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English Literature for Schools

JOURNAL OF A VOYAGE TO LISBON

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FIELDING
JOURNAL OF A
VOYAGE TO LISBON

Edited with Introduction and Notes

by

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PREFACE

FROM a merely literary point of view his JOURNAL OF A VOYAGE TO LISBON may add little or nothing to the fame of the author of *Tom Jones* and *Jonathan Wild*, though in respect of style it is not unworthy of this great master of English prose. But in another respect this brief record of his seven weeks' journey from Rotherhithe to Lisbon holds a distinct and very important place among the works of Fielding. For it is absolutely indispensable to the forming of a just estimate of the character of one of our greatest men of letters. Despite Johnson's eulogy—the more impressive as it was the triumph of criticism over prejudice—it would seem that there are few readers now of *Amelia*, the masterpiece of Fielding's premature old age. The last of the great trilogy of novels is assuredly not the least, and it will ever be dear to admirers of Fielding for its unintentional autobiography of a writer not at all given to displaying his heart on his sleeve.

The *Journal* is a codicil to *Amelia*. It was written under the shadow of death, and it is

indisputably one of the bravest books in the language.

“This was a man
Wrought on our noblest island plan”

is the description of Fielding by his most sympathetic and accomplished living editor, Mr Austin Dobson. And the only necessary footnote authority for Mr Dobson's eulogy is *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*. By his other writings Fielding presses into the select company of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Scott. By his *Voyage to Lisbon* he fully and finally demonstrates his claim to stand beside them not only by right and might of genius but by his serene courage and large-hearted humanity.

J. H. L.

LONDON
February 1913

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INTRODUCTION

LEAVING Eton in 1725, at the age of eighteen, Henry Fielding, like Goldsmith, spent an enjoyable year or two in deciding upon a profession. When he was twenty-one his first comedy was produced at Drury Lane, and poverty and inclination combined to keep him writing for the theatres during the first decade of his literary life. In 1698 Jeremy Collier, in his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, had made an unanswerable attack on the Restoration drama, which was succeeded by a school of Sentimental Comedy that for the most part lacked the wit as well as the grossness of the plays it displaced. By the time of Fielding the Puritan reaction was losing force, and the young dramatist was content to pour out at astonishing speed a flood of farces and comedies remarkable neither for their refinement nor their wit. The exceptions are when Fielding fleshes the sword of his satire, as in *The Tragedy of Tragedies, or the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great*, where the absurdities of the Sentimentalists are mercilessly and wittily travestied. In 1737 Fielding attacked Walpole's administration in his *Historical Register for the Year 1736*, and the play was immediately followed

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by the institution of a dramatic censorship. Some years later Mr Justice Fielding was assiduous in enforcing the law begotten of his own satirical misdemeanours.

Before his dramatic career was thus rudely interrupted Fielding had married Charlotte Cradock, whom he drew so charmingly in his novels that Johnson and Thackeray for once agree in reckoning her “the most pleasing heroine of all the romances.” Miss Cradock’s dowry provided the means for one year of magnificent splendour, to be followed shortly by “decent lodgings with tolerable comfort; sometimes in a garret without necessaries.” At the age of thirty Fielding essayed a new profession and entered the Middle Temple, where he was called in 1740. Eight years later, through the influence of Lyttelton, his old schoolfellow at Eton, he received his one step of preferment when he was appointed Justice of the Peace for Middlesex and Westminster. The office was neither lucrative nor held in high repute, and Fielding in this *Journal* speaks bitterly of having had to reduce “an income of about £500 a year of the dirtiest money upon earth to little more than £300; a considerable portion of which remained with my clerk; and indeed if the whole had done so, as it ought, he would be but ill paid for sitting almost sixteen hours in the twenty-four in the most unwholesome as well as nauseous air in the universe.” Fielding has left many proofs of his zeal and ability as a magistrate, and one scathing presentment (Mr Justice Thrasher in *Amelia*) of the venal and incompetent “trading justice” who had brought the office into ridicule and contempt.

Fielding little dreamed that the year 1740 was to open for him the road not to legal but to new literary fame. Five months after he was called to

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the Bar a literary sensation was created by the appearance of *Pamela*, a novel, written in the form of letters, by a prosaic master-printer called Samuel Richardson. With no more ambitious intention at first than to compile a Complete Letter-Writer, Richardson proceeded to give his letters the unity of a plot by making them relate the persecution of the virtuous Pamela at the hands of her employer. The scheme of the book is best indicated by a fragment of its very voluminous sub-title which declares that the book is "Published in order to cultivate the Principles of Virtue and Religion in the Minds of the Youth of Both Sexes." Almost by chance Richardson had stumbled on a new literary form, and *Pamela* is our first novel of character analysis. Its moral is not quite so self-evident as its novelty and ability, and many readers have felt that the passage we have quoted from its sub-title might well have contained the additional words "by showing that virtue pays best in the end." It was this aspect of the book that appealed to Fielding's keen sense of humour, and the result of his reflections appeared in 1742 in his first novel, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, and of his friend Mr Abraham Adams*. Fielding wittily parodied the scheme of Richardson's story by making his hero a brother of Pamela and by bringing him safely through a similar persecution at the hands of his mistress. From a parody, however, *Joseph Andrews* developed into a highly original novel, replete with wit and variety and shrewd insight, and presenting in Parson Adams one of the finest humorous creations in the range of English fiction. Within his own special province—the analysis of "the female heart"—Richardson could well afford to defy the wits. His eminence

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has remained undisputed. Fielding's innovation is the novel of plot interest, in which kind his pre-eminence is equally secure. Like many other branches of eighteenth-century prose, the novel seemed to spring into life at once fully matured.

