

favour. Urge not upon me the inference that made me hesitate."

"I won't be interrupted, Clary — You have seen, in my behaviour to you on this occasion, a truly maternal tenderness; you have observed that I have undertaken the task with some reluctance, because the man is not everything; and because I know you carry your notions of perfection in a man too high —"

"Dearest Madam, this one time excuse me! — Is there then any danger that I should be guilty of an imprudent thing for the man's sake you hint at?"

"Again interrupted! — Am I to be questioned, and argued with? You know this won't do somewhere else. You *know* it won't. What reason then, ungenerous girl, can you have for arguing with me thus, but because you think from my indulgence to you, you may?"

"What *can* I say? What *can* I do? What must that cause be that will not bear being argued upon?"

"Again! Clary Harlowe!"

"Dearest Madam, forgive me: it was always my pride and my pleasure to obey you. But look upon that man — see but the disagreeableness of his person —"

"Now, Clary, do I see whose person you have in your eye! — Now is Mr. Solmes, I see, but *comparatively* disagreeable; disagreeable only as another man has a much more specious person."

"But, Madam, are not his manners equally so? — Is not his person the true representative of his mind? — That other man is not, shall not be, anything to me, release me but from this one man, whom my heart, unbidden, resists."

"Condition thus with your father. Will *he* bear, do you think, to be thus dialogued with? Have I not conjured you, as you value my peace — What is it that *I* do not give up? — This very task, because I apprehended you would not be *easily* persuaded, is a task *indeed* upon me. And will *you* give up nothing? Have you not refused as many as have been offered to you? If you would not have us guess for whom, comply; for comply you must, or be looked upon as in a state of defiance with your whole family."

And saying this, she arose, and went from me. But at the chamber-door stopped; and turned back: "I will not say below in what disposition I leave you. Consider of everything. The matter is resolved upon. As you value your father's blessing and mine,

and the satisfaction of all the family, resolve to comply. I will leave you for a few moments. I will come up to you again. See that I find you as I wish to find you; and since *your heart is free*, let your duty govern it."

In about half an hour, my mother returned. She found me in tears. She took my hand: "It is my part evermore," said she, "to be of the acknowledging side. I believe I have needlessly exposed myself to your opposition, by the method I have taken with you. I first began as if I *expected* a denial, and by my indulgence brought it upon myself."

"Do not, my dearest mamma! do not say so!"

"Were the occasion for this debate," proceeded she, "to have risen from myself; were it in my power to dispense with your compliance; you too well know what you can do with me."

Would anybody, my dear Miss Howe, wish to marry, who sees a wife of such a temper, and blessed with such an understanding as my mother is noted for, not only deprived of all power, but obliged to be even *active* in bringing to bear points of high importance, which she thinks ought not to be insisted upon?

"When I came to you a second time," proceeded she, "knowing that your opposition would avail you nothing, I refused to hear your reasons: and in this I was wrong too, because a young creature who loves to reason, and *used* to love to be convinced by reason, ought to have all her objections heard: I now therefore, this third time, see you; and am come resolved to hear all you have to say: and let me, my dear, by my patience, engage your gratitude; your *generosity*, I will call it, because it is to you I speak, who used to have a mind wholly generous. — Let me, if your heart be *really free*, let me see what it will induce you to do to oblige me: and so as you permit your usual discretion to govern you, I will hear all you have to say; but with this intimation, that say what you will, it will be of no avail elsewhere."

"What a dreadful saying is that! But could I engage your pity, Madam, it would be somewhat."

"You have as much of my pity as of my love. But what is *person*, Clary, with one of your prudence, and *your heart disengaged*?"

"Should the eye be disgusted, when the heart is to be engaged? — O Madam, who can think of marrying when the heart is shocked at the first appearance, and where the disgust must

be confirmed by every conversation afterwards?"

"This, Clary, is owing to your prepossession. Let me not have cause to regret that noble firmness of mind in so young a creature which I thought your glory, and which was my boast in your character. In this instance it would be obstinacy, and want of duty. — Have you not made objections to several —"

"That was to their *minds*, to their *principles*, Madam. — But this man —"

"Is an honest man, Clary Harlowe. He has a good mind. He is a virtuous man."

"*He* an honest man? *His* a good mind, Madam? *He* a virtuous man? —"

"Nobody denies him these qualities."

"Can *he* be an honest man who offers terms that will rob all his own relations of their just expectations? — Can *his* mind be good —"

"You, Clary Harlowe, for whose sake he offers so much, are the last person that should make this observation."

"Give me leave to say, Madam, that a person preferring happiness to fortune, as I do; that want not even what I *have*, and can give up the use of *that*, as an instance of duty —"

"No more, no more of your merits! — You know you will be a gainer by that cheerful instance of your duty; not a loser. You know you have but *cast your bread upon the waters* — so no more of that! — For it is not understood as a merit by everybody, I assure you; though I think it a high one; and so did your father and uncles at the time —"

"At the *time*, Madam! — How unworthily do my brother and sister, who are afraid that the favour I was so lately in —"

"I hear nothing against your brother and sister. What family feuds have I in prospect, at a time when I hoped to have most comfort from you all!"

