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Hogarth moralized

Hogarth, William

London, 1831

Taste In High Life. In The Year 1742.

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TASTE IN HIGH LIFE,

IN THE YEAR 1742.

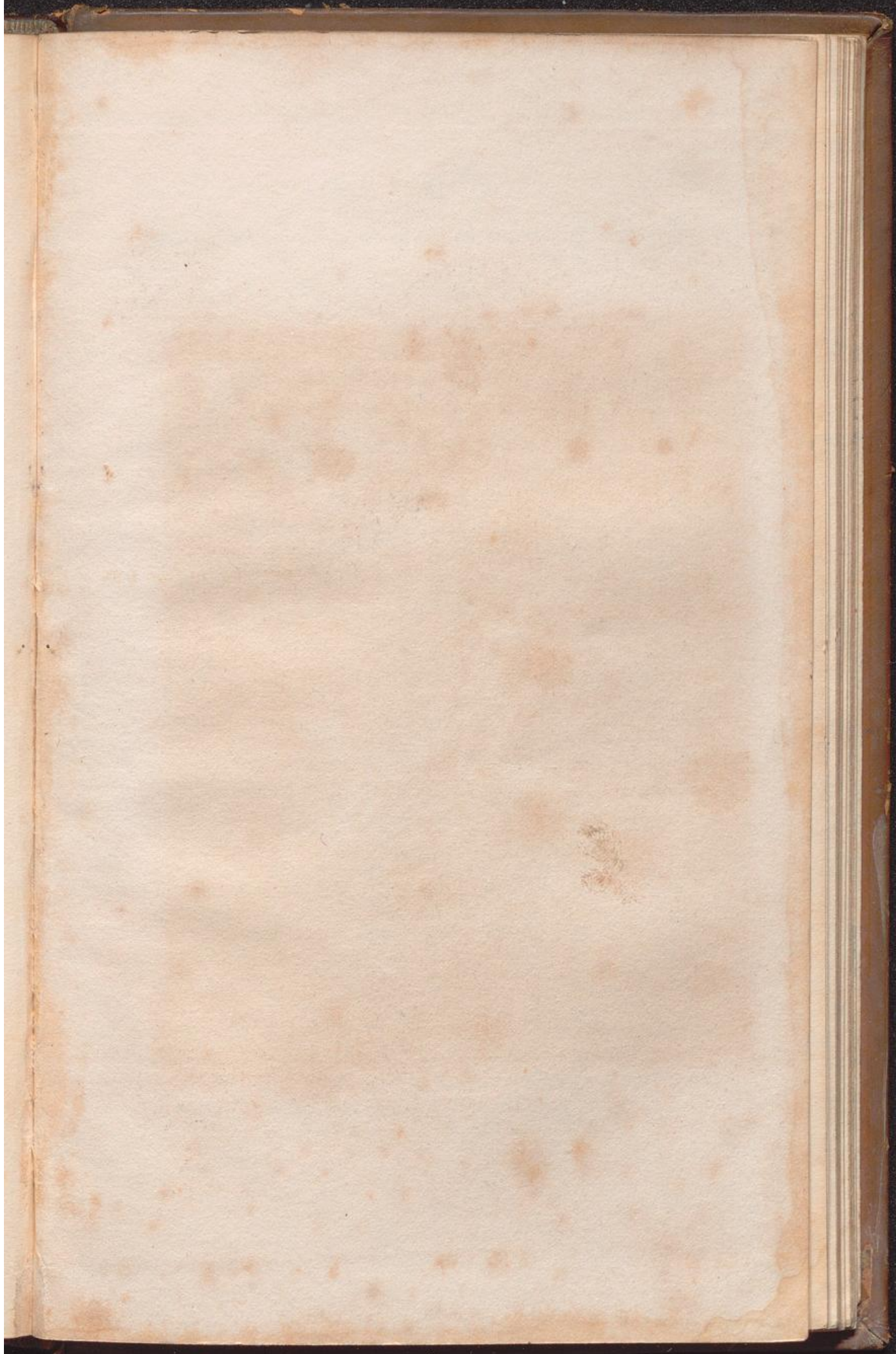
The picture from which this print was copied, Hogarth painted by the order of Miss Edwards, a woman of large fortune, who having been laughed at for some singularities in her manners, called in the artist to recriminate on her opponents, and paid him sixty guineas for his production.

