

CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

ORMOND; OR, THE
SECRET WITNESS.
VOLUME 2 (OF 3)

Charles Brown

**Ormond; Or, The Secret
Witness. Volume 2 (of 3)**

«Public Domain»

Brown C.

Ormond; Or, The Secret Witness. Volume 2 (of 3) / C. Brown —
«Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	12
CHAPTER III	16
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	18

Charles Brockden Brown

Ormond; Or, The Secret Witness. Volume 2 (of 3)

CHAPTER I

On leaving Mr. Ormond's house, Constantia was met by that gentleman. He saw her as she came out, and was charmed with the simplicity of her appearance. On entering, he interrogated the servant as to the business that brought her thither.

"So," said he, as he entered the drawing-room, where Craig was seated, "you have had a visitant. She came, it seems, on a pressing occasion, and would be put off with nothing but a letter."

Craig had not expected this address, but it only precipitated the execution of a design that he had formed. Being aware of this or similar accidents, he had constructed and related on a previous occasion to Ormond a story suitable to his purpose.

"Ay," said he, in a tone of affected compassion, "it is a sad affair enough. I am sorry it is not in my power to help the poor girl. She is wrong in imputing her father's misfortunes to me, but I know the source of her mistake. Would to heaven it was in my power to repair the wrongs they have suffered not from me, but from one whose relationship is a disgrace to me."

"Perhaps," replied the other, "you are willing to explain this affair."

"Yes, I wish to explain it. I was afraid of some such accident as this. An explanation is due to my character. I have already told you my story. I mentioned to you a brother of mine. There is scarcely thirteen months difference in our ages. There is a strong resemblance between him and me in our exterior, though I hope there is none at all in our minds. This brother was a partner of a gentleman, the father of this girl, at New York. He was a long time nothing better than an apprentice to Mr. Dudley, but he advanced so much in the good graces of his master, that he finally took him into partnership. I did not know till I arrived on the continent the whole of his misconduct. It appears that he embezzled the property of the house, and fled away with it, and the consequence was, that his quondam master was ruined. I am often mistaken for my brother, to my no small inconvenience: but all this I told you formerly. See what a letter I just now received from this girl."

Craig was one of the most plausible of men. His character was a standing proof of the vanity of physiognomy. There were few men who could refuse their confidence to his open and ingenuous aspect. To this circumstance, perhaps, he owed his ruin. His temptations to deceive were stronger than what are incident to most other men. Deception was so easy a task, that the difficulty lay, not in infusing false opinions respecting him, but in preventing them from being spontaneously imbibed. He contracted habits of imposture imperceptibly. In proportion as he deviated from the practice of truth, he discerned the necessity of extending and systematizing his efforts, and of augmenting the original benignity and attractiveness of his looks, by studied additions. The further he proceeded, the more difficult it was to return. Experience and habit added daily to his speciousness, till at length the world perhaps might have been searched in vain for his competitor.

He had been introduced to Ormond under the most favourable auspices. He had provided against a danger which he knew to be imminent, by relating his own story as if it were his brother's. He had, however, made various additions to it, serving to aggravate the heinousness of his guilt. This arose partly from policy, and partly from the habit of lying, which was prompted by a fertile invention, and rendered inveterate by incessant exercise. He interwove in his tale an intrigue between Miss Dudley and his brother. The former was seduced, and this man had employed his skill in chirographical imitation, in composing letters from Miss Dudley to his brother, which sufficiently

attested her dishonour. He and his brother, he related, to have met in Jamaica, where the latter died, by which meant his personal property and papers came into his possession.

Ormond read the letter which his companion presented to him on this occasion. The papers which Craig had formerly permitted him to inspect had made him familiar with her handwriting. The penmanship was, indeed, similar, yet this was written in a spirit not quite congenial with that which had dictated her letters to her lover. But he reflected that the emergency was extraordinary, and that the new scenes through which she had passed, had, perhaps, enabled her to retrieve her virtue and enforce it. The picture which she drew of her father's distresses affected him and his companion very differently. He pondered on it for some time in silence; he then looked up, and with his usual abruptness said, "I suppose you gave her something?"

"No. I was extremely sorry that it was not in my power. I have nothing but a little trifling silver about me. I have no more at home than will barely suffice to pay my board here, and my expenses to Baltimore. Till I reach there I cannot expect a supply. I was less uneasy I confess on this account, because I knew you to be equally willing and much more able to afford the relief she asks."

