rarely exist, were conclusive with her. There was no danger of her relinquishing them in compliance with the remonstrances of her parents and the solicitations of her lover; though the one and the other were urged with all the force of authority and insinuation. The prescriptions of duty were too clear to allow her to hesitate and waver; but the consciousness of rectitude could not secure her from temporary vexations.

Her parents were blemished with some of the frailties of that character. They held themselves entitled to prescribe in this article, but they forbore to exert their power. They condescended to persuade, but it was manifest that they regarded their

own conduct as a relaxation of right; and had not the lever's importunities suddenly ceased, it is not possible to tell how far the happiness of Miss Dudley might have been endangered. The misfortunes of her father were no sooner publicly known, than the youth forbore his visits, and embarked on a voyage which he had long projected, but which had been hitherto delayed by a superior regard to the interests of his passion.

It must be allowed that the lady had not foreseen this event. She had exercised her judgment upon his character, and had not been deceived. Before this desertion, had it been clearly stated to her apprehension, she would have readily admitted it to be probable. She knew the fascination of wealth, and the delusiveness of self-confidence. She was superior to the folly of supposing him exempt from sinister influences, and deaf to the whispers of ambition; and yet the manner in which she was affected by this event convinced her that her heart had a larger share than her reason in dictating her expectations.

Yet it must not be supposed that she suffered any very acute distress on this account. She was grieved less for her own sake than his. She had no design of entering into marriage in less than seven years from this period. Not a single hope, relative to her own condition, had been frustrated. She had only been mistaken in her favourable conceptions of another. He had exhibited less constancy and virtue than her heart had taught her to expect.

With those opinions, she could devote herself with a single heart to the alleviation of her parent's sorrows. This change in

her condition she treated lightly, and retained her cheerfulness unimpaired. This happened because, in a rational estimate, and so far as it affected herself, the misfortune was slight, and because her dejection would only tend to augment the disconsolateness of her parents, while, on the other hand, her serenity was calculated to infuse the same confidence into them. She indulged herself in no fits of exclamation or moodiness. She listened in silence to their invectives and laments, and seized every opportunity that offered to inspire them with courage, to set before them the good as well as the ill to which they were reserved, to suggest expedients for improving their condition, and to soften the asperities of his new mode of life, to her father, by every species of blandishment and tenderness.

She refused no personal exertion to the common benefit. She incited her father to diligence, as well by her example as by her exhortations; suggested plans, and superintended or assisted in the execution of them. The infirmities of sex and age vanished before the motives to courage and activity, flowing from her new situation. When settled in his new abode and profession, she began to deliberate what conduct was incumbent on herself, how she might participate with her father the burden of the common maintenance, and blunt the edge of this calamity by the resources of a powerful and cultivated mind.

In the first place, she disposed of every superfluous garb and trinket. She reduced her wardrobe to the plainest and cheapest establishment. By this means alone she supplied her father's

necessities with a considerable sum. Her music, and even her books were not spared, – not from the slight esteem in which these were held by her, but because she was thenceforth to become an economist of time as well as of money, because musical instruments are not necessary to the practice of this art in its highest perfection, and because books, when she could procure leisure to read, or money to purchase them, might be obtained in a cheaper and more commodious form, than those costly and splendid volumes with which her father's munificence had formerly supplied her.

To make her expenses as limited as possible was her next care. For this end she assumed the province of cook, the washing of house and clothes, and the cleaning of furniture. Their house was small; the family consisted of no more than four persons, and all formality and expensiveness were studiously discarded; but her strength was unequal to unavoidable tasks. A vigorous constitution could not supply the place of laborious habits, and this part of her plan must have been changed for one less frugal. The aid of a servant must have been hired, if it had not been furnished by gratitude.

Some years before this misfortune, her mother had taken under her protection a girl, the daughter of a poor woman, who subsisted by labour, and who dying, left this child without friend or protector. This girl possessed no very improvable capacity, and therefore could not benefit by the benevolent exertions of her young mistress so much as the latter desired; but her temper was

artless and affectionate, and she attached herself to Constantia with the most entire devotion. In this change of fortune she would not consent to be separated; and Miss Dudley, influenced by her affection for her Lucy, and reflecting that on the whole it was most to her advantage to share with her at once her kindness and her poverty, retained her as her companion. With this girl she shared the domestic duties, scrupling not to divide with her the meanest and most rugged, as well as the lightest offices.

This was not all. She in the next place considered whether her ability extended no farther than to save. Could she not by the employment of her hands increase the income as well as diminish the expense? Why should she be precluded from all lucrative occupation? She soon came to a resolution. She was mistress of her needle; and this skill she conceived herself bound to employ for her own subsistence.

Clothing is one of the necessities of human existence. The art of the tailor is scarcely less use than that of the tiller of the ground! There are few the gains of which are better merited, and less infurious to the principles of human society. She resolved therefore to become a workwoman, and to employ in this way the leisure she possessed from household avocations. To this scheme she was obliged to reconcile not only herself but her parents. The conquest of their prejudices was no easy task, but her patience and skill finally succeeded, and she procured needlework in sufficient quantity to enable her to enhance in no trivial degree the common fund.

It is one thing barely to comply with the urgencies of the case, and to do that which in necessitous circumstances is best. But to conform with grace and cheerfulness, to yield no place to fruitless recriminations and repinings, to contract the evils into as small a compass as possible, and extract from our condition all possible good, is a task of a different kind.

Mr. Dudley's situation required from him frugality and diligence. He was regular and unintermitted in his application to his pen. He was frugal. His slender income was administered agreeably to the maxims of his daughter: but he was unhappy. He experienced in its full extent the bitterness of disappointment.

He gave himself up for the most part to a listless melancholy. Sometimes his impatience would produce effects less excusable, and conjure up an accusing and irascible spirit. His wife, and even his daughter, he would make the objects of peevish and absurd reproaches. These were moments when her heart drooped indeed, and her tears could not be restrained from flowing. These fits were transitory and rare, and when they had passed, the father seldom failed to mingle tokens of contrition and repentance with the tears of his daughter. Her arguments and soothings were seldom disappointed of success. Her mother's disposition was soft and pliant, but she could not accommodate herself to the necessity of her husband's affairs. She was obliged to endure the want of some indulgences, but she reserved to herself the liberty of complaining, and to subdue this spirit in her was found utterly impracticable. She died a victim to discontent.

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