

A D A M C R U I C K S H A N K .

A MODEST little volume, "Poems, Scotch and English", issued from the press of Cobban & Co., Guestrow, in 1829, and containing eighteen pieces chiefly of a didactic and elegaic character, claims attention more for the items of folk-lore contained in one of its pieces, than for any poetic worth it in general possesses. Its author, ADAM CRUICKSHANK, was born in the parish of Daviot, and baptized 17th August, 1807. Passing through the stages of herd-boy and labourer, he turned his attention to teaching, was for three years dominie at Oldmeldrum, fourteen years at Foveran, and latterly, two years at Banchory. While in the last-named district, he became agent for the Aberdeen Colporteur Society, an office which he held for upwards of

twenty-three years; and is now (1887) a frail old man, wearing out the closing years of an active life, in the retirement and comfort of a daughter's home.

The little volume mentioned above, it must be remembered, is the production of a young man, who made his appearance in print "for this occasion only". No doubt the author, in after years, looking with a more experienced and critical eye, saw many defects in his youthful essay, but if it failed to land him on Parnassus, there is certainly nothing within its covers which could cause him a moment's regret. In the main, his thoughts are pensive, if not very poetical; his descriptions of nature fair, though they have a flavour as if he had trusted more to the descriptions of others than to impressions born of his own observation. He must have been deeply impressed with Burns' immortal "Vision"—for in many of his poems the like machinery is called to his aid again and again, frequently with results, certainly original and as certainly grotesque.

The item, however, in the volume which we mentioned above, and one of really some antiquarian value, is his verses on "Paul's Well". This is, or was, a well in the parish of Fyvie, which rose in a fine stream from a sandy marl in the base of a hill near some ruins said to have belonged to some religious house. The water seems to have had a certain medicinal value, but it was also used by way of a charm. For instance, as is well known, many parents used to be grievously afflicted by having their chubby, rosy infant exchanged by the fairies for one of their own "peenging shargars". In such a case a few pailfuls of water from "Paul's Well" were an unfailing specific to restore the stolen infant to its proper parents, and wash the uncanny changeling back to its "land without a gloamin'". The curative effects of the water were so powerful that those unable to go to the well used to send some of their clothes, which were left lying about, and so were cured. Near the well was an oblong stone, known by the name of "the shargar stone", which was said to stop the growth of any one creeping underneath it. The author, however, remarks that the youngsters of his day used to raise it up and creep through below it in turns, with a bravado appalling, though characteristic of these degenerate modern days. The poem, like some of his

others, has its "vision". The author is sitting reading—within doors—when

A cannie rap cam' to the door
Which led me ben,
To open it as fest's I cud,
That I might see fa't was that sud
Be seekin' in.

Bit sic a sight to my surprise
I ne'er afore saw wi' my eyes
In a' my days;
His face did look sae grim and black,
It gar't me wis I cud draw back.
An' syne his claes

Were a' sae antique and sae queer,
I trimmel't ilka limb wi' fear,
An' sae wad ye;
For a' the sights that e'er I saw,
I think this monster dang them a'
That I did see.

This "monster" was "Superstition", who details how universally he is worshipped; how his devotees use the waters of "Paul's Well", and, among other things, declares—

There's very few in a' the lan'
Bit bows his head at my comman',
An' thinks't nae sin;
I wis' ye war sometimes to see
The great respect that's paid to me
Baith out an' in.
* * * * *
Ev'n ministers the head does bend,
An' fears lest they sud me offend,
As may be seen;
For though well clothed wi' common dress,
They'll hae a garb a' trimmed wi' lace
Hung on abene.

An' nu' gin ye observe, my chap,
These antique gowns o' fite an' black,
Which parsons wear,
Ye'll find it's jest a law o' mine,
For nae sic' laws can be divine,
I'm very sere.

* * * * *

For gin that Death tak' ane awa',
Come win', come weather, drift or sna',
I maun be there,
An' see the Holy Bible plac't
Upo' the caul', unsobbin' breast,
Wi' cannie care.

The cat I also maun hae taen,
For fear somebody lose their een,
Fan they her meet—
For cats ye ken are nae that mows,
To aye be runnin' thro' the house
Wi' pow'r sae great.

An' tho' the sun be shinin' bricht,
We aye keep up the candle licht,
As ye hae seen ;
Wi' somethings mair I needna tell,
Ye hear them unco weel yersel'
Fat things are deen.

An' fan there is a childie born,
I maun be there, be't even or morn,
Some pranks to use ;
An', till the time it be baptis'd,
My laws an' rules are well practis'd
About the house.

For, gin ane happen to gang in,
Out o' the house they winna win
'Thout meat an' drink,
Else fae the bairnie soon wad gae
Fat guid an' beauty it may hae,
The fowkies think.

An' till the mither kirket be,
She wadna gang a frien' to see
Fate'er betide ;
Sae at this rate save jest a few,
The maist o' fowk a' thro' an' thro'
Are on my side.