

**THE LETTERS OF A SOLITARY
WANDERER: CONTAINING
NARRATIVES OF VARIOUS
DESCRIPTION. VOL. IV**

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The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer: Containing Narratives of Various Description. Vol. IV by
Charlotte Smith

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LETTERS
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SOLITARY WANDERER:

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By CHARLOTTE SMITH.

VOL. IV.

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1802.

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P R E F A C E

TO THE FOURTH AND FIFTH VOLUMES OF

“The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer.”

THE work, of which the fourth and fifth volumes are now published, was sold to Mr. *Sampson Low* more than three years since: and the first three books were published in *October*, 1800. A few months afterwards, Mr. *Low* died; and his executors thought it advisable to sell such part of his effects as consisted of copy-right, by auction. Among the property thus disposed of was the remainder of the impression of three volumes of the *“Letters of a Solitary Wanderer,”* and his purchase of two manuscript volumes, for which I had been paid. It happened, that of

these five volumes of the same work, the three volumes already published were bought by Messrs. *Crosby* and *Letterman*; and the two others by Messrs. *Longman* and *Rees*. This occasions the book to appear under very awkward circumstances; and has prevented my concluding it, at least at present, according to my original agreement with Mr. *Low*, which was, to furnish him with six volumes. The conclusion of the work must now depend on my health and leisure. Had the book been of another description, and contained only a single narrative, I must have completed it. As it is, the story of the *Solitary Wanderer* himself remains to be told; but the want of it does not affect any of the narratives except the last; and I have written much of it a second time, to disentangle it, as far as I could, from that which would have closed the work,

work, had it now been finished according to my first design, and with which I intended to connect it.

Since I have written for the press (now about thirteen years) I have very seldom had occasion to name the strictures which the monthly pamphlets, called *Reviews*, have passed on my writing. Far from complaining of them, I have sometimes thought that praise has been too indiscriminately bestowed; and where errors have been candidly pointed out, I have been grateful for the correction, and very sincerely endeavoured to take advantage of just and well-founded criticism.

But a style of animadversion has obtained within these last seven or eight years, subversive of all the purposes for which these pamphlets are professedly published. The gentlemen—or ladies—(for I believe novels are often left to the latter,)

now

now very frequently transfer their remarks from the books they undertake to criticise, to the private history of the authors: they do not tell the public *why* the work they are reviewing is good or bad; but they take upon them to say how they suppose the writers have conducted themselves in domestic life, and how their writings are by those circumstances influenced; which is nothing to the purpose, and proves only that such *soi disant* critics are not qualified, either by liberality of mind, or literary knowledge, for the task they pretend to execute.

Among other invidious remarks of this kind it is observed, by one of these critics, that "Mrs. SMITH is too fond of representing the distresses of *middle-aged ladies*; and has given the same character, under different names, in almost all her novels."

I never

I never imagined, till I read this judicious criticism, that no interest could be excited but by love stories that relate to girls of fifteen: and as to the resemblance they thus pretend to find between certain characters in different books, as all alluding to one person, what right have they to say it? Surely no impartial reader will judge in this manner, or imagine I could be guilty of such foolish egotism as to represent myself under these different characters, and under circumstances which, in no single instance, bear any relation to my private life; except only that one of those characters suffers from the artifices of worthless men of a certain profession: to which profession, perhaps, the reviewers of this article might originally belong. I venture to assert that such reflections as these, have nothing to do with sound criticism; and

that to call them so is an insult to the feelings, as well as to the taste of the public.

The consequence of this abuse of the design of Reviews is, that these monthly oracles are, for the most part, considered as the mere vehicles of political animosity, written by the humblest retainers of party. And if in certain departments some learning and integrity are still found, others are filled by persons who have nothing but their malignity to supply the want of those qualifications, and who, neither by natural talent or acquired information, are adequate to the task of correcting the advertisements of a country newspaper.

CHARLOTTE SMITH.

Feb. 1, 1807.