

The Brownie of Blednoch.

BY WILLIAM NICHOLSON.

ANNOTATED BY J. G. CARTER, F.S.A. SCOT.



HE "Brownie of Blednoch" first appeared in the *Dumfries Magazine* for 1825, and soon spread the fame of Nicholson far beyond the bounds of his native Galloway, and secured for him that wider recognition which Dumas considered the test of true genius, and which M. Renan has called "the glory that is not altogether vanity."

There cam' a strange wight to our toun-en',
And the fient a body did him ken ;
He tirl'd na lang, but he glided ben
Wi' a dreary, dreary hum.

His face did glare like the glow o' the west
When the drumlie cloud has it half o'ercast ;
Or the struggling moon when she's sair distrest—
O sirs ! 'twas Aiken-drum.

I trow the bauldest stood a back,
Wi' a gape and a glower till their lugs did crack,
As the shapeless phantom mum'ling spak',
"Hae ye wark for Aiken-drum ?"

O ! had ye seen the bairns' fright,
As they stared at this wild and unyirthly wight
As he stauket in 'tween the dark and the light,
And graned out, "Aiken-drum !"

"Sauf us !" quoth Jock, "d'ye see sic een ?"
Cries Kate, "There's a hole where his nose should hae been ;
And the mouth's like a gash which a horn had ri'en ;
Wou ! keep's frae Aiken-drum !"

The black dog growling cowered his tail,
The lassie swarfed, loot fa' the pail ;
Rob's lingle brack as he men't the flail,
At the sight o' Aiken-drum.

His matted hair on his breast did rest,
A lang blude beard wan'ered doon like a vest ;
But the glare o' his e'e nae bard hath exprest,
Nor the skimes o' Aiken-drum.

Roun' his hairy form there was naething seen
 But a philabeg o' the rashes green,
 And his knotted knees played aye knoit between;
 What a sight was Aiken-drum!

On his wauchie arms three claws did meet,
 As they trailed on the grun' by his taeless feet;
 E'en the auld gudeman himsel' did sweat
 To look at Aiken-drum.

But he drew a score, himsel' did sain,
 The auld wife tried, but her tongue was gane;
 While the young ane closer clasped her wane,
 And turned frae Aiken-drum.

But the canny auld wife can' till her breath,
 And she deemed the Bible might ward aff scaith,
 Be it benshee, bogle, ghaist, or wraith—
 But it fear't na Aiken-drum.

“His presence protect us!” quoth the auld gudeman;
 “What wad ye, where won ye, by sea or by lan’?
 I conjure ye—speak—by the Beuk in my han’!”
 What a grane gaed Aiken-drum!

“I lived in a lan’ where we saw nae sky,
 I dwalt in a spot where a burn rins na by;
 But I’se dwall now wi’ you if ye like to try—
 Hae ye wark for Aiken-drum?

“I’ll shiel a’ your sheep i’ the mornin’ sune,¹
 I’ll berry your crap by the light o’ the moon,
 An’ baa the bairns wi’ an unken’d tune,
 If ye’ll keep puir Aiken-drum.

“I’ll loup the linn when ye canna wade,
 I’ll kirn the kirn and I’ll turn the bread;
 And the wildest fillie that ever ran rede
 I’se tame’t,” quoth Aiken-drum!

“To wear the tod frae the flock on the fell—
 To gather the dew frae the heather bell—
 And to look at my face in your clear crystal well,
 Might gie pleasure to Aiken-drum.

¹ On one occasion, Brownie had undertaken to gather the sheep into the bucht at an early hour, and so zealously did he perform his task, that not only was there not one sheep left on the hill, but he had also collected a number of hares, which were found fairly penned along with them. Upon being congratulated on his extraordinary success, Brownie exclaimed, “Confound thae wee gray anes! they hae cost me mair trouble than a’ the lave o’ them.”

