Memoirs of Fanny Hill: A New and Genuine Edition from the Original Text (London, 1749)

John Cleland

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Memoirs Of Fanny Hill

by John Cleland

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PARIS—ISIDORE LISEUX

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LETTER THE FIRST

Madam,

I sit down to give you an undeniable proof of my considering your desires as indispensable orders. Ungracious then as the task may be, I shall recall to view those scandalous stages of my life, out of which I emerged, at length, to the enjoyment of every blessing in the power of love, health and fortune to bestow; whilst yet in the flower of youth, and not too late to employ the leisure afforded me by great ease and affluence, to cultivate an understanding, naturally not a despicable one, and which had, even amidst the whirl of loose pleasures I had been tossed in, exerted more observation on the characters and manners of the world than what is common to those of my unhappy profession, who, looking on all though or reflection as their capital enemy, keep it at as great a distance as they can, or destroy it without

mercy.

Hating, as I mortally do, all long unnecessary prefaces, I shall give you good quarter in this, and use no farther apology, than to prepare you for seeing the loose part of my life, written with the same liberty that I led it.

Truth! stark, naked truth, is the word; and I will not so much as take the pains to bestow the strip of a gauze wrapper on it, but paint situations such as they actually rose to me in nature, careless of violating those laws of decency that were never made for such unreserved intimacies as ours; and you have too much sense, too much knowledge of the originals, to sniff prudishly and out of character at the pictures of them. The greatest men, those of the first and most leading taste, will not scruple adorning their private closets with nudities, though, in compliance with vulgar prejudices, they may not think them decent decorations of the staircase, or salon.

This, and enough, premised, I go souse into my personal history. My maiden name was Frances Hill. I was born at a small village near Liverpool, in Lancashire, of parents extremely poor, and, I piously believe, extremely honest.

My father, who had received a maim on his limbs, that disabled him from following the more laborious branches of country drudgery, got, by making nets, a scanty subsistence, which was not much enlarged by my mother’s keeping a little day-school for the girls in her neighborhood. They had had several children; but none lived to any age except myself, who had received from nature a constitution perfectly healthy.

My education, till past fourteen, was no better than very vulgar:

reading, or rather spelling, an illegible scrawl, and a little ordinary plain work, composed the whole system of it; and then all my foundation in virtue was no other than a total ignorance of vice, and the shy timidity general to our sex, in the tender age of life, when objects alarm or frighten more by their novelty than anything else. But then, this is a fear too often cured at the expense of innocence, when Miss, by degrees, begins no longer to look on a man as a creature of prey that will eat her.

My poor mother had divided her time so entirely between her scholars and her little domestic cares, that she had spared very little to my instruction, having, from her own innocence from all ill, no hint or thought of guarding me against any.

I was now entering on my fifteenth year, when the worst of ills befell me in the loss of my fond, tender parents, who were both carried off by the small-pox, within a few days of each other; my father dying first, and thereby by hastening the death of my mother: so that I was now left an unhappy friendless orphan (for my father’s coming to settle there, was accidental, he being originally a Kentisrman). That cruel distemper which had proved so fatal to them, had indeed seized me, but with such mild and favourable symptoms, that I was presently out of danger, and what then I did not know the value of, was entirely unmarked I skip over here an account of the natural grief and affliction which I felt on this melancholy occasion. A little time, and the giddiness of that age, dissipated too soon my reflections on that irreparable loss; but nothing contributed more to reconcile me to it, than the notions that were immediately put into my head, of going to London, and looking out for a service, in which I was promised all assistance and advice from one Esther Davis, a young woman that

had beer down to see her friends, and who, after the stay of a few days, was returned to her place.

As I had now nobody left alive in the village, who had concern enough about what should become of me, to start any objections to this scheme, and the woman who took care of me after my parents' death, rather encouraged me to pursue it, I soon came to a resolution of making this launch into the wide world, by repairing to London, in order to seek my fortune, a phrase which, by the bye, has ruined more adventurers of both sexes, from the country, than ever it made or advanced.

Nor did Esther Davis a little comfort and inspirit me to venture with her, by piquing my childish curiosity with the fine sights that were to be seen in London: the Tombs, the Lions, the King, the Royal Family, the fine Plays and Operas, and, in short, all the diversions which fell within her sphere of life to come at; the detail of all which perfectly turned the little head of me.

Nor can I remember, without laughing, the innocent admiration, not without a spice of envy, with which we poor girls, whose church-going clothes did not rise above dowlas shifts and stuff gowns, beplaced with silver: all which we imagined grew in London, and entered for a great deal into my determination of trying to come in for my share of them.

