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The Works Of Horatio Walpole, Earl Of Orford

In Five Volumes

Walpole, Horace

London, 1798

Lord Orford's last Declaration respecting Chatterton

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Lord ORFORD's last Declaration respecting CHATTERTON.

Berkeley-square,
March 16, 1792.

A LETTER from me to Chatterton, dated March 28, 1769, appeared in The European Magazine for the past month of February*. I believe it is a genuine one, and the first which I wrote to him on his first application to me: though, not having seen the original now, nor since it was written, nor having kept any copy of it, I cannot at the distance of so many years say more than that I do believe it is genuine.

* The letter printed in The European Magazine was as follows:

Arlington-street, March 28, 1769.

SIR,

I CANNOT but think myself singularly obliged by a gentleman with whom I have not the pleasure of being acquainted, when I read your very curious and kind letter, which I have this minute received. I give you a thousand thanks for it, and for the very obliging offer you make me, of communicating your MSS. to me. What you have already sent me is very valuable, and full of information; but instead of correcting you, sir, you are far more able to correct me. I have not the happiness of understanding the Saxon language, and without your learned notes should not have been able to comprehend Rowley's text.

As a second edition of my Anecdotes was published but last year, I must not flatter myself that a third will be wanted soon; but I shall be happy to lay up any notices you will be so good as to extract for me, and send me at your leisure; for, as it is uncertain when I may use them, I would by no means borrow and detain your MSS.

Give me leave to ask you where Rowley's

poems are to be found? I should not be sorry to print them; or, at least, a specimen of them, if they have never been printed.

The abbot John's verses, that you have given me, are wonderful for their harmony and spirit, though there are some words I do not understand.

You do not point out exactly the time when he lived, which I wish to know, as I suppose it was long before John Ab Eyck's discovery of oil-painting. If so, it confirms what I had guessed, and have hinted in my Anecdotes, that oil-painting was known here much earlier than that discovery or revival.

I will not trouble you with more questions now, sir; but flatter myself, from the humanity and politeness you have already shown me, that you will sometimes give me leave to consult you. I hope too you will forgive the simplicity of my direction, as you have favoured me with no other.

I am, sir,

Your much obliged and

Obedient humble servant,

HOR. WALPOLE.

P. S. Be so good as to direct to Mr. Walpole in Arlington-street.

As

As I have seen the death of Chatterton's mother mentioned lately in the papers, I conclude the original letter was found in her custody. Why it is now produced, I know not; but am glad it is. I have long desired my accusers to publish my letters to that young man; and do urge the possessors, if they have more, to print them likewise, as they ought in justice to me to do.

The letter now printed, is agreeable to what I have constantly affirmed, with the strictest truth, that I did not treat that unhappy young man with arrogance. I do as positively affirm that I wrote a subsequent letter to him with kind and good advice; and that in not one of the few letters that I did write to him, was an arrogant word. To an impertinent one from him I sent no answer, but returned his papers without a word of reply.

As the letter of mine now published criminales me with no arrogance, I take notice of it but with this view: If my letter of advice to him still exists, it ought to be published while I am alive, both for my sake and for that of the possessor, because, if withheld, nobody will believe it genuine; or must conclude it maliciously suppressed, that I may not have the satisfaction of seeing my steady veracity confirmed. Should a letter to arraign me be produced hereafter, nobody will suppose it was stifled out of tenderness to me, after so many *vain* attempts have been made to charge me with arrogance and cruelty towards Chatterton, of which I have cleared myself totally to the universal satisfaction of all who have given themselves the trouble to read my defence.

Should a posthumous letter hereafter appear, contradicting my assertions, when I shall not be alive to disprove it, it will carry its own condemnation in its front, and must be deemed a forgery. The advocates of Chatterton having dared, till confuted, to ascribe his death to me who never beheld him, would most assuredly not have stifled a letter that would have ascertained their own assertions, and the falsehood of my denials.

HORACE Earl of Orford.

P. S. The letter now printed corroborates what I said by memory in my defence, that from the antique air of the poems, and from the elegy on Richard the first, I had concluded them much antecedent to the date to which Chatterton

terton afterwards chose to allot them. As no one circumstance has come out to shake my veracity, but many to confirm it, and as no arrogance can be discovered in my first letter, is it probable that I should treat the poor lad with insolence afterwards without any provocation? True it is, that he did write to me in a manner that might have provoked me; and yet, so far from treating him arrogantly in return, I made not a word of reply, but returned his papers in silence. If *that* was the behaviour of arrogance, I am yet to learn the meaning of the term.

Remarks on a Letter signed SCRUTATOR, which appeared in the Cambridge Chronicle of June 16th 1792.

A LETTER in the Cambridge Chronicle, of June 16, 1792, signed Scrutator^{*}, and dated May 9th, swarms with blunders and false facts. A person totally

^{*} The letter was as follows:

To the Printer of the CAMBRIDGE CHRONICLE.

SIR, June 16, 1792.

A WRITER in The Gentleman's Magazine for last month having thought proper to call in question the authenticity of a letter inserted some time ago in your paper, from the hon. Horace Walpole to Thomas Chatterton of Bristol, I think it incumbent upon me to transmit you an attested copy of the above letter, as the best answer to any doubts or denials which may be entertained about it. I have only to add, that besides the notary-public's attestation, this letter agrees very exactly with other letters of Mr. Walpole's hand-writing—and that from its allusions, both to the two letters from Chatterton, to which it is an answer, and from the text and notes accompanying them, it is utterly impossible but that it should be genuine.

The fate of this curious controversy has indeed been very hard. *Fashion*, somehow or other, seems to have influenced it more than conviction.

tion—and the authority of a name or two of note in opposition to the authenticity of the poems, &c. has been substituted instead of fair enquiry and candid investigation.

In the present instance it appears, that so far back as the year 1769, Thomas Chatterton applied to the hon. Horace Walpole for his protection and patronage of the very curious specimens of ancient English poetry, &c. the whole of which he then tendered to him (Mr. W.) To these letters of application Mr. W. replied with many compliments, and in terms of much civility and deference, expressing his admiration of what Chatterton had already thought proper to communicate to him. Why, at any future period, this correspondence was to be *disavowed* on the part of Mr. W. is hard to conceive; but true it is, that in the year 1789, immediately after the death of Mr. Barrett, who, in his History of Bristol, had printed the two letters of Chatterton above alluded to, the following clause of a letter, or to the same purpose, from Mr. Walpole to a friend of his, was circulated with