

**ARTHUR MERVYN;
OR, MEMOIRS OF THE
YEAR 1793, VOL. I**

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Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the year 1793, Vol.I by Charles Brockden Brown

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CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

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Down, Charles Brockden
Novels (v. 2)

ARTHUR MERVYN

OR

MEMOIRS OF THE YEAR 1793

BY

CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

VOL. I (*of Arthur Mervyn*)



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PREFACE.

THE evils of pestilence by which this city has lately been afflicted will probably form an era in its history. The schemes of reformation and improvement to which they will give birth, or, if no efforts of human wisdom can avail to avert the periodical visitations of this calamity, the change in manners and population which they will produce, will be, in the highest degree, memorable. They have already supplied new and copious materials for reflection to the physician and the political economist. They have not been less fertile of instruction to the moral observer, to whom they have furnished new displays of the influence of human passions and motives.

Amidst the medical and political discussions which are now afloat in the community relative to this topic, the author of these remarks has ventured to methodize his own reflections, and to weave into an humble narrative such incidents as appeared to him most instructive and remarkable among those which came within the sphere of his own observation. It is every one's duty to profit by all opportunities of inculcating on mankind the lessons of justice and humanity. The influences of hope and fear, the trials of fortitude and con-

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stancy, which took place in this city in the autumn of 1793, have, perhaps, never been exceeded in any age. It is but just to snatch some of these from oblivion, and to deliver to posterity a brief but faithful sketch of the condition of this metropolis during that calamitous period. Men only require to be made acquainted with distress for their compassion and their charity to be awakened. He that depicts, in lively colours, the evils of disease and poverty, performs an eminent service to the sufferers, by calling forth benevolence in those who are able to afford relief; and he who portrays examples of disinterestedness and intrepidity confers on virtue the notoriety and homage that are due to it, and rouses in the spectators the spirit of salutary emulation.

In the following tale a particular series of adventures is brought to a close; but these are necessarily connected with the events which happened subsequent to the period here described. These events are not less memorable than those which form the subject of the present volume, and may hereafter be published, either separately or in addition to this.

C. B. B.



ARTHUR MERVYN.

CHAPTER I.

I WAS resident in this city during the year 1793. Many motives contributed to detain me, though departure was easy and commodious, and my friends were generally solicitous for me to go. It is not my purpose to enumerate these motives, or to dwell on my present concerns and transactions, but merely to compose a narrative of some incidents with which my situation made me acquainted.

Returning one evening, somewhat later than usual, to my own house, my attention was attracted, just as I entered the porch, by the figure of a man reclining against the wall at a few paces distant. My sight was imperfectly assisted by a far-off lamp; but the posture in which he sat, the hour, and the place, immediately suggested the idea of one disabled by sickness. It was obvious to conclude that his disease was pestilential. This did not deter me from approaching and examining him more closely.

He leaned his head against the wall; his eyes were shut, his hands clasped in each other, and his body seemed to be sustained in an upright position merely by the cellar-door against which he rested his left shoulder. The lethargy into which he was sunk seemed scarcely interrupted by my feeling his hand and his forehead. His throbbing temples and burning skin indicated a fever, and his form, already emaciated, seemed to prove that it had not been of short duration.

There was only one circumstance that hindered me from forming an immediate determination in what man-

ner this person should be treated. My family consisted of my wife and a young child. Our servant-maid had been seized, three days before, by the reigning malady, and, at her own request, had been conveyed to the hospital. We ourselves enjoyed good health, and were hopeful of escaping with our lives. Our measures for this end had been cautiously taken and carefully adhered to. They did not consist in avoiding the receptacles of infection, for my office required me to go daily into the midst of them; nor in filling the house with the exhalations of gunpowder, vinegar, or tar. They consisted in cleanliness, reasonable exercise, and wholesome diet. Custom had likewise blunted the edge of our apprehensions. To take this person into my house, and bestow upon him the requisite attendance, was the scheme that first occurred to me. In this, however, the advice of my wife was to govern me.

I mentioned the incident to her. I pointed out the danger which was to be dreaded from such an inmate. I desired her to decide with caution, and mentioned my resolution to conform myself implicitly to her decision. Should we refuse to harbour him, we must not forget that there was a hospital to which he would, perhaps, consent to be carried, and where he would be accommodated in the best manner the times would admit.

"Nay," said she, "talk not of hospitals. At least, let him have his choice. I have no fear about me, for my part, in a case where the injunctions of duty are so obvious. Let us take the poor, unfortunate wretch into our protection and care, and leave the consequences to Heaven."

I expected and was pleased with this proposal. I returned to the sick man, and, on rousing him from his stupor, found him still in possession of his reason. With a candle near, I had an opportunity of viewing him more accurately.

His garb was plain, careless, and denoted rusticity. His aspect was simple and ingenuous, and his decayed visage still retained traces of uncommon but manlike beauty. He had all the appearances of mere youth, unspoiled by luxury and uninured to misfortune. I scarcely

ever beheld an object which laid so powerful and sudden a claim to my affection and succour.

"You are sick," said I, in as cheerful a tone as I could assume. "Cold bricks and night-airs are comfortless attendants for one in your condition. Rise, I pray you, and come into the house. We will try to supply you with accommodations a little more suitable."

At this address he fixed his languid eyes upon me. "What would you have?" said he. "I am very well as I am. While I breathe, which will not be long, I shall breathe with more freedom here than elsewhere. Let me alone—I am very well as I am."

"Nay," said I, "this situation is unsuitable to a sick man. I only ask you to come into my house, and receive all the kindness that it is in our power to bestow. Pluck up courage, and I will answer for your recovery, provided you submit to directions, and do as we would have you. Rise, and come along with me. We will find you a physician and a nurse, and all we ask in return is good spirits and compliance."

"Do you not know," he replied, "what my disease is? Why should you risk your safety for the sake of one whom your kindness cannot benefit, and who has nothing to give in return?"

There was something in the style of this remark, that heightened my prepossession in his favour, and made me pursue my purpose with more zeal. "Let us try what we can do for you," I answered. "If we save your life, we shall have done you some service, and, as for recompense, we will look to that."

It was with considerable difficulty that he was persuaded to accept our invitation. He was conducted to a chamber, and, the criticalness of his case requiring unusual attention, I spent the night at his bedside.

My wife was encumbered with the care both of her infant and her family. The charming babe was in perfect health, but her mother's constitution was frail and delicate. We simplified the household duties as much as possible, but still these duties were considerably burdensome to one not used to the performance, and luxuriously educated. The addition of a sick man was likely