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The History Of Tom Jones, A Foundling

In Four Volumes

Fielding, Henry

London, 1750

Chap. IX. Containing Love-Letters of several Sorts.

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had been totally spared as impertinent to the main Design, which I suppose they conclude is to bring Mr. *Jones* to the Gallows, or if possible, to a more deplorable Catastrophe.

CH A P. IX.

Containing Love-Letters of several Sorts.

MR. *Jones*, at his Return Home, found the following Letters lying on his Table, which he luckily opened in the Order they were sent.

L E T T E R I.

‘ Surely I am under some strange Infatuation ;
‘ I cannot keep my Resolutions a Moment, how-
‘ ever strongly made or justly founded. Last
‘ Night I resolv’d never to see you more ; this
‘ Morning I am willing to hear if you can, as
‘ you say, clear up this Affair. And yet I know
‘ that to be impossible. I have said every Thing
‘ to myself which you can invent.—Perhaps
‘ not. Perhaps your Invention is stronger.
‘ Come to me therefore the Moment you receive
‘ this. If you can forge an Excuse I almost pro-
‘ mise you to believe it. Betrayed to---I will
‘ think no more.—Come to me directly.—This
‘ is the third Letter I have writ, the two former
‘ are burnt---I am almost inclin’d to burn this
‘ too—I wish I may preserve my Senses.—Come
‘ to me presently.’

L. E. T.

LETTER II.

‘ If you ever expect to be forgiven, or even
 ‘ suffered within my Doors, come to me this In-
 ‘ stant.’

LETTER III.

‘ I now find you was not at Home when my
 ‘ Notes came to your Lodgings. The Moment
 ‘ you receive this let me see you;—I shall not
 ‘ stir out; nor shall any Body be let in but your-
 ‘ self. Sure nothing can detain you long.’

Jones had just read over these three Billets,
 when *Mr. Nightingale* came into the Room.
 ‘ Well *Tom,*’ said he, ‘ any News from Lady
 ‘ *Bellaſton*, after laſt Night’s Adventure?’ (for
 it was now no Secret to any one in that Houſe
 who the Lady was.) ‘ The Lady *Bellaſton*?’
 answered *Jones* very gravely.---‘ Nay, dear *Tom,*’
 cries *Nightingale*, ‘ don’t be ſo reſerved to your
 ‘ Friends. Though I was too drunk to ſee her
 ‘ laſt Night; I ſaw her at the Maſquerade. Do
 ‘ you think I am ignorant who the Queen of
 ‘ the Fairies is?’ ‘ And did you really then
 ‘ know the Lady at the Maſquerade?’ ſaid *Jones*.
 ‘ Yes, upon my Soul, did I,’ ſaid *Nightingale*,
 ‘ and have given you twenty Hints of it ſince,
 ‘ though you ſeemed always ſo tender on that
 ‘ Point, that I would not ſpeak plainly. I fan-
 ‘ cy, my Friend, by your extreme Nicety in
 ‘ this Matter, you are not ſo well acquainted
 ‘ with the Character of the Lady, as with her
 ‘ Perſon. Don’t be angry, *Tom*, but, upon
 ‘ my

‘ my Honour, you are not the first young Fellow she hath debauched. Her Reputation is in no Danger, believe me.’

Though *Jones* had no Reason to imagine the Lady to have been of the vestal Kind when his Amour began; yet as he was thoroughly ignorant of the Town, and had very little Acquaintance in it, he had no Knowledge of that Character which is vulgarly called a Demirep; that is to say, a Woman who intrigues with every Man she likes, under the Name and Appearance of Virtue; and who, though some over-nice Ladies will not be seen with her, is visited (as they term it) by the whole Town; in short, whom every knows to be what no Body calls her.

When he found, therefore, that *Nightingale* was perfectly acquainted with his Intrigue, and began to suspect, that so scrupulous a Delicacy as he had hitherto observed, was not quite necessary on the Occasion, he gave a Latitude to his Friend’s Tongue, and desired him to speak plainly what he knew, or had ever heard of the Lady.

Nightingale, who in many other Instances, was rather too effeminate in his Disposition, had a pretty strong Inclination to Tittle-Tattle. He had no sooner, therefore, received a full Liberty of speaking from *Jones*, than he entered upon a long Narrative concerning the Lady; which as it contained many Particulars highly to her Dishonour, we have too great a Tenderness for all Women of Condition to repeat. We would cautiously avoid giving an Opportunity to the future Commentators on our Works, of making any malicious Application; and of forcing us to be,
against

against our Will, the Author of Scandal, which never entered into our Head.

