

**SUMMERS AND WINTERS AT  
BALMAWHAPPLE: A SECOND  
SERIES OF THE TABLE-TALK  
OF SHIRLEY, VOL. I**

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Summers and Winters at Balmawhapple: A Second Series of The Table-Talk of Shirley, Vol. I  
by John Skelton

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**JOHN SKELTON**

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*Summers and Winters at  
Balmawhapple*



MARY STUART.

*From the Sketch by Janet in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.*

*The Second Series of "Table-Talk"*

60630

Summers and Winters  
at Balmawhapple a  
Second Series of The  
Table-Talk of Shirley  
by John Skelton C.B.  *died 1897*  
LL.D.

With Illustrations

Volume One

Second Edition

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Edinburgh and London 1897

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To  
A. A. S.  
1867-1897.  
*Fides, nudaque Veritas.*





### THE PRELUDE.

**T**WO hundred years ago (or thereby) a Yorkshire Shirley crossed the Border, and settled on the banks of Loch Leven. There his sons and grandsons continued to reside till the other day: famous anglers when living, they now sleep peacefully on its shores,—dreaming, it may be, of the big trout they landed or of the bigger that they lost. A grandson or a great-grandson, more adventurous than the others, migrated from the inland water to the sea, and it

was thus that in due season I came to know Balmawhapple.<sup>1</sup> Here we have no continuing city; but in Balmawhapple I have been content to abide. My constancy is somewhat singular, I admit. Our royal and ancient burgh may be compared to the hive which sends off swarm after swarm. Among sea-bred people the sea-bird's instinct is strong. There are Balmawhapple men to be found in every corner of the globe. The boys who were with me at school have wandered away to Canada and the States, to Central Africa and Pacific islands. One of them is an engineer on the line that is crossing the Andes. Another is shooting ibex in Thibet. Another has a fruit-farm in California. They write to me at times,—letters arrive with strange stamps and outlandish post-marks, that bring a sense of romance and adventure into our uneventful life. But Fate, though not unkind to me on the whole,—why should I fret, who have been spared through it all, while so many strong men have gone down—down even unto Hades?—has ordained that I

<sup>1</sup> The Shirleys (I may venture to add in the modest obscurity of a footnote) remained persistently "English" until, marrying into a great Scottish house (Mary Stuart was niece of Thomas and Methuen, the last Earls of Kellie of the family of Cambo), they were able to trace their descent back to Celtic Mormaers and the Victor of Bannockburn, and so became entirely acclimatised, and indeed more "Scotch" than the Scots. The "Shirra" (who married Mary Stuart sometime in the 'nineties) was the most expert fly-fisher of his day, and came to be known far and wide as "The Shirra of the Loch." "Will the Shirra of the Loch take a glass of wine with the Shirra of the Forest?" was Sir Walter's greeting when they met each year at Blair Adam.

should stay at home. Unlike so many of our people, I have not been permitted to walk "by the long wash of Australasian seas," nor "breathe in converse seasons." I have not been a rover.

Do not mistake me. I do not complain. For even in *Balmawhapple* the sluggish current is sometimes interrupted, is sometimes accelerated. During the fifty years on which I can look back, the pulse of the community has sometimes beat faster than is common with, or probably good for, that somewhat feeble organ. When young *Dr Diamond* was found dead in his bed, with an empty bottle on the table which smelt of bitter almonds; when pretty *Nellie Barton* ran away with the groom; when lawyer *Jenkins*, who was also the local banker, took an autumn holiday with the midsummer rents of half the county gentlemen of the district in his pocket and forgot to return,—the usual afternoon crowd on the *High Street* became positively animated. And when *Mark Holdfast* came back from the south, where his

*"strong and simple words,  
Keen to wound as sharpened swords,"*

had won him fame and fortune; and—— But *Mark* must have the opening chapter to himself.

S.