This Mr. Ormond had predetermined to do. He paused only to deliberate in what manner it could, with most propriety, be done. He was always willing, when he conferred benefits, to conceal the author. He was not displeased when gratitude was misplaced, and readily allowed his instruments to act as if they were principals. He questioned not the veracity of Craig, and was, therefore, desirous to free him from the molestation that was threatened in the way which had been prescribed. He put a note of one hundred dollars into his hand, and enjoined him to send it to the Dudleys that evening, or early the next morning. "I am pleased," he added, "with the style of this letter: It can be of no service to you; leave it in my possession."

Craig would much rather have thrown it into the fire; but he knew the character of his companion, and was afraid to make any objection to his request. He promised to send, or carry the note the next morning, before he set out on his intended journey.

This journey was to Baltimore, and was undertaken so soon merely to oblige his friend, who was desirous of remitting to Baltimore a considerable sum in English guineas, and who had been for some time in search of one who might execute this commission with fidelity. The offer of Craig had been joyfully accepted, and next morning had been the time fixed for his departure, a period the most opportune for Craig's designs that could be imagined. To return to Miss Dudley.

The sum that remained to her after the discharge of her debts would quickly be expended. It was no argument of wisdom to lose sight of the future in the oblivion of present care. The time would inevitably come when new resources would be necessary. Every hour brought nearer the period without facilitating the discovery of new expedients. She related the recent adventure to her father. He acquiesced in the propriety of her measures, but the succour that she had thus obtained consoled him but little. He saw how speedily it would again be required, and was hopeless of a like fortunate occurrence.

Some days had elapsed, and Constantia had been so fortunate as to procure some employment. She was thus engaged in the evening when they were surprised by a visit from their landlord. This was an occurrence that foreboded them no good. He entered with abruptness, and scarcely noticed the salutations that he received. His bosom swelled with discontent, which seemed ready to be poured out upon his two companions. To the inquiry as to the condition of his health and that of his family, he surlily answered: "Never mind how I am: none the better for my tenants I think. Never was a man so much plagued as I have been; what with one putting me off from time to time; what with another quarrelling about terms, and denying his agreement, and another running away in my debt, I expect nothing but to come to poverty – God help me! – at last. But this was the worst of all. I was never before treated so in all my life. I don't know what or when I shall get to the end of my troubles. To be fobbed out of my rent and twenty-five dollars into the bargain! It is very strange treatment, I assure you, Mr. Dudley."

"What is it you mean?" replied that gentleman. "You have received your dues, and – "

"Received my dues, indeed! High enough too! I have received none of my dues. I have been imposed upon. I have been put to very great trouble, and expect some compensation. There is no knowing the character of one's tenants. There is nothing but knavery in the world one would think. I'm sure no man has suffered more by bad tenants than I have. But this is the strangest treatment I ever met with. Very strange indeed, Dudley, and I must be paid without delay. To lose my rent and twenty-five dollars into the bargain, is too hard. I never met with the equal of it – not I. Besides, I wouldn't be put to all this trouble for twice the sum."

"What does all this mean, Mr. M'Crea? You seem inclined to scold; but I cannot conceive why you came here for that purpose. This behaviour is improper – "

"No, it is very proper, and I want payment of my money. Fifty dollars you owe me. Miss comes to pay me my rent as I thought. She brings me a fifty-dollar note; I changes it for her, for I thought to be sure I was quite safe: but, behold, when I sends it to the bank to get the money, they sends me back word that it's forged, and calls on me, before a magistrate, to tell them where I got it from. I'm sure I never was so flustered in my life. I would not have such a thing for ten times the sum."

He proceeded to descant on his loss without any interruption from his auditors, whom this intelligence had struck dumb. Mr. Dudley instantly saw the origin and full extent of this misfortune. He was, nevertheless, calm, and indulged in no invectives against Craig. "It is all of a piece," said he: "our ruin is inevitable. Well then, let it come."

After M'Crea had railed himself weary, he flung out of the house, warning them that next morning he should distrain for his rent, and, at the same time, sue them for the money that Constantia had received in exchange for her note.

Miss Dudley was unable to pursue her task. She laid down her needle, and fixed her eyes upon her father. They had been engaged in earnest discourse when their landlord entered. Now there was a pause of profound silence, till the affectionate Lucy, who sufficiently comprehended this scene, gave vent to her affliction in sobs. Her mistress turned to her: —

"Cheer up, my Lucy. We shall do well enough, my girl. Our state is bad enough, without doubt, but despair will make it worse."

