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The History Of Tom Jones, A Foundling

In Four Volumes

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London, 1750

Chap. I. Containing Instructions very necessary to be perused by modern Critics.

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THE
HISTORY
OF A
FOUNDLING.

BOOK X.

*In which the History goes forward about
Twelve Hours.*

CHAP. I.

*Containing Instructions very necessary to be perused
by modern Critics.*

READER, it is impossible we should know what Sort of Person thou wilt be : For perhaps, thou may'ft be as learned in Human Nature as *Shakespear* himself was, and, perhaps, thou may'ft be no wiser than some of his Editors. Now lest this latter should be the Case, we think proper, before we go any farther together, to give thee a few wholesome Admonitions; that thou may'ft not as grossly misunder-

stand and misrepresent us, as some of the said Editors have misunderstood and misrepresented their Author.

First, then, we warn thee not too hastily to condemn any of the Incidents in this our History, as impertinent and foreign to our main Design, because thou dost not immediately conceive in what Manner such Incident may conduce to that Design. This Work may, indeed, be considered as a great Creation of our own; and for a little Reptile of a Critic to presume to find Fault with any of its Parts, without knowing the Manner in which the Whole is connected, and before he comes to the final Catastrophe, is a most presumptuous Absurdity. The Allusion and Metaphor we have here made use of, we must acknowledge to be infinitely too great for our Occasion; but there is, indeed, no other, which is at all adequate to express the Difference between an Author of the first Rate, and a Critic of the lowest.

Another Caution we would give thee, my good Reptile, is, that thou dost not find out too near a Resemblance between certain Characters here introduced; as for Instance, between the Landlady who appears in the Seventh Book, and her in the Ninth. Thou art to know, Friend, that there are certain Characteristics, in which most Individuals of every Profession and Occupation agree. To be able to preserve these Characteristics, and at the same Time to diversify their Operations, is one Talent of a good Writer. Again, to mark the nice Distinction between two Persons actuated by the same Vice or Folly is another; and as this last Talent is found in very few Writers, so is the true Discernment
of

of it found in as few Readers; though, I believe, the Observation of this forms a very principal Pleasure in those who are capable of the Discovery: Every Person, for Instance, can distinguish between Sir *Epicure Mammon*, and Sir *Fopling Flutter*; but to note the Difference between Sir *Fopling Flutter* and Sir *Courtly Nice*, requires a more exquisite Judgment: For want of which, vulgar Spectators of Plays very often do great Injustice in the Theatre; where I have sometimes known a Poet in Danger of being convicted as a Thief, upon much worse Evidence than the Resemblance of Hands hath been held to be in the Law. In Reality, I apprehend every amorous Widow on the Stage would run the Hazard of being condemned as a servile Imitation of *Dido*, but that happily very few of our Play-house Critics understand enough of *Latin* to read *Virgil*.

In the next Place, we must admonish thee, my worthy Friend, (for, perhaps, thy Heart may be better than thy Head) not to condemn a Character as a bad one, because it is not perfectly a good one. If thou dost delight in these Models of Perfection, there are Books enow written to gratify thy Taste; but as we have not, in the course of our Conversation, ever happened to meet with any such Person, we have not chosen to introduce any such here. To say the Truth, I a little question whether mere Man ever arrived at this consummate Degree of Excellence, as well as whether there hath ever existed a Monster bad enough to verify that

— *nulla virtute redemptum*
A vitiis—*

* Whose Vices are not allayed with a sin'y'e Virtue.

in *Juvenal*: Nor do I, indeed, conceive the good Purposes served by inserting Characters of such angelic Perfection, or such diabolical Depravity, in any Work of Invention: Since from contemplating either, the Mind of Man is more likely to be overwhelmed with Sorrow and Shame, than to draw any good Uses from such Patterns; for in the former Instance he may be both concerned and ashamed to see a Pattern of Excellence, in his Nature, which he may reasonably despair of ever arriving at; and in contemplating the latter, he may be no less affected with those uneasy Sensations, at seeing the Nature, of which he is a Partaker, degraded into so odious and detestable a Creature.

In Fact, if there be enough of Goodness in a Character to engage the Admiration and Affection of a well-disposed Mind, though there should appear some of those little Blemishes, *quas humana parum cavit natura*, they will raise our Compassion rather than our Abhorrence. Indeed, nothing can be of more moral Use than the Imperfections which are seen in Examples of this Kind; since such form a Kind of Surprise, more apt to affect and dwell upon our Minds, than the Faults of very vicious and wicked Persons. The Föibles and Vices of Men in whom there is great Mixture of Good, become more glaring Objects, from the Virtues which contrast them, and shew their Deformity; and when we find such Vices attended with their evil Consequence to our favourite Characters, we are not only taught to shun them for our own Sake, but to hate them for the Mischiefs they have already brought on those we love.

And