

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 neighbours, 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 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, 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 honour 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 sir-loan; on Scotland, a savoury and well-seasoned haggis, with a sheep's-head and trotters; while the intermediate space was filled with 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 remained unoccupied.—He had raised his hands before his eyes, and besought a blessing on what was placed before them, and was preparing to carve for his visitors, when his eyes fell upon the vacant chair. The knife dropped upon the table.—Anxiety flashed across his countenance, like an arrow from an unseen hand.

"Janet; where is Thomas?" he enquired; "hae nane o' ye seen him?" and, without waiting an answer, he continued—"How is it possible he can be absent at a time like this? And on such a day, too? Excuse me a minute, friends, till I step out and see if I can find him. Since ever I kept this day, as mony o' ye ken, he has always been at my right hand, in that very chair; and I canna think o' beginning our dinner while I see it empty."

"If the filling of the chair be all," said a pert young sheep-farmer, named Johnson, "I will step into it till Master Thomas arrive."

"Ye're not a faither, young man," said Peter, and walked out of the room.

Minute succeeded minute, but Peter returned not. The guests became hungry, peevish, and gloomy, while an excellent dinner continued spoiling before them. Mrs. Elliot, whose good-nature was the most prominent feature in her character, strove, by every possible effort, to beguile the unpleasant impressions she perceived gathering upon their countenances.

"Peter is just as bad as him," she remarked, "to hae gane to seek him when he kened the dinner wouldna keep. And I'm sure Thomas kened it would be ready at one o'clock to a minute. It's sae unthinking and unfriendly like to keep folk waiting."—And, endeavoring to smile upon a beautiful black-haired girl of seventeen, who sat by her elbow, she continued, in an anxious whisper—"Did ye see naething o' him, Elizabeth?"

The maiden blushed deeply; the question evidently gave freedom to a tear, which had for some time, been an unwilling prisoner in the room; and the monosyllable, "No," that trembled from her lips, was audible only to