Fielding's next effort was a trenchant satire on the then prevalent glorification of the criminal. This is the motive of his *Jonathan Wild*, whose scandalous career he traces with mock solemnity from his baptism by the Rev. Titus Oates to the last glorious scene at Tyburn, where the "hero," the moment before he is hanged, robs the attendant chaplain of a cork-screw. Six years later, in 1749, our author, now Mr Justice Fielding, produced his admitted masterpiece, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*. The traditional fame of this great novel has centred on the excellence of its plot construction, an excellence due in no small measure probably to its author's earlier practice in writing for the stage. But its plot is by no means the measure of its greatness. Fielding draws his characters from first-hand knowledge, and his wit, says Thackeray, "lightens up a rascal like a policeman's lantern." With equal skill and sureness of touch he paints the nobility of character of Sophia Western and Allworthy and exposes the hypocrisy and cupidity of Blifil and the "college of chambermaids." Fielding's two guiding principles in the novel are that affectation and hypocrisy are the truest objects of satire, and that "the various callings in lower spheres produce the greatest variety of humorous characters." The excellence of Fielding's style reached its full height in *Tom Jones*, especially in the celebrated prefatory discourses, in which with delightful urbanity and scholarship he talks with his readers concerning various aspects of his art.

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After an interval of only two years, during which his pen had been busily engaged on more professional matters, particularly the valuable *Enquiry into the Causes of the late Increase of Robbers in the Metropolis*, came the last of his novels, *Amelia*. The fame of *Tom Jones* has served to obscure the reputation of this great novel which compensates by its pathos and its social satire for its undoubted but not surprising diminution of the gaiety of health and energy. For Fielding's constitution had broken down suddenly and irreparably, and in *Amelia* there is much of the sadness of retrospect. This element, however, is for the seeing reader to find. The author makes no pageant of his sorrows, and the wit flashes forth with its old brightness in describing the humorous irascibility of Colonel Bath. Fielding made effective use in the novel of his magisterial experience, and gives us many memorable sidelights on the London of the mid-eighteenth century. *Amelia*, a novel beginning and not ending with marriage, is also of supreme biographical interest. For many traits of the erring Captain Booth are the outcome of Fielding's remorseful retrospect of his own life, while to the drawing of *Amelia* he brought the gratitude of a noble nature and the maturity of a great genius. The result in the latter case is commensurate with the means expended, and Fielding succeeded, where so many who called him master failed, in describing without triviality or insipidity a heroine whose chief charm is her limitless forgiveness and who knew no ambitions beyond the reward promised to the ideal wife and mother commended by Solomon.

The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon tells with a fulness that leaves no need for addition the story of his miserable journey in quest of health,

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a quest that Fielding himself knew to be vain. That the record was ever written at all is a striking proof of the author's indomitable courage, and in reading it we think of the sick and broken author writing in the little cabin of the *Queen of Portugal* and then of the man of whom his cousin, Lady Mary Montagu, said, "No man enjoyed life more than he did, though few had less reason to do so. I am persuaded he has known more happy moments than any prince on earth." No literary hero-worshipper could wish from the object of his devotion a braver *vale* to life than this *Journal* of Fielding. It is replete with the traits we most admire in him—his courage, his courtesy, his spirit, his humanity, his stalwart commonsense. He had consistently waged war all his life—"a Drawcansir in wit," said an old enemy, "who spared neither friend nor foe"—against affectation and hypocrisy, and it is safe to say that no satirist was ever more free of the weaknesses he satirised. He had others in plenty, and he has left pages that he might well have wished to blot. The weaknesses, like the animosities, are mortal: "the humanities live for ever." The creator of Captain Booth has anticipated the accuser: the thought of Fielding's ironic laughter has turned aside the itinerant biographical apologist with his bucket of whitewash. On the morality of Fielding's work as a whole we may safely accept the verdict of Sir Walter Scott, the greatest of Fielding's descendants and incomparably the most competent judge in all cases where literature and morals meet. "It is with concern," says Scott, "we add our sincere belief that the fine picture of frankness and generosity exhibited in that fictitious character [Tom Jones] has had as few imitators as the career of his follies... We treat with scorn the affectation which, while in common life it connives

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at the practice of libertinism, pretends to detest the memory of an author who painted life as it was, with all its shades, and more than all the lights which it occasionally exhibits to relieve them.”

In his account of Fielding (written, as ought to be remembered but so often is not, for the purpose of a popular lecture) Thackeray allowed his imagination free play with the “inked ruffles, and claret-stains on his tarnished lace coat.” There seems little doubt that such references, torn from their context, have, combined with Johnson’s unsympathetic comments, to mould a popular conception of Fielding’s character that is at once lop-sided and unjust, and one that Thackeray himself would have been the first to combat. The closing words of the following extract from his generous appreciation of his literary master are sufficient to show the wrong that has been inflicted by partial quotation both on Fielding and on Thackeray himself. “He has an admirable natural love of truth, the keenest instinctive antipathy to hypocrisy, the happiest satirical gift of laughing it to scorn. His wit is wonderfully wise and detective; it flashes upon a rogue and lightens up a rascal like a policeman’s lantern. He is one of the manliest and kindest of human beings... He could not be so brave, generous, truth-telling as he is, were he not infinitely merciful, pitiful, and tender. He will give any man his purse—he can’t help kindness and profusion. He may have low tastes, but not a mean mind; he admires with all his heart good and virtuous men, stoops to no flattery, bears no rancour, disdains all disloyal acts, does his public duty uprightly, is fondly loved by his family, and dies at his work.”

J. H. L.