3350 MAJOR WEIR'S COACH.
11290 words original text.
A LEGEND OF EDINBURGH.[7]

[Footnote 7: A legend, similar to that here given, was current in Glasgow a number of years ago, and for ages before. The hero's name was Bob Dragon, whose income, when alive, was said to have been one guinea a minute. His coachman and horses were said, as those of the major, to want the heads. The most curious trait of the Glasgow goblin horses, was that they went down to the river to drink, although they had no heads. The superstitions of most European countries have a similar origin: the Germans have their spectre huntsman; the coaches and horses of Major Weir and Bob Dragon are of the same character. The antiquary will find the trial of Major Weir in Pitcairn's "Criminal Trials;" and the lover of such stories may consult "Satan's Invisible World Discovered."--ED.]

The time of our story was September, early in the seventies of the last century, or it might be the end of the sixties--it matters not much as to the year--but it was in the month of September, when parties and politics had set the freemen and burgesses of the royal burghs by the ears--when feasting and caballing formed almost their whole employment. The exaltation of themselves or party friends to the civic honours engrossed their whole attention, and neither money nor time was grudgingly bestowed to obtain their objects. The embellishment and improvement of the city of Edinburgh were keenly urged and carried on by one party, at the head of which was Provost Drummond. He was keenly opposed by another, which, though fewer in number, and not so well organized, was not to be despised; for it only wanted a leader of nerve and tact to stop or utterly undo all that had been done, and keep the city, as it had been for more than a century, in a position of stately decay. The wild project of building a bridge over the North Loch was keenly contested; and ruin and bankruptcy were foretold to the good town, if the provost and his party were not put out of the council before it was begun to be carried into execution.
The heavens were illuminated by a glorious harvest moon, far in her southings; the High Street was deep in shade, like a long dark avenue; the dim oil lamps, perched high upon their wooden posts, few and far between, gleamed in the darkness like glow-worms--as two portly figures were seen in earnest discourse, walking, not with steady step, up the High Street.
"By my troth, deacon!" said one of them, "I fear Luckie Bell has had too much of our company this night. I had no idea it was so late. There is the eighth chime of St. Giles': what hour will strike?"
"Deil may care for me, Treasurer Kerr!" hiccuped the deacon.
"Preserve me, deacon!" replied the treasurer, "it has struck twelve! What shall I say to the wife? It's to-morrow, deacon! it's to-morrow!"
"Whisht, man, whisht! and no speak with such a melancholy voice," said the other. "Are you afraid of Kate? What have we to do with to-morrow? It is a day we shall never see, were we to live as long as Methusalem; for, auld as he was, he never saw 'to-morrow.' It's always to come, with its cares or joy." And the deacon stood and laughed aloud at his conceit. "Let to-morrow care for itself, Tom, say I. What can Kate say to you? What the deil need you care? Have we not had a happy evening? Have we not been well employed?" And they again moved on towards the Castlehill, where the deacon resided.
Thomas Kerr was treasurer of the incorporation, and hoped at this election to succeed his present companion, whose influence in the incorporation was great, and to secure which he was, for the time, his humble servant, and assiduous in his attentions to him--so much so, that, although his own domicile was in St. Mary's Wynd, at the other extremity of the High Street, his ambition had overcome his fears of his better half, and, still ascending the long street, he resolved to accompany the deacon home; not, however, without some strong misgivings as to what he might encounter at his return. Both were in that happy state of excitement when cares and fears press lightly on the human mind; but the deacon, who had presided at the meeting, and spoken a good deal, was much more overcome than his treasurer; and the liquor had made him loquacious.
"Tom, man," again said the deacon, "you walk by my side as douce as if you were afraid to meet Major Weir in his coach on your way down the wynd to Kate. Be cheerful man, as I am. Tell her she will be deaconess in a fortnight, and that will quiet her clatter, or I know not what will please her; they are all fond of honours. We have done good work this night--secured two votes against Drummond; other three would graze him. Pluck up your spirit, Tom, and be active; if we fail, the whole town will be turned upside down--confound him, and his wild projects, of what he calls

improvements! The deil be in me, if I can help thinking--and it sticks in my gizzard yet--that he was at the bottom of the pulling down of my outside stair, by these drunken fellows of masons; the more by token that, when, after much trouble, I discovered them, and had them all safe in the guardhouse, he took a small bail, and only fined them two shillings a-piece, when it caused me an expense of ten good pounds to repair the mischief they had done; and, more than that, I was forced to erect it inside the walls; for they would not allow me to put it as it was, or grant me a Dean of Guild warrant on any other terms. They said it cumbered the foot-pavement, although, as you know, it had stood for fifty years. From that day to this I have been his firm opponent in and out of the council. Tom, are ye asleep? Where are your eyes? What high new wall is this? See, see, man!"

"This beats all he has done yet!" said the treasurer; "a high white wall across the High Street, and neither slap nor style that I can see! Wonderful, wonderful! A strange man that provost!"

"He has done it to vex me, since I came down to Luckie Bell's," replied the deacon. "It was not there in the early part of the evening. He must have had a hundred masons at it. But I'll make him repent this frolic to-morrow in the council, or my name is not Deacon Dickson!"

"What can he mean by it, deacon?" rejoined the other. "I see no purpose it can serve, for my part."

"But it does serve a purpose," hiccuped the deacon; "It will prevent me from getting home. It is done through malice against me, for the efforts I am making to get him and his party out of the council."

During the latter part of this discourse, they had walked, or rather staggered, from side to side of the street. Between the pillars that, before the great fires in Edinburgh, formed the base of the high tenement standing there, and St. Giles' Church, being the entrance into the Parliament Square, and between St. Giles' and the Exchange buildings, the full moon threw a stream of light, filling both the openings, and leaving all above and below involved in deep shade. It was the moon's rays thus thrown upon the ground, and reaching up to the second windows of the houses, that formed the wall which the two officials observed.

