The Works Of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford

In Five Volumes

Walpole, Horace

London, 1798

Preface To the Second Edition.

PREFACE

To the Second Edition.

THE favourable manner in which this little piece has been received by the public, calls upon the author to explain the grounds on which he compoſed it. But before he opens thoſe motives, it is fit that he ſhould aſk pardon of his readers for having offered his work to them under the borrowed perſonage of a tranſlator. As diffidence of his own abilities, and the novelty of the attempt, were his ſole inducements to aſſume that diſguiſe, he flatters himſelf he ſhall appear excuſable. He reſigned his performance to the impartial judgment of the public; determined to let it periſh in obſcurity, if diſapproved; nor meaning to avow ſuch a trifle, unleſs better judges ſhould pronounce that he might own it without a bluſh.

It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and ſometimes has been, copied with ſucceſs. Invention has not been wanting; but the great reſources of fancy have been dammed up, by a ſtrict adherence to common life. But if in the latter ſpecies Nature has cramped imagination, ſhe did but take her revenge, having been totally excluded from old romances. The actions, ſentiments, converſations, of the heroes and heroines of ancient days were as unnatural as the machines employed to put them in motion.

The author of the following pages thought it poſſible to reconcile the two kinds. Deſirous of leaving the powers of fancy at liberty to expatiate through the boundleſs realms of invention, and thence of creating more intereſting ſituations,

ſituations, he wiſhed to conduct the mortal agents in his drama according to the rules of probability; in ſhort, to make them think, ſpeak and act, as it might be ſuppoſed mere men and women would do in extraordinary poſitions. He had obſerved, that in all inſpired writings, the perſonages under the diſpenſation of miracles, and witneſſes to the moſt ſtupendous phenomena, never loſe ſight of their human character: whereas in the productions of romantic ſtory, an improbable event never fails to be attended by an abſurd dialogue. The actors ſeem to loſe their ſenſes the moment the laws of nature have loſt their tone. As the public have applauded the attempt, the author muſt not ſay he was entirely unequal to the taſk he had undertaken: yet if the new route he has ſtruck out ſhall have paved a road for men of brighter talents, he ſhall own with pleaſure and modeſty, that he was ſenſible the plan was capable of receiving greater embelliſhments than his imagination or conduct of the paſſions could beſtow on it.

With regard to the deportment of the domeſtics, on which I have touched in the former preface, I will beg leave to add a few words. The ſimplicity of their behaviour, almoſt tending to excite ſmiles, which at firſt ſeem not conſonant to the ſerious caſt of the work, appeared to me not only not improper, but was marked deſignedly in that manner. My rule was nature. However grave, important, or even melancholy, the ſenſations of princes and heroes may be, they do not ſtamp the ſame affections on their domeſtics: at leaſt the latter do not, or ſhould not be made to expreſs their paſſions in the ſame dignified tone. In my humble opinion, the contraſt between the ſublime of the one, and the *naïveté* of the other, ſets the pathetic of the former in a ſtronger light. The very impatience which a reader feels, while delayed by the coarſe pleaſantries of vulgar actors from arriving at the knowledge of the important cataſtrophe he expects, perhaps heightens, certainly proves that he has been artfully intereſted in, the depending event. But I had higher authority than my own opinion for this conduct. That great maſter of nature, Shakeſpeare, was the model I copied. Let me aſk if his tragedies of Hamlet and Julius Cæſar would not loſe a conſiderable ſhare of their ſpirit and wonderful beauties, if the humour of the grave-diggers, the fooleries of Polonius, and the clumſy jeſts of the Roman citizens were omitted, or veſted in heroics? Is not the eloquence of Antony, the nobler and affectedly-unaffected oration of Brutus, artificially exalted by the rude burſts of nature from the mouths of their auditors? Theſe touches remind one of the Grecian

ſculptor,

ſculptor, who, to convey the idea of a Coloſſus within the dimenſions of a ſeal, inſerted a little boy meaſuring his thumb.