"God bless my brother and sister in all their *worthy* views! You shall have no family feuds if I can prevent them. You yourself, Madam, shall tell me what I shall bear from them, and I will bear it: but let *my* actions, not *their* misrepresentations (as I am sure by the disgraceful prohibitions I have met with has been the case), speak for me."

Just then up came my father, with a sternness in his looks that made me tremble. — He took two or three turns about my chamber, though pained by his gout; and then said to my mother, who was silent as soon as she saw him —

"My dear, you are long absent. — Dinner

is near ready. What you had to say lay in a very little compass. Surely you have nothing to do but to declare *your* will, and *my* will — but perhaps you may be talking of the preparations — let us have you soon down — your daughter in your hand, if worthy of the name."

And down he went, casting his eye upon me with a look so stern, that I was unable to say one word to him, or even for a few minutes to my mother.

Was not this very intimidating, my dear?

My mother, seeing my concern, seemed to pity me. She called me her good child, and kissed me; and told me that my father should not know I had made such opposition. "He has kindly furnished us with an excuse for being so long together," said she. — "Come, my dear — dinner will be upon table presently — shall we go down?" — And took my hand.

This made me start: "What, Madam, go down to let it be supposed we were talking of *preparations*! — Oh, my beloved mamma, command me not down upon such a supposition."

"You see, child, that to stay longer together, will be owning that you are debating about an absolute duty; and that will not be borne. Did not your father himself some days ago tell you he would be obeyed? I will a third time leave you. I must say something by way of excuse for you: and that you desire not to go down to dinner — that your modesty on the occasion —"

"O Madam! say not my modesty on *such* an occasion: for that will be to give hope —"

"And design you *not* to give hope? — Perverse girl!" — *Rising and flinging from me*; "take more time for consideration! — Since it is necessary, *take* more time — and when I see you next, let me know what blame I have to cast upon myself, or to bear from your father, for my indulgence to you."

She made, however, a little stop at the chamber-door; and seemed to expect that I would have besought her to make the gentlest construction for me; for, hesitating, she was pleased to say, "I suppose you would not have me make a report —"

"O Madam!" interrupted I, "whose favour can I hope for, if I lose my mamma's?"

To have desired a *favourable* report, you know, my dear, would have been qualifying upon a point that I was too much determined upon, to give room for any of my friends to

think I have the least hesitation about it. And so my mother went down stairs.

I will deposit thus far; and as I know you will not think me too minute in the relation of particulars so very interesting to one you honour with your love, proceed in the same way. As matters stand, I don't care to have papers so freely written about me.

Pray let Robert call every day, if you can spare him, whether I have anything ready or not.

I should be glad you would not send him empty handed. What a generosity will it be in you, to write as frequently from friendship as I am forced to do from misfortune! The letters being taken away will be an assurance that you have them. As I shall write and deposit as I have opportunity, the formality of *super* and *sub*-scription will be excused. For I need not say how much I am

Your sincere and ever affectionate

Cl. Harlowe.

HENRY FIELDING (1707-1754)

TOM JONES

BOOK I

CHAP. I. — THE INTRODUCTION TO THE WORK,  
OR BILL OF FARE TO THE FEAST

An author ought to consider himself, not as a gentleman who gives a private or eleemosynary treat, but rather as one who keeps a public ordinary, at which all persons are welcome for their money. In the former case, it is well known that the entertainer provides what fare he pleases; and though this should be very indifferent and utterly disagreeable to the taste of his company, they must not find any fault: nay, on the contrary, good breeding forces them outwardly to approve and to commend whatever is set before them. Now the contrary of this happens to the master of an ordinary: men who pay for what they eat, will insist on gratifying their palates, however nice and whimsical these may prove; and if everything is not agreeable to their taste, will challenge a right to censure, to abuse, and to d—n their dinner without control.

To prevent, therefore, giving offence to their customers by any such disappointment, it has been usual with the honest and well-meaning host to provide a bill of fare, which all persons may peruse at their first entrance into the house; and, having thence acquainted

themselves with the entertainment which they may expect, may either stay and regale with what is provided for them, or may depart to some other ordinary better accommodated to their taste.

As we do not disdain to borrow wit or wisdom from any man who is capable of lending us either, we have condescended to take a hint from these honest victuallers, and shall prefix not only a general bill of fare to our whole entertainment, but shall likewise give the reader particular bills to every course which is to be served up in this volume.

The provision, then, which we have here made, is no other than Human Nature: nor do I fear that my sensible reader, though most luxurious in his taste, will start, cavil, or be offended because I have named but one article. The tortoise, as the alderman of Bristol, well learned in eating, knows by much experience, besides the delicious calipash and calipee, contains many different kinds of food; nor can the learned reader be ignorant, that in human nature, though here collected under one general name, is such prodigious variety, that a cook will have sooner gone through all the several species of animal and vegetable food in the world, than an author will be able to exhaust so extensive a subject.

An objection may perhaps be apprehended from the more delicate, that this dish is too common and vulgar; for what else is the subject of all the romances, novels, plays, and poems, with which the stalls abound? Many exquisite viands might be rejected by the epicure, if it was a sufficient cause for his contemning of them as common and vulgar, that something was to be found in the most paltry alleys under the same name. In reality, true nature is as difficult to be met with in authors, as the Bayonne ham, or Bologna sausage, is to be found in the shops.