"Deil tak me," ejaculated the deacon, "but this is a fine trick to play upon the deacon of an incorporation in his own town! Were it not for exposing myself at this untimeous hour, I would raise the town, and pull it down at the head of the people. Faith, Tom, I will do it!" And he was on the point of shouting aloud at the pitch of his voice, when the more prudent treasurer put his hand upon the mouth of the enraged deacon.

"For mercy's sake, be quiet!" said he. "What are you going to be about? Is this a time of night for a member of council to make a riot, and expose himself in the High Street? To-morrow will be time enough to pull it down by force, if you cannot get a vote of the council to authorise it. No doubt it is a round-about way and a sair climb; but just, like a wise and prudent man, as you always are, put up with it for one night, and come along down the Fishmarket Close, up the Cowgate, and climb the West Bow, to the deaconess, who, I have no doubt, is weary waiting on you."

"Faith, Tom, I am in part persuaded you advise well for once," replied the deacon; "so I will act upon it, although I am your deacon, and all advice ought to come from me."

And away they trudged. Both were corpulent men; but the deacon, having been several times in the council, was by much the heavier of the two. Down they went by the Fishmarket Close, and up the Cowgate, the deacon, sulky and silent, meditating all the way vengeance against the provost; but, in ascending the steep and winding Bow, his patience entirely left him; he stopped, more than once, to wipe the perspiration from his brow, recover his breath, and mutter curses on the head of the official. At length, they reached the deacon's home, where his patient spouse waited his arrival. Without uttering a word, he threw himself upon a chair, placing his hat and wig upon a table. It was some minutes before he recovered his breath sufficiently to answer the questions of his anxious wife, or give vent to the anger that was consuming him. At length, to the fifty-times put questions of--

"Deacon, what has vexed you so sorely? what has happened to keep you so late?" he broke forth--

"What vexes me? what has kept me so late? You may, with good reason, inquire that, woman. Our pretty provost is the sole cause. You may be thankful that you have seen my face this night."

And he commenced and gave an exaggerated account of the immense wall that the provost had caused to be built, from the Crames to the Royal Exchange, reaching as high as the third story of the houses; and the great length of time he had been detained in examining it, to discover a way to get over or through it--all which the simple deaconess believed, and heartily joined her husband in abusing the provost.

"Had a wall been built across the Castlehill," she said, "when the highlandmen were in the town, and the cannon balls flying down the street, I could have known the use of it; but to build a wall between the Crames and the Royal Exchange, to keep the Lawnmarket and Castlehill people from kirk and market--surely the man's mad!"
The treasurer had been for some time gone ere the worthy couple retired to rest, big with the events that were to be transacted on the morrow, for the downfall of the innovating provost. The morning was still grey, the sun was not above the horizon, when the deaconess, as was her wont, arose to begin her household duties; but, anxious to communicate the strange conduct of the provost, in raising the wall of partition in the city, she seized her water stoups, and hurried to the public well at the Bowhead, to replenish them, and ease her overcharged mind of the mighty circumstance. Early as the hour was, many of the wives of the good citizens were already there, seated on their water stoups, and awaiting their turn to be supplied--their shrill voices mixing with those of the more sonorous tones of the highland water-carriers, and rising in violent contention on the stillness of the morning, like the confusion of Babel.
The sensation caused by the relation of the deaconess of her husband's adventure of the preceding evening, was nothing impaired by the story being related at second-hand. Arms were raised in astonishment as she proceeded with her marvellous tale of the high wall built in so short a space by the provost. After some time spent in fruitless debate, it was agreed that they should go down in a body and examine this bold encroachment upon the citizens--and away they went, with the indignant deaconess at their head.
For some hundred feet down the Lawnmarket, the buildings of the jail and Luckenbooths hid that part of the street from the phalanx of Amazons; but, intent to reconnoitre where the wall of offence was said to stand, they reached the Luckenbooths, and a shout of laughter and derision burst from the band. The deaconess stood petrified, the image of shame and anger. No wall was there--everything stood as it had done for years!
"Lucky Dickson," cried one, "ye hae gien us a gowk's errand. I trow the deacon has been fu' yestreen. Where is the fearfu wa' ye spak o', that he neither could get through nor owre? Ha! ha! ha!"
"Did ye really believe what he told you, Mrs. Dickson?" screamed another. "It was a silly excuse for being owre late with his cronies. He surely thinks you a silly woman to believe such tales. Were my husband to serve me so, I would let him hear of it on the deafest side of his head."
"You need not doubt but that he shall hear of it," responded the deaconess; "and that before long. But, dear me, there must have been some witchcraft played off upon him and the treasurer last night; for, as true as death, they baith said they saw it with their een. There's been glamour in it. I fear Major Weir is playing more tricks in the town than riding his coach. There was no cause to tell me a lie as an excuse, for I am always happy to see him come hame safe at ony hour."
By this time they had returned to the well, where they resumed their water vessels and hurried home, some to report the strange adventure the deacon had encountered the night before, and the deaconess to tell her better half of the delusion he had been under. Before breakfast time, the story was in every one's mouth, from the Castle to the Abbey-gate, and as far as the town extended. On a clear moonlight night, for many years afterwards, Deacon Dickson's dike was pointed out by the inhabitants; and at jovial parties we have heard it said--"Sit still a little longer; we are all sober enough to get over Deacon Dickson's wall."
The treasurer, who was not so muddled by the effect of the evening's entertainment as the deacon, yet still impressed by the idea of the wall, proceeded homewards by the same route whereby he had reached the deacon's, but now much refreshed by the walk, and night, or rather morning air--for it was nearly one o'clock. As he approached the Bow-foot Well, the sobbing of a female broke the stillness of the night: he paused for a few minutes, and, looking towards the spot from whence the sound came, urged by humanity, he drew more near, till he perceived an aged female almost concealed by the dark shade of the well, against which she leaned to support herself. As soon as he saw her distinctly, with an emotion of grief and surprise he exclaimed--
"Mrs. Horner!--what has happened? Why are you here at this untimeous hour?--or what is the cause of your grief?"
"Thomas Kerr," replied she, "I am a poor unfortunate woman, whom God alone can help. Pass on, and leave me to my misery." And she buried her face in her hands, while the large drops of anguish welled through her withered fingers.
"I cannot leave you here in such a state," said he again. "Come home, my good woman, and I shall accompany you."
"I have no home," was her sad reply. "Alas! I have no home but the grave. I am a poor, silly, undone woman, in my old age. Comfortable, and even rich as I was, I am now destitute. I have

