

ORMISTON YEW TREE;

With a LAMENT FOR THE EARL OF HOPETOUN.

By James Miller Published by Oliver & Boyd, 1824

From *Poems and Ballads Founded on the Local Traditions of East Lothian and Berwickshire*  
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Photos Tim Hills (2001)

HAIL ! monarch of the garden's bed,  
That gleams like Druids' grove afar;  
May lightnings never blast thy head,  
Nor blighting dews thy glories mar;  
And, should Destruction's arm abhorr'd,  
E'er smite thee in thy noon of fame,  
Thy trunk shall deck the festive board  
Like Shakspeare's tree, and save thy name.

Beneath thy dark umbrageous shade  
The village swain delights to rove,  
To tell his kind-consenting maid  
The soft voluptuous tale of love;  
While blushes tinge her rosy cheeks,  
As crimson rays o'er snow-wreaths steal,  
The silent sigh too well bespeaks  
What maiden lips may not reveal.

How oft thy branches, spreading wide,  
Have canopied the children's ring,  
From merry morn till eventide,  
Disporting like the birds in spring;  
While chasing from their dewy nest  
The covey o'er the lilled lea;  
Or, climbing high, with fearless breast,  
To rob the rook on yonder tree.

Years speed away-the rustic core  
Again beneath thy foliage meet,  
But not so blest as when of yore  
They tripp'd on music-loving feet.  
Now manhood's sterner cares engage  
As Mammon's paths they keen explore;  
Or, haply, read the patriarch's page  
Or turn unmeaning thesis o'er.

When sultry Sol is flaming high,  
At summer's noon the swains repair  
'Neath thy impervious canopy  
The frugal fare of health to share.  
The cup goes round at pleasure's call,  
The kiss is stolen from buxom maid ;  
While, catching fragments as they fall,  
The fawning dog is couchant laid.

But when the clouds in darkness roam,  
Thick scatter'd by the murmuring wind,  
The moralist loves thy solemn gloom,  
That suits his meditative mind:  
Dull tree! thou lov'st the burial-ground,  
With evergreens thou mock'st decay;  
For where the woodmen moulder round,  
Thou gather'st moisture from their clay.



Canst thou, like old Dodona's oak,  
 Thy silent leaves to language wake,  
 Where sacred doves responsive spoke ?-  
 The tree this answer deign'd to make:  
 " Here Wishart shew'd prophetic powers,  
 " Before that vial of wrath was given,  
 " When in St Andrew's dungeon towers  
 " His vengeance-blood uprose to heaven !-

" Here Cockburn, in my solitude,  
 " Forgot the bench and wrangling bar,  
 " With Science in her gentler mood  
 " To wage the literary war:-  
 " Alike the senate or the plough,  
 " The olive branch or patriot's steel,  
 " To him who with undaunted brow  
 " Still advocated Scotia's weel.

" Haply, beneath my verdant spray,  
 " You tread the muse's path divine,  
 " Where lovely Fairnalie would stray,  
 " The gentle votress of the nine  
 " She struck the lyre amongst these bowers,  
 " And breathed that sweetly plaintive lay,  
 " That weeps the forest's wither'd flowers,  
 " To fatal Flodden wede away."

The tree was silent as before,  
 It's voice like summer breezes died,  
 When the lone stranger rests his oar  
 Upon Loch Lomond's shelter'd side.  
 Perhaps thy earlier shoots might form  
 The trusty bow on Flodden's plain,  
 Where fell, amidst the arrowy storm,  
 Thy warrior lord 'midst heaps of slain !

But now thy vernal boughs must mourn,  
 The archer weep beneath thy shade ;  
 For Hopetoun never shall return,  
 In Gallia's fields all lowly laid.  
 He loved to prune thy dark-green plumes,  
 Which rising beauties still display ;  
 Nor deem'd thy never-fading blooms  
 The emblem of his laurel bay.