But the whole, to continue the same metaphor, consists in the cookery of the author; for, as Mr. Pope tells us, —

True wit is nature to advantage dress'd;  
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.

The same animal which hath the honour to have some part of his flesh eaten at the table of a duke, may perhaps be degraded in another part, and some of his limbs gibbeted, as it were, in the vilest stall in town. Where then lies the difference between the food of the nobleman and the porter, if both are at dinner on the

same ox or calf, but in the seasoning, the dressing, the garnishing, and the setting forth? Hence the one provokes and incites the most languid appetite, and the other turns and palls that which is the sharpest and keenest.

In like manner the excellence of the mental entertainment consists less in the subject than in the author's skill in well dressing it up. How pleased, therefore, will the reader be to find that we have, in the following work, adhered closely to one of the highest principles of the best cook which the present age, or perhaps that of Heliogabalus, hath produced? This great man, as is well known to all lovers of polite eating, begins at first by setting plain things before his hungry guests, rising afterwards by degrees, as their stomachs may be supposed to decrease, to the very quintessence of sauce and spices. In like manner we shall represent human nature at first, to the keen appetite of our reader, in that more plain and simple manner in which it is found in the country, and shall hereafter hash and ragout it with all the high French and Italian seasoning of affectation and vice which courts and cities afford. By these means, we doubt not but our reader may be rendered desirous to read on for ever, as the great person just above mentioned is supposed to have made some persons eat.

Having premised thus much, we will now detain those who like our bill of fare no longer from their diet, and shall proceed directly to serve up the first course of our history for their entertainment.

## BOOK II

CHAP. I. — SHOWING WHAT KIND OF HISTORY  
THIS IS; WHAT IT IS LIKE, AND WHAT  
IT IS NOT LIKE

Though we have properly enough entitled this our work a history, and not a life; nor an apology for a life, as is more in fashion; yet we intend in it rather to pursue the method of those writers who profess to disclose the revolutions of countries, than to imitate the painful and voluminous historian, who, to preserve the regularity of his series, thinks himself obliged to fill up as much paper with the details of months and years in which nothing remarkable happened, as he employs upon those notable eras when the greatest scenes have been transacted on the human stage. Such histories as these do in reality very much resemble a newspaper, which consists of just the same number of words, whether there be any news in it or not.

They may likewise be compared to a stage coach, which performs constantly the same course empty as well as full: the writer indeed seems to think himself obliged to keep even pace with Time, whose amanuensis he is; and like his master, travels as slowly through centuries of monkish dulness, when the world seems to have been asleep, as through that bright and busy age so nobly distinguished by the excellent Latin poet:

Ad configendum venientibus undique Poenis,  
Omnia cum belli trepido concussa tumultu  
Horrida contremuere sub altis aetheris auris;  
In dubioque fuit sub utrorum regna cadendum  
Omnibus humanis esset, terraque marique:

of which we wish we could give our reader a more adequate translation than that by Mr. Creech:

When dreadful Carthage frighted Rome with arms,  
And all the world was shook with fierce alarms;  
Whilst undecided yet which part should fall,  
Which nation rise the glorious lord of all.

Now it is our purpose, in the ensuing pages, to pursue a contrary method: when any extraordinary scene presents itself, as we trust will often be the case, we shall spare no pains nor paper to open it at large to our reader; but if whole years should pass without producing any thing worthy his notice, we shall not be afraid of a chasm in our history, but shall hasten on to matters of consequence, and leave such periods of time totally unobserved. These are indeed to be considered as blanks in the grand lottery of Time: we therefore, who are the registers of that lottery, shall imitate those sagacious persons who deal in that which is drawn at Guildhall, and who never trouble the public with the many blanks they dispose of; but when a great prize happens to be drawn, the newspapers are presently filled with it, and the world is sure to be informed at whose office it was sold: indeed commonly two or three different offices lay claim to the honour of having disposed of it; by which I suppose the adventurers are given to understand that certain brokers are in the secrets of Fortune, and indeed of her cabinet council.

My reader then is not to be surprised, if in the course of this work he shall find some chapters very short and others altogether as long; some that contain only the time of a single day and others that comprise years; in a word, if my history sometimes seems to stand still, and sometimes to fly: for all which I shall

not look on myself as accountable to any court of critical jurisdiction whatever; for as I am in reality the founder of a new province of writing, so I am at liberty to make what laws I please therein; and these laws my readers, whom I consider as my subjects, are bound to believe in and to obey; with which, that they may readily and cheerfully comply, I do hereby assure them that I shall principally regard their ease and advantage in all such institutions; for I do not, like a *jure divino* tyrant, imagine that they are my slaves or my commodity. I am indeed set over them for their own good only, and was created for their use and not they for mine; nor do I doubt, while I make their interest the great rule of my writings, they will unanimously concur in supporting my dignity, and in rendering me all the honour I shall deserve or desire.