neither house nor hall to cover my grey hairs. Oh, if I were only dead and buried out of this sinful world, to hide the shame of my own child. An hour is scarce passed since I thought my heart would burst in my bosom before I would be enabled to reach the Greyfriars' church-yard, to lay my head upon Willie Horner's grave, and the graves of my innocent babes that sleep in peace by his side. I feared my strength would fail; for all I wish is to die there. I did reach the object of my wish, and laid myself upon the cold turf, and prayed for death to join as he had separated us; but my heart refused to break, and tears that were denied me before, began to stream from my eyes. The fear of unearthly sights came strong upon me, stronger even than my grief. Strange moanings and sounds came on the faint night wind, from Bloody Mackenzie's tomb, and the bright moonlight made the tombstones look like unearthly things. I rose and fled. I will tarry here, and die in sight of the gallows stone; for it was here my only brother fell, killed by a shot from cruel Porteous' gun; and on the fatal tree which that stone is meant to support, my grandfather cheerfully gave his testimony for the covenanted rights of a persecuted kirk. Leave me, Thomas Kerr--leave me to my destiny. I can die here with pleasure; and it is time I were dead. To whom can a mother look for comfort or pity, when her own son has turned her out upon a cold world? I am as Rachel mourning for her children. I will not be comforted." And the mourner wrapped her mantle round her head with the energy of despair, and, bending it upon the well, burst anew into an agony of sobs and tears.

The treasurer felt himself in an awkward situation. He paused, and began to revolve in his mind what was best to be done at the moment--whether to obey the widow or the dictates of humanity. His better feeling prompted him to stay and do all in his power for the mourner, whom he had known in happier times; but his caution and avarice, backed by the dread of his spouse, urged him, with a force he felt every moment less able to resist, to leave her and hurry home. As he stood irresolute, the voice of the stern monitor sounded in the auricles of his heart like the knell of doom, and roused into fearful energy feelings he had long treated lightly, or striven to suppress when they rose upon him with greater force. He ran like a guilty criminal from the spot. The wailings of the crushed and pitiable object he had left, had given them a force he had never before known, and he urged his way down the Cowgate head as if he wished to fly from himself--the traces of the evening's enjoyments having fled, and their place being supplied by the pangs of an awakened conscience. There was, indeed, too much cause for his agitation, often hinted at by his acquaintances, but in its full extent only known in his own family--a striking similarity between the situation of his own mother and that of Widow Horner. The cases of the two aged individuals agreed in all points, save that he had not yet turned her out of doors; and conscience told him that even that result had been prevented, more by the patient endurance of his worthy parent herself, than any kindly feeling on the part of her son.

The father of the treasurer, and the husband of Widow Horner, had both been industrious, and, for their rank in life, wealthy burgesses of the city. At their death, they had left their widows with an only child to succeed them and be a comfort to their mothers, who had struggled hard to retain and add to the wealth, until their sons were of age to succeed and manage it for themselves. Their sole and rich reward, as they anticipated, would be the pleasure of witnessing the prosperity of their sons. That they would be ungrateful, was an idea so repugnant to their maternal feelings, that, for a moment, it was never harboured in their bosoms. A cruel reality was fated to falsify their anticipations.

The treasurer had, before he was twenty-five years of age, married a female, whom his fond mother had thought unworthy of her son; and to prevent the marriage she had certainly done all that lay in her power. Her endeavours and remonstrances had only served to hasten the event she wished so much to retard and hinder from taking place; the consequence was, that the hated alliance was made several weeks before she was made aware of it, by the kindness of a gossiping neighbour or two. Much as she felt, and sore as her heart was wrung, she, like a prudent woman, shed her tears of bitter anguish at the want of filial regard in her son, in secret. She at once resolved to pardon this act of ingratitude, and, for her son's sake, to receive her unwelcome daughter-in-law with all the kindness she could assume on the trying occasion. Not so her daughter-in-law, who was of an overbearing, subtile, and vindictive turn of mind. The mother of her husband had wounded her pride; she resolved never to forget or forgive; and, before she had crossed her threshold, a deep revenge was vowed against her, as soon as it was in her power to execute it. The first meeting was embarrassing on both sides; each had feelings to contend against and disguise; yet it passed off well to outward appearance--the widow from love to her son, striving to love his wife--the latter, again, with feigned smiles and meekness, affecting to gain her mother-in-law's esteem; and so well did she act her part, that, before many days after their first interview had passed, Thomas was requested to bring his wife into the house, to reside in the

family, and to save the expense of a separate establishment. From that hour the house of Widow Kerr began to cease to be her own, for the first few months almost imperceptibly. Thomas, although a spoiled child, was not naturally of an unfeeling disposition, but selfish and capricious from over-indulgence. Amidst all his faults, there was still a love and esteem of his mother, which his wife, seeing it would be dangerous openly to attack it, had resolved to undermine, and therefore laid her wicked schemes accordingly. In the presence of her husband, she was, for a time, all smiles and affability; but, in his absence, she said and did a thousand little nameless things, to tease and irritate the good old dame. This produced complaints to her son, who, when he spoke to his wife of them, was only answered by her tears and lamentations, for the misery she suffered in being the object of his mother's dislike. To himself she referred, if she did not do all in her power to please his mother. These scenes had become of almost daily occurrence, and were so artfully managed, that the mother had the appearance of being in the fault. Gradually, the son's affection became deadened towards his parent; she had ceased to complain, and now suffered in silence. For her there was no redress--for, in a fit of fondness, she had made over to her son all she possessed in the world. She was thus in his power; yet her heart revolted at exposing his cruelty. The revenge of the wife was not complete, even after the spirit of the victim was completely crushed, and she had ceased to complain. Often the malignant woman would affect lowness of spirits, and even tears, refusing to tell the cause of her grief until urged by endearments, and obtaining an assurance that he would not regard her folly in yielding to her feelings; but she could not help it--were it not for her love to him, she knew not in what she had ever offended his mother, save in preferring him to every other lover who had sought her hand. Thus, partly by artifice, but more by her imperious turn of mind, which she had for years ceased to conceal, the treasurer was completely subdued to her dictation; and, by a just retribution, he was punished for his want of filial affection, for he was as much the sufferer from her temper as his mother was the victim of her malice. With a crushed heart, the old woman ate her morsel in the kitchen, moistened by her tears. Even her grandchildren were taught to insult and wound her feelings. So short-sighted is human nature, the parents did not perceive that by this proceeding they were laying rods in pickle for themselves, which, in due time, would be brought in use, when the recollection of their own conduct would give tenfold poignancy to every blow.

