

EUGENE ARAM

A TALE

BY

THE RIGHT HON. LORD LYTON

*"Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal Shadows that walk by us still.*

* * * * *
*All things that are
Made for our general uses are at war—
E'en we among ourselves!"*

JOHN FLETCHER, upon an "Honest Man's Fortune."

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TO
SIR WALTER SCOTT, BART.,
&c., &c.

SIR,—It has long been my ambition to add some humble tribute to the offerings laid upon the shrine of your genius. At each succeeding book that I have given to the world, I have paused to consider if it were worthy to be inscribed with your great name, and at each I have played the procrastinator, and hoped for that morrow of better desert which never came. But *defluat annis*, the time runs on—and I am tired of waiting for the ford which the tides refuse. I seize, then, the present opportunity, not as the best, but as the only one I can be sure of commanding, to express that affectionate admiration with which you have inspired me in common with all your contemporaries, and which a French writer has not ungracefully termed “the happiest prerogative of genius.” As a Poet, and as a Novelist, your fame has attained to that height in which praise has become superfluous; but in the character of the writer there seems to me a yet higher claim to veneration than in that of the writings. The example your genius sets us, who can emulate?—the example your moderation bequeaths to us, who shall forget? That nature must indeed be gentle which has conciliated the envy that pursues intellectual greatness, and left without an enemy a man who has no living equal in renown.

You have gone for a while from the scenes you have immortalised, to regain, we trust, the health which has

been impaired by your noble labours, or by the manly struggles with adverse fortunes, which have not found the frame as indomitable as the mind. Take with you the prayers of all whom your genius, with playful art, has soothed in sickness—or has strengthened, with generous precepts, against the calamities of life.¹

“Navis quæ tibi creditum
Debes Virgilium——
Reddas incolumem!”²

You, I feel assured, will not deem it presumptuous in one who, to that bright and undying flame which now streams from the grey hills of Scotland,—the last halo with which you have crowned her literary glories,—has turned from his first childhood with a deep and unrelaxing devotion; you, I feel assured, will not deem it presumptuous in him to inscribe an idle work with your illustrious name:—a work which, however worthless in itself, assumes something of value in his eyes when thus rendered a tribute of respect to you.

THE AUTHOR OF “EUGENE ARAM.”

London, December 22, 1831.

¹ Written at the time of Sir W. Scott's visit to Italy—after the great blow to his health and fortunes.

² O ship, thou owest to us Virgil—restore in safety him whom we entrusted to thee.

PREFACE

TO THE EDITION OF 1831.

SINCE, dear Reader, I last addressed thee, in PAUL CLIFFORD, nearly two years have elapsed, and somewhat more than four years since, in PELHAM, our familiarity first began. The Tale which I now submit to thee differs equally from the last as from the first of those works; for, of the two evils, perhaps it is even better to disappoint thee in a new style, than to weary thee with an old. With the facts on which the tale of EUGENE ARAM is founded, I have exercised the common and fair license of writers of fiction: it is chiefly the more homely parts of the real story that have been altered; and for what I have added, and what omitted, I have the sanction of all established authorities, who have taken greater liberties with characters yet more recent, and far more protected by historical recollections. The book was, for the most part, written in the early part of the year, when the interest which the task created in the Author was undivided by other subjects of excitement, and he had leisure enough not only to be *nescio quid meditans nugarum*, but also to be *totus in illis*!¹

I originally intended to adapt the story of Eugene Aram to the Stage. That design was abandoned when more than half completed: but I wished to impart to this Romance something of the nature of a Tragedy,—something of the

¹ Not only to be meditating I know not what of trifles, but also to be wholly engaged on them.