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The History Of Tom Jones, A Foundling

In Four Volumes

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Chap. I. Of those who lawfully may, and of those who may not write such Histories as this.

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THE
HISTORY
OF A
FOUNDLING.

BOOK IX.

Containing twelve Hours.

CHAP. I.

Of those who lawfully may, and of those who may not write such Histories as this.

AMONG other good Uses for which I have thought proper to institute these several introductory Chapters, I have considered them as a Kind of Mark or Stamp, which may hereafter enable a very indifferent Reader to distinguish what is true and genuine in this historic Kind of Writing, from what is false and counterfeit. Indeed it seems likely that some such Mark may shortly become necessary, since the favourable Reception which two or three
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Authors have lately procured for their Works of this Nature from the Public, will probably serve as an Encouragement to many others to undertake the like. Thus a Swarm of foolish Novels, and monstrous Romances will be produced, either to the great impoverishing of Booksellers, or to the great Loss of Time, and Depravation of Morals in the Reader; nay, often to the spreading of Scandal and Calumny, and to the Prejudice of the Characters of many worthy and honest People.

I question not but the ingenious Author of the Spectator was principally induced to prefix *Greek* and *Latin* Mottos to every Paper from the same Consideration of guarding against the Pursuit of those Scribblers, who, having no Talents of a Writer but what is taught by the Writing-master, and yet nowise afraid nor ashamed to assume the same Titles with the greatest Genius, than their good Brother in the Fable was of braying in the Lion's Skin.

By the Device therefore of his Motto, it became impracticable for any Man to presume to imitate the Spectators, without understanding at least one Sentence in the learned Languages. In the same Manner I have now secured myself from the Imitation of those who are utterly incapable of any Degree of Reflection, and whose Learning is not equal to an Essay.

I would not be here understood to insinuate, that the greatest Merit of such historical Productions can ever lie in these introductory Chapters; but, in Fact, those Parts which contain mere Narrative only, afford much more Encouragement to the Pen of an Imitator, than those which are composed of Observation and Reflection. Here

I mean such Imitators as *Rowe* was of *Shakespear*, or as *Herace* hints some of the *Romans* were of *Cato*, by bare Feet and four Faces.

To invent good Stories, and to tell them well, are possibly very rare Talents, and yet I have observed few Persons who have scrupled to aim at both; and if we examine the Romances and Novels with which the World abounds, I think we may fairly conclude, that most of the Authors would not have attempted to shew their Teeth (if the Expression may be allowed me) in any other Way of Writing; nor could indeed have strung together a dozen Sentences on any other Subject whatever. *Scribimus indocti doctique passim* *, may be more truly said of the Historian and Biographer, than of any other Species of Writing: For all the Arts and Sciences (even Criticism itself) require some little Degree of Learning and Knowledge. Poetry indeed may perhaps be thought an Exception; but then it demands Numbers, or something like Numbers; whereas to the Composition of Novels and Romances, nothing is necessary but Paper, Pens and Ink, with the manual Capacity of using them. This, I conceive, their Productions shew to be the Opinion of the Authors themselves; and this must be the Opinion of their Readers, if indeed there be any such.

Hence we are to derive that universal Contempt, which the World, who always denominate the Whole from the Majority, have cast on all historical Writers, who do not draw their

* —Each desperate Blockhead dares to write,
Verse is the Trade of every living Wight.

FRANCIS.

Mate-

Materials from Records. And it is the Apprehension of this Contempt, that hath made us so cautiously avoid the Term Romance, a Name with which we might otherwise have been well enough contented. Though as we have good Authority for all our Characters, no less indeed than the vast authentic Doomsday-Book of Nature, as is elsewhere hinted, our Labours have sufficient Title to the Name of History. Certainly they deserve some Distinction from those Works, which one of the wittiest of Men regarded only as proceeding from a Pruritus, or indeed rather from a Looseness of the Brain.

But besides the Dishonour which is thus cast on one of the most useful as well as entertaining of all Kinds of Writing, there is just Reason to apprehend, that by encouraging such Authors, we shall propagate much Dishonour of another Kind; I mean to the Characters of many good and valuable Members of Society: For the dullest Writers, no more than the dullest Companions, are always inoffensive. They have both enough of Language to be indecent and abusive. And surely, if the Opinion just above cited be true, we cannot wonder, that Works so nastily derived should be nasty themselves, or have a Tendency to make others so.