No, ſays Voltaire in his edition of Corneille, this mixture of buffoonery and ſolemnity is intolerable.-----Voltaire is a genius *---but not of Shakeſpeare's magnitude. Without recurring to diſputable authority, I appeal from Voltaire to himſelf. I ſhall not avail myſelf of his former encomiums on our mighty poet; though the French critic has twice tranſlated the ſame ſpeech in Hamlet, ſome years ago in admiration, latterly in deriſion; and I am ſorry to find that his judgment grows weaker, when it ought to be farther matured. But I ſhall make uſe of his own words, delivered on the general topic of the theatre, when he was neither thinking to recommend or decry Shakeſpeare's practice; conſequently at a moment when Voltaire was impartial. In the preface to his Enfant prodigue, that exquiſite piece of which I declare my admiration, and which, ſhould I live twenty years longer, I truſt I ſhould never attempt to ridicule, he has theſe words, ſpeaking of comedy, [but equally applicable to tragedy, if tragedy is, as ſurely it ought to be, a picture of human life; nor can I conceive why occaſional pleaſantry ought more to be baniſhed from the tragic ſcene, than pathetic ſerioufneſs from the comic] *On y voit un melange de ſerieux et de plaiſanterie, de comique et de touchant*; ſouvent même une ſeule avanture *produit tous ces contraſtes. Rien n'eſt ſi commun qu'une maiſon dans laquelle* un pere gronde, une fille occupée de ſa paſſion pleure; *le fils ſe moque des deux, et quelques parens prennent part differemment à la ſcene, &c. Nous n'inferons pas de là que toute comedie doive*

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* The following remark is foreign to the preſent queſtion, yet excuſable in an Engliſhman, who is willing to think that the ſevere criticiſms of ſo maſterly a writer as Voltaire on our immortal countryman, may have been the effuſions of wit and precipitation, rather than the reſult of judgment and attention. May not the critic's ſkill in the force and powers of our language have been as incorrect and incompetent as his knowledge of our hiſtory? Of the latter his own pen has dropped glaring evidence. In his preface to Thomas Corneille's Earl of Eſſex, monſieur de Voltaire allows that the truth of hiſtory has been groſsly perverted in that piece. In excuſe he pleads, that when Corneille wrote, the nobleſſe of France were much unread in Engliſh ſtory; but now, ſays the commentator, that they ſtudy it, ſuch miſrepreſentation would not be ſuffered——Yet forgetting that the period of ignorance is lapſed, and that it is not very neceſſary to inſtruct the knowing, he undertakes from the overflowing of his own reading to give the nobility of his own country a detail of queen Elizabeth's favourites—of whom, ſays he, Robert Dudley was the firſt, and the earl of Leiceſter the ſecond.——Could one have believed that it could be neceſſary to inform monſieur de Voltaire himſelf, that Robert Dudley and the earl of Leiceſter were the ſame perſon?

avoir des ſcenes de bouffonnerie et des ſcenes attendriſſantes : il y a beaucoup de tres bonnes pieces où il ne regne que de la gayeté ; d'autres toutes ſerieuſes ; d'autres melangées : d'autres où l'attendriſſement va juſques aux larmes : il ne faut donner l'excluſion à aucun genre : *et ſi l'on me demandoit, quel genre eſt le meilleur, je repondrois, celui qui eſt le mieux traité.* Surely if a comedy may be *toute ſerieuſe*, tragedy may now and then, ſoberly, be indulged in a ſmile. Who ſhall proſcribe it? Shall the critic, who in ſelf-defence declares that *no kind* ought to be excluded from comedy, give laws to Shakeſpeare?

I am aware that the preface from whence I have quoted theſe paſſages does not ſtand in monſieur de Voltaire's name, but in that of his editor; yet who doubts that the editor and author were the ſame perſon? Or where is the editor, who has ſo happily poſſeſſed himſelf of his author's ſtyle and brilliant eaſe of argument? Theſe paſſages were indubitably the genuine ſentiments of that great writer. In his epiſtle to Maffei, prefixed to his Merope, he delivers almoſt the ſame opinion, though I doubt with a little irony. I will repeat his words, and then give my reaſon for quoting them. After tranſlating a paſſage in Maffei's Merope, monſieur de Voltaire adds, *Tous ces traits ſont naïfs : tout y eſt convenable à ceux que vous introduiſez ſur la ſcene*, et aux mœurs que vous leur donnez. *Ces familiarités naturelles euſſent eté, à ce que je crois, bien reçues dans Athenes; mais Paris et notre parterre veulent une autre eſpece de ſimplicité.* I doubt, I ſay, whether there is not a grain of ſneer in this and other paſſages of that epiſtle; yet the force of truth is not damaged by being tinged with ridicule. Maffei was to repreſent a Grecian ſtory: ſurely the Athenians were as competent judges of Grecian manners, and of the propriety of introducing them, as the parterre of Paris. On the contrary, ſays Voltaire [and I cannot but admire his reaſoning] there were but ten thouſand citizens at Athens, and Paris has near eight hundred thouſand inhabitants, among whom one may reckon thirty thouſand judges of dramatic works.----Indeed!----But allowing ſo numerous a tribunal, I believe this is the only inſtance in which it was ever pretended that thirty thouſand perſons, living near two thouſand years after the æra in queſtion, were, upon the mere face of the poll, declared better judges than the Grecians themſelves of what ought to be the manners of a tragedy written on a Grecian ſtory.