The anxiety that occupied her mind related less to herself than to her father. He, indeed in the present instance, was exposed to prosecution. It was he who was answerable for the debt, and whose person would be thrown into durance by the suit that was menaced. The horrors of a prison had not hitherto been experienced or anticipated. The worst evil that she had imagined was inexpressibly inferior to this. The idea had in it something of terrific and loathsome. The mere supposition of its being possible was not to be endured. If all other expedients should fail, she thought of nothing less than desperate resistance. No. It was better to die than to go to prison.

For a time she was deserted of her admirable equanimity. This, no doubt, was the result of surprise. She had not yet obtained the calmness necessary to deliberation. During this gloomy interval, she would, perhaps, have adapted any scheme, however dismal and atrocious, which her father's despair might suggest. She would not refuse to terminate her own and her father's unfortunate existence by poison or the cord.

This confusion of mind could not exist long; it gradually gave place to cheerful prospects. The evil perhaps was not without its timely remedy. The person whom she had set out to visit, when her course was diverted by Craig, she once more resolved to apply to; to lay before him, without reserve, her father's situation, to entreat pecuniary succour, and to offer herself as a servant in his family, or in that of any of his friends who stood in need of one. This resolution, in a slight degree, consoled her; but her mind had been too thoroughly disturbed to allow her any sleep during that night.

She equipped herself betimes, and proceeded with a doubting heart to the house of Mr. Melbourne. She was informed that he had risen, but was never to be seen at so early an hour. At nine o'clock he would be disengaged, and she would be admitted. In the present state of her affairs this

delay was peculiarly unwelcome. At breakfast, her suspense and anxieties would not allow her to eat a morsel; and when the hour approached she prepared herself for a new attempt.

As she went out, she met at the door a person whom she recognized, and whose office she knew to be that of a constable. Constantia had exercised, in her present narrow sphere, that beneficence which she had formerly exerted in a larger. There was nothing, consistent with her slender means, that she did not willingly perform for the service of others. She had not been sparing of consolation and personal aid in many cases of personal distress that had occurred in her neighbourhood. Hence, as far as she was known, he was revered.

The wife of their present visitant had experienced her succour and sympathy, on occasion of the death of a favourite child. The man, notwithstanding his office, was not of a rugged or ungrateful temper. The task that was now imposed upon him he undertook with extreme reluctance. He was somewhat reconciled to it by the reflection that another might not perform it with that gentleness and lenity which he found in himself a disposition to exercise on all occasions, but particularly on the present.

She easily guessed at his business, and having greeted him with the utmost friendliness, returned with him into the house. She endeavoured to remove the embarrassment that hung about him, but in vain. Having levied what the law very properly calls a distress, he proceeded, after much hesitation, to inform Dudley that he was charged with a message from a magistrate, summoning him to come forthwith, and account for having a forged banknote in his possession.

M'Crea had given no intimation of this. The painful surprise that it produced soon yielded to a just view of this affair. Temporary inconvenience and vexation was all that could be dreaded from it. Mr. Dudley hated to be seen or known. He usually walked out in the dusk of evening, but limited his perambulations to a short space. At all other times he was obstinately recluse. He was easily persuaded by his daughter to allow her to perform this unwelcome office in his stead. He had not received, nor even seen the note. He would have willingly spared her the mortification of a judicial examination, but he knew that this was unavoidable. Should he comply with this summons himself, his daughter's presence would be equally necessary.

Influenced by these considerations, he was willing that his daughter should accompany the messenger, who was content that they should consult their mutual convenience in this respect. This interview was to her not without its terrors; but she cherished the hope that it might ultimately conduce to good. She did not foresee the means by which this would be effected, but her heart was lightened by a secret and inexplicable faith in the propitiousness of some event that was yet to occur. This faith was powerfully enforced when she reached the magistrate's door, and found that he was no other than Melbourne, whose succour she intended to solicit. She was speedily ushered, not into his office, but into a private apartment, where he received her alone.