Jones having very attentively heard all that *Nightingale* had to say, fetched a deep Sigh, which the other observing, cried, 'Heyday! Why thou art not in Love, I hope! Had I imagined my Stories would have affected you, I promise you should never have heard them.' 'O my dear Friend,' cries *Jones*, 'I am so entangled with this Woman, that I know not how to extricate myself.' 'In Love indeed?' 'No, my Friend, but I am under Obligations to her, and very great ones. Since you know so much, I will be very explicit with you. It is owing perhaps solely to her, that I have not before this, wanted a Bit of Bread. How can I possibly desert such a Woman? and yet I must desert her, or be guilty of the blackest Treachery to one, who deserves infinitely better of me than she can: A Woman, my *Nightingale*, for whom I have a Passion which few can have an Idea of. I am half distracted with Doubts how to act.' 'And is this other, pray, an honourable Mistress?' cries *Nightingale*. 'Honourable?' answered *Jones*; 'No Breath ever yet durst fully her Reputation. The sweetest Air is not purer, the limpid Stream not clearer than her Honour. She is all over, both in Mind and Body, consummate Perfection. She is the most beautiful Creature in the Universe; and yet she is Mistress of such noble, elevated Qualities, that though she is never from my Thoughts, I scarce ever think of her Beauty; but when I see it.'—'And can you, my good Friend,' cries *Nightingale*, 'with such an Engagement as this upon your
' Hands,

' Hands, hesitate a Moment about quitting such
 ' a——' ' Hold,' said *Jones*, ' no more Abuse
 ' of her; I detest the Thought of Ingratitude.'
 ' Pooh!' answered the other, ' you are not the
 ' first upon whom she hath conferred Obligations
 ' of this Kind. She is remarkably liberal where
 ' she likes; though, let me tell you, her Fa-
 ' vours are so prudently bestowed, that they
 ' should rather raise a Man's Vanity, than his
 ' Gratitude.' In short, *Nightingale* proceeded
 so far on this Head, and told his Friend so many
 Stories of the Lady, which he swore to the Truth
 of, that he entirely removed all Esteem for her
 from the Breast of *Jones*; and his Gratitude was
 lessened in Proportion. Indeed he began to look
 on all the Favours he had received, rather as
 Wages than Benefits, which depreciated not only
 her, but himself too in his own Conceit, and put
 him quite out of Humour with both. From this
 Disgust, his Mind, by a natural Transition turn-
 ed towards *Sophia*: Her Virtue, her Purity, her
 Love to him, her Sufferings on his Account,
 filled all his Thoughts, and made his Commerce
 with Lady *Bellafton* appear still more odious.
 The Result of all was, that though his turning
 himself out of her *Service*, in which Light he
 now saw his Affair with her, would be the Loss
 of his Bread; yet he determined to quit her, if
 he could but find a handsome Pretence; which
 being communicated to his Friend, *Nightingale*
 considered a little, and then said, ' I have it,
 ' my Boy! I have found out a sure Method:
 ' Propose Marriage to her, and I would venture
 ' hanging upon the Success.' ' Marriage!'
 cries *Jones*. ' Ay, propose Marriage,' answer-
 ed *Nightingale*, ' and she will declare off in a
 ' Moment.

‘ Moment. I knew a young Fellow whom she
 ‘ kept formerly, who made the Offer to her in
 ‘ earnest, and was presently turned off for his
 ‘ Pains.’

Jones declared he could not venture the Experiment. ‘ Perhaps,’ said he, ‘ she may be
 ‘ less shocked at this Proposal from one Man
 ‘ than from another. And if she should take me
 ‘ at my Word, where am I then? Caught in
 ‘ my own Trap, and undone for ever.’ ‘ No;’
 answered *Nightingale*, ‘ not if I can give you an
 ‘ Expedient, by which you may, at any Time,
 ‘ get out of the Trap.’ — ‘ What Expedient
 ‘ can that be?’ replied *Jones*. ‘ This,’ answered
Nightingale. ‘ The young Fellow I mentioned,
 ‘ who is one of the most intimate Acquaintances
 ‘ I have in the World, is so angry with her for
 ‘ some ill Offices she hath since done him, that
 ‘ I am sure he would, without any Difficulty,
 ‘ give you a Sight of her Letters; upon which
 ‘ you may decently break with her; and declare
 ‘ off before the Knot is ty’d, if she should really
 ‘ be willing to tie it, which I am convinced
 ‘ she will not.’

After some Hesitation, *Jones*, upon the Strength of this Assurance, consented; but as he swore he wanted the Confidence to propose the Matter to her Face, he wrote the following Letter, which *Nightingale* dictated.

