

A Romance of Tyne Bridge.

The Story of Dr. Oliphant.

DR. OLIPHANT, whose name is associated with a tragic incident in the history of Old Tyne Bridge, resided in one of the houses which partly covered that picturesque structure. The house was at the southern end of Tyne Bridge, and on the western side. It stood over an arch of that portion of the bridge which belonged to the bishopric of Durham, and which the count palatine (or bishop) was bound to keep in repair. There were four floors, the dwelling comprising cellar, shop, kitchen, and parlour (whose doors were opposite to each other), and attics. The cellar (if we may call it so) hung down in the arch, and had half-doors (upper and lower) looking out upon the Tyne. The river rose to within a few inches of the lower door, so that goods could be received and shipped, "the water at high tide running deep and rapid, and almost close below." Smeaton the engineer, reporting on the bridge at the time of which we are speaking, tells us, as to the arch in question, that it was in a great measure blocked up by cellars for the convenience of the houses above (on the east and the west), and had no current of water through it when the tide was below the starlings or jetties surrounding the piers. It was a dry arch, with sundry "holes and chasms," when the water was down. When it was up, the cellar floor was little above the level of the flood; and at all hours of the day the tide of life rolled along the bridge on the level of the floor of the shop. Four flights of stairs ran up from the river to the roof, a winding stair connecting the cellar with the shop. The viaduct, we have said, was on the level of the shop-floor; but the word level is somewhat out of place, for the bridge was steep. Where the road passed the shop window of the surgeon and apothecary, it rose at the rate of a foot in every seven or eight; and it was also very narrow. The whole width, from parapet to parapet, was not more than fifteen feet; yet room had been made for dwellings on both sides, still further cramping the thoroughfare, and in several places reducing the breadth of the roadway to three yards. A tower, used as a prison, bestrode the way; and there were two or three gates to guard the passage of the river. Old and infirm, the structure had long been regarded with an anxious eye. "Originally very ill built, and in general of too small stones, and not of the best kind," Smeaton "found it in a general state of disrepair." But, although it was feared that unless measures were taken for its safety it might fall through decay, there was no dream of the flood that was shortly to throw it down. This cloud was no more foreseen by James Oliphant than was the baleful prosecution by which it was preceded.

Dr. Oliphant, at the period of our story, had lived nine or ten years on the Tyne. The eldest son of James Oliphant, of Perth, sometime wine merchant there, and nephew of Lawrence Oliphant, of Gask, he had been brought up to the medical profession, and in his earlier years was in the army. In 1754-55, he came to Newcastle, where he met Margaret Erskine, daughter of Dr. William Erskine, of Gateshead. An attachment sprang up between them, which led to an engagement; and on the 13th of July, 1755, they were married in St. Mary's Church, Gateshead, the subscribing witnesses being "William Erskine" and "Jeffrey Oliphant." The marriage with the daughter was followed by a partnership with the father; and they all lived together in the old house on the bridge in which Dr. Erskine had dwelt from the closing days of Queen Anne.

Twice has Tyne Bridge passed away since Dr. and Mrs. Oliphant were dwelling there in the year which brought unmerited reproach and suffering to their happy home. The calamity which came over them occurred in the year 1764. On the 28th of July there appeared in the *Newcastle Chronicle*, about four months after the publication of its first number, the following short paragraph:—"On Sunday last, the body of Diana Armstrong, late servant] to a gentleman in Gateshead, was found floating in the Tyne near Dunston Staiths, and had, as is supposed, lain in the river several days. The cause of the accident is not known." An inquest had been held by the County Coroner (who was household steward of the bishop); the verdict of the jury had been returned; and the Whickham register had recorded the burial of "Dinah Armstrong, belonging to Hexham, supposed to be both hang'd and drown'd": "The coroner's jury," added the parochial penman, "brought in their verdict wilful murder. She was found at Dunstan. Bur. 24 July, 1764." Parish registers did not restrict themselves, in those days, to a simple record of baptism, marriage, and burial; they partook of the character of chronicles and diaries; and we have here the clerk of the parish writing down, besides the burial, a supposition and a verdict, both of which were destitute of foundation, and fell to the ground as false and worthless when they came to the test of a court of justice.

