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EPISTLE

TO

WALTER SCOTT.

*Written at Pittsburgh, during the sitting of the term, by
H. H. Brackenridge, Sept. 9th, 1811, on reading "The
Lady of the Lake"—Taken up by chance.*

FULL many a rounded year has cast
A shade upon to period past,
Since Scotia on maternal lap
Received me. There, upon the map,
I see Kintyre;* there was I born.
Hard fate to be so rudely torn
By poverty and need of change,
Away to this a foreign range,
With parents whom Culloden muir
And other troubles had made poor.
But early mem'ry paints me well
The *Bellivollan*† hill and dale;
The bracken green; the heather blue,
And gowan of a golden hue;
And though se-join'd by length of wave,
I feel a charm some fairy gave
To bind me to my natal soil,
And think upon that distant isle;
An isle where charm of verse is found
To make it an enchanted ground:
For most the ballad and the rhyme

* *A Peninsula in the North.*

† *Farm.*

Imparts a charm to every clime;
 And not the deeds that men have done
 So much the listening ear has won,
 As magick of that art divine,
 Which springs from the harmonious nine,
 Oh give me Burns; oh give me Scott;
 I want no more when these I've got,
 To make a rock of any sea
 Immortal by such minstrelsy.

Who now need ask, where are the nine,
 That sang the tale of Troy divine;
 Or later, in Italian day
 Gave to the Mantuan his lay?
 These fairy footsteps here I trace
 On lands from whence have sprung my race.
 Here heights are sung, unknown before,
 But by traditionary lore.
 Who would have thought that Thule's isle
 Would be the seat of song erewhile;
 And lyric fire, and epick swell
 Come with Apollo here to dwell?

Ah me! that cannot nearer be
 To hear such native melody!
 Here by Ohio's stream my pen
 Gives image to a sort of strain
 Which feeling prompts, but Genius none,
 So gifted to a favourite son.
 My gift is only to admire;
 In madness I attempt the lyre,
 At hearing this celestial sound

From Scotia's hills and distant bound:
 Of this I dream, and when awake,
 I read the Lady of the Lake;
 Or throw it by to gain the power
 Of sense and motion for an hour;
 For such excess too long to bear
 Incapable our natures are;
 And the delirium must have stay,
 Or springs of human frame give way.

HERE silly hills, and untaught wood,
 Because a little of that blood,
 Address me, or I think address
 The lonely weeping wilderness.
 Have you not something of that vein,
 A little of the minstrel strain,
 To give us also here a name,
 And taste of an immortal fame.
 Ah! lonely bowers you gave me shade,
 But such return cannot be made;
 Sweet waters, you must trickle on
 Till some more favour'd muse's son
 Shall sing of you like Walter Scott
 And to immortal change your lot!
 Through many ages cast your glance;
 Perhaps a thousand years at once;
 A lesser time will be too soon
 For nature to dispense such boon;
 As comets centuries require
 To pass off and recruit their fire.
 Who knows but this epistle may
 To you attract a poet's lay;

To put in verse some height, some stream
Just incidental in his theme.

Oh! might my name of Bracken born
Some ridge where infant lay forlorn
Or peasant built his hamlet drear
Attain the sanctity to hear
It named in one immortal line,
Which turns a harsh word to divine!
But this too much; I cannot claim
The meed of such advance to fame,
So far secluded from my race,
And cut off from romantick base.
It can't be said that such a dale
Where deeds were done, is where I dwell;
Or that I vegetate among
The hills which once were hills of song.
Here neighbouring to the savage tread
Inglorious I must bend my head,
And think of something else than fame;
Though in my bosom burns the flame
That in a happier age and clime
Might have attempted lofty rhyme.

But thou, celestial, take thy course
With fancy's pinion, reason's force;
Go on; enjoy increasing fame,
Now equal with a Milton's name;
Or him that sang the fairy-queen;
Or other Southren that has been.
Not Shakspeare would himself disdain
The rivalship of such a strain.

