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Title: Caleb Williams

 Things As They Are

Author: William Godwin

Release Date: February 26, 2004 [EBook #11323]

[This File last updated: October 19, 2010]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ISO-8859-1

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# CALEB WILLIAMS

## OR THINGS AS THEY ARE

## BY WILLIAM GODWIN

### WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY ERNEST A. BAKER, M.A.

#### LONDON

### 1903

**VOLUME THE FIRST.**

**CHAPTER I.**

My life has for several years been a theatre of calamity. I have been a mark for the vigilance of tyranny, and I could not escape. My fairest prospects have been blasted. My enemy has shown himself inaccessible to entreaties, and untired in persecution. My fame, as well as my happiness, has become his victim. Every one, as far as my story has been known, has refused to assist me in my distress, and has execrated my name. I have not deserved this treatment. My own conscience witnesses in behalf of that innocence, my pretensions to which are regarded in the world as incredible. There is now, however, little hope that I shall escape from the toils that universally beset me. I am incited to the penning of these memoirs only by a desire to divert my mind from the deplorableness of my situation, and a faint idea that posterity may by their means be induced to render me a justice which my contemporaries refuse. My story will, at least, appear to have that consistency which is seldom attendant but upon truth.

I was born of humble parents, in a remote county of England. Their occupations were such as usually fall to the lot of peasants, and they had no portion to give me, but an education free from the usual sources of depravity, and the inheritance, long since lost by their unfortunate progeny! of an honest fame. I was taught the rudiments of no science, except reading, writing, and arithmetic. But I had an inquisitive mind, and neglected no means of information from conversation or books. My improvement was greater than my condition in life afforded room to expect.

There are other circumstances deserving to be mentioned as having influenced the history of my future life. I was somewhat above the middle stature. Without being particularly athletic in appearance, or large in my dimensions, I was uncommonly vigorous and active. My joints were supple, and I was formed to excel in youthful sports. The habits of my mind, however, were to a certain degree at war with the dictates of boyish vanity. I had considerable aversion to the boisterous gaiety of the village gallants, and contrived to satisfy my love of praise with an unfrequent apparition at their amusements. My excellence in these respects, however, gave a turn to my meditations. I delighted to read of feats of activity, and was particularly interested by tales in which corporeal ingenuity or strength are the means resorted to for supplying resources and conquering difficulties. I inured myself to mechanical pursuits, and devoted much of my time to an endeavour after mechanical invention.

The spring of action which, perhaps more than any other, characterised the whole train of my life, was curiosity. It was this that gave me my mechanical turn; I was desirous of tracing the variety of effects which might be produced from given causes. It was this that made me a sort of natural philosopher; I could not rest till I had acquainted myself with the solutions that had been invented for the phenomena of the universe. In fine, this produced in me an invincible attachment to books of narrative and romance. I panted for the unravelling of an adventure with an anxiety, perhaps almost equal to that of the man whose future happiness or misery depended on its issue. I read, I devoured compositions of this sort. They took possession of my soul; and the effects they produced were frequently discernible in my external appearance and my health. My curiosity, however, was not entirely ignoble: village anecdotes and scandal had no charms for me: my imagination must be excited; and when that was not done, my curiosity was dormant.

The residence of my parents was within the manor of Ferdinando Falkland, a country squire of considerable opulence. At an early age I attracted the favourable notice of Mr. Collins, this gentleman's steward, who used to call in occasionally at my father's. He observed the particulars of my progress with approbation, and made a favourable report to his master of my industry and genius.

In the summer of the year ----, Mr. Falkland visited his estate in our county after an absence of several months. This was a period of misfortune to me. I was then eighteen years of age. My father lay dead in our cottage. I had lost my mother some years before. In this forlorn situation I was surprised with a message from the squire, ordering me to repair to the mansion-house the morning after my father's funeral.

Though I was not a stranger to books, I had no practical acquaintance with men. I had never had occasion to address a person of this elevated rank, and I felt no small uneasiness and awe on the present occasion. I found Mr. Falkland a man of small stature, with an extreme delicacy of form and appearance. In place of the hard-favoured and inflexible visages I had been accustomed to observe, every muscle and petty line of his countenance seemed to be in an inconceivable degree pregnant with meaning. His manner was kind, attentive, and humane. His eye was full of animation; but there was a grave and sad solemnity in his air, which, for want of experience, I imagined was the inheritance of the great, and the instrument by which the distance between them and their inferiors was maintained. His look bespoke the unquietness of his mind, and frequently wandered with an expression of disconsolateness and anxiety.