He had been favourably prepossessed with regard to her character by the report of the officer who, on being charged with the message, had accounted for the regret which he manifested, by dwelling on the merits of Miss Dudley. He behaved with grave civility, requested her to be seated, and accurately scrutinized her appearance. She found herself not deceived in her preconceptions of this gentleman's character, and drew a favourable omen as to the event of this interview by what had already taken place. He viewed her in silence for some time, and then, in a conciliating tone, said: —

"It seems to me, madam, as if I had seen you before. Your face, indeed, is of that kind which, when once seen, is not easily forgotten. I know it is a long time since, but I cannot tell when or where. If you will not deem me impertinent, I will venture to ask you to assist my conjectures. Your name, as I am informed, is Acworth." — (I ought to have mentioned that Mr. Dudley, on his removal from New York, among other expedients to obliterate the memory of his former condition, and conceal his poverty from the World, had made this change in his name.)

"That, indeed," said the lady, "is the name which my father at present bears. His real name is Dudley. His abode was formerly in Queen Street, New York. Your conjecture, Sir, is not erroneous.

This is not the first time we have seen each other. I well recollect your having been at my father's house in the days of his prosperity."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Mr. Melbourne, starting from his seat in the first impulse of his astonishment. "Are you the daughter of my friend Dudley, by whom I have so often been hospitably entertained? I have heard of his misfortunes, but knew not that he was alive, or in what part of the world he resided.

"You are summoned on a very disagreeable affair, but I doubt not you will easily exculpate your father. I am told that he is blind, and that his situation is by no means as comfortable as might be wished. I am grieved that he did not confide in the friendship of those that knew him. What could prompt him to conceal himself?"

"My father has a proud spirit. It is not yet broken by adversity. He disdains *to beg*, but I must now assume *that office* for his sake. I came hither this morning to lay before you his situation, and to entreat your assistance to save him from a prison. He cannot pay for the poor tenement he occupies; and our few goods are already under distress. He has, likewise, contracted a debt. He is, I suppose, already sued on this account, and must go to gaol, unless saved by the interposition of some friend."

"It is true," said Melbourne, "I yesterday granted a warrant against him at the suit of Malcolm M'Crea. Little did I think that the defendant was Stephen Dudley; but you may dismiss all apprehensions on that score. That affair shall be settled to your father's satisfaction: meanwhile we will, if you please, despatch this unpleasant business respecting a counterfeit note received in payment from you by this M'Crea."

Miss Dudley satisfactorily explained that affair. She stated the relation in which Craig had formerly stood to her father, and the acts of which he had been guilty. She slightly touched on the distresses which the family had undergone during their abode in this city, and the means by which she had been able to preserve her father from want. She mentioned the circumstances which compelled her to seek his charity as the last resource, and the casual encounter with Craig, by which she was for the present diverted from that design. She laid before him a copy of the letter she had written, and explained the result in the gift of the note which now appeared to be a counterfeit. She concluded with stating her present views, and soliciting him to receive her into his family, in quality of a servant, or use his interest with some of his friends to procure a provision of this kind. This tale was calculated deeply to affect a man of Mr. Melbourne's humanity.

"No," said he, "I cannot listen to such a request. My inclination is bounded by my means. These will not allow me to place you in an independent situation; but I will do what I can. With your leave, I will introduce you to my wife in your true character. Her good sense will teach her to set a just value on your friendship. There is no disgrace in earning your subsistence by your own industry. She and her friends will furnish you with plenty of materials; but if there ever be a deficiency, look to them for a supply."

Constantia's heart overflowed at this declaration. Her silence was more eloquent than any words could have been. She declined an immediate introduction to his wife, and withdrew; but not till her new friend had forced her to accept some money.

"Place it to account," said he. "It is merely paying you before hand, and discharging a debt at the time when it happens to be most useful to the creditor."

To what entire and incredible reverses is the tenor of human life subject! A short minute shall effect a transition from a state utterly destitute of hope to a condition where, all is serene and abundant. The path, which we employ all our exertions to shun, is often found, upon trial, to be the true road to prosperity.

Constantia retired from this interview with a heart bounding with exultation. She related to her father all that had happened. He was pleased on her account, but the detection of his poverty by Melbourne was the parent of new mortification. His only remaining hope relative to himself was that he should die in his obscurity, whereas, it was probable that his old acquaintance would trace him

to his covert. This prognostic filled him with the deepest inquietude, and all the reasonings of his daughter were insufficient to appease him.

