

**BECKINGHAM CHARLES, DEFOE
DANIEL**

**THE LIFE OF MR.
RICHARD
SAVAGE**

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The Life of Mr. Richard Savage

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The Life of Mr. Richard Savage

ERHAPS no History in the World, either ancient or modern, can produce an Instance of any one Man's Life fill'd with so many calamitous Circumstances, as *That* of the unhappy young Gentleman, who is the melancholy Subject of the following Sheets; his Misfortunes may be said to be begun, if not strictly before he had a Being, yet, before his Birth; for when his Mother, the late Countess of *M – d*, was big with Child of him, she publicly declared, That the Infant then in her Womb, did not in the least appertain to her Husband, but to another noble Earl, upon which a Trial was commenced in the House of Lords, and my Lord *M – d*, obtained a Divorce, his Lady had her Fortune, which was very considerable, paid back to her again, with full Liberty of marrying whom she pleased, which Liberty she made use of in a very short Time, and my Lord *M – d* meeting her new Husband, Colonel *B – t*, in the Court of *Request* soon after, wish'd him Joy upon it, and said, he hoped my Lady *M – d* would make the Colonel a better Wife than she had done to him. It is very probable that this Divorce gave the Lady a great deal of Satisfaction: But her Son, being thus bastardized, could not be born, as otherwise he would have been, a Lord by Courtesy, and Heir to the Title of an *English* Earl, with one of the finest Estates in the Kingdom, which was afterwards, for want of Male-Issue, the Occasion of engaging two eminent Peers¹ in a Duel, in which they had the Misfortune to kill each other. Happy we may say it had been, as well for these Noblemen, as Mr. *Savage* himself, if he had either not been illegitimately begotten, or if that Illegitimacy had been prudently concealed: The being cut off from the certain Inheritance of that great Wealth and Honour, which, nothing, but his Mother's resentful Confession, could have hindered him of, would have given any other Person, when he came to Years of Maturity and Reflection, Sentiments of a quite different Nature from those which he always, with a Generosity of Temper peculiar to himself, expressed when that Affair has been mentioned to him; constantly excusing his Mother for taking any Methods, how injurious soever they may have been to himself, to be disengaged from an Husband, whose ill Treatment of her could not suffer her to live much to her Content with him.

But to give the Reader his History in as exact Order of Time as possible, we shall begin with the Day of his Birth, which was *January the 10th*, 1697-8. A Day, that he might very reasonably, in the Language of the despairing *Job*, have repented his ever seeing, when he considered, as he had too frequently the bitterest Occasions to do, what an almost uninterrupted Train of Miseries it had introduced him into. The Reader may easily imagine, that an Affair of this extraordinary Kind, among Persons of that high Rank, did not a little employ the Conversation and Scandal of the Town, for which Reason, the Lady resolving to move out of her Sight, and if possible, by that, out of her Remembrance, him, who was innocently the Cause of her Reproach, committed him to the Care of

¹ D. Hamilton and Lord Mohun.

a poor Woman, with Orders to breed him up as her own, and in a Manner suitable to her Condition, withal, laying a strict Injunction upon her, never to let him come to the Knowledge of his real Parents. The Nurse was faithful to the Trust reposed in her, at the same Time not neglecting to do her Duty to the Infant in a homely Manner, agreeable to the Disposition of a well-meaning ordinary Person, and her scanty Allowance from his Mother's Relations; for she did not appear in the Affair herself, but her Mother, my Lady *Mason*, whether at her Daughter's Desire, or prompted by her own natural Compassion, I shall not pretend to determine, transacted every Thing with the *Nurse*, whose Name was the only one, for many Years, he knew he had any Claim to, and was called after it accordingly; although his real Father, the late *Earl Rivers*, was himself one of his God-fathers, and had his right Name regularly Registered in the Parish Books of *St. Andrew's Holbourn*; Mrs. *Lloyd*, his God-mother, was as kind to him as the Time she lived would admit of, but her Death, next to his own Birth, was his earliest Misfortune; for he not only lost, in all likelihood, a very good Friend, but could never recover any Part of the 300 Pounds she left him as a Legacy. When he arrived at Years capable of receiving the first Rudiments of Learning, and after an Attempt had been made in vain, to have had him spirited away to one of the *American* Plantations, he was sent to a little *Grammar School* at *St. Alban's* in *Hertfordshire*. Here I hope I shall be excused saying, That by the great *Natural Genius* he discover'd, this *School* has had ample Retribution for the little Assistance he receiv'd from it, for as he never was favour'd with any Academical Learning, so it was no Secret to those he most familiarly conversed with, that his Knowledge of the *Classics* was very slender and imperfect: Tho', with humble Submission to the Judgment of those Gentlemen who are such bigotted sticklers for the *Ancients*, he had something in the Force and Sprightliness of his own Imagination, that more than made amends for the want of it.

It was while he was at this School, that his Father, *the Earl Rivers*, died, who had several Times made Enquiry after him, but could never get any satisfactory Account of him; and when on his Death-Bed, he more strenuously demanded to know what was become of him, in order to make him a Partaker in the Distribution of that very handsome Estate he left among his natural Children, he was positively told he was dead: Thus was he, whilst, (as he expressed it himself) *legally* the Son of one *Earl*, and *naturally* the Son of another, by the Management of his own Mother, denied the Benefit of belonging to either of them. In a Piece that was printed, but, for some weighty Reasons, never made publick, he tells us, That when he was about *Fifteen*, her Affection began to awake; and he was sollicitated to be bound Apprentice to a *Shoemaker*, which Proposal he rejected with Scorn, for he had now by the Death of his Nurse, discover'd some Letters of his Grandmother's, and by those Means the whole Contrivance that had been carried on to conceal his Birth. And being now entirely destitute of every the least Necessary of Life, to whom was it so Natural to apply to as a Mother? Can a Mother forget her sucking Child! But in this Instance Nature seem'd to be inverted, the Mother upon no Terms would endure the Sight of her Son, the Son on all Occasions expressing his Affection for his Mother, and the strong Desire he had of seeing her; "While Nature acted so weakly," *says an ingenious Gentleman, writing in Mr. Savage's Behalf*, "on the Humanity of the Parent, she seems on the Son's Side to have doubled her usual Influence. Even the most shocking personal Repulses, and a Severity of Contempt and Injuries received at her Hands, through the whole Course of his Life, were not able to erase from his Heart the Impressions of his filial Duty; nor, which is much more strange, of his Affection; I have known him walk three or four Times in a dark Evening, through the Street this Mother lives in, only for the melancholy Pleasure of looking up at her Windows, in hopes to catch a Moment's Sight of her as she might cross the Room by Candle-light."

Being thus abandoned on all Sides to the Frowns of Fortune and a capricious World, without any other Friend but his own *Genius* to support him, he threw himself upon the barren and unthriving Province of *Poetry*, a Science how ornamental a Flower soever it may be among the Qualifications of Men of Ease and Fortune, when display'd only for the Amusement of a leisure Hour, yet too frequently held in Contempt, when made the whole Business of a Man's Life, and set to Sale for Bread; and

more especially from the Taste of the present Age, in which the Figure and Condition of the Author takes up a greater Share of the Reader's Enquiry, than his Parts or the Matter he writes upon. Had the unfortunate Gentleman I am speaking of, been invested with either of his Father's Titles or Estates, I question not but we should have almost lost the Nobleman in the Honours paid to the *Poet*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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