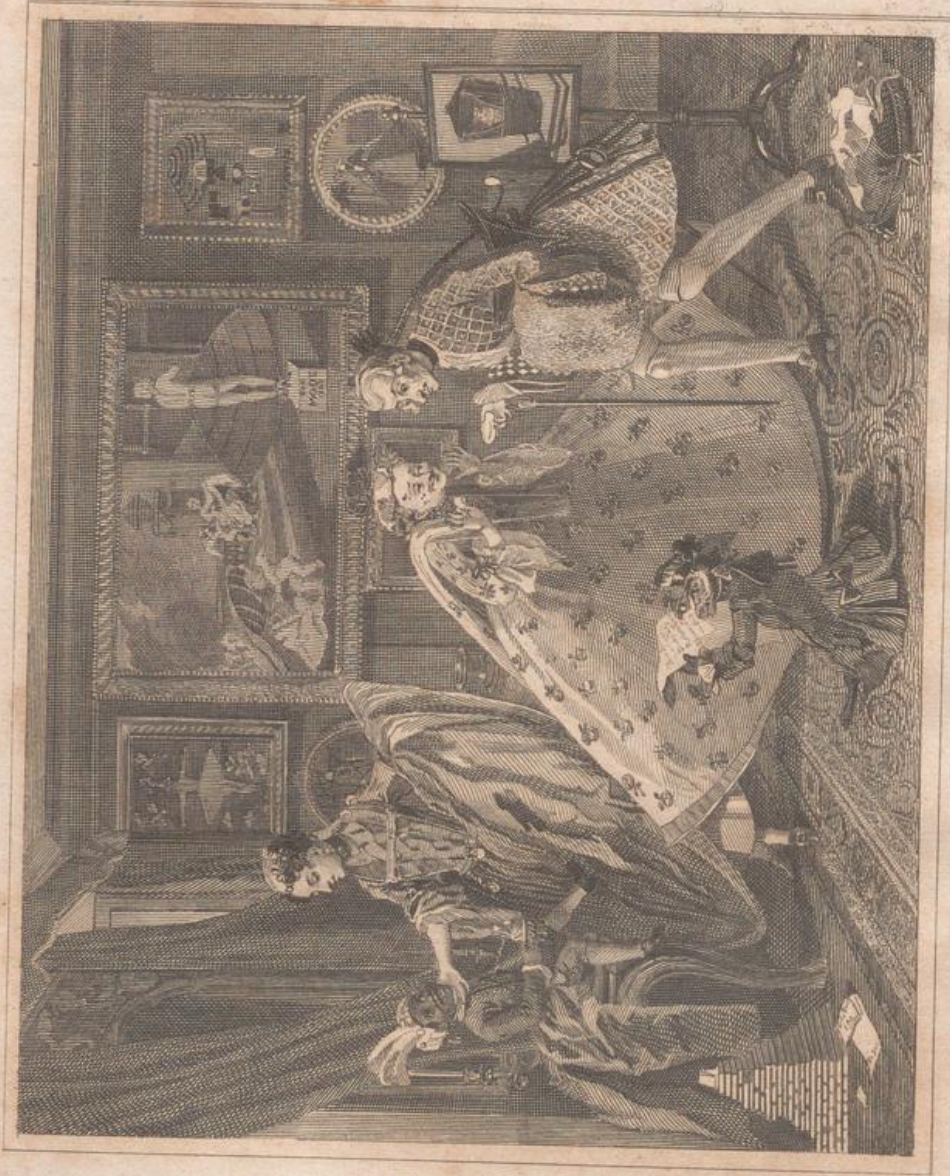
It is professedly intended to ridicule the reigning fashions of high life in the year 1742: to do this, the painter has brought into one group, an old beau, and an old lady of the Chesterfield school, a fashionable young lady, a little black boy, and a full dressed monkey. The old lady, with a most affected air, poises between her finger and thumb, a small tea-cup, with the beauties of which she appears to be highly enamoured.