I will not enter into a diſcuſſion of the *eſpece de ſimplicité*, which the *par-*

terre

terre of Paris demands, nor of the ſhackles with which *the thirty thouſand judges* have cramped their poetry, the chief merit of which, as I gather from repeated paſſages in The New Commentary on Corneille, conſiſts in vaulting in ſpite of thoſe fetters; a merit which, if true, would reduce poetry from the lofty effort of imagination, to a puerile and moſt contemptible labour--- *difficiles nugæ* with a witneſs! I cannot help however mentioning a couplet, which to my Engliſh ears always ſounded as the flatteſt and moſt trifling inſtance of circumſtantial propriety; but which Voltaire, who has dealt ſo ſeverely with nine parts in ten of Corneille's works, has ſingled out to defend in Racine;

De ſon appartement cette porte eſt prochaine,
Et cette autre conduit dans celui de la reine.

In Engliſh,
To Cæſar'*s cloſet through this door you come,*
And t'other leads to the queen's drawing-room.

Unhappy Shakeſpeare! hadſt thou made Roſencraus inform his compeer Guildenſtern of the ichnography of the palace of Copenhagen, inſtead of preſenting us with a moral dialogue between the prince of Denmark and the grave-digger, the illuminated pit of Paris would have been inſtructed *a ſecond time* to adore thy talents.

The reſult of all I have ſaid, is to ſhelter my own daring under the cannon of the brighteſt genius this country, at leaſt, has produced. I might have pleaded, that having created a new ſpecies of romance, I was at liberty to lay down what rules I thought fit for the conduct of it: but I ſhould be more proud of having imitated, however faintly, weakly, and at a diſtance, ſo maſterly a pattern, than to enjoy the entire merit of invention, unleſs I could have marked my work with genius as well as with originality. Such as it is, the public have honoured it ſufficiently, whatever rank their ſuffrages allot to it.

SONNET

To the Right Honourable

LADY MARY COKE.

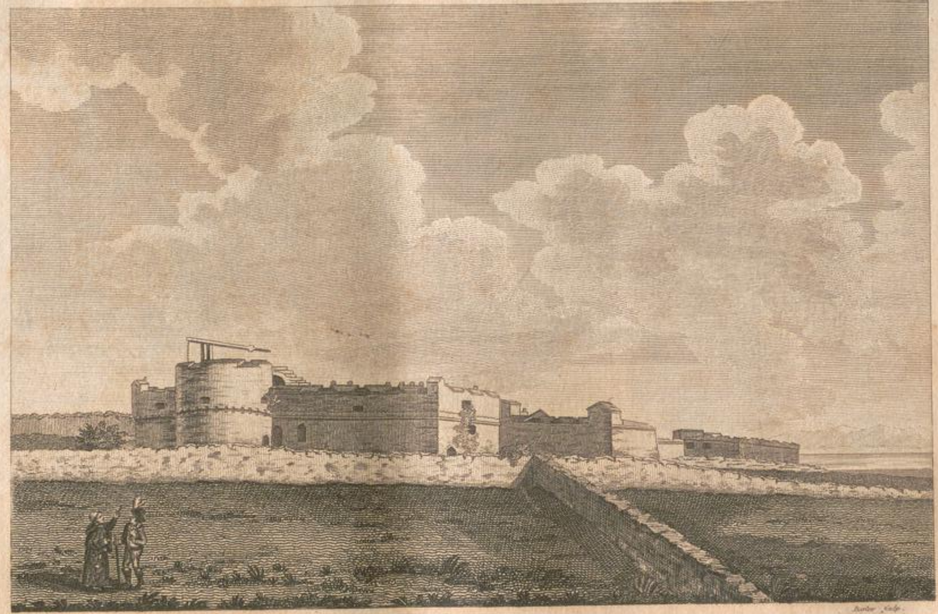
THE gentle maid, whoſe hapleſs tale
These melancholy pages ſpeak;
Say, gracious lady, ſhall ſhe fail
To draw the tear adown thy cheek?

No; never was thy pitying breaſt
Inſenſible to human woes;
Tender, though firm, it melts diſtreſt
For weakneſſes it never knows.

Oh! guard the marvels I relate
Of fell ambition ſcourg'd by fate,
From reaſon's peeviſh blame:
Bleſt with thy ſmile, my dauntleſs ſail
I dare expand to fancy's gale,
For ſure thy ſmiles are fame.

H. W.

Vol.II.P.I.



Barlow Sculp.

The **CASTLE** of **OTRANTO**.

From an Original Drawing, as it now exists, in the Kingdom of Naples.