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The History Of Tom Jones, A Foundling

In Four Volumes

Fielding, Henry

London, 1750

Chap. IX. The wife of Mr. Western in the Character of a Magistrate.

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C H A P. IX.

The wise Demeanour of Mr. Western in the Character of a Magistrate. A Hint to Justices of Peace, concerning the necessary Qualifications of a Clerk; with extraordinary Instances of paternal Madnes, and filial Affection.

Logicians sometimes prove too much by an Argument, and Politicians often over-reach themselves in a Scheme. Thus had it like to have happened to Mrs. Honour, who instead of recovering the rest of her Clothes, had like to have stopped even those she had on her Back from escaping: For the Squire no sooner heard of her having abused his Sister, than he swore twenty Oaths he would send her to *Bridewell*.

Mrs. *Western* was a very good-natured Woman, and ordinarily of a forgiving Temper. She had lately remitted the Trespas of a Stage-coachman, who had overturned her Post-chaise into a Ditch; nay, she had even broken the Law in refusing to prosecute a Highwayman who had robbed her, not only of a Sum of Money, but of her Ear-rings; at the same Time d—ning her, and saying, ‘such handsome B—s as you, don’t want Jewels to set them off, and be d—ned to you.’ But now, so uncertain are our Tempers, and so much do we at different Times differ from ourselves, she would hear of no Mitigation; nor could all the affected Penitence of *Honour*, nor all the Entreaties of *Sophia* for her own Servant, prevail with her to desist from earnestly desiring her Brother to execute Justice (for it was indeed

indeed a Syllable more than Justice) on the Wench.

But luckily the Clerk had a Qualification, which no Clerk to a Justice of Peace ought ever to be without, namely, some Understanding in the Law of this Realm. He therefore whispered in the Ear of the Justice, that he would exceed his Authority by committing the Girl to *Bridewell*, as there had been no Attempt to break the Peace; 'for I am afraid, Sir,' says he, 'you cannot legally commit any one to *Bridewell* only for Ill-breeding.'

In Matters of high Importance, particularly in Cases relating to the Game, the Justice was not always attentive to these Admonitions of his Clerk: For, indeed, in executing the Laws under that Head, many Justices of Peace suppose they have a large discretionary Power. By Virtue of which, under the Notion of searching for, and taking away Engines for the Destruction of the Game, they often commit Trespasses, and sometimes Felony at their Pleasure.

But this Offence was not of quite so high a Nature, nor so dangerous to the Society. Here, therefore, the Justice behaved with some Attention to the Advice of his Clerk: For, in Fact, he had already had two Informations exhibited against him in the King's-Bench, and had no Curiosity to try a third.

The Squire, therefore, putting on a most wise and significant Countenance, after a Preface of several Hum's and Ha's, told his Sister, that upon more mature Deliberation, he was of Opinion that 'as there was no breaking up of the Peace, such as the Law,' says he, 'calls breaking open a Door, or breaking a Hedge, or
' break-

‘ breaking a Head ; or any such Sort of Break-
 ‘ ing ; the Matter did not amount to a felonious
 ‘ Kind of a Thing, nor Trespasses nor Damages,
 ‘ and, therefore, there was no Punishment in the
 ‘ Law for it.’

Mrs. *Western* said, ‘ she knew the Law much
 ‘ better ; that she had known Servants very se-
 ‘ verely punished for affronting their Masters ;’
 and then named a certain Justice of the Peace in
London, ‘ who,’ she said, ‘ would commit a Ser-
 ‘ vant to *Bridewell*, at any Time when a Master
 ‘ or Mistress desired it.’

‘ Like enough,’ cries the Squire, ‘ it may be
 ‘ so in *London* ; but the Law is different in the
 ‘ Country.’ Here followed a very learned Dis-
 pute between the Brother and Sister concerning
 the Law, which we would insert, if we imagined
 many of our Readers could understand it. This
 was, however, at length referred by both Parties
 to the Clerk, who decided it in Favour of the
 Magistrate ; and Mrs. *Western* was, in the End,
 obliged to content herself with the Satisfaction of
 having *Honour* turned away ; to which *Sophia*
 herself very readily and cheerfully consented.