The gentleman, gazing with vacant wonder at that, and the companion saucer which he holds in his hand, joins in admiration of its astonishing beauties!

“ Each varied colour of the brightest hue,
The green, the red, the yellow, and the blue,
In every part their dazzled eyes behold,
Here streak'd with silver—there enrich'd with gold.”

This gentleman is said to be intended for Lord Portmore, in the habit he first appeared at Court on his return from France. The cane dangling from his wrist, large muff, long





A. Durran, sc.

TASTE IN HIGH LIFE

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queue, black stock, feathered chapeau, and shoes, give him the air of

—— “ An old and finish'd fop,
All cork at heel, and feather all at top.”

The old lady's habit, formed of stiff brocade, gives her the appearance of a squat pyramid, with a grotesque head at the top of it. The young one is fondling a little black boy, who on his part is playing with a petite pagoda. This miniature Othello has been said to be intended for the late Ignatius Sancho, whose talents and virtues were an honour to his colour. At the time the picture was painted he would have been rather older than the figure, but as he was then honoured by the partiality and protection of a noble family, the painter might delineate what his figure had been a few years before.

The little monkey, with a magnifying glass, bag-wig, solitaire, laced hat, and ruffles, is eagerly inspecting a bill of fare, with the following articles pour dinner; cocks combs, ducks tongues, rabbits ears, fricasey of snails, grande d'oeuts beurre.*

In the centre of the room is a capacious china jar; in one corner a tremendous pyramid, composed of packs of cards, and on the floor close to them, a bill inscribed, “ Lady Basto Dr to John Pip, for cards,—£300.”

The room is ornamented with several pictures; the principal represents the Medicean Venus, on a pedestal, in stays and high-heeled shoes, and holding before her a hoop petticoat, somewhat larger than a fig-leaf; a Cupid paring down

* “ For eating and drinking we know the best rules,
Our fathers and mothers were blockheads and fools;
'Tis dress, cards, and dancing, alone should engage
This highly enlighten'd and delicate age.”

a fat lady to a thin proportion, and another Cupid blowing up a fire to burn a hoop petticoat, muff, bag, and queue wig, &c. On the dexter side, is another picture, representing Monsieur Desnoyer, operatically habited, dancing in a grand ballet, and surrounded by butterflies, &c., inscribed insects, and evidently of the same genus with this deity of dance. On the sinister, is the drawing denominated exotics, consisting of queue and bag-wigs, muffs, solitaires, petticoats, French heeled shoes, and other fantastic fripperies.

Beneath this is a lady in a pyramidal habit walking the Park; and as the companion picture, we have a blind man walking the streets.

The fire-screen is adorned with a drawing of a lady in a sedan chair—

“ To conceive how she looks, you must call to your mind
 The lady you’ve seen in a lobster confin’d
 Or a pagod in some little corner inshrin’d.” }

As Hogarth made this design from the ideas of Miss Edwards, it has been said that he had no great partiality for his own performance, and that, as he never would consent to its being engraved, the drawing from which the print is copied, was made by the connivance of one of her servants. Be that as it may, his ridicule on the absurdities of fashion, —on the folly of collecting old china,—cookery,—card playing, &c., is pointed, and highly wrought.

At the sale of Miss Edwards’s effects at Kensington, the original picture was purchased by the father of Mr. Birch, surgeon, of Essex-street, Strand. J. I.