On the occasion to which we have alluded, the situation and wailings of Widow Horner still rung in the ears of the treasurer. All his acts of unkindness to his parent passed before him like a hideous phantasmagoria as he hurried down the Cowgate. He even became afraid of himself, as scene after scene arose to his awakened conscience--all the misery and indignities that had been heaped upon his parent by his termagant wife, he himself either looking on with indifference, or supporting his spouse in her cruelty. Goaded by remorse, he still hurried on. The celerity of his movements seemed to relieve him. He had formed no fixed resolution as to how he was to act upon his arrival at home. A dreamy idea floated in his tortured mind that he had some fearful act to perform to ease it, and do justice to his parent; yet, as often as he came to the resolution to dare every consequence, his courage would again quail at the thought of encountering one who had, in all contentions, ever been the victor, and riveted her chains the more closely around him on every attempt he had made to break them. In this pitiable state, he had got as far towards home as the foot of the College Wynd, when the sound of a carriage approaching rapidly from the east roused him and put all other thoughts to flight. With a start of horror and alarm, he groaned--"The Lord have mercy upon me! The Major's coach! If I see it, my days are numbered." And, with an effort resembling the energy of despair, he rushed into a stair foot, and, placing both his hands upon his face to shut out from his sight the fearful object, supported himself by leaning upon the wall. As the sound increased, so did the treasurer's fears; but what words can express his agony when it drew up at the foot of the very stair in which he stood, and a sepulchral voice issued from it--

"Is he here?"

"Just come," was the reply in a similar tone.

"Then all's right."

"O God! have mercy on my sinful soul!" screamed the treasurer, as he sank senseless out of the foot of the stair upon the street.

How long he remained in this state, or what passed in the interval, he could give no account. When he awoke to consciousness, he found himself seated in a carriage jolting along at a great speed, supported on each side by what appeared to him headless trunks; for the bright moonlight shone in at the carriage window, and exhibited two heads detached from their bodies dangling from the top. The glance was momentary. Uttering a deep groan, he shut his eyes to avoid the fearful sight. He would have spoken; but his palsied tongue refused to move, even to implore for

mercy. Wringing his hands in despair, he would have sunk to the bottom of the coach upon his knees, but was restrained by the two figures. He felt their grasp upon his arms, firm as one of his own vices. The same fearful voice he had first heard fell again on his ear--"Sit still. Utter no cry. Make a clean breast, as you hope for mercy at the major's tribunal. He knows you well; but wishes to test your truth. Proceed!"

With a memory that called up every deed he had ever done, and sunk to nothingness any of the actions he had at one time thought good, he seemed as if he now stood before his Creator. All his days on earth appeared to have been one long black scene of sin and neglected duties. His head sunk upon his breast, and the tears of repentance moistened his bosom. When he had finished his minute confession, a pause ensued of a few minutes. The moon, now far in the west, was sinking behind a dense mass of clouds. The wind began to blow fitfully, with a melancholy sound, along the few objects that interrupted its way, and around the fearful conveyance in which he sat, more dead than alive. The measured tramp of the horses, and rattling of the carriage, fell on his ear like the knell of death. He felt a load at his heart, as if the blood refused to leave it and perform its functions. Human nature could not have sustained itself under such circumstances much longer. The carriage stopped; the door opened with violence; his breathing became like a quick succession of sobs; his ears whizzed, almost producing deafness. Still he was fearfully awake to every sensation; a painful vitality seemed to endow every nerve with tenfold its wonted activity; all were in action at the moment; his whole frame tingled; and the muscles seemed to quiver on his bones. The same hollow voice broke the silence.

"Thomas Kerr, your sincerity and contrition has delivered you from my power this once. Beware of a relapse. Go, do the duty of a son to your worthy parent. You have been a worse man than ever I was on earth. I have my parent's blessing with me in the midst of my sufferings; and there is a soothing in it which the wretched can alone feel."

Quick as thought he was lifted from the coach and seated upon the ground. With the speed of a whirlwind, as it appeared to him, the carriage disappeared, and the sound died away. For some time he sat bewildered, as if he had fallen from the clouds. Gradually he began to breathe more freely, and felt as if a fearful night-mare had just passed away. Slowly the events of the night rose in regular succession. The forlorn and desolate widow; the hideous spectres in the coach, that, without heads, spake and moved with such energy--the whole now passed before him so vividly that he shuddered. At first he hoped all had been a fearful dream; but the cold, damp ground on which he sat banished the fond idea. He felt, in all its force, that he was now wide awake, as he groped with his hands and touched the damp grass beneath him. All around was enveloped in impenetrable darkness. Not one star shone in the murky sky. How much of the night had passed, or where he at present was, he had no means of ascertaining. The first use he made of his restored faculties was to rise upon his knees, and pour out his soul to God, imploring pardon and protection in this hour of suffering. He rose with a heart much lightened, and felt his energies restored. Stumbling onwards, he proceeded, he knew not whither, until, bruised by falls and faint from exhaustion, he again seated himself upon a stone, to wait patiently the approach of dawn. Thus, melancholy and pensive, he sat, eager to catch the faintest sound; but all was silent as the grave, save the faint rustling of the long grass, waving around him in the night breeze, that was chilling his vitals, as it, in fitful gusts, swept past him. The hope of surviving the night had almost forsaken him, when the distant tramp of a horse fell on his longing ears. Then the cheerful sound of a popular air, whistled to cheer the darkness, gladdened his heart. In an ecstasy of pleasure, he sprung to his feet. The rolling of wheels over the rugged road, was soon added to the cheering sounds. With caution he approached them over hedge and ditch, until, dark as it was, he could discern the object of his search almost before him--a carrier's cart, with the driver seated upon the top, whistling and cracking his whip to the time.

