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The History Of Tom Jones, A Foundling

In Four Volumes

Fielding, Henry

London, 1750

Chap. XIV. A most dreadful Chapter indeed; and which few Readers ought to venture upon in an Evening, espacially when alone.

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' Affront; not all the Books, nor all the Parsons
 ' in the World, shall ever persuade me to that.
 ' I love my Religion very well, but I love my
 ' Honour more. There must be some Mistake
 ' in the wording the Text, or in the Transla-
 ' tion, or in the understanding it, or somewhere
 ' or other. But however that be, a Man must
 ' run the Risque; for he must preserve his Ho-
 ' nour. So compose yourself To-night, and I
 ' promise you, you shall have an Opportunity of
 ' doing yourself Justice.' Here he gave *Jones* a
 hearty Buss, shook him by the Hand, and took
 his Leave.

But tho' the Lieutenant's Reasoning was very
 satisfactory to himself, it was not entirely so to
 his Friend. *Jones* therefore having revolved this
 Matter much in his Thoughts, at last came to a
 Resolution, which the Reader will find in the
 next Chapter.

C H A P. XIV.

*A most dreadful Chapter indeed; and which few
 Readers ought to venture upon in an Evening,
 especially when alone.*

JONES swallowed a large Mess of Chicken,
 or rather Cock, Broth, with a very good Ap-
 petite, as indeed he would have done the Cock it
 was made of, with a Pound of Bacon into the
 Bargain; and now, finding in himself no Defi-
 ciency of either Health or Spirit, he resolved to
 get up and seek his Enemy.

But first he sent for the Serjeant, who was his
 first Acquaintance among these military Gentle-
 men. Unluckily that worthy Officer having, in



a literal Sense, taken his Fill of Liquor, had been some Time retired to his Bolster, where he was snoring so loud, that it was not easy to convey a Noise in at his Ears capable of drowning that which issued from his Noftrils.

However, as *Jones* persisted in his Desire of seeing him, a vociferous Drawer at length found Means to disturb his Slumbers, and to acquaint him with the Message. Of which the Serjeant was no sooner made sensible, than he arose from his Bed, and having his Clothes already on, immediately attended. *Jones* did not think fit to acquaint the Serjeant with his Design, tho' he might have done it with great Safety; for the Halberdier was himself a Man of Honour, and had killed his Man. He would therefore have faithfully kept this Secret, or indeed any other which no Reward was published for discovering. But as *Jones* knew not those Virtues in so short an Acquaintance, his Caution was perhaps prudent and commendable enough.

He began therefore by acquainting the Serjeant, that as he was now entered into the Army, he was ashamed of being without what was perhaps the most necessary Implement of a Soldier, namely, a Sword; adding, that he should be infinitely obliged to him, if he could procure one. 'For which,' says he, 'I will give you any reasonable Price; nor do I insist upon its being silver-hilted, only a good Blade, and such as may become a Soldier's Thigh.'

The Serjeant, who well knew what had happened, and had heard that *Jones* was in a very dangerous Condition, immediately concluded, from such a Message, at such a Time of Night, and from a Man in such a Situation, that he was
light.

light-headed. Now as he had his Wit (to use that Word in its common Signification) always ready, he bethought himself of making his Advantage of this Humour in the sick Man. ‘ Sir,’ says he, ‘ I believe I can fit you. I have a most excellent Piece of Stuff by me. It is not indeed Silver-hilted, which, as you say, doth not become a Soldier; but the Handle is decent enough, and the Blade one of the best in *Europe*.—It is a Blade that—a Blade that—in short, I will fetch it you this Instant, and you shall see it and handle it.—I am glad to see your Honour so well with all my Heart.’

Being instantly returned with the Sword, he delivered it to *Jones*, who took it and drew it; and then told the Serjeant it would do very well, and bid him name his Price.

The Serjeant now began to harangue in Praise of his Goods. He said (nay he swore very heartily) ‘ that the Blade was taken from a *French* Officer of very high Rank, at the Battle of *Dettingen*. I took it myself,’ says he, ‘ from his Side, after I had knocked him o’ the Head. The Hilt was a golden one. That I sold to one of our fine Gentlemen; for there are some of them, an’t please your Honour, who value the Hilt of a Sword more than the Blade.’

Here the other stopped him, and begged him to name a Price. The Serjeant, who thought *Jones* absolutely out of his Senses, and very near his End, was afraid, lest he should injure his Family by asking too little.—However, after a Moment’s Hesitation, he contented himself with naming twenty Guineas, and swore he would not sell it for less to his own Brother.