## BOOK V

## CHAP. I. — OF THE SERIOUS IN WRITING, AND FOR WHAT PURPOSE IT IS INTRODUCED

Peradventure there may be no parts in this prodigious work which will give the reader less pleasure in the perusing, than those which have given the author the greatest pain in composing. Among these probably may be reckoned those initial essays which we have prefixed to the historical matter contained in every book; and which we have determined to be essentially necessary to this kind of writing, of which we have set ourselves at the head. For this our determination we do not hold ourselves strictly bound to assign any reason; it being abundantly sufficient that we have laid it down as a rule necessary to be observed in all prosai-comi-epic writing. Who ever demanded the reasons of that nice unity of time or place which is now established to be so essential to dramatic poetry? What critic has ever been asked, why a play may not contain two days as well as one? or why the audience, provided they travel like electors, without any expense, may not be wafted fifty miles as well as five? Has any commentator well accounted for the limitation which an ancient critic has set to the drama, which he will have contain neither more nor less than five acts? or has any one living attempted to explain what the modern judges of our theatres mean by that word *Low*; by which they have happily succeeded in banishing all humour from the stage, and have made the theatre as dull as a drawing-room? Upon all these occasions the world seems to have

embraced a maxim of our law, viz., *cuiusque in arte sua perito credendum est*: for it seems perhaps difficult to conceive that any one should have had enough of impudence to lay down dogmatical rules in any art or science without the least foundation: in such cases, therefore, we are apt to conclude there are sound and good reasons at the bottom, though we are unfortunately not able to see so far. Now in reality the world have paid too great a compliment to critics, and have imagined them men of much greater profundity than they really are: from this complaisance the critics have been emboldened to assume a dictatorial power, and have so far succeeded that they have now become the masters, and have the assurance to give laws to those authors from whose predecessors they originally received them. The critic, rightly considered, is no more than the clerk, whose office it is to transcribe the rules and laws laid down by those great judges, whose vast strength of genius has placed them in the light of legislators in the several sciences over which they presided: this office was all which the critics of old aspired to; nor did they ever dare to advance a sentence, without supporting it by the authority of the judge from whence it was borrowed. But in process of time, and in ages of ignorance, the clerk began to invade the power and assume the dignity of his master; the laws of writing were no longer founded on the practice of the author, but on the dictates of the critic: the clerk became the legislator, and those very peremptorily gave laws whose business it was at first only to transcribe them. Hence arose an obvious and perhaps an unavoidable error; for these critics, being men of shallow capacities, very easily mistook mere form for substance: they acted as a judge would who should adhere to the lifeless letter of law, and reject the spirit. Little circumstances, which were perhaps accidental in a great author, were by these critics considered to constitute his chief merit, and transmitted as essentials to be observed by all his successors; to these encroachments, time and ignorance, the two great supporters of imposture, gave authority; and thus many rules for good writing have been established, which have not the least foundation in truth or nature; and which commonly serve for no other purpose than to curb and restrain genius in the same manner as it would have restrained the dancing master, had the many excellent treatises on that art laid it down as an essential rule that every man must dance in chains. To avoid, there-

fore, all imputation of laying down a rule for posterity, founded only on the authority of *ipse dixit*, — for which, to say the truth, we have not the profoundest veneration, — we shall here waive the privilege above contended for, and proceed to lay before the reader the reasons which have induced us to intersperse these several digressive essays in the course of this work. And here we shall of necessity be led to open a new vein of knowledge, which, if it has been discovered, has not to our remembrance been wrought on by any ancient or modern writer: this vein is no other than that of contrast, which runs through all the works of the creation, and may probably have a large share in constituting in us the idea of all beauty, as well natural as artificial: for what demonstrates the beauty and excellence of anything but its reverse? Thus the beauty of day, and that of summer, is set off by the horrors of night and winter; and I believe, if it was possible for a man to have seen only the two former, he would have a very imperfect idea of their beauty. But to avoid too serious an air; can it be doubted but that the finest woman in the world would lose all benefit of her charms in the eyes of a man who had never seen one of another cast? The ladies themselves seem so sensible of this, that they are all industrious to procure foils; nay, they will become foils to themselves: for I have observed, at Bath particularly, that they endeavour to appear as ugly as possible in the morning, in order to set off that beauty which they intend to show you in the evening. Most artists have this secret in practice, though some perhaps have not much studied the theory; the jeweller knows that the finest brilliant requires a foil; and the painter, by the contrast of his figures, often acquires great applause.

A great genius among us will illustrate this matter fully. I cannot indeed range him under any general head of common artists, as he has a title to be placed among those

*Inventas qui vitam excoluere per artes:*

Who by invented arts have life improved.