"Stop friend, for mercy's sake, and take me up beside you."

"Na, na," replied the carrier; "I will do no such foolish action. Hap, Bassie! hap!" And, smacking his whip, the horse increased its speed. "Come not near my cart, or I will make Caesar tear you in pieces. Look to him, Caesar!" And the snarling of a dog gave fearful warning to the poor treasurer to keep at a distance; but, rendered desperate by his situation, he continued to follow, calling out--

"Stop, if you are a Christian; for mercy's sake, stop and hear me. I am a poor lost creature, sick and unable to harm, but rich enough to reward you, if you will save my life. I am no robber, but a decent burgess and freeman of Edinburgh; and where I am at present I cannot tell."

"Woo, Bassie! woo!" responded the carrier. "Silence, Caesar! Preserve us from all evil! Amen! Sure you cannot be Thomas Kerr, whose shop is in Saint Mary's Wynd?"

"The very same; but who are you that know my voice?"

"Who should I be," rejoined he, "but Watty Clinkscales, the North-Berwick carrier, on my way to the town; for you may know well enough that Wednesday morning is my time to be in Edinburgh; but come up beside me, man, and do not stand longer there. If you have lost yourself, as you say, I will with pleasure give you a ride home this dark morning; but tell me how, in all the world, came you to be standing at the Figgate Whins, instead of being in your warm bed? I am thinking, friend Kerr, you have been at a corporation supper last night."
While the carrier was speaking, the treasurer mounted the cart, and took his seat beside him. They moved slowly on. To all the questions of the carrier, evasive answers were returned; the treasurer felt no desire to be communicative. As they reached the Watergate, the first rays of morning shone upon Arthur's Seat and the Calton Hill. Before they entered, the treasurer dismounted, having first rewarded his conveyer to the town, and proceeded to his home by the south back of the Canongate, faint and unwell. When he reached his own door, he was nearly exhausted. It was opened to him by his anxious mother, who had watched for him through the whole night. Alarmed by his haggard and sickly appearance, timidly she inquired what had happened to him, to cause such an alteration in his looks in so short a time. The tears started into his eyes as he looked at her venerable form, degraded by her attire. He took her hand in both his, and, pressing it to his lips, faltered out--
"Oh, my mother! can you pardon your undutiful son? Only say you will forgive me."
"Tammy, my bairn," she replied, "what have I to pardon? Is not all my pleasure in life to see you happy? What signifies what becomes of me, the few years I have to be on earth? But you are ill, my son--you are very ill!"
"I am indeed very unwell, both in body and mind," said he. "Say you pardon me, for the manner in which I have allowed you to be treated since my marriage; and give me your blessing, lest I die without hearing you pronounce it."
"Bless you, my Thomas, and all that is yours, my son! with my blessing, and the blessing of God, which is above all riches! But go to your bed, my bairn, and do not let me make dispeace in the family."
At this moment his spouse opened the door of the bedroom, and began, in her usual manner, to rate and abuse him for keeping untimeous hours. Still holding his mother's hands in his, he commanded her, in a voice he had never before assumed to her, to be silent. She looked at him in amazement, as if she had doubted the reality of his presence; and was on the point of becoming more violent, when his fierce glance, immediately followed by the sunken, sickly look which one night of suffering had given him, alarmed her for his safety, and she desisted, anxiously assisting his mother to undress and put him to bed.
He soon fell into a troubled sleep, from which he awoke in the afternoon, unrefreshed and feverish. His wife was seated by his bed when he awoke. Turning his languid eye towards her, he inquired for his mother. A scene of angry altercation would have ensued; but he was too ill to reply to the irritating language and reproaches of his spouse. The anger increased his fever, and delirium came on towards the evening. A physician was sent for, who at once pronounced his life to be in extreme danger; and, indeed, for many days it was despaired of.
The horrors of that night were the theme of his discourse, while the fever raged in his brain. The smallest noise, even the opening of a door, made him shriek and struggle to escape from those who watched him. His efforts were accompanied by cries for mercy from Major Weir; his bed was the coach, and his wife and mother the headless phantoms. Clinkscales had told the manner and where he had found him, on the morning he was taken ill. The sensation this excited through the city became extreme. Deacon Dickson told the hour in which he left his house, and the language of the sufferer filled up the space until he was met by the carrier. The nocturnal apparition of the major's carriage had, for many years, been a nursery tale of Edinburgh. Many firmly believed in its reality. There were not awanting several who affirmed they had seen it; and scarce an inhabitant of the Cowgate or St. Mary's Wynd, but thought they had heard it often before the present occurrence.
That the treasurer had by some means been transported to the Figgate Whins in the major's coach, a great many firmly believed; for two of the incorporation on the same night had been alarmed by a coach driving furiously down the Cowgate; but they could not describe its appearance, as they had hid themselves until it passed, fearful of seeing the spectre carriage and its unearthly attendants. It was at least certain that, of late, many had been aroused out of their sleep by the noise of a carriage; and, the report gaining ground, the terror of the citizens became so great that few chose to be upon any of the streets after twelve at night, unless urged by extreme necessity. This state of foolish alarm, as the magistrates called it, could not be allowed to continue within their jurisdiction; and they resolved to investigate the whole affair. Several were