Melbourne made his appearance in the afternoon. He was introduced by Constantia to her father. Mr. Dudley's figure was emaciated, and his features corroded by his ceaseless melancholy. His blindness produced in them a woeful and wildering expression. His dress betokened his penury, and was in unison with the meanness of his habitation and furniture. The visitant was struck with the melancholy contrast, which these appearances exhibited, to the joyousness and splendour that he had formerly witnessed.

Mr. Dudley received the salutations of his guest with an air of embarrassment and dejection. He resigned to his daughter the task of sustaining the conversation, and excused himself from complying with the urgent invitations of Melbourne, while, at the same time, he studiously forebore all expressions tending to encourage any kind of intercourse between them.

The guest came with a message from his wife, who entreated Miss Dudley's company to tea with her that evening, adding that she should be entirely alone. It was impossible to refuse compliance with this request. She cheerfully assented, and in the evening was introduced to Mrs. Melbourne by her husband.

Constantia found in this lady nothing that called for reverence or admiration, though she could not deny her some portion of esteem. The impression which her own appearance and conversation made upon her entertainer was much more powerful and favourable. A consciousness of her own worth, and disdain of the malevolence of fortune, perpetually shone forth in her behaviour. It was modelled by a sort of mean between presumption on the one hand, and humility on the other. She claimed no more than what was justly due to her, but she claimed no less. She did not soothe our vanity nor fascinate our pity by diffident reserves and fluttering. Neither did she disgust by arrogant negligence, and uncircumspect loquacity.

At parting she received commissions in the way of her profession, which supplied her with abundant and profitable employment. She abridged her visit on her father's account, and parted from her new friend just early enough to avoid meeting with Ormond, who entered the house a few minutes after she had left it.

"What pity," said Melbourne to him, "you did not come a little sooner. You pretend to be a judge of beauty. I should like to have heard your opinion of a face that has just left us."

"Describe it," said the other.

"That is beyond my capacity. Complexion, and hair, and eyebrows may be painted, but these are of no great value in the present case. It is in the putting them together that nature has here shown her skill, and not in the structure of each of the parts, individually considered. Perhaps you may at some time meet each other here. If a lofty fellow like you, now, would mix a little common sense with his science, this girl might hope for a husband, and her father for a natural protector."

"Are they ill search of one or the other?"

"I cannot say they are. Nay, I imagine they would hear any imputation with more patience than that, but certain I am, they stand in need of them. How much would it be to the honour of a man like you rioting in wealth, to divide it with one, lovely and accomplished as this girl is, and struggling with indigence!"

Melbourne then related the adventure of the morning. It was easy for Ormond to perceive that this was the same person of whom he already had some knowledge; but there were some particulars in the narrative that excited surprise. A note had been received from Craig, at the first visit in the evening, and this note was for no more than fifty dollars. This did not exactly tally with the information received from Craig. But this note was forged. Might not this girl mix a little imposture with her truth? Who knows her temptations to hypocrisy? It might have been a present from another quarter, and accompanied with no very honourable conditions. Exquisite wretch! Those whom honesty will not let live must be knaves. Such is the alternative offered by the wisdom of society.

He listened to the tale with apparent indifference. He speedily shifted the conversation to new topics, and put an end to his visit sooner than ordinary.

CHAPTER II

I know no task more arduous than a just delineation of the character of Ormond. To scrutinize and ascertain our own principles is abundantly difficult. To exhibit these principles to the world with absolute sincerity can hardly be expected. We are prompted to conceal and to feign by a thousand motives; but truly to portray the motives, and relate the actions of another, appears utterly impossible. The attempt, however, if made with fidelity and diligence, is not without its use.

To comprehend the whole truth with regard to the character and conduct of another, may be denied to any human being, but different observers will have, in their pictures, a greater or less portion of this truth. No representation will be wholly false, and some, though not perfectly, may yet be considerably exempt from error.

Ormond was of all mankind the being most difficult and most deserving to be studied. A fortunate concurrence of incidents has unveiled his actions to me with more distinctness than to any other. My knowledge is far from being absolute, but I am conscious of a kind of duty, first to my friend, and secondly to mankind, to impart the knowledge I possess.

I shall omit to mention the means by which I became acquainted with his character, nor shall I enter, at this time, into every part of it. His political projects are likely to possess an extensive influence on the future condition of this western world. I do not conceive myself authorized to communicate a knowledge of his schemes, which I gained, in some sort, surreptitiously, or at least, by means of which he was not apprised. I shall merely explain the maxims by which he was accustomed to regulate his private deportment.