My reception was as gracious and encouraging as I could possibly desire. Mr. Falkland questioned me respecting my learning, and my conceptions of men and things, and listened to my answers with condescension and approbation. This kindness soon restored to me a considerable part of my self-possession, though I still felt restrained by the graceful, but unaltered dignity of his carriage. When Mr. Falkland had satisfied his curiosity, he proceeded to inform me that he was in want of a secretary, that I appeared to him sufficiently qualified for that office, and that, if, in my present change of situation, occasioned by the death of my father, I approved of the employment, he would take me into his family.

I felt highly flattered by the proposal, and was warm in the expression of my acknowledgments. I set eagerly about the disposal of the little property my father had left, in which I was assisted by Mr. Collins. I had not now a relation in the world, upon whose kindness and interposition I had any direct claim. But, far from regarding this deserted situation with terror, I formed golden visions of the station I was about to occupy. I little suspected that the gaiety and lightness of heart I had hitherto enjoyed were upon the point of leaving me for ever, and that the rest of my days were devoted to misery and alarm.

My employment was easy and agreeable. It consisted partly in the transcribing and arranging certain papers, and partly in writing from my master's dictation letters of business, as well as sketches of literary composition. Many of these latter consisted of an analytical survey of the plans of different authors and conjectural speculations upon hints they afforded, tending either to the detection of their errors, or the carrying forward their discoveries. All of them bore powerful marks of a profound and elegant mind, well stored with literature, and possessed of an uncommon share of activity and discrimination.

My station was in that part of the house which was appropriated for the reception of books, it being my duty to perform the functions of librarian as well as secretary. Here my hours would have glided in tranquillity and peace, had not my situation included in it circumstances totally different from those which attended me in my father's cottage. In early life my mind had been much engrossed by reading and reflection: my intercourse with my fellow mortals was occasional and short. But, in my new residence, I was excited by every motive of interest and novelty to study my master's character; and I found in it an ample field for speculation and conjecture.

His mode of living was in the utmost degree recluse and solitary. He had no inclination to scenes of revelry and mirth. He avoided the busy haunts of men; nor did he seem desirous to compensate for this privation by the confidence of friendship. He appeared a total stranger to every thing which usually bears the appellation of pleasure. His features were scarcely ever relaxed into a smile, nor did that air which spoke the unhappiness of his mind at any time forsake them: yet his manners were by no means such as denoted moroseness and misanthropy. He was compassionate and considerate for others, though the stateliness of his carriage and the reserve of his temper were at no time interrupted. His appearance and general behaviour might have strongly interested all persons in his favour; but the coldness of his address, and the impenetrableness of his sentiments, seemed to forbid those demonstrations of kindness to which one might otherwise have been prompted.

Such was the general appearance of Mr. Falkland: but his disposition was extremely unequal. The distemper which afflicted him with incessant gloom had its paroxysms. Sometimes he was hasty, peevish, and tyrannical; but this proceeded rather from the torment of his mind than an unfeeling disposition; and when reflection recurred, he appeared willing that the weight of his misfortune should fall wholly upon himself. Sometimes he entirely lost his self-possession, and his behaviour was changed into frenzy: he would strike his forehead, his brows became knit, his features distorted, and his teeth ground one against the other. When he felt the approach of these symptoms, he would suddenly rise, and, leaving the occupation, whatever it was, in which he was engaged, hasten into a solitude upon which no person dared to intrude.

It must not be supposed that the whole of what I am describing was visible to the persons about him; nor, indeed, was I acquainted with it in the extent here stated but after a considerable time, and in gradual succession. With respect to the domestics in general, they saw but little of their master. None of them, except myself, from the nature of my functions, and Mr. Collins, from the antiquity of his service and the respectableness of his character, approached Mr. Falkland, but at stated seasons and for a very short interval. They knew him only by the benevolence of his actions, and the principles of inflexible integrity by which he was ordinarily guided; and though they would sometimes indulge their conjectures respecting his singularities, they regarded him upon the whole with veneration, as a being of a superior order.

One day, when I had been about three months in the service of my patron, I went to a closet, or small apartment, which was separated from the library by a narrow gallery that was lighted by a small window near the roof. I had conceived that there was no person in the room, and intended only to put any thing in order that I might find out of its place. As I opened the door, I heard at the same instant a deep groan, expressive of intolerable anguish. The sound of the door in opening seemed to alarm the person within; I heard the lid of a trunk hastily shut, and the noise as of fastening a lock. I conceived that Mr. Falkland was there, and was going instantly to retire; but at that moment a voice, that seemed supernaturally tremendous, exclaimed, Who is there? The voice was Mr. Falkland's. The sound of it thrilled my very vitals. I endeavoured to answer, but my speech failed, and being incapable of any other reply, I instinctively advanced within the door into the room. Mr. Falkland was just risen from the floor upon which he had been sitting or kneeling. His face betrayed strong symptoms of confusion. With a violent effort, however, these symptoms vanished, and instantaneously gave place to a countenance sparkling with rage.