The idea however of having the company of a towns-woman with her, was the trivial, and all the motives that engaged Esther to take charge of me during my journey to town, where she told me, after the manner and style, "as how several maids out of the country had made themselves and all their kind for ever: that by preserving their virtue,

some had taken so with their masters, that they had married them, and kept them coaches, and lived vastly grand and happy; and some, may-hap, came to be Duchesses; luck was all, and why not I, as well as another?"; with other almanacs to this purpose, which set me a tip-toe to begin this promising journey, and to leave a place which, though my native one, contained no relations that I had reason to regret, and was grown insupportable to me, from the change of the tenderest usage into a cold air of charity, with which I was entertained, even at the only friend's house that I had the least expectation of care and protection from. She was, however, so just to me, as to manage the turning into money the little matters that remained to me after the debts and burial charges were allowed for, and, at my departure, put my whole fortune into my hands; which consisted of a very slender wardrobe, packed up in a very portable box, and eight guineas, with seventeen shillings in silver, stowed in a spring-pouch, which was a greater treasure than I ever had seen together, and which I could not conceive there was a possibility of running out; and indeed, I was so entirely taken up with the joy of seeing myself mistress of such an immence sum, that I gave very little attention to a world of good advice which was given me with it.

Places, then, being taken for Esther and me in the Chester waggon, I pass over a very immaterial scene of leave-taking, at which I droped a few tears betwixt grief and joy; and, for the same reasons of insignificance, skip over all that happened to me on the road, such as the waggoner's looking liquorish on me, the schemes laid for me by some of the passengers, which were defeated by the valiance of my guardian Esther; who, to do her justice, took a motherly care of me, at the same time that she taxed me for the protection by making me bear

all travelling charges, which I defrayed with the unmost cheerfulness, and thought myself much obliged to her into the bargain.

She took indeed great care that we were not overrated, or imposed on, as well as of managing as frugally as possible; expensiveness was not her vice.

It was pretty late in a summer evening when we reached the town, in our slow conveyance, though drawn by six at length. As we passed through the greatest streets that led to our inn, the noise, of the coaches, the hurry, the crowds of foot passengers, in short, the new scenery of the shops and houses, at once pleased and amazed me.

But guess at my mortification and surprise when we came to the inn, and our things were landed and delivered to us, when my fellow traveller and protectress, Esther Davis, who had used me with the utmost tenderness during the journey, and prepared me by no preceedings signs for the stunning blow I was to receive, when I say, my only dependence and friend, in this strange place, all of a sudden assumed a strange and cool air towards me, as if she dreaded my becoming a burden to her.

Instead, then, of proffering me the continuance of her assistance and good offices, which I relied upon, and never more wanted, she thought herself, it seems, abundantly acquitted of her engagements to me, by having brought me safe to my journey’s end, and seeing nothing in her procedure towards me but what natural and in order, began to embrace me by the way of taking leave, whilst I was so confounded, so struck, that I had not spirit or sense enough so much as to mention my hopes or expectations from her experience, and knowledge of the place she had brought me to.

Whilst I stood thus stupid and mute, which she doubtless attributed to nothing more than a concern at parting, this idea procured me perhaps a slight alleviation of it, in the following harangue: “That now we were got safe to London, and that she was obliged to go to her place, she advised me by all means to get into one as soon as possible; that I need not fear getting one; there were more places than parish-churches; that she advised me to go to an intelligence office; that if she heard of any thing stirring, she would find me out and let me know; that in the meantime, I should take a private lodging, and acquaint her where to send to me; that she wished me good luck, and hoped I should always have the grace to keep myself honest, and not bringing a disgrace on my parentage.” With this; she took her leave of me, and left me, as it were, on my own hands, full as lightly as I had been put into hers.

Left thus alone, absolutely destitute and friendless I began then to feel most bitterly the severity of this separation, the scene of which had passed in a little room in the inn; and no sooner was her back turned, but the affliction I felt at my helpless strange circumstances, burst out into a flood of tears, which infinitely relieved the oppression of my heart; though I still remained stupified, and most perfectly perplexed how to dispose of myself.

One of the drawers coming in, added yet more to my uncertainty, by asking me, in a short way, if I called for anything? to which I replied innocently: “No.” But I wished him to tell me where I might get a lodging for that night. He said he would go and speak to his mistress, who accordingly came, and told me drily, without entering in the least into the distress she saw me in, that I might have a bed for a shilling, and that, as she supposed I had some friends in town (there I fetched a

deep sigh in vain!), I might provide for myself in the morning.

It is incredible what trifling consolations the human mind will seize in its greatest afflictions. The assurance of nothing more than a bed to lie on that night, calmed my agonies; and being ashamed to acquaint the mistress of the inn that I had no friends to apply to in town, I proposed to myself to proceed, the very next morning, to an intelligence office, to which I was furnished with written directions on the back of a ballad, Esther had given me. There I counted on getting information of any place that such a country girl as I might be fit for, and where I could get into any sort of being, before my little stock should be consumed; and as to a character, Esther had often repeated to me, that I might depend on her managing me one; nor, however affected I was at her leaving me thus, did I entirely cease to rely on her, as I began to think, good-naturedly, that her procedure was all in course, and that is was only my ignorance of life that had made me take it in the light I at first did.

Accordingly, the next morning I dressed myself as clean and as neat as my rustic wardrobe would permit me; and having left my box, with special recommendation, with the landlady, I ventured out by myself, and without any more difficulty than can be supposed of a young country girl, barely fifteen, and to whom every sign or shop was a gazing trap, I got to the wished for intelligence office.

It was kept by an elderly woman, who sat at the receipt of custom, with a book before her in great form and order, and several scrolls made out, of directions for places.

I made up then to this important personage, without lifting up my eyes or observing any of the people round me, who were attending

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