‘ Twenty Guineas!’ says *Jones*, in the utmost Surprize, ‘ sure you think I am mad, or that I never saw a Sword in my Life. Twenty Guineas, indeed! I did not imagine you would endeavour to impose upon me.—Here, take the Sword—No, now I think on’t, I will keep it myself, and shew it your Officer in the Morning, acquainting him, at the same Time, what a Price you asked me for it.’

The Serjeant, as we have said, had always his Wit (*in sensu prædicto*) about him, and now plainly saw that *Jones* was not in the Condition he had apprehended him to be; he now, therefore, counterfeited as great Surprize as the other had shewn, and said, ‘ I am certain, Sir, I have not asked you so much out of the way. Besides, you are to consider, it is the only Sword I have, and I must run the Risque of my Officer’s Displeasure, by going without one myself. And truly, putting all this together, I don’t think twenty Shillings was so much out of the Way.’

‘ Twenty Shillings!’ cries *Jones*, ‘ why you just now asked me twenty Guineas.’ ‘ How!’ cries the Serjeant—‘ Sure your Honour must have mistaken me; or else I mistook myself—and indeed I am but half awake——Twenty Guineas indeed! no wonder your Honour flew into such a Passion. I say twenty Guineas too—No, no, I meant twenty Shillings, I assure you. And when your Honour comes to consider every Thing, I hope you will not think that so extravagant a Price. It is indeed true, you may buy a Weapon which looks as well for less Money. But—

Here

Here *Jones* interrupted him, saying, ' I will
 ' be so far from making any Words with you,
 ' that I will give you a Shilling more than your
 ' Demand.' He then gave him a Guinea, bid
 him return to his Bed, and wished him a good
 March; adding, he hoped to overtake them be-
 fore the Division reached *Worcester*.

The Serjeant very civilly took his Leave, fully
 satisfied with his Merchandize, and not a little
 pleased with his dextrous Recovery from that
 false Step into which his Opinion of the sick
 Man's Light-headedness had betrayed him.

As soon as the Serjeant was departed, *Jones*
 rose from his Bed, and dressed himself entirely,
 putting on even his Coat, which, as its Colour
 was white, shewed very visibly the Streams of
 Blood which had flowed down it; and now,
 having grasped his new-purchased Sword in his
 Hand, he was going to issue forth, when the
 Thought of what he was about to undertake laid
 suddenly hold of him, and he began to reflect
 that in a few Minutes he might possibly deprive
 a human Being of Life, or might lose his own.
 ' Very well,' said he, ' and in what Cause do I
 ' venture my Life? Why, in that of my Ho-
 ' nour. And who is this human Being? A Ras-
 ' cal who hath injured and insulted me without
 ' Provocation. But is not Revenge forbidden
 ' by Heaven?—Yes, but it is enjoined by the
 ' World. Well, but shall I obey the World in
 ' Opposition to the express Commands of Hea-
 ' ven? Shall I incur the divine Displeasure ra-
 ' ther than be called---Ha--Coward--Scoundrel?
 ' --I'll think no more; I am resolved, and must
 ' fight him.'

The

The Clock had now struck Twelve, and every one in the House were in their Beds, except the Centinel who stood to guard *Northerton*, when *Jones* softly opening his Door, issued forth in Pursuit of his Enemy, of whose Place of Confinement he had received a perfect Description from the Drawer. It is not easy to conceive a much more tremendous Figure than he now exhibited. He had on, as we have said, a light-coloured Coat, covered with Streams of Blood. His Face, which misted that very Blood, as well as twenty Ounces more drawn from him by the Surgeon, was pallid. Round his Head was a Quantity of Bandage, not unlike a Turban. In the right Hand he carried a Sword, and in the left a Candle. So that the bloody *Banquo* was not worthy to be compared to him. In Fact, I believe a more dreadful Apparition was never raised in a Church-yard, nor in the Imagination of any good People met in a Winter Evening over a Christmas Fire in *Somersetshire*.

When the Centinel first saw our Heroe approach, his Hair began gently to lift up his Grenadier Cap; and in the same Instant his Knees fell to Blows with each other. Presently his whole Body was seized with worse than an Ague Fit. He then fired his Piece, and fell flat on his Face.

