

EMANCIPATION

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Emancipation by Mrs. Sherwood

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MRS. SHERWOOD

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BY

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&c. &c.



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EMANCIPATION.



THE late events which have agitated the minds of all the inhabitants of this once happy island have led me to so accurate a retrospect of my life, as, I trust, has not only had a good effect on my own mind, but is of such a nature, as, if put into a legible form, might, I think, be useful to others. With this view, I am suddenly become an author; having resolved to give a faithful account of the leading events of my family history; rather choosing to incur the risk of being recognized in my own little circle, than to deprive the world of what I consider to be a very valuable and important lesson.

It cannot, under these circumstances, be supposed that I should choose to give my

real name: I will, therefore, call myself James Penson.

My father was the cultivator of a small farm; part of which he held under a nobleman who resided in the adjoining parish, the other part having long been in our family. The tenement which my father occupied is called The Woodhouse, from its situation within the precincts of a wood belonging to his noble landlord; and the gardens and fields behind the house have been redeemed from the forest within the memory of my grandfather. The approach to the front of the house was through an avenue in the woods; and, from the contiguity of this front to the trees, it seldom saw the sun, excepting on a fine day in winter, when the woods were leafless.

Mine were as worthy parents as ever children were blessed with. They were simple people, knew little of the ways of the world, and had no ambition; having scarcely any other object in life, I verily believe, but to live inoffensively in the present world, and to be with their Saviour in that which is to

come. Their gains were little, but their wants were less: hence they were rich.— They lived in comfort and in plenty; and they made it a rule of never sending a poor person empty from their door. Begging in those days, (for I am speaking of fifty or sixty years ago,) was not become the system which it now is; and there was not, then, the risk of actually injuring society, and encouraging vice, which there now would be, in harbouring and feeding every wanderer who chooses to solicit our hospitality.

My parents had only two children; viz. myself, and my brother Robert. There is only one year's difference in our age, and I am the elder.

I lived at home till I was ten years of age; and those were happy years. O how have I, in after-life, looked back with anguish and regret on those pure and innocent days—comparatively pure and innocent—when we followed our father to the fields in the morning, and finished the evening in reading the Word of God, verse by verse, to our mother! How dear, then, was Robert to me! how precious

was he in my sight! How did I love my parents! What a number of innocent pleasures we then enjoyed! Who was the first to tell our mother when the chickens were beginning to break the shell, or when another lamb had appeared in the field—who knew where the first violets bloomed, or the first roses unfolded themselves—but Robert and myself? But, when I was ten years of age, a sad change for me took place.

My father's elder brother, who was a surgeon and apothecary in a small town in Devonshire, came to see us; and, having been married many years without hope of children, he persuaded my parents to permit him to adopt me; and the good people consented, not knowing the character of the man to whom they were intrusting me: and thus I bade adieu, at once, to my home, my brother, and my happiness.

I still fancy I can see my Robert, in his Sunday-coat of russet grey, rubbing the tears from his eyes, as he stood in the street of our village; and still hear the solemnly-pronounced blessing of my father, when he lifted me

to the top of the heavy coach, by the side of my uncle.

It had been promised that I should return to the Woodhouse for a few weeks during the next summer. But that summer, and many other summers, winters, springs, and autumns, passed away, before I saw my native place again. Our village is at least two hundred miles from what was my uncle's residence, and it was no easy matter for a child to undertake such a journey; therefore, during the first few years of my residence in Devonshire, my visit to my home was put off from season to season; and, after a while, I was become so useful to my uncle in his business, that he could not part with me: and thus, from the age of ten to twenty-four, I never saw my parents.

In the mean time, I was advancing in the way that I suppose my uncle intended I should go; that is, if I may judge of the end desired by the means which were used to obtain it. My uncle lived in a small town, where he was the only surgeon; and, being also an apothecary, he kept a shop; and,