

THE FIRST CANTO OF RICCIARDETTO

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The first canto of Ricciardetto by Sylvester Douglas Glenbervie

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SYLVESTER DOUGLAS GLENBERVIE

**THE FIRST CANTO
OF RICCIARDETTO**

*To Mrs de Butler
In testimony of the friendship regard
and esteem of*

The Author. 1. May 1822.

THE
FIRST CANTO
OF
RICCIARDETTO:

TRANSLATED FROM THE
ITALIAN OF FORTEGUERRI:

WITH
AN INTRODUCTION, CONCERNING THE PRINCIPAL ROMANTIC,
BURLESQUE, AND MOCK-HEROIC POETS;
AND
NOTES, CRITICAL AND PHILOLOGICAL.

BY
SYLVESTER (*DOUGLAS*) LORD GLENBERVIE.

Non ego sum vates sed priscae conscia vultus.

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE-STREET.

1822.

————— Neque enim concludere versum
Dixeris esse satis : neque si quis scribat uti nos.

Hon.

PREFACE.

A FEW copies of this little book were printed some months ago. I had no fixed design at that time of submitting it to the criticism and presumed candour of the public at large. The circumstances which gave occasion to its being written, at least the part which is in verse, are correctly set forth in the Introduction: the very miscellaneous notes are such as most probably might have occurred to me had it been, not my own, but the production of a friend who had entrusted it to my perusal. I do not say that I was entirely determined not to publish when I first sent my manuscript to the press: but the mere printing, correcting the *errata*, and adding the notes as chance suggested them, served to amuse me, then in bad health and spirits,

and gave me better opportunities of improving the book to the best of my skill, than I should otherwise have had. I believe whoever has dealt in printing, must have found that blemishes, even of style and composition, have struck him on reading the proof sheets, which had wholly escaped his attention in the manuscript; and also that many collateral thoughts, tending to elucidate and illustrate his meaning, had then first presented themselves to his mind.

In parts of Germany where paper and printing are very cheap, and authorship much practised, I have understood that several of their writers have used themselves to send their works, prose and verse, to the printer's, sheet by sheet, or leaf by leaf, never polishing or amending them till they receive the first of the printed proofs. I recollect that Wieland says, in

one of his prefaces, that he had found great advantage in this.

Of the small impression of this essay which I had taken off at the beginning of this year, I distributed the greater part among particular friends, from whom I flattered myself that I might receive good-natured and useful remarks and counsel, touching the numerous defects which I justly apprehended might still have remained after my own repeated revisions; and I have had good reason to be glad that I had indulged that expectation.

Having come to the resolution of throwing myself on the mercy of the grand literary inquest of the nation, of whatever class or cast of his majesty's liege subjects that awful assemblage of rarely unanimous jurymen is composed, perhaps I may seem to have been a little precipitate in carrying such resolution into effect. But Horace's

advice, and Pope's, "to keep your piece nine years," would have been equally inapplicable to my time of life, and to the nature of this ephemeral trifle : that may be a good rule for the works of authors, who, like young Cowley, say to themselves,

"What shall I do to be for ever known,
And make the world to come my own!"*

or who, according to one of Shakespeare's inspired expressions, imagine they "feel immortal longings in them." Though even as to such cases, experience in some noted instances shows the danger of too far exceeding the proper period of retention, and still continuing polishing and re-polishing, or rather altering and re-altering, while confined within the author's closet, works so meant for remotest posterity. It has been said, that Lord Lyttelton printed, and then totally

* That same Cowley, in his less sanguine days, quaintly but strongly exclaimed,

"Who his to-morrow would bestow

For all great Homer's life, even from his death till now?"

cancelled and destroyed, several entire impressions of his elaborate History of Henry II., during the course of twenty or thirty years; and that those who had seen the work in its earlier state, found it had gradually acquired from the author's too anxious ambition to improve it, while he fondly dreamed it was advancing to perfection, the sort of heaviness and languor which is now generally thought to belong to it. A like fate is known to have attended another historical work of more modern date, the History of the Rebellion in 1745, by the author of the tragedy of Douglas. That history, according to many concurrent reports at the time, by the author's continual cancellings, and, as he thought, meliorations, during near half a century, had been in a considerable degree emasculated, and deprived of much of its original interest. So far is it from being universally true, that "Authors lose half the praise they would have got, Were it but known what they *discreetly* blot."