

some do not please at this distance, and yet must be set down, if with a wry face.

Of which, I am glad to say, that the worst—with one exception—comes first, or at least early. And with that, to proceed; premising always that, as in all that follows I am no one, and the tale is my lord's, I shall deal very succinctly with my own concerns and chancings, and where I must state them for clearness of narration, will do so *currente calamo* (as the ancients were wont to say) and so forthwith to those more important matters with which my readers desire to be made acquainted.

Suffice it, then, that I was born near Bishop's Stortford on the borders of Hertfordshire, in that year so truly called the *Annus Mirabilis*, 1666; my father, a small yeoman, my mother of no better stock, she being the daughter of a poor parson in that neighbourhood. In such a station she was not likely to boast much learning, yet she could read, and having served two years in a great man's still-room, had acquired notions of gentility that went as ill with her station as they were little calculated to increase her contentment. Our house lay not far from the high road between Ware and Bishop's Stortford, which furnished us with frequent opportunities of viewing the King and Court, who were in the habit of passing that way two or three times in the year to Newmarket to see the horse-races. On these occasions we crowded with our neighbours to the side of the road, and gaped on the pageant, which lacked no show of ladies, both masked and unmasked, and gentlemen in all kinds of fripperies, and mettlesome horses that hit the taste of some among us better than either. On these excursions my mother was ever the foremost and the most ready; yet it was not long before I learned to beware of her hand for days after, and expect none but gloomy looks and fretful answers; while my father dared no more spell duty for as much as a week, than refuse the King's taxes.