The Brownie of ¹ and dark

BY WILLIAM N²

ANNOTATED BY J. G. ^{the thing speaks weel:}



HE "Brownie of Be¹ Aiken-drum."
Magazine for 182⁷
far beyond the ^{skirled, "He's no be here!}
for him the' ^{gars us swarf wi' fear,}
the test of true gr ^{will the hoose come near,}
that is not alto ^{they think but o' Aiken-drum."}

The ^{al and a stalwart ghaist is he,}
A ^{sits broodin' aboon his e'e-bree,}
^{chanceic to light o' a maiden's e'e}
Is the grim glower o' Aiken-drum.

^{pair slippmalalves! ye hae little wit:}
^{is't na hallowmas now, and the crap out yet?"}
She she silenced them a' wi' a stamp o' her fit:
"Sit yer wa's doon, Aiken-drum."

Roun' a' that side what wark was dune,
By the streamer's gleam or the glance o' the moon:
A word, or a wish—and the brownie cam' sune,
Sae helpfu' was Aiken-drum.

But he slade ay awa' ere the sun was up,
He ne'er could look straught on Macmillan's cup;¹
They watched—but nane saw him his brose ever sup,
Nor a spume sought Aiken-drum.

On Blednoch banks, and on crystal bree,
For mony a day a toiled wight was he:
While the bairns played harmless roun' his knee,
Sae social was Aiken-drum.

¹ A communion cup, belonging to Macmillan, a well-known ousted minister of Balmaghie, and founder of the body lately known as the Reformed Presbyterian, now in union with the Free Church of Scotland—a church in Castle Douglas bearing his name. Mr. Macmillan was minister of Balmaghie for more than two years, and was deposed for his nonconformity to the Established forms of Church Government in December, 1703. He died 1st December, 1753, at Broomhill in Lanarkshire, at the venerable age of 84 years. This cup was treasured by a zealous disciple in the parish of Kirkeowan, and long used as a test by which to ascertain the orthodoxy of suspected persons. If, on taking the precious relic into his hand, the person trembled, or gave other symptoms of agitation, he was denounced as having bowed the knee to Baal, and sacrificed at the altar of idolatry; and it required through his future life no common exertions in the good cause to efface the stigma.

But a new-made wife, fu' o' frippish freaks,
 Fond o' a' things feat for the first five weeks,
 Laid a mouldy pair o' her ain man's breeks
 By the brose o' Aiken-drum.

He learned decide, when they convene,
 Spell was him an' the breeks between;
 That day forth he was nae mair seen,
 And sair missed was Aiken-drum.

He was heard by a herd gaun by the Thrieve,¹
 Crying, "Lang, lang now may I greet and grieve,
 For alas! I ha' gotten baith fee and leave,
 Oh, luckless Aiken-drum!"

Awa', ye wrangling sceptic tribe,
 Wi' your pros and your cons wad ye decide
 'Gainst the 'sponsible voice o' a hale country-side
 On the facts 'bout Aiken-drum?

Though the "Brownie o' Blednoch" lang be gane,
 The mark o' his feet's left on mony a stane;²
 And mony a wife and mony a wean
 Tell the feats o' Aiken-drum.

E'en now, light loons that jibe and sneer
 At spiritual guests and a' sic gear
 At the Glashnoch mill hae swat wi' fear,
 And looked roun' for Aiken-drum.

And guidly folks hae gotten a fright,
 When the moon was set and the stars gied nae light,
 At the roaring linn in the howe o' the night,
 Wi' sughs like Aiken-drum.

farm in the parish of Penninghame, belonging to William Dunbar of Mochrum.

It is a curious fact worth notice, that in the neighbouring parish of Whithorn, west of the Burrow Head within the tide-mark, there is a large flat stone, on the prints of human footsteps of all sizes are plainly discerned; they are usually known by the name of the *Deil's Footsteps*, and have the appearances as if miscellaneous multitude of barefooted people had trodden on a bed of soft clay.