examined privately; but the treasurer was too ill to be spoken to, even by his friend the deacon. There was a strange harmony in the statements of several who had really distinctly heard the sounds of horses' feet, and the rumbling of a carriage, and the ravings of the unfortunate treasurer. The authorities were completely at a stand how to proceed. Several shook their heads and looked grave; others proposed to request the ministers of the city to watch the major's carriage, and pray it out of the city. But the provost's committee sent for the captain of the train-bands, and consulted with him: he agreed to have twelve of the band and six of the town-guard in readiness by twelve at night, to waylay the cause of annoyance, should it make its appearance, and unravel the mystery. That there was some unlawful purpose connected with it, several of the council had little doubt. These meetings were private, and the proceedings are not on record to guide us. It was with considerable difficulty the captain could get the number of his band required for the duty; they chose rather to pay the fine, believing it to be a real affair of diablerie; for their earliest recollections were associated with the truth of the major's night airings. For several nights the watch was strictly kept by many of the citizens; but in vain. No appearance disturbed the usual stillness of the night in the city; not even the sound of a carriage was heard. The whole affair gradually lost its intense interest, and ceased to be the engrossing theme of conversation. The sceptics triumphed over their believing acquaintance; and the mysterious occurrence was allowed to rest.

The election week for deacon of the crafts at length arrived. All was bustle among the freemen; the rival candidates canvassing and treating, and their partisans bustling about everywhere. City politics ran high; but the treasurer, although recovered, was still too weak to take an active part in the proceedings. Deacon Dickson, on this account, redoubled his exertions--for the indisposition of his treasurer had deranged his plans; and it was of great importance, in his eyes, to have one of his party elected in his place. Had Kerr been able to move about, to visit and flatter his supporters, his election was next to certain, so well had the whole affair been managed. Kerr was accordingly dropped by him, and a successor pitched upon, who could at this eventful period aid him in his efforts against the candidate of the Drummondites, as the supporters of the provost were called.

On the Thursday, when the long lists were voted, the deacon carried his list, and every one of the six were tried men, and hostile to the innovations of the provost and his party. The deacon was in great spirits, and told the treasurer, whom he visited as soon as his triumph was secure, that, if not cut off the list in shortening the leet, his election was sure. On the list coming down from the council, neither Kerr nor the person Dickson wished were on the leet; both had been struck off, and the choice behoved to fall upon one of three, none of whom had hoped, at this time, to succeed to office. Their joy was so much the greater, and the election dinner not less substantial.

It was the evening of the election, closely bordering upon the morning--for all respected the Sabbath-day, and even on this joyous occasion, would not infringe upon it--that a party of some ten or twelve were seen to issue from one of the narrow closes in the High Street, two and two, arm in arm, dressed in the first style of fashion, with bushy wigs, cocked hats, and gold-headed canes. At their head was, now old Deacon Dickson, and his successor in office. They were on their way, accompanying their new deacon home to his residence, near the foot of St. Mary's Wynd in the Cowgate, and to congratulate the deaconess on her husband's elevation to the council. None of them were exactly tipsy; but in that middle state when men do not stand upon niceties, neither are scared by trifles. The fears of the major's coach were not upon them; or, if any thought of it came over them, their numbers gave them confidence. Leaving the High Street, they proceeded down Merlin's Wynd to the Cowgate. Scarce had the head of the procession emerged from the dark thoroughfare, when the sound of a carriage, in rapid advance, fell on their astonished ears. The front stood still, and would have retreated back into the wynd, but could not; for those behind, unconscious of the cause of the stoppage, urged on and forced them out into the street. There was not a moment for reflection, scarce to utter a cry, before the fearful equipage was full upon them. Retreat was still impossible; and those in front, by the pressure from behind, becoming desperate by their situation, the two deacons seized the reins of the horses, to prevent their being ridden over. In a second, the head of the coachman (held in his hand!) was launched at Deacon Dickson, with so true an aim that it felled him to the ground, with the loss of his hat and wig. Though stunned by the blow, his presence of mind did not forsake him. Still holding on by the reins, and dragged by the horses, he called lustily for his companions to cut the traces. The head of the coachman, in the meantime, had returned to his hand, and been launched forth, with various effect, on the aggressors. Other heads flew from the windows on each side, and from the coach-box, in rapid, darting motions. The cries of the assailants resounded through the stillness of the night; fear had fled their bosoms; there was scarce one but had received contusions from

the flying heads, and rage urged them on to revenge. Candles began to appear at the windows, exhibiting faces pale with fear. Some of the bolder of the male inhabitants, recognising the voice of some relative or acquaintance in the cries of the assailants, ran to the street and joined the fray. Dickson, who had never relinquished his first hold, recovered himself, severely hurt as he was by the feet of the horses, which were urged on, short as the struggle was, up to the College Wynd, in spite of the resistance. At the moment the carriage reached the foot of the wynd, the door on the left burst open, and two figures leaped out, disappearing instantly, although closely pursued. In the confusion of the pursuit, the coachman also disappeared. No one could tell how, or in what manner he had fled, he appeared to fall from the box among the crowd; and, when several stooped to lift and secure him, all that remained in their hands was a greatcoat, with basket work within the shoulders, so contrived as to conceal the head and neck of the wearer, to which was fastened a stout cord, the other end of which was attached to an artificial head, entangled in the strife between the horses and the pole of the coach. Two similar dresses were also found inside. The coach was heavily laden; but with what, the authorities never could discover, although envious persons said that several of the tradesmen's wives in the Cowgate afterwards wore silk gowns that had never before had one in their family, had better and stronger tea at their parties, and absolutely abounded in tobacco for many weeks. But whether these were the spoils of the combat with the infernal coach, or the natural results of successful industry, was long a matter of debate.

