

**THE BRITISH NOVELISTS; WITH AN
ESSAY, AND PREFACES
BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL,
VOL. XLIII. THE ROMANCE OF THE
FOREST, IN TWO VOLUMES, VOL. I**

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MRS. ANNA LETITIA BARBAULD

**THE BRITISH NOVELISTS; WITH AN
ESSAY, AND PREFACES
BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL,
VOL. XLIII. THE ROMANCE OF THE
FOREST, IN TWO VOLUMES, VOL. I**

Ann (Ward) Radcliffe

THE
ROMANCE OF THE FOREST:

INTERSPERSED WITH

SOME PIECES OF POETRY.

BY THE AUTHORESSES OF

"A SICILIAN ROMANCE," &c.

" Ere the bat hath flown
" His closter'd flight; ere to black Hecate's summons,
" The shard-born beetle, with his drowsy hums,
" Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done
" A deed of dreadful note."

MACHETEL

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

L15



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BY

MRS. BARBAULD.

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MRS. RADCLIFFE.

THOUGH every production which is good in its kind entitles its author to praise, a greater distinction is due to those which stand at the head of a class; and such are undoubtedly the novels of Mrs. Radcliffe,—which exhibit a genius of no common stamp. She seems to scorn to move those passions which form the interest of common novels; she alarms the soul with terror; agitates it with suspense, prolonged and wrought up to the most intense feeling, by mysterious hints and obscure intimations of unseen danger. The scenery of her tales is in “time-shook towers,” vast uninhabited castles, winding staircases, long echoing aisles; or, if abroad, lonely heaths, gloomy forests, and abrupt precipices, the haunt of banditti;—the canvass and the figures of Salvator Rosa. Her living characters correspond to the scenery:—their wicked projects are dark, singular, atrocious. They are not of English growth; their guilt is tinged with a darker hue than that of the bad and profligate characters we see in the world about us; they seem almost to belong to an unearthly sphere of powerful mischief. But to the terror produced

by the machinations of guilt, and the perception of danger, this writer has had the art to unite another, and possibly a stronger feeling. There is, perhaps, in every breast at all susceptible of the influence of imagination, the germ of a certain superstitious dread of the world unknown, which easily suggests the ideas of commerce with it. Solitude, darkness, low-whispered sounds, obscure glimpses of objects, flitting forms, tend to raise in the mind that thrilling, mysterious terror, which has for its object the "powers unseen and mightier far than we." But these ideas are suggested only; for it is the peculiar management of this author, that though she gives, as it were, a glimpse of the world of terrible shadows, she yet stops short of any thing really supernatural: for all the strange and alarming circumstances brought forward in the narrative are explained in the winding up of the story by natural causes; but in the mean time the reader has felt their full impression.

The first production of this lady, in which her peculiar genius was strikingly developed, is *The Romance of the Forest*, and in some respects it is perhaps the best. It turns upon the machinations of a profligate villain and his agent against an amiable and unprotected girl, whose birth and fortunes have been involved in obscurity by crime and perfidy. The character of La Motte, the agent, is drawn with spirit. He is represented as weak and timid, gloomy and arbitrary in his family, drawn by extravagance into vice and atrocious actions; capable of remorse, but not capable of withstanding temptation. There is a

scene between him and the more hardened Marquis, who is tempting him to commit murder, which has far more nature and truth than the admired scene between King John and Hubert, in which the writer's imagination has led him rather to represent the action to which the King is endeavouring to work his instrument, as it would be seen by a person who had a great horror of its guilt, than in the manner in which he ought to represent it in order to win him to his purpose :

"——— If the midnight bell
 Did with his iron tongue and brazen mouth
 Sound one unto the drowsy ear of night,
 If this same were a churchyard where we stand,
 And thou possessed with a thousand wrongs,
 —— if thou couldst see me without eyes,
 Hear me without thine ears, and make reply
 Without a tongue," &c.

What must be the effect of such imagery, but to infuse into the mind of Hubert that horror of the crime with which the spectator views the deed, and which it was the business, indeed, of Shakespear to impress upon the mind of the spectator, but not of King John to impress upon Hubert ? In the scene referred to, on the other hand, the Marquis, whose aim is to tempt La Motte to the commission of murder, begins by attempting to lower his sense of virtue, by representing it as the effect of prejudices imbibed in early youth ; reminds him that in many countries the stiletto is resorted to without scruple ; treats as trivial his former deviations from integrity ; and, by lulling his conscience and awakening his cupidity, draws him to his purpose.