Whether Fear or Courage was the Occasion of his Firing, or whether he took Aim at the Object of his Terror, I cannot say. If he did, however, he had the good Fortune to miss his Man.

Jones seeing the Fellow fall, guessed the Cause of his Fright, at which he could not forbear smiling, not in the least reflecting on the Danger from

from which he had just escaped. He then passed by the Fellow, who still continued in the Posture in which he fell, and entered the Room where *Northerton*, as he had heard, was confined. Here, in a solitary Situation, he found-an empty Quart-Pot standing on the Table, on which some Beer being spilt, it looked as if the Room had lately been inhabited; but at present it was entirely vacant.

Jones then apprehended it might lead to some other Apartment; but, upon searching all round it, he could perceive no other Door than that at which he entered, and where the Centinel had been posted. He then proceeded to call *Northerton* several Times by his Name; but no one answered; nor did this serve to any other Purpose than to confirm the Centinel in his Terrors, who was now convinced that the Volunteer was dead of his Wounds, and that his Ghost was come in Search of the Murtherer: He now lay in all the Agonies of Horror; and I wish, with all my Heart, some of those Actors, who are hereafter to represent a Man frightened out of his Wits, had seen him, that they might be taught to copy Nature, instead of performing several antic Tricks and Gestures, for the Entertainment and Applause of the Galleries.

Perceiving the Bird was flown, at least despairing to find him, and rightly apprehending that the Report of the Firelock would alarm the whole House, our Heroe now blew out his Candle, and gently stole back again to his Chamber, and to his Bed: Whither he would not have been able to have gotten undiscovered, had any other Person been on the same Stair-case, save only one Gentleman who was confined to his Bed by the
Gout;

Gout; for before he could reach the Door to his Chamber, the Hall where the Centinel had been posted, was half full of People, some in their Shirts, and others not half drest, all very earnestly enquiring of each other, what was the Matter?

The Soldier was now found lying in the same Place and Posture in which we just now left him. Several immediately applied themselves to raise him, and some concluded him dead: But they presently saw their Mistake; for he not only struggled with those who laid their Hands on him, but fell a roaring like a Bull. In reality, he imagined so many Spirits or Devils were handling him; for his Imagination being possessed with the Horror of an Apparition, converted every Object he saw or felt, into nothing but Ghosts and Spectres.

At length he was overpowered by Numbers, and got upon his Legs; when Candles being brought, and seeing two or three of his Comrades present, he came a little to himself; but when they asked him what was the Matter? he answered, 'I am a dead Man, that's all, I am a dead Man. I can't recover it. I have seen him.' 'What hast thou seen, *Jack*?' says one of the Soldiers. 'Why, I have seen the young Volunteer that was killed Yesterday.' He then imprecated the most heavy Curses on himself, if he had not seen the Volunteer, all over Blood, vomiting Fire out of his Mouth and Nostrils, pass by him into the Chamber where Ensign *Northberton* was, and then seizing the Ensign by the Throat, fly away with him in a Clap of Thunder.

This Relation met with a gracious Reception from the Audience. All the Women present believed

lived it firmly, and prayed Heaven to defend them from Murther. Amongst the Men too, many had Faith in the Story; but others turned it into Derision and Ridicule; and a Serjeant who was present, answered very coolly: 'Young Man, you will hear more of this for going to sleep, and dreaming on your Post.'

The Soldier replied, 'You may punish me if you please; but I was as broad awake as I am now; and the Devil carry me away, as he hath the Ensign, if I did not see the dead Man, as I tell you, with Eyes as big and as fiery as two large Flambeaux.'

The Commander of the Forces, and the Commander of the House, were now both arrived: For the former being awake at the Time, and hearing the Centinel fire his Piece, thought it his Duty to rise immediately, tho' he had no great Apprehensions of any Mischief; whereas the Apprehensions of the latter were much greater, lest her Spoons and Tankards should be upon the March, without having received any such Orders from her.

Our poor Centinel, to whom the Sight of this Officer was not much more welcome than the Apparition, as he thought it, which he had seen before, again related the dreadful Story, and with many Additions of Blood and Fire: But he had the Misfortune to gain no Credit with either of the last-mentioned Persons; for the Officer, tho' a very religious Man, was free from all Terrors of this Kind; besides, having so lately left *Jones* in the Condition we have seen, he had no Suspicion of his being dead. As for the Landlady, tho' not over religious, she had no kind of Aversion to the Doctrine of Spirits; but there was a
Circum-