I mean here, the inventor of that most exquisite entertainment, called the English pantomime. This entertainment consisted of two parts, which the inventor distinguished by the names of the serious and the comic. The serious exhibited a certain number of heathen gods and heroes, who were certainly the worst and dullest company into which an audience was ever in-

troduced; and, which was a secret known to few, were actually intended so to be, in order to contrast the comic part of the entertainment, and to display the tricks of Harlequin to the better advantage. This was, perhaps, no very civil use of such personages, but the contrivance was, nevertheless, ingeniously enough, and had its effect. And this will now plainly appear, if, instead of serious and comic, we supply the words duller and dullest, for the comic was certainly duller than anything before shown on the stage, and could be set off only by that superlative degree of dullness which composed the serious. So intolerably serious, indeed, were these gods and heroes, that Harlequin (though the English gentleman of that name is not at all related to the French family, for he is of a much more serious disposition) was always welcome on the stage, as he relieved the audience from worse company. Judicious writers have always practised this art of contrast, with great success. I have been surprised that Horace should cavil at this art in Homer; but, indeed, he contradicts himself in the very next line:

*Indignor quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus,  
Verum opere in longo fas est obrepere somnum:*

I grieve if e'er great Homer chance to sleep;  
Yet slumbers on long works have right to creep:

for we are not here to understand, as perhaps some have, that an author actually falls asleep while he is writing. It is true that readers are too apt to be so overtaken. But if the work was as long as any of Oldmixon, the author himself is too well entertained to be subject to the least drowsiness: he is, as Mr. Pope observes,

Sleepless himself to give his readers sleep.

To say the truth, these soporific parts are so many serious scenes artfully interwoven, in order to contrast and set off the rest; and this is the true meaning of a late facetious writer, who told the public that, whenever he was dull, they might be assured there was a design in it. In this light, then, or rather in this darkness, I would have the reader to consider these initial essays; and, after this warning, if he shall be of opinion that he can find enough of serious in other parts of this history, he may pass over these, in which we profess to be laboriously dull, and begin the following books at the second chapter.

## BOOK VIII

## CHAP. I. — A WONDERFUL LONG CHAPTER CONCERNING THE MARVELLOUS; BEING MUCH THE LONGEST OF ALL OUR INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS

As we are now entering upon a book, in which the course of our history will oblige us to relate some matters of a more strange and surprising kind than any which have hitherto occurred, it may not be amiss, in the prolegomenous or introductory chapter, to say something of that species of writing which is called the marvellous. To this we shall, as well for the sake of ourselves as of others, endeavour to set some certain bounds; and, indeed, nothing can be more necessary, as critics of very different complexions are here apt to run into very different extremes; for while some are, with M. Dacier, ready to allow, that the same thing which is impossible may yet be probable, others have so little historic or poetic faith, that they believe nothing to be either possible or probable, the like to which has not occurred to their own observation. First, then, I think it may very reasonably be required of every writer, that he keeps within the bounds of possibility; and still remembers that what it is not possible for man to perform, it is scarce possible for man to believe he did perform. This conviction, perhaps, gave birth to many stories of the ancient heathen deities, for most of them are of poetical original. The poet, being desirous to indulge a wanton and extravagant imagination, took refuge in that power, of the extent of which his readers were no judges, or rather which they imagined to be infinite, and consequently they could not be shocked at any prodigies related of it. This has been strongly urged in defence of Homer's miracles: and it is perhaps a defence; not, as Mr. Pope would have it, because Ulysses told a set of lies to the Pheacians, who were a very dull nation; but because the poet himself wrote to heathens, to whom poetical fables were articles of faith.

For my own part, I must confess, so compassionate is my temper, I wish Polypheme had confined himself to his milk diet, and preserved his eye; nor could Ulysses be much more concerned than myself, when his companions were turned into swine by Circe, who showed, I think, afterwards too much regard for man's flesh, to be supposed capable of converting it into bacon. I wish, likewise, with all my heart, that Homer could have known the rule prescribed by Horace, to introduce supernatural agents as seldom as possible: we should

not then have seen his gods coming on trivial errands, and often behaving themselves so as not only to forfeit all title to respect, but to become the objects of scorn and derision; a conduct which must have shocked the credulity of a pious and sagacious heathen; and which could never have been defended, unless by agreeing with a supposition to which I have been sometimes almost inclined, that this most glorious poet, as he certainly was, had an intent to burlesque the superstitious faith of his own age and country. But I have rested too long on a doctrine which can be of no use to a Christian writer; for as he cannot introduce into his works any of that heavenly host which make a part of his creed, so is it horrid puerility to search the heathen theology for any of those deities who have been long since dethroned from their immortality. Lord Shaftesbury observes, that nothing is more cold than the invocation of a Muse by a modern: he might have added, that nothing can be more absurd. A modern may, with much more elegance, invoke a ballad, as some have thought Homer did, or a mug of ale, with the author of *Hudibras*; which latter may perhaps have inspired much more poetry, as well as prose, than all the liquors of Hippocrene or Helicon.

The only supernatural agents which can in any manner be allowed to us moderns, are ghosts; but of these I would advise an author to be extremely sparing. These are indeed, like arsenic, and other dangerous drugs in physic, to be used with the utmost caution: nor would I advise the introduction of them at all in those works, or by those authors, to which, or to whom, a horse-laugh in the reader would be any great prejudice or mortification. As for elves and fairies, and other such mummery, I purposely omit the mention of them, as I should be very unwilling to confine within any bounds those surprising imaginations, for whose vast capacity the limits of human nature are too narrow; whose works are to be considered as a new creation; and who have, consequently, just right to do what they will with their own. Man, therefore, is the highest subject, unless on very extraordinary occasions indeed, which presents itself to the pen of our historian, or of our poet; and, in relating his actions, great care is to be taken that we do not exceed the capacity of the agent we describe. Nor is possibility alone sufficient to justify us; we must keep likewise within the rules of probability. It is, I think, the opinion of Aristotle; or, if not, it is the opinion of some

wise man, whose authority will be as weighty when it is as old, "That it is no excuse for a poet who relates what is incredible, that the thing related is a matter of fact." This may, perhaps, be allowed true with regard to poetry, but it may be thought impracticable to extend it to the historian; for he is obliged to record matters as he finds them, though they may be of so extraordinary a nature as will require no small degree of historical faith to swallow them. Such was the successless armament of Xerxes, described by Herodotus, or the successful expedition of Alexander, related by Arrian: such of later years was the victory of Agincourt, obtained by Harry the Fifth, or that of Narva, won by Charles the Twelfth of Sweden: all which instances, the more we reflect on them, appear still the more astonishing.

