

WILSON'S BORDER TALES.

THE VACANT CHAIR.

You have all heard of the Cheviot mountains. If you have not, they are a rough, rugged, majestic chain of hills, which a poet might term the Roman wall of nature; crowned with snow, belted with storms, surrounded by pastures and fruitful fields, and still dividing the northern portion of Great Britain from the southern. With their proud summits piercing the clouds, and their dark rocky declivities frowning upon the glens below, they appear symbolical of the wild and untameable spirits of the Borderers who once inhabited their sides. We say, you have all heard of the Cheviots, and know them to be very high hills, like a huge clasp riveting England and Scotland together; but we are not aware that you may have heard of Marchlaw, an old, grey-looking farm-house, substantial as a modern fortress, recently, and, for aught we know to the contrary, still inhabited by Peter Elliot, the proprietor of some five hundred surrounding acres. The boundaries of Peter's farm, indeed, were defined neither by fields, hedges, nor stone walls. A wooden stake, here, and a stone there, at considerable distances from each other, were the general land marks; but neither Peter nor his neighbours considered a few acres worth quarrelling about; and their sheep frequently visited each other's pastures in a friendly way, harmoniously sharing a family dinner, in the same spirit as their masters made themselves free at each other's tables.

Peter was placed in very unpleasant circumstances, owing to the situation of Marchlaw House, which, unfortunately, was built immediately across the "ideal line," dividing the two kingdoms; and his misfortune was, that, being born within it, he knew not whether he was an Englishman or a Scotchman. He could trace his ancestral line no farther back than his great-grandfather, who it appeared from the family Bible, had, together with his grandfather and father, claimed Marchlaw as their birth place. They, however, were not involved in the same perplexities as their descendant. The parlour was distinctly acknowledged to be in Scotland, and two-thirds of the kitchen were as certainly allowed to be in England: his three ancestors were born in the room over the parlour, and, therefore, were Scotchmen beyond question; but Peter, unluckily, being brought into the world before the death of his grandfather, his parents occupied a room immediately over the debatable boundary line which

crossed the kitchen. The room, though scarcely eight feet square, was evidently situated between the two countries; but, no one being able to ascertain what portion belonged to each, Peter, after many arguments and altercations upon the subject, was driven to the disagreeable alternative of confessing he knew not what countryman he was.—What rendered the confession the more painful was, it was Peter's highest ambition to be thought a Scotchman. All his arable land lay on the Scotch side; his mother was collaterally related to the Stuarts; and few families were more ancient or respectable than the Elliots. Peter's speech, indeed, betrayed him to be a walking partition between the two kingdoms, a living representation of the Union; for in one word he pronounced the letter *r* with the broad, masculine sound of the North Briton, and in the next with the liquid *burr* of the Northumbrians.

Peter, or, if you prefer it, Peter Elliot, Esquire, of Marchlaw, in the counties of Northumberland and Roxburgh, was, for many years, the best runner, leaper, and wrestler, between Wooler and Jedburgh. Whirled from his hand, the ponderous bullet whizzed through the air like a pigeon on the wing; and the best putter on the Borders quailed from competition. As a feather in his grasp, he seized the unwieldy hammer, swept it round and round his head, accompanying with agile limb its evolutions, swiftly as swallows play around a circle, and hurled it from his hands like a shot from a rifle, till antagonists shrunk back, and the spectators burst into a shout. "Well done, Squire! the Squire for ever!" once exclaimed a servile observer of titles. "Squire! what are ye squiring at?" returned Peter. "Confound ye! where was ye when I was christened Squire? My name's Peter Elliot—your man, or anybody's man, at whatever they like!

Peter's soul was free, bounding, and buoyant, as the wind that carrolled in a zephyr, or shouted in a hurricane, upon his native hills; and his body was thirteen stone of healthy, substantial flesh, steeped in the spirits of life. He had been long married, but marriage had wrought no change upon him. They who suppose that wedlock transforms the lark into an owl, offer an insult to the lovely beings who, brightening our darkest hours with the smiles of affection, teach us that that only is unbecoming in the husband which is disgraceful in the man. Nearly