

PROLOGUE,
SPOKEN BY THE AUTHOR, ON OPENING
THE NEW THEATRE AT BLENHEIM,
OCTOBER 1787.

TO THEIR GRACES THE DUKE AND DUCHESS OF
MARLBOROUGH.

THOUGH each theatric wight, in prose or rhyme,
Condemns of course the drama of his time;
'Tis better sure than when, in tilted cart
Each tragic hero mouth'd his thund'ring part.
The Muses then—their brains a little crack'd,
Were fairly subject to the *Vagrant Act*.
But, mark! how greatly chang'd their *present* state!
Victims no more of law, caprice, or fate;
Thrice-welcome now to Shakspeare's native isle,
Where Genius hails them with a fost'ring smile:

Whilst Spenser's princely race erect their shrine,

'Midst scenes for ever sacred to the Nine.

These scenes, of old how fam'd for beauteous dames!

And Blenheim *now* the palm of beauty claims.

Within *this* shade, as say the tales of old,

As Hull in pensive verse hath sweetly told,

HERE Nature's fairest rose was seen to bloom,

Till jealous rage decreed an early tomb.

Where her cold ashes rest, let no stern prude,

In all the pomp of vestal pride, intrude.

By Pity's tears embalm'd, still lives her name,

By mercy screen'd from infamy and shame.

His lyre to strains uncouth HERE Chaucer strung,

And o'er THESE plains his Gothic stanzas sung.

And erst within this dark embowering shade,

The stern Eliza dwelt—a captive maid.

Then free from murd'rous deeds and crimes of state,

And guiltless *then* of sainted Mary's fate.

Here Wilmot too, the witty and the gay,
 Repentant—saw the close of mortal day.
 Oft o'er his urn shall British Genius weep,
 And there in watchet weeds her vigils keep.
 Nor Love's soft wreath alone shall Woodstock claim,
 Nor rest on GENIUS all her hopes of fame.
 HERE, ere on Cressy's plain the victor fought,
 Great Edward's soul the flame of glory caught.
 And HERE, when peace return'd to Britain's shore,
 When Marlborough bade his thunders cease to roar,
 And Albion triumph'd o'er unnumber'd foes,
 'Twas HERE her guardian hero sought repose.
 To crown with wealth her Marlborough's glorious toil
 A grateful country gave THIS classic foil.
 She bade yon dome arise, and by its name
 Prolong'd her mighty warrior's lasting fame;
 Then round her godlike Marlborough's glory'd shrine
 Bade all her brightest, greenest, laurels twine.

And HERE, through countless ages shall they bloom,
 And shed around a consecrated gloom:
 For still to Britain shall THESE scenes be dear,
 Since all the milder virtues flourish HERE.
 Like vernal suns, with genial warmth they glow,
 And soothe the pangs of poverty and woe.

But, sick of worthies and their fame, ye fair,
 Perhaps ye wish to know our bill of fare.

Spoken before Who is the Dupe?

Know, then, fair Cowley's Muse will paint a wight,
 Who thinks that Learning's always in the right.
 But, sure, of tonish life he little knows
 Who worships scholars, and who laughs at beaux!
 Which of the bucks that shine in Pleasure's round
 Was e'er a scholar or a critic found?
 By Fashion's rule the sweets of life they cull,
 "Gay by constraint, and elegantly dull*."

* See Hobhouse.

They ne'er o'er Homer's thund'ring verses pore ;
 And Tully's self they deem an arrant bore.
 When such the charming youths our isle can boast,
 What chance has Learning with a reigning toast ?
 For both our sakes, ye Fair, I hope our Bard
 Has on the softer sex been somewhat hard :
 For, if the picture she presents be just,
 Then—books farewell !—consign'd to mould'ring dust ;
 For, who the toils of Learning will pursue,
 If unprotected and ungrac'd by you ?

Spoken before the Lyar.

This night our laughing Muse will paint a youth
 At constant war with Heaven-descended Truth.
 Yet still she hopes, by Candour's rules you'll try her,
 Nor kill with frown severe one harmless Lyar.