Such facts, however, as they occur in the thread of the story, nay, indeed, as they constitute the essential part of it, the historian is not only justifiable in recording as they really happened, but indeed would be unpardonable should he omit or alter them. But there are other facts, not of such consequence nor so necessary, which, though ever so well attested, may nevertheless be sacrificed to oblivion, in complaisance to the scepticism of a reader: such is that memorable story of the ghost of George Villiers, which might with more propriety have been made a present of to Dr. Drelincourt, to have kept the ghost of Mrs. Veale company, at the head of his "Discourse upon Death," than have been introduced into so solemn a work as the "History of the Rebellion." To say the truth, if the historian will confine himself to what really happened, and utterly reject any circumstance, which, though ever so well attested, he must be well assured is false, he will sometimes fall into the marvellous, but never into the incredible: he will often raise the wonder and surprise of his reader, but never that incredulous hatred mentioned by Horace. It is by falling into fiction therefore that we generally offend against this rule, of deserting probability, which the historian seldom, if ever, quits till he forsakes his character, and commences a writer of romance. In this, however, those historians who relate public transactions, have the advantage of us, who confine ourselves to scenes of private life. The credit of the former is by common notoriety supported for a long time; and public records, with the concurrent testimony of many authors, bear evidence to their truth in future ages.

Thus a Trajan and an Antoninus, a Nero and

a Caligula, have all met with the belief of posterity; and no one doubts but that men so very good and so very bad were once the masters of mankind: but we, who deal in private character, who search into the most retired recesses, and draw forth examples of virtue and vice from holes and corners of the world, are in a more dangerous situation. As we have no public notoriety, no concurrent testimony, no records to support and corroborate what we deliver, it becomes us to keep within the limits not only of possibility, but of probability too; and this more especially in painting what is greatly good and amiable. Knavery and folly, though ever so exorbitant, will more easily meet with assent, for ill-nature adds great support and strength to faith. Thus we may perhaps with little danger, relate the history of Fisher, who having long owed his bread to the generosity of Mr. Derby, and having one morning received a considerable bounty from his hands, yet in order to possess himself of what remained in his friend's *escritoire*, concealed himself in a public office of the Temple, through which there was a passage into Mr. Derby's chambers. Here he overheard Mr. Derby for many hours solacing himself at an entertainment which he that evening gave his friends, and to which Fisher had been invited; during all this time no tender, no grateful reflections arose to restrain his purpose; but when the poor gentleman had let his company out through the office, Fisher came suddenly from his lurking-place, and, walking softly behind his friend into his chamber, discharged a pistol-ball into his head. This may be believed when the bones of Fisher are as rotten as his heart. Nay, perhaps, it will be credited, that the villain went two days afterwards with some young ladies to the play of Hamlet, and, with an unaltered countenance heard one of the ladies, who little suspected how near she was to the person, cry out, "Good God! if the man that murdered Mr. Derby was now present!" manifesting in this a more seared and callous conscience than even Nero himself; of whom we are told by Suetonius, "that the consciousness of his guilt, after the death of his mother, became immediately intolerable, and so continued; nor could all the congratulations of the soldiers, of the senate, and the people, allay the horrors of his conscience."

But now, on the other hand, should I tell my reader, that I had known a man whose penetrating genius had enabled him to raise a large fortune in a way where no beginning was

chalked out to him; that he had done this with the most perfect preservation of his integrity, and not only without the least injustice or injury to any one individual person, but with the highest advantage to trade, and a vast increase of the public revenue; that he had expended one part of the income of this fortune in discovering a taste superior to most, by works where the highest dignity was united with the purest simplicity, and another part in displaying a degree of goodness superior to all men, by acts of charity to objects whose only recommendations were their merits or their wants; that he was most industrious in searching after merit in distress, most eager to relieve it, and then as careful, perhaps too careful, to conceal what he had done; that his house, his furniture, his gardens, his table, his private hospitality, and his public beneficence, all denoted the mind from which they flowed, and were all intrinsically rich and noble, without tinsel, or external ostentation; that he filled every relation in life with the most adequate virtue; that he was most piously religious to his Creator, most zealously loyal to his sovereign, a most tender husband to his wife, a kind relation, a munificent patron, a warm and firm friend, a knowing and a cheerful companion, indulgent to his servants, hospitable to his neighbours, charitable to the poor, and benevolent to all mankind:—should I add to these the epithets of wise, brave, elegant, and indeed every other epithet in our language; I might surely say,

. . . Quis credet? nemo, Hercule! nemo:  
Vel duo, vel nemo:<sup>1</sup>

and yet I know a man who is all I have here described. But a single instance (and I really know not such another) is not sufficient to justify us, while we are writing to thousands who never heard of the person, nor of anything like him. Such *rarae aves*<sup>2</sup> should be remitted to the epitaph-writer, or to some poet, who may condescend to hitch him in a distich, or to slide him into a rhyme with an air of carelessness and neglect, without giving any offence to the reader.