When on Corunna's fatal shore  
 Afar the Gallic ensigns waved,  
 When fell in Victory's arms, brave Moore,  
 Hopetoun retiring legions saved ;  
 Then, 'midst the din of doubtful war,  
 Ere British ships came o'er the sea,  
 His pensive thoughts might wander far,  
 And sigh for home, and think on thee !

Thy chieftain fought on Egypt's sands,  
 And turn'd the battle's reddening tide;  
 Broke vaunting Gallia's veteran bands,  
 Unconquer'd by the world beside:  
 His monument, his country's page,  
 In burning characters shall live;  
 'Twill gather lustre age by age,-  
 The lustre worth alone can give.



This though his public acts may earn,  
Yet private tears will also flow  
The splendid tower, the mountain cairn,  
A country's weeping love will shew.  
These domes shall warm the patriot's breast  
To deeds of glory undesign'd,  
While at the base the swain shall rest,  
And mourn a benefactor kind.

#### NOTES TO ORMISTON YEW TREE

*Hail! monarch of the garden'\* bed,  
That gleams like Druids' grove afar.*

THIS luxuriant tree ornaments the Earl of Hopetoun's garden at Ormiston-hall . Dr Walker, in his Essays on Natural History, says, that on the 10th May, 1762, the **yew** measured ten feet three inches in circumference ; in 1792, the trunk measured eleven feet, and twenty-five in height; and now (1824) it measures thirteen feet in circumference, and twenty-eight in height: the diameter of the ground covered by its branches being about 64 feet, or 190 in circumference. The tree flourishes in full vigour without any symptoms of decay ; and in the autumnal months, when covered with its red berries, has a magnificent appearance. The author of the Statistical Account of the Parish ascertained that the **yew** had existed for at least two centuries.

*Here Wishart shew'd prophetic powers,  
Before that vial of wrath was given.*

In the north-west side of the garden wall, part of the gable remains of one of the wings of the old family mansion of the Cockburns, which contains the grated window of a chamber from whence, it is said, the unfortunate George Wishart was taken in 1546, previous to his suffering martyrdom at St Andrews. Tradition says that Wishart frequently preached beneath the **yew** tree, when on a visit to the hospitable Laird of Ormiston.

*Here Cockbam, in my solitude,  
Forgot the bench and wrangling bar.*

John Cockburn, of Ormiston, was celebrated both as statesman and a patriotic representative of his country in the Union parliament. He contributed to erect the first bleachfield in Scotland, and it was by his example and influence that improvements were made on the high-roads in the neighbourhood. For some time he was one of the Lords of the Admiralty.

The family burial vault of the Cockburns is situated a few yards from the present garden, and marks the site of the old church, which was dedicated to St Giles, and was granted, with its pertinents, to the hospital of Soltre, in the 13th century.

*Where lovely Fairnalie would stray,  
The gentle votress of the nine*

The late Mrs Cockburn of Ormiston, relict of John Cockburn, whose father was Lord Justice Clerk, was daughter to Mr Rutherford of Fairnalie, in Selkirkshire, and wrote the second part of the beautiful song entitled the Flowers of the Forest

*But now thy vernal boughs must mourn,  
The archer weep beneath thy shade ;  
For Hopetoun never shall return,  
In Gallia's fields all lowly laid.*

John, fourth earl of Hopetoun, who, after a life devoted to the service of his country, died at Paris in August, 1823, whither he had gone for the benefit of his health. Our limits will not permit us to detail the many public acts of his lordship ; suffice to say, that he accompanied Sir Ralph Abercrombie as brigadier-general in the Egyptian expedition, in 1800; and was wounded in the hand at the battle of Alexandria, which deprived the army a while of his services. In consequence of the death of Sir John Moore, and the wounds of Sir David Baird, at the fatal battle of Corunna, the command devolved on Lord Hopetoun, then Lieutenant-general Hope, " to whose zeal and valour was attributed the success of the day, when the enemy were repulsed at every point of attack." A handsome monument to his memory is presently erecting at Byershill, East Lothian, by his tenantry.