

THE WARLOCK'S DEATH-BED.

BY THE LATE WILLIAM MAIN, WITH INTRODUCTION BY ALEXANDER M'LACHLAN.

THE physical features of Scotland, its dreary moors and morasses, its solitary tarns, wild mountains, and hoarse-roaring waterfalls, tended to imbue the minds of an illiterate but highly imaginative people with gloomy thoughts ; and no wonder they peopled the waste with unearthly beings, and believed that they heard the voice of the demon, or Water Kelpie, rising above the roar of the torrent, and saw weird women, witches and warlocks, at their midnight revels on the blasted heath. The Mythology of Scotland has also, nearly in our own day, given birth to a literature of weird beauty. Save for it, a great part of Sir Walter Scott's poetry and prose could not have been written. From it James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, drew the greater part of his inspiration, as his Mountain Bard and Queen's Wake abundantly testify. His Bonny Kilmeny alone is sufficient to make the Scotch dialect classical ; as a picture of female purity and loveliness it is unsurpassed. It is also to that Mythology that we are indebted for Burns' wondrous tale of Tam O'Shanter ; and we might also include Shakspeare's tragedy of Macbeth.

Down almost to our own day every green knoll, every conical hill, and almost every strath and glen in Scotland, were peopled with fairies that at the "hour o' gloaming grey" came forth in the wake of their queen, mounted on cream-coloured horses that glittered with dewdrops, and all kept pace to the music of silver bells which dangled from their manes. We once said to a Scotch peasant who firmly believed in fairies, and who always kept a sharp lookout for them in suspicious places—"Now, Duncan, tell us tru-

ly, were you really ever in company with the fairies ?" "That I was," said he, "and no farther gane than the last time I came ower the Mearns Moor by munelicht. I cam' by accident on a whole flock o' them. There they were ! a' sittin' roun' a spring amang the fox-bells, drinkin' and singin' like mavis. I cam' on them a' at ance ; I took them fairly by surprise ; but they ne'er loot on, but pretended that they were expectin' me ; and, losh man ! how the wee chiels in their green coats crackit their thouns, and danc'd roun' about me, and sang and shouted

Hurrah ! hurrah !
Come awa'
Laddy braw,
Join us a'
Ha, ha !
Dunkie man !"

But steam, wheels and electricity, have fairly frightened witches, warlocks, brownies, and fairies, from the land of the hill and the heather ; in fact they have passed out of the actual prose world into the poetic region, and are now invested with a romantic interest which they were far from having in what some sentimental people call "the good old days," when their power for evil was believed in by high and low, and they were feared and dreaded accordingly. To show the power which the belief in witchcraft exercised over the minds of the Scottish peasantry, and the power which they ascribed to witches at no very remote period, we quote the following lines from Allan Ramsay's Gentle Shepherd, where Bauldy goes to consult old Mause, the supposed witch :

"Mause.—What fook say of me, Bauldy, let me hear,

Keep naething up, ye naething hae to fear.