In the last place, the actions should be such as may not only be within the compass of human agency, and which human agents may probably be supposed to do; but they should be likely for the very actors and characters themselves to have performed; for what may be only wonderful and surprising in one man, may

<sup>1</sup> Who will believe it? No one, by Hercules! no one; two at most, or none. <sup>2</sup> rare birds

become improbable, or indeed impossible, when related of another. This last requisite is what the dramatic critics call conservation of character; and it requires a very extraordinary degree of judgment, and a most exact knowledge of human nature.

It is admirably remarked by a most excellent writer, that zeal can no more hurry a man to act in direct opposition to itself, than a rapid stream can carry a boat against its own current. I will venture to say, that for a man to act in direct contradiction to the dictates of his nature, is, if not impossible, as improbable and as miraculous as anything which can be well conceived. Should the best parts of the story of M. Antoninus be ascribed to Nero, or should the worst incidents of Nero's life be imputed to Antoninus, what would be more shocking to belief than either instance? whereas both these, being related of their proper agent, constitute the truly marvellous. Our modern authors of comedy have fallen almost universally into the error here hinted at: their heroes generally are notorious rogues, and their heroines abandoned jades, during the first four acts; but in the fifth, the former become very worthy gentlemen, and the latter women of virtue and discretion; nor is the writer often so kind as to give himself the least trouble to reconcile or account for this monstrous change and incongruity. There is indeed no other reason to be assigned for it, than because the play is drawing to a conclusion; as if it was no less natural in a rogue to repent in the last act of a play, than in the last of his life; which we perceive to be generally the case at Tyburn, a place which might indeed close the scene of some comedies with much propriety, as the heroes in these are commonly eminent for those very talents which not only bring men to the gallows, but enable them to make an heroic figure when they are there.

Within these few restrictions, I think, every writer may be permitted to deal as much in the wonderful as he pleases; nay, if he thus keeps within the rules of credibility, the more he can surprise the reader, the more he will engage his attention, and the more he will charm him. As a genius of the highest rank observes in his fifth chapter of the *Bathos*, "The great art of all poetry is to mix truth with fiction, in order to join the credible with the surprising:" for though every good author will confine himself within the bounds of probability, it is by no means necessary that his characters or his incidents should be trite, common, or vulgar;

such as happen in every street or in every house, or which may be met with in the home articles of a newspaper; nor must he be inhibited from showing many persons and things, which may possibly have never fallen within the knowledge of great part of his readers. If the writer strictly observes the rules above-mentioned, he has discharged his part; and is then entitled to some faith from his reader, who is indeed guilty of critical infidelity if he disbelieves him. For want of a portion of such faith, I remember the character of a young lady of quality was condemned on the stage for being unnatural, by the unanimous voice of a very large assembly of clerks and apprentices, though it had the previous suffrages of many ladies of the first rank; one of whom, very eminent for her understanding, declared it was the picture of half the young people of her acquaintance.

#### BOOK X

##### 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 mayest be as learned in human nature as Shakspeare himself was, and perhaps thou mayest 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 mayest not as grossly misunderstand 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 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 has 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 playhouse 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 has ever existed a monster bad enough to verify that

. . . nulla virtute redemptum  
A vitis<sup>1</sup> . . .

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

<sup>1</sup> by no virtue redeemed from his vices

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*,<sup>1</sup> 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 foibles and vices of men, in whom there is a great mixture of good, become more glaring objects from the virtues which contrast them and show 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 now, my friend, having given you these few admonitions, we will, if you please, once more set forward with our history.

## SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709-1784)

## CONGREVE

William Congreve descended from a family in Staffordshire, of so great antiquity that it claims a place among the few that extend their line beyond the Norman Conquest; and was the son of William Congreve, second son of Richard Congreve, of Congreve and Stratton. He visited, once at least, the residence of his ancestors; and, I believe, more places than one are still shown, in groves and gardens, where he is related to have written his "Old Bachelor."

Neither the time nor place of his birth are certainly known; if the inscription upon his monument be true, he was born in 1672. For the place; it was said by himself, that he owed his nativity to England, and by every body

<sup>1</sup> which human nature too little avoids

else that he was born in Ireland. Southern mentioned him with sharp censure, as a man that meanly disowned his native country. The biographers assign his nativity to Bardsa, near Leeds in Yorkshire, from the account given by himself, as they suppose, to Jacob.

To doubt whether a man of eminence has told the truth about his own birth, is, in appearance, to be very deficient in candour; yet nobody can live long without knowing that falsehoods of convenience or vanity, falsehoods from which no evil immediately visible ensues, except the general degradation of human testimony, are very lightly uttered, and once uttered are sullenly supported. Boileau, who desired to be thought a rigorous and steady moralist, having told a petty lie to Lewis XIV, continued it afterwards by false dates; "thinking himself obliged *in honour*," says his admirer, "to maintain what, when he said it, was so well received."

