

XI.—*Letter addressed to SIR WALTER SCOTT, Baronet, by Mr JAMES BOWD, on a Popular Superstition formerly used to prevent Cattle from Witchcraft; with Remarks on the Superstition, by JAMES SKENE, Esq. in a Letter to the Secretary.*

*Dalkeith, 10th Feb. 1827.*

SIR WALTER SCOTT,

THE Heart that I presented unto you on Wednesday week came into my possession under the following circumstances:—Fifteen years ago a friend of mine, a Mr James Mutter (now deceased) was making alterations in the house in which I found the heart; having been requested by Mr Mutter to give my opinion about the alterations he intended making—the masons having taken up all the flag-stones, and when looking over the place, found amongst the rubbish of the floor the said heart. I have been making enquiry at all the old people residing near the house, if they knew by whom it had been formerly possessed, but can find nothing particular about it, farther than the house had been built for a Roman Catholic chapel, as the font-stone is still to be seen at the entry of the house. From what I can learn, there had been no alterations made upon the house prior to my finding the heart, so far as any person then knew. The house is situated about one hundred yards below the Town-house of this place, and on the same side of the street;—also learns that, about fifty years back, the house was possessed by people that kept cattle, and probably were the persons by whom the heart had been roasted and then buried under the flag-stones, to keep away any mischance from their cattle. This is all that I can learn about the heart; but Mr Melville Burd, W. S. has the title-deeds of the said property in his possession, who probably may give you some information about the original of the building.

I am, Respected Sir, your, &c.

JAMES BOWD.

DEAR SIR,

I ENCLOSE the Letter respecting the heart stuck full of pins; and learnt farther, in conversation with Mr Bowd, that he had seen an old woman of past eighty, who lived in the neighbourhood of the house where the heart was found; that she recollected, in her youth, a bad disease having got amongst the cattle in that quarter, and particularly among those kept in the house in question; and that she knew that it was then the practice, when such calamities befell their cattle, for the country people to take the heart of a calf, as a representative for the heart of the witch by whose malice their cattle were visited, and to place it on a spit before the fire, sticking in a pin at every turn, until it was completely roasted, by which the witch was subjected to a simultaneous operation of proportional severity in her own bosom; or the roasting was reserved until she had ob-

tained the place assigned her in the infernal regions, of which event the incantation had the effect to make her presently sensible. The heart thus prepared was secretly deposited near the cattle; and no doubt the one in question had been of that description. I recollect having heard of a Scotch practice analogous to this, though not of a very seemly description, by which the goodwife endeavoured to correct the laziness of the farm-servants in committing any nuisance too near the house door. The poker was heated red hot, and with a certain form of words thrust into the offensive object, by which the perpetrator incurred the hazard of being speedily visited with dysentery, and consequent discovery by means of this calamity.—I am, your's faithfully,

JAMES SKENE.

The virtues of a twig of mountain-ash or service tree, in protecting cattle from disease, I have no doubt you know well. The highland herds still practice that observance; they make two cross cuts in one end of the branch, into which they place two cross twigs, which they consecrate by carrying them thrice round a fire lighted on some hillock, on which they roast eggs and cakes, and after having eaten them, proceed with the twigs to the cattle-house, and fix them over the door. Shaw, in his History of Moray, mentions that, when a contagious disease enters among cattle, the fires in the village are extinguished, and that a new fire is excited by rubbing two pieces of wood together, and with it they burn the wood of the juniper bush in the stalls of the cattle, and sprinkle the cattle with water in which juniper has been infused. The fires of the houses are then rekindled from this consecrated fire; and when the epidemic has attacked any of the inhabitants themselves, they pare the nails of their fingers and toes, and, wrapping them up in a rag of the invalid's own clothes, wave it thrice round his head, and then secretly bury it somewhere in the house.

J. S.