As for the coach and horses, they became the prize of Deacon Dickson and his friends, never having been claimed by the major. The sensation created on the following day by the exaggerated reports of the fearful rencounter and unheard of bravery of the tradesmen, was in proportion to the occasion. Several of the assailants were reported to have been killed, and, among the rest, the deacon. For several days, the inn-yard of the White Hart was crowded to excess to view the carriage and horses. As for the deacon, no doubt, he was considerably bruised about the legs; but the glory he had acquired was a medicine far more efficacious to his hurts than any the faculty could have prescribed. At the first toll of the bells for church, he was seen descending from the Castle Hill towards the Tron Church, limping much more, many thought, than there was occasion for, supported by his battered gold-headed cane on one side, and holding by the arm of the deaconess on the other. With an affected modesty, which no general after the most brilliant victory could better have assumed, he accepted the congratulations he had come out to receive. When he entered the church, a general whisper ran through it, and all eyes were upon him, while the minister had not yet entered. This was the proudest moment of his life. He had achieved, with the assistance of a few friends, what the train-bands and city-guard had failed to accomplish; that it was more by accident, and against his will he had performed the feat, he never once allowed to enter his mind, and stoutly denied when he heard it hinted at by those who envied him the glory he had acquired.

As soon as the afternoon's service was over, he proceeded to the treasurer's house, to congratulate him on his re-election to the treasurership, and give a full account of his adventure. To his exaggerated account, Kerr listened with the most intense interest; a feeling of horror crept over his frame as the deacon dwelt upon the blow he had received from the coachman's head, and the efficacious manner in which the two inside phantoms had used theirs, concluding with--

"It was a fearful and unequal strife--devils against mortal men."

"Do you really think they were devils, deacon? Was it really their own heads they threw about?" said the treasurer.

"I am not clear to say they were devils," replied the other; "but they fought like devils. Severe blows they gave, as I feel this moment. They could not be anything canny; for they got out from among our hands like a flash of light."

The deacon's vanity would have tempted him to say he believed them to be not of this earth; but the same feeling restrained him. Where there had been so many actors in the affair, he had as yet had no opportunity of learning their sentiments; and, above all things, he hated to be in a minority, or made an object of ridicule. Turning aside the direct question of the treasurer, he continued--

"Whatever they were, the horses are two as bonny blacks as any gentleman could wish to put into his carriage. By my troth, I have made a good adventure of it? I mean to propose, and I have no doubt I shall carry my motion, that they and the major's coach be sold, and the proceeds spent in a treat to the incorporation. Make haste, man, and get better. You are as welcome to a share as if you had been one of those present; although, indeed, I cannot give you a share of the glory of putting Major Weir and his devils to the rout--and no small glory it is, on the word of a deacon, treasurer."

The load that had for many days pressed down the treasurer's spirits gradually passed off as the deacon proceeded, and a new light shone on his mind; his countenance brightened up.
"Deacon," he said, "the truth begins to dawn upon me, and I feel a new man. Confess at once that the whole has been a contrivance of the smugglers to run their goods, availing themselves of the real major's coach. It was a bold game, deacon, and, like all unlawful games, a losing one in the end. Still, it is strange what inducement they could have had for their cruel conduct to me on that miserable night, or how I was enabled to survive, or retained my reason. I have been often lost in fearful misery upon this subject since the fever left me; but you, my friend, have restored peace to my mind."
And they parted for the evening. The treasurer's recovery was now most rapid. In a few days, all traces of his illness were nearly obliterated, and he went about his affairs as formerly. An altered man--all his wife's influence for evil was gone for ever; calmly and dispassionately he remonstrated with her; for a few days she struggled hard to retain her abused power; tears and threatened desertion of his house were used--but he heard her unmoved, still keeping his stern resolve with a quietness of manner which her cunning soon perceived it was not in her power to shake. She ceased to endeavour to shake it. His mother was restored to her proper station, and all was henceforth peace and harmony.
Several years had rolled on. The deaconship was, next election, bestowed upon Treasurer Kerr. He had served with credit, and his business prospered. The adventure with the major's coach was only talked of as an event of times long passed, when, one forenoon, an elderly person, in a seaman's dress, much soiled, entered his workshop, and, addressing him by name, requested employment. Being very much in want of men at the time, he at once said he had no objection to employ him, if he was a good hand.
"I cannot say, I am, now what I once was in this same shop," he replied. "It is long since I forsook the craft; but, if you are willing to employ me, I will do my best."
The stranger was at once engaged, and gave satisfaction to his employer--betraying a knowledge of events that had happened to the family, and that were only traditionary to his master. His curiosity became awakened; to gratify which, he took the man home, one evening, after his day's work was over. For some time after they entered the house, the stranger became pensive and reserved--his eyes, every opportunity, wandering to the mother of his master, with a look of anxious suspense. At length, he arose from his seat, and said, in a voice tremulous with emotion--
"Mistress! my ever-revered mistress! have you entirely forgot Watty Brown, the runaway apprentice of your husband?"
"Watty Brown, the yellow-haired laddie," ejaculated she, "I can never forget. He was always a favourite of mine. You cannot be him; your hair is grey?"
"My good mistress, old and grey-headed as you see me," said he, "I am Watty Brown; but much has passed over my once yellow head to bleach it white as you see. My master here was but an infant in your arms, when I left Edinburgh. Often have I rocked him in his cradle. After all that has passed, I am here again, safe. I am sure there is no one present would bring me into trouble for what is now so long passed."
"How time flies!" said she. "The Porteous mob is in my mind as if it had happened last week. O Watty! you were always a reckless lad. Sore, sore you have rued, I do not doubt, that night. Do tell us what has come of you since?"
"Well, mistress, you recollect there was little love between the apprentices of Edinburgh and Captain Porteous. All this might have passed off in smart skirmishes on a king's birthday, or so; but his brutal behaviour at poor Robinson's execution, and slaughter of the townsmen, could not be forgiven by lord or tradesman. Well, as all the land knows, he was condemned, and all were satisfied; for the guilty was to suffer. But his pardon came; the bloodshedder of the innocent was to leave the jail as if he had done nothing wrong! Was this to be endured? Murmurs and threats were in every tradesman's mouth; the feuds of the apprentices were quelled, for a time; all colours joined in hatred of the murderer. Yet no plan of operations was adopted. In this combustible frame of mind, the drums of the city beat to arms. I rushed from this very house to know the cause, and saw the trades' lads crowding towards the jail. I inquired what was their intention.
"'To execute righteous judgment!' a strange voice said, in the crowd.
"I returned to the shop; and, taking the forehammer, as the best weapon I could find, in my haste, with good will joined, and was at the door amongst the foremost of those who attempted to break it open. Numbers had torches. Lustily did I apply my hammer to its studded front. Vainly did I exert myself, until fire was put to it, when it at length gave way. As I ceased from my efforts, one of the crowd, carrying a torch, put a guinea into my hand, and said--