‘ *Madam,*

‘ I am extremely concerned, that, by an unfortunate
 ‘ Engagement abroad, I should have missed receiving
 ‘ the Honour of your Ladyships Commands the Moment
 ‘ they came; and the Delay which I must now suffer of
 ‘ vindicating

' ing myself to your Ladyship, greatly adds to
 ' this Misfortune. O Lady *Bellaſton*, what a
 ' Terror have I been in, for Fear your Reputa-
 ' tion ſhould be expoſed by theſe perverſe Acci-
 ' dents. There is one only Way to ſecure it. I
 ' need not name what that is. Only permit me
 ' to ſay, that as your Honour is as dear to me as
 ' my own; ſo my ſole Ambition is to have the
 ' Glory of laying my Liberty at your Feet; and
 ' believe me when I aſſure you, I can never be
 ' made completely happy, without you generouſly
 ' beſtow on me a legal Right of calling you mine
 ' for ever. I am,

' *Madam,*

' *With moſt profound Reſpect,*

' *Your Ladyſhip's moſt Obliged,*

' *Obedient humble Servant,*

' Thomas Jones.'

To this ſhe preſently returned the following
 Answer.

' Sir,

' When I read over your ſerious Epistle, I
 ' could from its Coldneſs and Formality, have
 ' ſworn that you already had the legal Right you
 ' mention; nay, that we had, for many Years,
 ' compoſed that monſtrous Animal a Husband and
 ' Wife. Do you really then imagine me a Fool?
 ' Or do you fancy yourſelf capable of ſo entirely
 ' perſuading me out of my Senſes, that I ſhould
 ' deliver my whole Fortune into your Power, in
 ' order to enable you to ſupport your Pleaſures at
 ' my

‘ my Expence. Are these the Proofs of Love
 ‘ which I expected? Is this the Return for——
 ‘ but I scorn to upbraid you, and am in great
 ‘ Admiration of your profound Respect.

‘ P. S. I am prevented from Revising :—Per-
 ‘ haps I have said more than I meant.——
 ‘ Come to me at Eight this Evening.’

Jones, by the Advice of his Privy-council, re-
 plied.

‘ Madam,

‘ It is impossible to express how much I am
 ‘ shocked at the Suspicion you entertain of me.
 ‘ Can Lady *Bellafton* have conferred Favours on
 ‘ a Man whom she could believe capable of so
 ‘ base a Design? Or can she treat the most so-
 ‘ lemn Tie of Love with Contempt? Can you
 ‘ imagine, Madam, that if the Violence of my
 ‘ Passion, in an unguarded Moment, overcame
 ‘ the Tendernefs which I have for your Honour,
 ‘ I would think of indulging myself in the Con-
 ‘ tinuance of an Intercourse which could not pos-
 ‘ sibly escape long the Notice of the World;
 ‘ and which when discovered, must prove so
 ‘ fatal to your Reputation? If such be your Opi-
 ‘ nion of me, I must pray for a sudden Opportu-
 ‘ nity of returning those pecuniary Obligations,
 ‘ which I have been so unfortunate to receive at
 ‘ your Hands; and for those of a more tender
 ‘ Kind, I shall ever remain, &c.’ And so con-
 ‘ cluded in the very Words with which he had con-
 ‘ cluded the former Letter.

The

The Lady answered as follows :

‘ I see you are a Villain ; and I despise you
 ‘ from my Soul. If you come here I shall not
 ‘ be at Home.’

Though *Jones* was well satisfied with his Deliverance from a Thralldom which those who have ever experienced it, will, I apprehend, allow to be none of the lightest, he was not, however, perfectly easy in his Mind. There was, in this Scheme, too much of Fallacy to satisfy one who utterly detested every Species of Falshood or Dishonesty : nor would he, indeed, have submitted to put it in Practice, had he not been involved in a distressful Situation, where he was obliged to be guilty of some Dishonour, either to the one Lady or the other ; and surely the Reader will allow, that every good Principle, as well as Love, pleaded strongly in Favour of *Sophia*.

Nightingale, highly exulted in the Success of his Stratagem, upon which he received many Thanks, and much Applause from his Friend. He answered, ‘ Dear *Tom*, we have conferred
 ‘ very different Obligations on each other. To
 ‘ me you owe the regaining your Liberty ; to
 ‘ you I owe the Loss of mine. But if you are
 ‘ as happy in the one Instance as I am in the other,
 ‘ I promise you, we are the two happiest Fellows
 ‘ in *England*.

The two Gentlemen were now summoned down to Dinner, where Mrs. *Miller*, who performed herself the Office of Cook, had exerted her best Talents, to celebrate the Wedding of her Daughter. This joyful Circumstance she ascribed

princi-