To prevent therefore for the future, such intemperate Abuses of Leisure, of Letters, and of the Liberty of the Press, especially as the World seems at present to be more than usually threatned with them, I shall here venture to mention some Qualifications, every one of which are in a pretty high Degree necessary to this Order of Historians.

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The first is Genius, without a full Vein of which, no Study, says *Horace*, can avail us. By Genius I would understand that Power, or rather those Powers of the Mind, which are capable of penetrating into all Things within our Reach and Knowledge, and of distinguishing their essential Differences. These are no other than Invention and Judgment; and they are both called by the collective Name of Genius, as they are of those Gifts of Nature which we bring with us into the World. Concerning each of which many seem to have fallen into very great Errors: For by Invention, I believe, is generally understood a creative Faculty; which would indeed prove most Romance-Writers to have the highest Pretensions to it; whereas by Invention is really meant no more, (and so the Word signifies) than Discovery, or finding out; or to explain it at large, a quick and sagacious Penetration into the true Essence of all the Objects of our Contemplation. This, I think, can rarely exist without the Concomitancy of Judgment: For how we can be said to have discovered the true Essence of two Things, without discerning their Difference, seems to me hard to conceive. Now this last is the undisputed Province of Judgment, and yet some few Men of Wit have agreed with all the dull Fellows in the World, in representing these two to have been seldom or never the Property of one and the same Person.

But tho' they should be so, they are not sufficient for our Purpose without a good Share of Learning; for which I could again cite the Authority of *Horace*, and of many others, if any was necessary to prove that Tools are of no Service to a Workman, when they are not sharpened

by Art, or when he wants Rules to direct him in his Work, or hath no Matter to work upon. All these Uses are supplied by Learning: For Nature can only furnish us with Capacity, or, as I have chose to illustrate it, with the Tools of our Profession; Learning must fit them for Use, must direct them in it; and lastly, must contribute, Part at least, of the Materials. A competent Knowledge of History and of the *Belles Lettres*, is here absolutely necessary; and without this Share of Knowledge at least, to affect the Character of an Historian, is as vain as to endeavour at building a House without Timber or Mortar, or Brick or Stone. *Homer* and *Milton*, who, though they added the Ornament of Numbers to their Works, were both Historians of our Order, and Masters of all the Learning of their Times.

Again, there is another Sort of Knowledge beyond the Power of Learning to bestow, and this is to be had by Conversation. So necessary is this to the understanding the Characters of Men, that none are more ignorant of them than those learned Pedants, whose Lives have been entirely consumed in Colleges, and among Books; For however exquisitely human Nature may have been described by Writers, the true practical System can be learnt only in the World. Indeed the like happens in every other Kind of Knowledge. Neither Physic, nor Law, are to be practically known from Books. Nay, the Farmer, the Planter, the Gardener, must perfect by Experience what he hath acquired the Rudiments of by Reading. How accurately soever the ingenious Mr. *Miller* may have described the Plant, he himself would advise his Disciple to see it in the Garden. As we must perceive, that after the nicest

nicest Strokes of a *Shakespear*, or a *Johnson*. of a *Wychebly*, or an *Otway*, some Touches of Nature will escape the Reader, which the judicious Action of a *Garrick*, of a *Cibber*, or a *Clive* *, can convey to him; so on the real Stage, the Character shews himself in a stronger and bolder Light, than he can be described. And if this be the Case in those fine and nervous Descriptions, which great Authors themselves have taken from Life, how much more strongly will it hold when the Writer himself takes his Lines not from Nature, but from Books! Such Characters are only the faint Copy of a Copy, and can have neither the Justness nor Spirit of an Original.

Now this Conversation in our Historian must be universal, that is, with all Ranks and Degrees of Men: For the Knowledge of what is called High-Life, will not instruct him in low, nor *e converso*, will his being acquainted with the inferior Part of Mankind, teach him the Manners of the superior. And though it may be thought that the Knowledge of either may sufficiently enable him to describe at least that in which he hath been conversant; yet he will even here fall greatly short of Perfection: for the Follies of either Rank do in reality illustrate each other. For instance, the Affectation of High-Life appears more glaring and ridiculous from the Simplicity of the Low; and again, the Rudeness and Barbarity of

* There is a peculiar Propriety in mentioning this great Actor, and these two most justly celebrated Actresses in this Place; as they have all formed themselves on the Study of Nature only; and not on the Imitation of their Predecessors. Hence they have been able to excel all who have gone before them; a Degree of Merit which the servile Herd of Imitators can never possibly arrive at.