No one could entertain loftier conceptions of human capacity than Ormond, but he carefully distinguished between men in the abstract, and men as they are. The former were beings to be impelled, by the breath of accident, in a right or a wrong road, but whatever direction they should receive, it was the property of their nature to persist in it. Now this impulse had been given. No single being could rectify the error. It was the business of the wise man to form a just estimate of things, but not to attempt, by individual efforts, so chimerical an enterprise as that of promoting the happiness of mankind. Their condition was out of the reach of a member of a corrupt society to control. A mortal poison pervaded the whole system, by means of which every thing received was converted into bane and purulence. Efforts designed to ameliorate the condition of an individual were sure of answering a contrary purpose. The principles of the social machine must be rectified, before men can be beneficially active. Our motives may be neutral or beneficent, but our actions tend merely to the production of evil.

The idea of total forbearance was not less delusive. Man could not be otherwise than a cause of perpetual operation and efficacy. He was part of a machine, and as such had not power to withhold his agency. Contiguity to other parts, that is, to other men, was all that was necessary to render him a powerful concurrent. What then was the conduct incumbent on him? Whether he went forward, or stood still, whether his motives were malignant, or kind, or indifferent, the mass of evil was equally and necessarily augmented. It did not follow from these preliminaries that virtue and duty were terms without a meaning, but they require us to promote our own happiness and not the happiness of others. Not because the former end is intrinsically preferable, not because the happiness of others is unworthy of primary consideration, but because it is not to be attained. Our power in the present state of things is subjected to certain limits. A man may reasonably hope to accomplish his end when he proposes nothing but his own good: any other point is inaccessible.

He must not part with benevolent desire: this is a constituent of happiness. He sees the value of general and particular felicity; he sometimes paints it to his fancy, but if this be rarely done, it is in consequence of virtuous sensibility, which is afflicted on observing that his pictures are reversed in the real state of mankind. A wise man will relinquish the pursuit of general benefit, but not the desire

of that benefit, or the perception of that in which this benefit consists, because these are among the ingredients of virtue and the sources of his happiness.

Principles, in the looser sense of that term, have little influence on practice. Ormond was, for the most part, governed, like others, by the influences of education and present circumstances. It required a vigilant discernment to distinguish whether the stream of his actions flowed from one or the other. His income was large, and he managed it nearly on the same principles as other men. He thought himself entitled to all the splendour and ease which it would purchase, but his taste was elaborate and correct. He gratified his love of the beautiful, because the sensations it afforded were pleasing, but made no sacrifices to the love of distinction. He gave no expensive entertainments for the sake of exciting the admiration of stupid gazers, or the flattery or envy of those who shared them. Pompous equipage and retinue were modes of appropriating the esteem of mankind which he held in profound contempt. The garb of his attendants was fashioned after the model suggested by his imagination, and not in compliance with the dictates of custom.

He treated with systematic negligence the etiquette that regulates the intercourse of persons of a certain class. He every where acted, in this respect, as if he were alone, or among familiar associates. The very appellations of Sir, and Madam, and Mister, were, in his apprehension, servile and ridiculous, and as custom or law had annexed no penalty to the neglect of these, he conformed to his own opinions. It was easier for him to reduce his notions of equality to practice than for most others. To level himself with others was an act of condescension and not of arrogance. It was of requisite to descend rather than to risk, – a task the most easy, if we regard the obstacle flowing from the prejudice of mankind, but far most difficult if the motive of the agent be considered.

That in which he chiefly placed his boast, was his sincerity. To this he refused no sacrifice. In consequence of this, his deportment was disgusting to weak minds, by a certain air of ferocity and haughty negligence. He was without the attractions of candour, because he regarded not the happiness of others, but in subservience to his sincerity. Hence it was natural to suppose that the character of this man was easily understood. He affected to conceal nothing. No one appeared more exempt from the instigations of vanity. He set light by the good opinions of others, had no compassion for their prejudices and hazarded assertions in their presence which he knew would be, in the highest degree, shocking to their previous notions. They might take it, he would say, as they list. Such were his conceptions, and the last thing he would give up was the use of his tongue. It was his way to give utterance to the suggestions of his understanding. If they were disadvantageous to him, the opinions of others, it was well. He did not want to be regarded in any light but the true one. He was contented to be rated by the world at his just value. If they esteemed him for qualities which he did not possess, was he wrong in rectifying their mistake: but in reality, if they valued him for that to which he had no claim, and which he himself considered as contemptible, he must naturally desire to show them their error, and forfeit that praise which, in his own opinion, was a badge of infamy.

