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Poetry.

LIFE—AN EPISTLE.

Hast thou consider'd Life, my Friend,
Its origin, pursuits, and end;
Its brief and shadowy course—its ties—
Its cares, and snares, and penalties?
If so, I guess you'll wish a better,
Without a monitory letter.
I thus its whole amount sum up,
The sipping from a vapid cup.
If Life's a boon, then I conclude,
The heart of man must be renew'd:—
Aye, that's the point—the heart once taught—
To estimate it as we ought.
Will use it as a path by night,
Conducting to a land of light;
And so employ its energies,
As, by the race, to win the prize,
And find that, after all we know
Of Earth's unhallow'd scenic show,
Religion's blossomings and fruit
Should be Man's *paramount* pursuit.
If such should be my friend's career,
He's soaring to a glorious sphere
Where he shall spend, without alloy,
A life of ever-flowing joy.

THE ESTIMATE.

"Let's live to-day," the Man of Pleasure cries,
"To-morrow may not come, at least, to us—
Why preach of *happiness beyond the skies?*
Let's have it now, without such whining fuss—
Why drudge along Life's road, knee-deep in care,
Since Pleasure hath prepared a flowery way?
Indulge desire, the present bouquet share!
Life wants space, Come, friends, let's live to-day!"—
True, jovial mortal, Life indeed is short,
But Sloth and Folly make it shorter still;
Heard, then, its hours, and let them well report
A prompt obedience to thy Maker's will,
There is a better life, which has no end,
Surely for that 'tis wisdom to prepare,—
Who would a too short life in *folly* spend,
That might in *bliss* a life eternal share.
"*Let's live to-day*"—to-morrow is not ours,
Or, should it come, 'twill give us only good;
No "knee-deep care"—no "whining fuss" devours
The wise man's feast of wasteless plenitude.

Literature.

THE VACANT CHAIR.

BY JOHN MACKAY WILSON.

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 walls 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 rivetting England and Scotland together; but we are not aware that you may have heard of Marchlaw, an old, gray-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 landmarks; but neither Peter nor his neighbors 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 table.

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 debateable boundary line which crossed the kitchen. The room, though scarcely eight feet square, was evident y 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, bewrayed 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! wha are ye squiring at?" returned Peter. "Confound ye! where was ye when I was christened Squire? My name's Peter Elliot—your man, or onybody's man, at whatever they like!"

Peter's soul was free, bounding and buoyant, as the wind that carolled 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 twenty years had passed over them; but Janet was still as kind, and, in his eyes, as beautiful, as when, bestowing on him her hand, she blushed her vows at the altar; and he was still as happy, as generous, and as free. Nine fair children sat around their domestic hearth, and one, the youngling of the flock, smiled upon its mother's knee. Peter had never known sorrow; he was blest in his wife, in his children, in his flocks. He had become richer than his fathers. He was beloved by his neighbors, the tillers of his ground, and his herdsmen; yea, no man envied his prosperity. But a blight passed over the harvest of his joys, and gall was rained into the cup of his felicity.

It was Christmas-day, and a more melancholy looking sun never rose on the 25th of December. One vast, sable cloud, like a universal pall, overspread the heavens. For weeks, the ground had been covered with clear, dazzling snow; and as, throughout the day, the rain continued its unwearied and monotonous drizzle, the earth assumed a character and appearance melancholy and troubled as the heavens. Like a mastiff that has lost its owner, the wind howled dolefully down the glens, and was re-echoed from the caves of the mountains, as the lamentations of a legion of invisible spirits. The frowning, snow-clad precipices were instinct with motion, as avalanche upon avalanche, the larger burying the less, crowded downward in their tremendous journey to the plain. The simple mountain rills had assumed the majesty of rivers; the broader streams were swollen into the wild torrent, and, gushing forth as cataracts, in fury and in foam, enveloped the valleys in an angry flood. But, at Marchlaw, the fire blazed blithely; the kitchen groaned beneath the load of preparations for a joyful feast, and glad faces glided from room to room.

Peter Elliot kept Christmas, not so much because it was Christmas, as in honor of its being the birth-day of Thomas, his first born, who, that day, entered his nineteenth year. With a father's love his heart yearned for all his children, but Thomas was the pride of his eyes. Cards of apology had not then found their way among our Border hills; and, as all knew that, although Peter admitted no spirits within his threshold, nor a drunkard at his table, he was, nevertheless, no niggard in his hospitality, his invitations were accepted without ceremony. The guests were assembled; and the kitchen being the only apartment in the building large enough to contain them, the cloth was spread upon a long, clear, oaken table, stretching from England into Scotland. On the English end of the board were placed a ponderous plum-pudding, studded with temptation, and a smoking sirloin; on Scotland, a savoury and well-seasoned haggis, with a sheep's head and trotters; while the intermediate space was filled with the good things of this life, common to both kingdoms, and to the season.

The guests from the north, and from the south, were arranged promiscuously. Every seat was filled—save one. The chair by Peter's right hand