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The Works Of Horatio Walpole, Earl Of Orford

In Five Volumes

Walpole, Horace

London, 1798

Mr. Walpole's Letter to Chatterton, on his re-demanding his MSS

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S I R,

I CANNOT reconcile your behaviour to me, with the notions I once entertained of you. I think myself injured, sir; and, did not you know my circumstances, you would not dare to treat me thus. I have sent twice for a copy of the MS.¹:—No answer from you. An explanation or excuse for your silence would oblige

THOMAS CHATTERTON.

July 24th.

¹ The MSS. were sent back the 4th of August.

*Mr. WALPOLE's Letter to CHATTERTON, on his re-demanding
his Manuscripts.*

(Not sent.)

S I R,

I DO not see, I must own, how those precious MSS. of which you have sent me a few extracts, should be lost to the world by my detaining your letters. Do the originals not exist, from whence you say you copied your extracts, and from which you offered me more extracts? In truth, by your first letter, I understood that the originals themselves were in your possession by the free and voluntary offer you made me of them, and which you know I did not chuse to accept. If Mr. Barrett (who, give me leave to say, cannot know much of antiquity if he believes in the authenticity of those papers) intends to make use of them, would he not do better to have recourse to the originals, than to the slight fragments you have sent me? You say, sir, you know them to be genuine; pray let me ask again, of what age are they? and how have they been transmitted? In what book of any age is there mention made either of Rowley or of the poetical monk, his ancient predecessor in such pure poetry? poetry, so resembling both Spenser and the moderns, and written in metre invented long since Rowley, and longer since the monk

wrote. I doubt Mr. Barrett himself will find it difficult to solve these doubts.

For myself, I undoubtedly will never print those extracts as genuine, which I am far from believing they are. If you want them, sir, I will have them copied, and will send you the copy. But having a little suspicion that your letters may have been designed to laugh at me, if I had fallen into the snare, you will allow me to preserve your original letters, as an ingenious contrivance, however unsuccessful. This seems the more probable, as any man would understand by your first letter, that you either was possessed of the original MSS. or had taken copies of them; whereas now you talk as if you had no copy but those written at the bottom of the very letters I have received from you.

I own I should be better diverted, if it proved that you have chosen to entertain yourself at my expence, than if you really thought these pieces ancient. The former would show you had little opinion of my judgment; the latter, that you ought not to trust too much to your own. I should not at all take the former ill, as I am not vain of it; I should be sorry for the latter, as you say, sir, that you are very young, and it would be pity an ingenious young man should be too early prejudiced in his own favour.

N. B. The above letter I had begun to write to Chatterton on his redemanding his MSS. but not chusing to enter into a controversy with him, I did not finish it, and, only folding up his papers, returned them.

HOR. WALPOLE,

Lord