In listening to his discourse, no one's claim to sincerity appeared less questionable. A somewhat different conclusion would be suggested by a survey of his actions. In early youth he discovered in himself a remarkable facility in imitating the voice and gestures of others. His memory was eloquently retentive, and these qualities would have rendered his career, in the theatrical profession, illustrious, had not his condition raised him above it. His talents were occasionally exerted for the entertainment of convivial parties and private circles, but he gradually withdrew from such scenes as he advanced in age, and devoted his abilities to higher purposes.

His aversion to duplicity had flowed from experience of its evils. He had frequently been made its victim; in consequence of this his temper had become suspicious, and he was apt to impute deceit on occasions when others, of no inconsiderable sagacity, were abundantly disposed to confidence. One transaction had occurred in his life, in which the consequences of being misled by false appearances were of the utmost moment to his honour and safety. The usual mode of salving his doubt he deemed insufficient, and the eagerness of his curiosity tempted him, for, the first time, to employ, for this

end, his talent at imitation. He therefore assumed a borrowed character and guise, and performed his part with so much skill as fully to accomplish life design. He whose mask would have secured him from all other attempts, was thus taken through an avenue which his caution had overlooked, and the hypocrisy of his pretensions unquestionably ascertained.

Perhaps, in a comprehensive view, the success of this expedient was unfortunate. It served to recommend this method of encountering deceit, and informed him of the extent of those powers which are so liable to be abused. A subtlety much inferior to Ormond would suffice to recommend this mode of action. It was defensible on no other principle than necessity. The treachery of mankind compelled him to resort to it. If they should deal in a manner as upright and explicit as himself, it would be superfluous. But since they were in the perpetual use of stratagems and artifices, it was allowable, he thought, to wield the same arms.

It was easy to perceive, however, that this practice was recommended to him by other considerations. He was delighted with the power it conferred. It enabled him to gain access, as if by supernatural means, to the privacy of others, and baffle their profoundest contrivances to hide themselves from his view. It flattered him with the possession of something like omniscience. It was besides an art, in which, as in others, every accession of skill was a source of new gratification. Compared with this, the performance of the actor is the sport of children. This profession he was accustomed to treat with merciless ridicule, and no doubt some of his contempt arose from a secret comparison between the theatrical species of imitation and his own. He blended in his own person the functions of poet and actor, and his dramas were not fictitious but real. The end that he proposed was not the amusement of a playhouse mob. His were scenes in which hope and fear exercised a genuine influence, and in which was maintained that resemblance to truth so audaciously and grossly violated on the stage.

It is obvious how many singular conjunctures must have grown out of this propensity. A mind of uncommon energy like Ormond's, which had occupied a wide sphere of action, and which could not fail of confederating its efforts with those of minds like itself, must have given birth to innumerable incidents, not unworthy to be exhibited by the most eloquent historian. It is not my business to relate any of these. The fate of Miss Dudley is intimately connected with him. What influence he obtained over her destiny, in consequence of this dexterity, will appear in the sequel.

It arose from these circumstances, that no one was more impenetrable than Ormond, though no one's real character seemed more easily discerned. The projects that occupied his attention were diffused over an ample space; and his instruments and coadjutors were culled from a field, whose bounds were those of the civilized world. To the vulgar eye, therefore, he appeared a man of speculation and seclusion, and was equally inscrutable in his real and assumed characters. In his real, his intents were too lofty and comprehensive, as well as too assiduously shrouded from profane inspection for them to scan. In the latter, appearances were merely calculated to mislead and not to enlighten.

In his youth he had been guilty of the usual excesses incident to his age and character. These had disappeared and yielded place to a more regular and circumspect system of action. In the choice of his pleasures he still exposed himself to the censure of the world. Yet there was more of grossness and licentiousness in the expression of his tenets, than in the tenets themselves. So far as temperance regards the maintenance of health, no man adhered to its precepts with more fidelity, but he esteemed some species of connection with the other sex as venial, which mankind in general are vehement in condemning.

In his intercourse with women he deemed himself superior to the allurements of what is called love. His inferences were drawn from a consideration of the physical propensities of a human being. In his scale of enjoyments the gratifications which belonged to these were placed at the bottom. Yet he did not entirely disdain them, and when they could be purchased without the sacrifice of superior advantages, they were sufficiently acceptable.

