

DEVEREUX

BY

THE RIGHT HON. LORD LYTTON

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Dedicatory Epistle
TO
JOHN AULDJO, Esq., &c.,
AT NAPLES.

London.

MY DEAR AULDJO:—

Permit me, as a memento of the pleasant hours we passed together, and the intimacy we formed by the winding shores and the rosy seas of the old Parthenope, to dedicate to you this romance. It was written in perhaps the happiest period of my literary life—when success began to brighten upon my labours, and it seemed to me a fine thing to make a name. Reputation, like all possessions, fairer in the hope than the reality, shone before me in the gloss of novelty—and I had neither felt the envy it excites, the weariness it occasions, nor (worse than all) that coarse and painful notoriety, that something between the gossip and the slander, which attends every man whose writings become known—surrendering the grateful privacies of life to

“The gaudy, babbling, and remorseless day.”

In short—yet almost a boy—for, in years at least, I was little more, when *Pelham* and *The Disowned* were conceived and composed), and full of the sanguine arrogance of hope, I pictured to myself far greater triumphs than it will ever be mine to achieve: and never did archi-

fect of dreams build his pyramid upon (alas!) a narrower base, or a more crumbling soil! . . . Time cures us sufficiently of these self-conceits, and brings us, somewhat harshly, from the gay extravagance of confounding the much that we design with the little that we can accomplish.

The Disowned and *Devereux* were both completed in retirement—and in the midst of metaphysical studies and investigations, varied and miscellaneous enough, if not very deeply connecl. At that time I was indeed engaged in preparing for the press a Philosophical Work which I had afterwards the good sense to postpone to a riper age and a more sobered mind. But the effect of these studies is somewhat prejudicially visible in both the romances I have referred to; and the external and dramatic colourings which belong to fiction are too often forsaken for the inward and subtle analysis of motives, characters, and actions. The workman was not sufficiently master of his art to forbear the vanity of parading the wheels of the mechanism, and was too fond of calling attention to the minute and tedious operations by which the movements were to be performed and the result obtained. I believe that an author is generally pleased with his work less in proportion as it is good, than in proportion as it fulfils the idea with which he commenced it. He is rarely perhaps an accurate judge how far the execution is in itself faulty or meritorious—but he judges with tolerable success how far it accomplishes the end and objects of the conception. He is pleased with his work, in short, according as he can say, "This has expressed what I meant it to convey." But the reader, who is not in the secret of the author's original design, usually views the work through a different medium—and is perhaps in this the wiser critic of the two; for the book that wanders the most from the idea which originated it may often be better than that which is rigidly limited to the unfolding and *dénoûment* of a single concep-

tion. If we accept this solution, we may be enabled to understand why an author not unfrequently makes favourites of some of his productions most condemned by the public. For my own part, I remember that *Devereux* pleased me better than *Pelham* or *The Disowned*, because the execution more exactly corresponded with the design. It expressed with tolerable fidelity what I meant it to express. That was a happy age, my dear Auldjo, when, on finishing a work, we could feel contented with our labour, and fancy we had done our best! Now, alas! I have learned enough of the wonders of the Art to recognise all the deficiencies of the Disciple; and to know that no author worth the reading can ever in one single work do half of which he is capable.

What man ever wrote anything really good who did not feel that he had the ability to write something better? Writing, after all, is a cold and a coarse interpreter of thought. How much of the imagination—how much of the intellect, evaporates and is lost while we seek to embody it in words! Man made language and God the genius. Nothing short of an eternity could enable men who imagine, think, and feel, to express *all* they have imagined, thought, and felt. Immortality, the spiritual desire, is the intellectual *necessity*.

In *Devereux* I wished to portray a man flourishing in the last century with the train of mind and sentiment peculiar to the present;—describing a life, and not its dramatic epitome, the historical characters introduced are not closely woven with the main plot, like those in the fictions of Sir Walter Scott—but are rather like the narrative romances of an earlier school, designed to relieve the predominant interest, and give a greater air of truth and actuality to the supposed memoir. It is a fiction which deals less with the Picturesque than the Real. Of the principal character thus introduced (the celebrated and