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PADERBORN

The Works Of Horatio Walpole, Earl Of Orford

In Five Volumes

Walpole, Horace

London, 1798

Prologue to The Mysterious Mother

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PROLOGUE AND EPILOGUES.

PROLOGUE TO THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

FROM no French model breathes the muse to-night;
 The scene she draws is horrid, not polite.
 She dips her pen in terror. Will ye shrink?
 Shall foreign critics teach you how to think?
 Had Shakespear's magic dignified the stage,
 If timid laws had school'd th' insipid age?
 Had Hamlet's spectre trod the midnight round?
 Or Banquo's issue been in vision crown'd?
 Free as your country, Britons, be your scene!
 Be Nature now, and now Invention, queen!
 Be Vice alone corrected and restrain'd.
 Can crimes be punish'd by a bard enchain'd?
 Shall the bold censor back be sent to school,
 And told, This is not nice; That is not rule?
 The French no crimes of magnitude admit;
 They seldom startle, just alarm the pit.
 At most, when dire necessity ordains
 That death should sluice some king's or lover's veins,
 A tedious confident appears, to tell
 What dismal woes behind the scenes befell.

Chill'd

Chill'd with the drowsy tale, his audience fret,
While the star'd piece concludes like a gazette.

The tragic Greeks with nobler licence wrote;
Nor veil'd the eye, but pluck'd away the mote.
Whatever passion prompted, was their game;
Not delicate, while chastisement their aim.
Electra now a parent's blood demands;
Now parricide distains the Theban's hands,
And love incestuous knots his nuptial bands.
Such is our scene; from real life it rose;
Tremendous picture of domestic woes.
If terror shake you, or soft pity move,
If dreadful pangs o'ertake unbridled love;
Excuse the bard, who from your feelings draws
All the reward he aims at, your applause.

EPILOGUE, to be spoken by Mrs. CLIVE.

OUR bard, whose head is fill'd with Gothic fancies,
And teems with ghosts and giants and romances,
Intended to have kept your passions up,
And sent you crying out your eyes, to sup.
Would you believe it—though *mine* all the vogue,
He meant his nun should speak the epilogue.
His nun! so pious, pliant and demure—
Lord! you have had enough of her, I'm sure!
I storm'd—for, when my honour is at stake,
I make the pillars of the green-room shake.
Heroes half-drest, and goddesses half-lac'd,
Avoid my wrath, and from my thunders haste.
I vow'd by all the gods of Rome and Greece,
'Twas I would finish his too doleful piece.

I, flush'd