His mistake on this head was the result of his ignorance. He had not hitherto met with a female worthy of his confidence. Their views were limited and superficial, or their understandings were betrayed by the tenderness of their hearts. He found in them no intellectual energy, no superiority to what he accounted vulgar prejudice, and no affinity with the sentiments which he cherished with most devotion. Their presence had been capable of exciting no emotion which he did not quickly discover to be vague and sensual; and the uniformity of his experience at length instilled into him a belief, that the intellectual constitution of females was essentially defective. He denied the reality of that passion which claimed a similitude or sympathy of minds as one of its ingredients.

CHAPTER III

He resided in New York some time before he took up his abode in Philadelphia. He had some pecuniary concerns with a merchant of that place. He occasionally frequented his house, finding, in the society which it afforded him, scope for amusing speculation, and opportunities of gaining a species of knowledge of which at that time he stood in need. There was one daughter of the family, who of course constituted a member of the domestic circle.

Helena Cleves was endowed with every feminine and fascinating quality. Her features were modified by the most transient sentiments, and were the seat of a softness at all times blushful and bewitching. All those graces of symmetry, smoothness, and lustre, which assemble in the imagination of the painter when he calls from the bosom of her natal deep the Paphian divinity, blended their perfections in the shape, complexion, and hair of this lady. Her voice was naturally thrilling and melodious, and her utterance clear and distinct. A musical education had added to all these advantages the improvements of art, and no one could swim in the dance with such airy and transporting elegance.

It is obvious to inquire whether her mental were, in any degree, on a level with her exterior accomplishments. Should you listen to her talk, you would be liable to be deceived in this respect. Her utterance was so just, her phrases so happy, and her language so copious and correct, that the hearer was apt to be impressed with an ardent veneration of her abilities, but the truth is, she was calculated to excite emotions more voluptuous than dignified. Her presence produced a trance of the senses rather than an illumination of the soul. It was a topic of wonder how she should have so carefully separated the husk from the kernel, and be so absolute a mistress of the vehicle of knowledge, with so slender means of supplying it: yet it is difficult to judge but from comparison. To say that Helena Cleves was silly or ignorant would be hatefully unjust. Her understanding bore no disadvantageous comparison with that of the majority of her sex; but when placed in competition with that of some eminent females or of Ormond, it was exposed to the risk of contempt.

This lady and Ormond were exposed to mutual examination. The latter was not unaffected by the radiance that environed this girl, but her true character was easily discovered, and he was accustomed to regard her merely as an object charming to the senses. His attention to her was dictated by this principle. When she sung or talked, it was not unworthy of the strongest mind to be captivated with her music and her elocution: but these were the limits which he set to his gratifications. That sensations of a different kind never ruffled his tranquillity must not be supposed, but he too accurately estimated their consequences to permit himself to indulge them.

Unhappily the lady did not exercise equal fortitude. During a certain interval Ormond's visits were frequent, and the insensibly contracted for him somewhat more than reverence. The tenor of his discourse was little adapted to cherish her hopes. In the declaration of his opinions he was never withheld by scruples of decorum, or a selfish regard to his own interest. His matrimonial tenets were harsh and repulsive. A woman of keener penetration would have predicted from them the disappointment of her wishes, but Helena's mind was uninured to the discussion of logical points and the tracing of remote consequences. His presence inspired feelings which would not permit her to bestow an impartial attention on his arguments. It is not enough to say that his reasonings failed to convince her: the combined influence of passion, and an unenlightened understanding hindered her from fully comprehending them. All she gathered was a vague conception of something magnificent and vast in his character.

Helena was destined to experience the vicissitudes of fortune. Her father died suddenly and left her without provision. She was compelled to accept the invitations of a kinswoman, and live, in some sort, a life of dependence. She was not qualified to sustain this reverse of fortune in a graceful manner. She could not bear the diminution of her customary indulgences, and to these privations were added the inquietudes of a passion which now began to look with an aspect of hopelessness.

These events happened in the absence of Ormond. On his return he made himself acquainted with them. He saw the extent of this misfortune to a woman of Helena's character, but knew not in what manner it might be effectually obviated. He esteemed it incumbent on him to pay her a visit in her new abode. This token at least of respect or remembrance his duty appeared to prescribe.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.