Thus Fortune, after having diverted herself,
 according to Custom, with two or three Frolicks,
 at last disposed all Matters to the Advantage of
 our Heroine ; who, indeed succeeded admirably
 well in her Deceit, considering it was the first
 she had ever practised. And, to say the Truth, I
 have often concluded, that the honest Part of
 Mankind would be much too hard for the kna-
 vish, if they could bring themselves to incur the
 Guilt, or thought it worth their while to take
 the Trouble.

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Honour

Honour acted her Part to the utmost Perfection. She no sooner saw herself secure from all Danger of *Bridewell*, a Word which had raised most horrible Ideas in her Mind, than she resumed those *Airs*, which her Terrors before had a little abated; and laid down her Place, with as much Affectation of Content, and indeed of Contempt, as was ever practised at the Resignation of Places of much greater Importance. If the Reader pleases, therefore, we chuse rather to say she resigned---which hath, indeed, been always held a synonymous Expression with being turned out, or turned away.

Mr. *Western* ordered her to be very expeditious in packing: For his Sister declared she would not sleep another Night under the same Roof with so impudent a Slut. To work therefore she went, and that so earnestly, that every Thing was ready early in the Evening; when having received her Wages, away packed she Bag and Baggage, to the great Satisfaction of every one, but of none more than of *Sophia*; who, having appointed her Maid to meet her at a certain Place not far from the House, exactly at the dreadful and ghostly Hour of Twelve, began to prepare for her own Departure.

But first she was obliged to give two painful Audiences, the one to her Aunt, and the other to her Father. In these Mrs. *Western* herself began to talk to her in a more peremptory Stile than before; but her Father treated her in so violent and outrageous a Manner, that he frightened her into an affected Compliance with his Will, which so highly pleased the good Squire, that he changed his Frowns into Smiles, and his Menaces into Promises; he vowed his whole Soul



was wrapped in hers, that her Consent (for so he construed the Words, *You know, Sir, I must not, nor can refuse to obey any absolute Command of yours,*) had made him the happiest of Mankind. He then gave her a large Bank-bill to dispose of in any Trinkets she pleased, and kissed and embraced her in the fondest Manner, while Tears of Joy trickled from those Eyes, which a few Moments before had darted Fire and Rage against the dear Object of all his Affection.

Instances of this Behaviour in Parents are so common, that the Reader, I doubt not, will be very little astonish'd at the whole Conduct of Mr. *Western*. If he should, I own I am not able to account for it; since that he loved his Daughter most tenderly, is, I think, beyond Dispute. So indeed have many others, who have rendered their Children most compleatly miserable by the same Conduct; which, tho' it is almost universal in Parents, hath always appeared to me to be the most unaccountable of all the Absurdities, which ever entered into the Brain of *that strange prodigious Creature Man*.

The latter Part of Mr. *Western's* Behaviour had so strong an Effect on the tender Heart of *Sophia*, that it suggested a Thought to her, which not all the Sophistry of her politic Aunt, nor all the Menaces of her Father had ever once brought into her Head. She revered her Father so piously, and loved him so passionately, that she had scarce ever felt more pleasing Sensations, than what arose from the Share she frequently had of contributing to his Amusement; and sometimes, perhaps, to higher Gratifications; for he never could contain the Delight of hearing her commended, which he had the Satisfaction of hearing almost

almost every Day of her Life. The Idea, therefore, of the immense Happiness she should convey to her Father by her Consent to this Match, made a strong Impression on her Mind. Again, the extreme Piety of such an Act of Obedience worked very forcibly, as she had a very deep Sense of Religion. Lastly, when she reflected how much she herself was to suffer, being indeed to become little less than a Sacrifice, or a Martyr, to filial Love and Duty, she felt an agreeable Tickling in a certain little Passion, which tho' it bears no immediate Affinity either to Religion or Virtue, is often so kind as to lend great Assistance in executing the Purposes of both.

Sophia was charmed with the Contemplation of so heroic an Action, and began to compliment herself with much premature Flattery, when *Cupid*, who lay hid in her Muff, suddenly crept out, and, like *Punchinello* in a Puppet-show, kicked all out before him. In Truth (for we scorn to deceive our Reader, or to vindicate the Character of our Heroine, by ascribing her Actions to supernatural Impulse) the Thoughts of her beloved *Jones*, and some Hopes (however distant) in which he was very particularly concerned, immediately destroyed all which filial Love, Piety and Pride had, with their joint Endeavours, been labouring to bring about.

But before we proceed any farther with *Sophia*, we must now look back to Mr. *Jones*.