"'Well done, my good lad. Take this; you have wrought for it. If you are like to come to trouble for this night's work, fly to Anstruther, and you will find a friend.'
"While he spoke, those who had entered the jail were dragging Porteous down the stairs. My heart melted within me at the piteous sight. My anger left me, as his wailing voice implored mercy. I left the throng, who were hurrying him up towards the Lawnmarket, and hastened back to the workshop, where I deposited the hammer, and threw myself upon my bed; but I could not remain. The image of the wretched man, as he was dragged forth, appeared to be by my side. Partly to know the result, partly to ease my mind, I went again into the street. The crowds were stealing quietly to their homes. From some neighbour apprentices I learned the fatal catastrophe. I now became greatly alarmed for my safety, as numbers who knew me well had seen my efforts against the door of the jail. Bitterly did I now regret the active part I had taken. My immediate impulse was to fly from the city; but in what direction I knew not. Thus irresolute, I stood at the Netherbow Port, when the same person that gave me the guinea at the jail-door approached to where I stood. Embracing the opportunity, I told him the fear I was in of being informed upon, when the magistrates began to investigate and endeavour to discover those who had been active in the affair.
"'Well, my good fellow, follow me. It will not serve your purpose standing there.'
"There were about a dozen along with him. We proceeded to the beach at Fisherrow--going round Arthur's Seat, by Duddingston--and were joined by many others. Two boats lay for them, on the beach, at a distance from the harbour. We went on board and set sail for Fife, where we arrived before morning dawned. I found my new friend and acquaintance was captain and owner of a small vessel, who traded to the coast of Holland. He scrupled not to run a cargo upon his own account, without putting the revenue officers to any trouble, either measuring or weighing it. He had been the intimate friend of Robinson, and often sailed in the same vessel. I joined his crew; and, on the following day, we sailed for Antwerp. But why should I trouble you with the various turns my fortunes have taken for the last thirty-seven years? At times, I was stationary, and wrought at my trade; at others, I was at sea. My home has principally been in Rotterdam; but my heart has ever been in Auld Reekie. Many a time I joined the crew of a lugger, and clubbed my proportion of the adventure; my object being--more than the gain--to get a sight of it; for I feared to come to town--being ignorant as to how matters stood regarding my share in the Porteous riot. We heard in Holland only of the threats of the government; but I was always rejoiced to hear that no one had been convicted. Several years had passed before it was safe for me to return; and, when it was, I could not endure the thought of returning to be a bound apprentice, to serve out the few months of my engagement that were to run when I left my master. Years passed on. I had accumulated several hundred guilders, with the view of coming to end my days in Edinburgh, when I got acquainted with a townsman deeply engaged in the smuggling line. I unfortunately embarked my all. He had some associates in the Cowgate, who disposed of, to great advantage, any goods he succeeded in bringing to them. His colleagues on shore had provided a coach and horses, with suitable dresses, to personate Major Weir's carriage, agreeably to the most approved description. The coach and horses were furnished by an innkeeper, whom they supplied with liquors at a low rate. My unfortunate adventure left the port, and I anxiously waited its return for several months; but neither ship nor friend made their appearance. At length he came to my lodgings in the utmost poverty--all had been lost. Of what use was complaint? He had lost ten times more than I had--everything had gone against him. His narrative was short. He reached the coast in safety, and landed his cargo in part, when he was forced to run for it, a revenue cutter coming in sight. After a long chase, he was forced to run his vessel on shore, near St. Andrew's, and got ashore with only his clothes, and the little cash he had on board. He returned to where his goods were deposited--all that were saved. The coach was rigged out, and reached the Cowgate in the usual manner, when it was attacked and captured, in spite of stout resistance, by a party of citizens. What of the goods remained in the neighbourhood of Musselburgh, were detained for the loss of the horses and coach. I was now sick of Holland, and resolved to return, poor as I left it, to the haunts of my happiest recollections. To be rich, and riches still accumulating in a foreign land, the idea of what we can at any time enjoy, a return--makes it bearable. But poverty and disappointment sadden the heart of the exile; and make the toil that would be counted light at home, a burden that sinks him early in a foreign grave."
"Did your partner make no mention of carrying off one of the townsmen in the coach?" said the treasurer.
"Excuse me, master, for not mentioning it," replied Walter. "He did give me a full account of all that happened to you, and all you said; and regretted, when he heard of your illness, what, at the time, he was forced to do in self-preservation. When you fell out of the stair he meant to enter, he

knew not who you were--a friend he knew you could not be, for only other two in the city had his secret. That you were a revenue officer, on the look-out for him, was his first idea. He was as much alarmed as you, until he found you were insensible. Not a moment was to be lost. The goods were hurried out, and you placed in the carriage, which was on its way from town before you showed any symptoms of returning consciousness. His first intention was to carry you on board his lugger, and convey you to Holland, then sell you to the Dutch East India Company, that you might never return to tell what you had been a witness of that night. The terror you were in, the sincerity of your confession, and belief that you were in the power of the major, saved you from the miserable fate he had fixed for you. Pity struggled against the caution and avarice which urged him to take you away. Pity triumphed--you had been both play and schoolfellows in former years. You were released--you know the rest."

The wife and mother scarce breathed, while Wattie related the danger the treasurer had been in; he himself gave a shudder--all thanked God for his escape. Wattie Brown continued in his employ, as foreman over his work, and died about the year 1789. Widow Horner did not long survive that night of intense anguish--she died of a broken heart in her son's house. It was remarked by all, that, while Thomas Kerr prospered, Walter Horner, who was at one time much the richer man, gradually sank into the most abject circumstances, and died a pensioner on his incorporation, more despised than pitied. And thus ends our tale of Major Weir's famous night airings in Edinburgh.