OH! for a theme of ~~ampler~~ space,
 Whereon eternal lines to trace;
 Embracing sea and continent,
 And not within an island pent;
 A stage commensurate with power
 Of bard and sacred orator!
 But this would kind of treason be
 To isle of my nativity,
 Which claims and has a right to claim
 Her bard for her own sep'rate fame;
 Since other lands no mention make
 Of genius which did here awake;
 Or deeds which heroes here have done
 However meriting renown?
 Much merit here of feeling heart
 To make the breast heave, and tear start
 Remains unsung; and valour's prize
 The golden hair and sky-blue eyes.
 Hence I retract the wish, resign;
 To Scotia give that harp of thine
 To which all melodies are known
 That harp has rung or pipe has blown;
 Like thine own bard, thy Allan Bane
 So full, so various is thy strain;
 In torrent numbers, flood of sense
 In bounds which judgement well restrains.

No fear of a short liv'd renown,
 Or fading to thy ivy-crown;
 For should some hidden fire or force
 Of ocean in his changing course

Unfix Benedi from his stance,
 Yet time at thee shall break his lance ;
 Or miss his aim and level wide
 At thy more solid pyramid !
 Go on ; add lustre to an earth
 So honoured by thy magick birth ;
 For not of mortal art thou born,
 O darling son of orient morn !
 Go on—and fill the rising gale
 With Scotia's early lore and tale ;
 Make vocal and give life in turn
 To every mountain, glen and burn ;
 As erst in Grecia did the god
 Of poesy, his dear abode,
 Attended by the sister choir,
 That hymned the song or tuned the lyre ;
 For of Castalia ev'ry dream
 Is found, in thy Loch Katrine theme ;
 And Pindus rises to our view
 When that we think of Benvenue ;
 Or we forget all other song,
 Thy inspiration pours so strong.

So far removed, what the reward
 Can we bestow upon the bard :
 Our praise is vain ; what winds will bear
 Encomium to a distant ear ?
 Or will it please, so little skill
 Have we, however the good will.
 All we can do, we bid the sun
 When he his weary course has run,
 And in the orient brings the day,

To halt a little at thy lay,
 And see if not his beams appear
 More cheering when he climbs the sphere;
 For joy of heart lights up a grace
 And dances in the human face?
 And why not morning at her dawn
 More sprightly look upon the lawn;
 And birds in melody repay
 With sweeter imitative lay?
 Though not, thou bird of scarlet wing†
 Canst thou a tale of Marmion sing?
 Though carol sweet and matin voice
 Is charming at our early rise:
 Thy *Border* minstrelsy fall short;
 Thy lay is not of such a sort
 Articulate as tongue of men.

WHAT sound is that I hear again,
 That winds across th' Atlantick bear
 In harmony to ev'ry ear?
 With gratulation welcome sped
 It trembles on the mountain head,
 Which starts to higher majesty,
 When rapturous strains like these pass by.
 Sit down thou ridge in lower stile;
 I also wish to hear awhile;
 Depress thy erst aspiring head;
 Be level with the ocean bed;
 That no impediment may be
 To this the coming minstrelsy,

† *A beautiful American bird of a variety of notes.*

Walter Scott

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The vision of *Sir Roderick*† sung
These woods and solitudes among :

SOLE Poet of the present age,
At once the Poet and the Sage,
Accept this distant homage given
To sounds that well deserve a heaven ;
Original, of vigour born,
And dress'd in splendor of the morn,
With all the witchery of the tale,
And spell unseen upon the gale.
What is this spell ? It is the charm
Of manners from the pencil warm :
And moral observations true,
Of passions which the world subdue,
With drapery that must beguile
Attention by the form and stile.

But now no more ; enough, enough,
Of these prosaick numbers rough :
We cease th' attempt, since it requires
A poet to tell, a poet's fires.

† *This Poem announced, but not arrived.*

END.

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