"Villain!" cried he, "what has brought you here?" I hesitated a confused and irresolute answer. "Wretch!" interrupted Mr. Falkland, with uncontrollable impatience, "you want to ruin me. You set yourself as a spy upon my actions; but bitterly shall you repent your insolence. Do you think you shall watch my privacies with impunity?" I attempted to defend myself. "Begone, devil!" rejoined he. "Quit the room, or I will trample you into atoms." Saying this, he advanced towards me. But I was already sufficiently terrified, and vanished in a moment. I heard the door shut after me with violence; and thus ended this extraordinary scene.

I saw him again in the evening, and he was then tolerably composed. His behaviour, which was always kind, was now doubly attentive and soothing. He seemed to have something of which he wished to disburthen his mind, but to want words in which to convey it. I looked at him with anxiety and affection. He made two unsuccessful efforts, shook his head, and then putting five guineas into my hand, pressed it in a manner that I could feel proceeded from a mind pregnant with various emotions, though I could not interpret them. Having done this, he seemed immediately to recollect himself, and to take refuge in the usual distance and solemnity of his manner.

I easily understood that secrecy was one of the things expected from me; and, indeed, my mind was too much disposed to meditate upon what I had heard and seen, to make it a topic of indiscriminate communication. Mr. Collins, however, and myself happened to sup together that evening, which was but seldom the case, his avocations obliging him to be much abroad. He could not help observing an uncommon dejection and anxiety in my countenance, and affectionately enquired into the reason. I endeavoured to evade his questions, but my youth and ignorance of the world gave me little advantage for that purpose. Beside this, I had been accustomed to view Mr. Collins with considerable attachment, and I conceived from the nature of his situation that there could be small impropriety in making him my confident in the present instance. I repeated to him minutely every thing that had passed, and concluded with a solemn declaration that, though treated with caprice, I was not anxious for myself; no inconvenience or danger should ever lead me to a pusillanimous behaviour; and I felt only for my patron, who, with every advantage for happiness, and being in the highest degree worthy of it, seemed destined to undergo unmerited distress.

In answer to my communication, Mr. Collins informed me that some incidents, of a nature similar to that which I related, had fallen under his own knowledge, and that from the whole he could not help concluding that our unfortunate patron, was at times disordered in his intellects. "Alas!" continued he, "it was not always thus! Ferdinando Falkland was once the gayest of the gay. Not indeed of that frothy sort, who excite contempt instead of admiration, and whose levity argues thoughtlessness rather than felicity. His gaiety was always accompanied with dignity. It was the gaiety of the hero and the scholar. It was chastened with reflection and sensibility, and never lost sight either of good taste or humanity. Such as it was however, it denoted a genuine hilarity of heart, imparted an inconceivable brilliancy to his company and conversation, and rendered him the perpetual delight of the diversified circles he then willingly frequented. You see nothing of him, my dear Williams, but the ruin of that Falkland who was courted by sages, and adored by the fair. His youth, distinguished in its outset by the most unusual promise, is tarnished. His sensibility is shrunk up and withered by events the most disgustful to his feelings. His mind was fraught with all the rhapsodies of visionary honour; and, in his sense, nothing but the grosser part, the mere shell of Falkland, was capable of surviving the wound that his pride has sustained."

These reflections of my friend Collins strongly tended to inflame my curiosity, and I requested him to enter into a more copious explanation. With this request he readily complied; as conceiving that whatever delicacy it became him to exercise in ordinary cases, it would be out of place in my situation; and thinking it not improbable that Mr. Falkland, but for the disturbance and inflammation of his mind, would be disposed to a similar communication. I shall interweave with Mr. Collins's story various information which I afterwards received from other quarters, that I may give all possible perspicuity to the series of events. To avoid confusion in my narrative, I shall drop the person of Collins, and assume to be myself the historian of our patron. To the reader it may appear at first sight as if this detail of the preceding life of Mr. Falkland were foreign to my history. Alas! I know from bitter experience that it is otherwise. My heart bleeds at the recollection of his misfortunes, as if they were my own. How can it fail to do so? To his story the whole fortune of my life was linked: because he was miserable, my happiness, my name, and my existence have been irretrievably blasted.