Wherever Congreve was born, he was educated first at Kilkenny, and afterwards at Dublin, his father having some military employment that stationed him in Ireland: but, after having passed through the usual preparatory studies, as may be reasonably supposed, with great celerity and success, his father thought it proper to assign him a profession, by which something might be gotten; and about the time of the Revolution sent him, at the age of sixteen, to study law in the Middle Temple, where he lived for several years, but with very little attention to Statutes or Reports.

His disposition to become an author appeared very early, as he very early felt that force of imagination, and possessed that copiousness of sentiment, by which intellectual pleasure can be given. His first performance was a novel, called "Incognita, or Love and Duty reconciled:" it is praised by the biographers, who quote some part of the Preface, that is, indeed, for such a time of life, uncommonly judicious. I would rather praise it than read it.

His first dramatic labour was "The Old Bachelor;" of which he says, in his defence against Collier, "that the comedy was written, as several know, some years before it was acted. When I wrote it, I had little thoughts of the stage; but did it to amuse myself in a slow recovery from a fit of sickness. Afterwards, through my indiscretion, it was seen, and in some little time more it was acted; and I, through the remainder of my indiscretion, suffered myself to be drawn into the prosecution of a difficult and thankless study, and to be

involved in a perpetual war with knaves and fools."

There seems to be a strange affectation in authors of appearing to have done every thing by chance. "The Old Bachelor" was written for amusement in the languor of convalescence. Yet it is apparently composed with great elaborateness of dialogue, and incessant ambition of wit. The age of the writer considered, it is indeed a very wonderful performance; for, whenever written, it was acted (1693) when he was not more than twenty-one years old; and was then recommended by Mr. Dryden, Mr. Southern, and Mr. Maynwaring. Dryden said that he never had seen such a first play; but they found it deficient in some things requisite to the success of its exhibition, and by their greater experience fitted it for the stage. Southern used to relate of one comedy, probably of this, that, when Congreve read it to the players, he pronounced it so wretchedly, that they had almost rejected it; but they were afterwards so well persuaded of its excellence, that, for half a year before it was acted, the manager allowed its author the privilege of the house.

Few plays have ever been so beneficial to the writer; for it procured him the patronage of Halifax, who immediately made him one of the commissioners for licensing coaches, and soon after gave him a place in the pipe-office, and another in the customs of six hundred pounds a year. Congreve's conversation must surely have been at least equally pleasing with his writings.

Such a comedy, written at such an age, requires some consideration. As the lighter species of dramatic poetry professes the imitation of common life, of real manners, and daily incidents, it apparently presupposes a familiar knowledge of many characters, and exact observation of the passing world; the difficulty therefore is, to conceive how this knowledge can be obtained by a boy.

But if "The Old Bachelor" be more nearly examined, it will be found to be one of those comedies which may be made by a mind vigorous and acute, and furnished with comic characters by the perusal of other poets, without much actual commerce with mankind. The dialogue is one constant reciprocation of conceits, or clash of wit, in which nothing flows necessarily from the occasion or is dictated by nature. The characters both of men and women are either fictitious and artificial, as those of Heartwell and the Ladies; or easy and

common, as Wittol a tame idiot, Bluff a swaggering coward, and Fondlewife a jealous puritan; and the catastrophe arises from a mistake not very probably produced, by marrying a woman in a mask.

Yet this gay comedy, when all these deductions are made, will still remain the work of very powerful and fertile faculties; the dialogue is quick and sparkling, the incidents such as seize the attention, and the wit so exuberant that it "o'er-informs its tenement."

Next year he gave another specimen of his abilities in "The Double Dealer," which was not received with equal kindness. He writes to his patron the lord Halifax a dedication, in which he endeavours to reconcile the reader to that which found few friends among the audience. These apologies are always useless: "de gustibus non est disputandum;" men may be convinced, but they cannot be pleased, against their will. But, though taste is obstinate, it is very variable: and time often prevails when arguments have failed.

Queen Mary conferred upon both those plays the honour of her presence; and when she died soon after, Congreve testified his gratitude by a despicable effusion of elegiac pastoral; a composition in which all is unnatural, and yet nothing is new.

In another year (1695) his prolific pen produced "Love for Love," a comedy of nearer alliance to life, and exhibiting more real manners than either of the former. The character of Foresight was then common. Dryden calculated nativities; both Cromwell and King William had their lucky days; and Shaftesbury himself, though he had no religion, was said to regard predictions. The Sailor is not accounted very natural, but he is very pleasant.

With this play was opened the New Theatre, under the direction of Betterton the tragedian; where he exhibited two years afterwards (1687) "The Mourning Bride," a tragedy, so written as to show him sufficiently qualified for either kind of dramatic poetry.

In this play, of which, when he afterwards revised it, he reduced the versification to greater regularity, there is more bustle than sentiment; the plot is busy and intricate, and the events take hold on the attention; but, except a very few passages, we are rather amused with noise, and perplexed with stratagem, than entertained with any true delineation of natural characters. This, however, was received with more benevolence than any other of his works, and still continues to be acted and applauded.