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The History Of Tom Jones, A Foundling

In Four Volumes

Fielding, Henry

London, 1750

Chap. I. Too short to need a Preface.

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THE
HISTORY
OF A
FOUNDLING.

BOOK XV.

In which the History advances about two Days.

CHAP. I.

Too short to need a Preface.

THERE are a Set of Religious, or rather Moral Writers, who teach that Virtue is the certain Road to Happiness, and Vice to Misery, in this World. A very wholesome and comfortable Doctrine, and to which we have but one Objection, namely, That it is not true.

Indeed, if by Virtue these Writers mean the Exercise of those Cardinal Virtues, which like good House-wives stay at home, and mind only the Business of their own Family, I shall very



readily concede the Point; For so surely do all these contribute and lead to Happiness, that I could almost wish, in Violation of all the antient and modern Sages, to call them rather by the Name of Wisom, than by that of Virtue: For with Regard to this Life, no System, I conceive, was ever wiser than that of the antient *Epureans*, who held this Wisdom to constitute the chief Good; nor foolisher than that of their Opposites, those modern *Epicures*, who place all Felicity in the abundant Gratification of every sensual Appetite.

But if by Virtue is meant (as I almost think it ought) a certain relative Quality, which is always busying itself without Doors, and seems as much interested in pursuing the Good of others as its own; I cannot so easily agree that this is the surest Way to human Happiness; because I am afraid we must then include Poverty and Contempt, with all the Mischiefs which Backbiting, Envy, and Ingratitude can bring on Mankind, in our Idea of Happiness; nay, sometimes perhaps we shall be obliged to wait upon the said Happiness to a Goal; since many by the above Virtue have brought themselves thither.

I have not now Leisure to enter upon so large a Field of Speculation, as here seems opening upon me; my Design was to wipe off a Doctrine that lay in my Way; since while Mr. Jones was acting the most virtuous Part imaginable in labouring to preserve his Fellow-creatures from Destruction, the Devil, or some other evil Spirit, one perhaps clothed in human Flesh, was hard at Work to make him completely miserable in the Ruin of his *Sophia*.

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