

ART. VI.—*A Seventeenth Century Charm.* By C. A. PARKER, M.D., F.R.C.S.E.

Read at Carlisle, April 27th, 1911.

THIS curious document was brought to me by my friend Mr. G. L. McKelvie, who had found it among the title-deeds of an Eskdale statesman, Mr. Edward Sharp of Spout House. The earliest deed among which it was found is dated 1705. Mr. Sharp does not know anything about the paper. It is written upon coarse paper 15½ inches wide by 12 inches deep, the lower corners of which have been torn off intentionally.

This letter by the commandement of Jesus Christ was found under a great stone read and large. It was at the foote of a crosse about sixe leagues from the citty Isundiagndiagna in the villig called Noumbue upon which was seen in a morning written and ingraven theis words as followeth : Blessed be he that turne[s] it and the people that saw the same and endeavoured to turne the stone, there labour was in vaine. Theire the people prayed and earnestly desired God that they might understand what the meaning of that writtinge was. Then there came a child betwixt sixe and seven yeares old which turned the stone himselfe without any worldly help to the great admiration of all the behoulders of the same. Being turned up there was found under it a letter written with golden letters and by the hand of Jesus Christ sent by the Angell Gabriall Ano Domini 1639 which commandement was as followeth :

You shall say one to another ~~that~~ they which worke one the Sabbath Day shall be tormented by me Jesus Christ. I doe commande you to keep the day holy without labouring. You shall not wash nor combe your head on that day but earnestly desiringe of God to forgive you all your sines. My commandement is you shall steadfastly beleive that this is written with mine owne hand and you shall goe to the Church and take your children with family and servant with you to heare and observe my words and you shall leave workinge of Saturday at Six of

the clock in the evninge and soe continiue till Monday in the morninge. I will that you fast five Frideyes in the yeare in remembrance of the wounds received for you and not to take gold nor silver unjustly neither scorne my commandements . you shall love one another verily alsoe you shall cause those that are unbaptized to come to the Church and receive it and in soe doinge I will blesse you with manyfold gifts. Your cattell goods and lands shall beare and plenish fruitfully to bringe forth abundantly of all sorts of fruits and all blesseings shall come upon you but they that doe contrary shall be cursed and not blessed. Their cattell goods and lands shall be cursed and not blessed. I will send lightnings and thunder and want of all manner of good things, hardnes will I send upon them and their laboure till I have them excommunicated and especkaly those that beare false witnes against this writing and believes not that this is written with mine owne hand and spoken with mine owne mouth, and those that have wherewith to give alms in my name and will not shall be cursed of me in the confuision of hell ; and also if any write a c[o]ppy of this letter without teaching of others shall be cursed of me contrarley and Whoso writeth a cobby of this letter without teaching and doth cause it to be read and published he shall be blessed of me. If he have sinned as oft as There is stares one the skie his sins shall be forgiven him if he be hartily sory for the same ; and if you doe against my commandments I will send black wormes as bige [as] pasnops which shall destroy your cattell goods and whatsoever you have. Moreover if any write a copley of this letter and keepe it one him no foule spirit shall vex him, no lightnings, thunders, plague, nor pestilence shall hurt him ; and also if any woman be big with child, if she have a cobby of this letter shall safely be delivered of her burden, and you shall heare no more till the day of J[u]dgment and all good livers shall be about the house where a copley of this writing shall be found.

In the name of God and Christ. Amen
 Lord have mercy upon us.

This is evidently a charm against bad luck and various other evils, written apparently in the later days of Charles I.,* by someone who was sufficiently educated to write

* A period of great unrest, when charms might be desired. In 1639 there was no Parliament, and much disturbance in the north. Charles led an army over the Border to suppress the Covenanters, but was obliged to sign the treaty of Berwick.

freely in a debased hand and was a good churchman. It is a sample of many charms locally written, for gratitude or gain, a piece of innocent white witchcraft. The writer may have been looked upon as the Wiseman or Medicine Man of the place, who availed himself of his knowledge of local relic and legend to ornament his tale. There is nothing in it foreign to the district. The practice of "charming" endured to modern times. (See Mr. H. S. Cowper's *Hawkshead, its History, etc.*, chapter vi.) Mr. Collingwood knew an old woman who cured by charms; she was by descent a Vickers of Borrowdale, connected with the family settled for centuries in Eskdale. Mrs. Porter of Gatehouse cured jaundice by charm, and two persons now living in Eskdale state they were charmed by her. She died in 1886.*

The extraordinary proper names Isundiag(u)ndiagna and Noubue suggest no place, and are obviously invented to throw a mysterious glamour over all, a common device in spells and folklore. The story of the child who turns the stone also suggests folklore, the Merlin legend, and Arthur drawing the sword fixed in the rock.

The allusion to parsnips is in keeping with the date, for the parsnip is a very ancient article of diet and was much more cultivated then than now. "Good live^{is}" I take to be the opposite to "evil livers" an injunction to lead good and healthy lives.

* The following from the *Daily Mail* of October 17th, 1911, shows that this kind of superstition is not dead yet :—

" SNOWBALL PRAYER.

" This morning's post brought a postcard addressed to my wife setting out a prayer (which I will not copy), and adding : ' This prayer was sent to me, and I send it to you. It is an ancient prayer. Copy it, and what happens ? It is said in Jerusalem that those who will receive this prayer and will not copy it will meet with misfortune. But those who will receive the prayer and will copy it nine times, beginning with the day they receive it, and will send a copy each day to a friend, will on the ninth day receive some great blessing or joy and be delivered from calamities.

' Make a wish while writing this. Keep the prayer ; it is your good luck, and do not break the chain. Copy this as I have copied it (not to be signed).'

The most interesting point of all to myself is contained in the first lines. As our Editor points out, we have a red, written stone, at the foot of a cross, spoken of. Where did the writer get his idea from? Assuming that the paper was written in Eskdale, the nearest red stone is at Gosforth, six miles away. The original letter was "written and ingraven" on the undersurface of the stone. The fourfold repetition of "written with mine owne hand" harks back to the tables of the law and "the finger of God." At Gosforth there were three conspicuous crosses, one of which was broken prior to 1654, and pieces lay about, for I myself dug up a red and large stone at the foot of the cross, which if not "written" was carved on the under surface with figures which would at once attract attention and tell a story. Again, up to 1789, a large red stone lay at the foot of Gosforth cross, a grave-slab with a sword carved upon it. Here again is a "written" stone, and here I think the writer got his idea.

In conclusion, I trust that the blessing which is to come upon him who causeth it to be read and published may embrace both the Editor and myself.