Dinah Armstrong was the younger servant of Mrs. Oliphant. About the latter end of May, 1764, a former servant had fallen sick; and Dinah, recently dismissed, for some slight misbehaviour, from the service of a widow lady in Newcastle (Mrs. Heath), was engaged in her stead. "The plausible account the girl gave of herself, joined to a good countenance, and other favourable appearances, were her only recommendations to Mrs. Oliphant," who knew nothing of the circumstance of the girl's dismissal. Dr. and Mrs. Oliphant were about to leave home for Scotland. The new girl came on or about the 31st of May; her master and mistress began their journey on the 5th of June, and they did not return

till the 10th of July. In the meanwhile, the two children had been left in the charge of Mrs. Milne, the wife of a merchant in Newcastle, where Dinah was in attendance upon them. Mrs. Oliphant was told on her return that the girl's behaviour had been but indifferent; that she had been detected in pilfering several trifling things from Mrs. Milne; and this lady, moreover, a day or two afterwards, said she had missed, among other things, three damask napkins, which she strongly suspected, from certain circumstances, Dinah had taken, and she desired that she might be strictly examined about them. Her mistress spoke to her accordingly on the subject. The suspicion was repelled, and the girl consented, reluctantly, to have her chest examined. The napkins were none of them found, but there was a sheet marked "A. H.," which she said was the gift of a relative. It was remarked, however, that the initials were those of her late mistress, and she confessed that it belonged to Mrs. Heath, and that she had taken some other trifles. Examining the sheet, Mrs. Oliphant was led to believe, from some marks upon it, that Dinah had intended to convert it into body linen, whereupon she asked her other servant, Mary Shittleton, if the girl was ill-provided, and learnt that she was so. She then made her a present of some materials; spoke tenderly to her as to the only means of making life honourable and happy; and promised to intercede with Mrs. Heath and Mrs. Milne on her behalf, and to keep her to the end of the quarter; at the same time begging that if she had the napkins she would restore them. This was on Monday, the 16th of July, when she still denied having the napkins, or any knowledge of them; and Mrs. Milne intimated her intention of prosecuting her as soon as she left the family. Mrs. Oliphant was advised to discharge her immediately, but did not do so. "Willing if possible to save the girl from public shame and ruin," Mrs. Oliphant "resolved to try a little further, to prevail on her to discover these napkins." It was thought that, for this purpose, "if some person of ingenuity was to interrogate and talk with her about them, she might possibly be prevailed upon to make a confession; and with this view and intention Mrs. Oliphant applied to Mr. Green, a neighbour and intimate acquaintance, and then a parish officer, a gentleman of great humanity, and acquainted him with the whole matter; and he, approving of the design as being laudable and benevolent, agreed to give his assistance towards furthering it." He accordingly saw Dinah on Tuesday forenoon, the 17th of July, and expostulated with her, representing the natural consequences of her conduct and of a prosecution. She admitted, as before, that she had taken the sheet, but denied the napkins; and he came away, saying he would see her again in the afternoon.

There was a report that she was under restraint; but she went about her work as usual, within doors and without. Several times on the day of Mr. Green's

conversation with her, she brought up water from the cellar; she also conducted the children to school; and before dinner she went for ale to the Queen's Head, in Pipewellgate. Dinner was served in the parlour over the shop, between one and two o'clock. Dr. Erskine, Dr. and Mrs. Oliphant, and Mr. Henry Thompson (residing in the family under the doctor's care), were those who sat down to table. The two children, a son and a daughter, were at school; and a staymaker (Mrs. French) was in the kitchen awaiting their return, that she might see Miss Oliphant, and "try on a pair of stays." Dinah was also there, "extremely dull and sullen," managing matters, while Mary waited at table. Suddenly Dinah was missed; and Mrs. French, when appealed to, thought she was gone downstairs. Her fellow-servant called to her in vain; went down to the shop, but she was not there; then descended to the cellar, where she saw her shadow as she leaped out at the door, and heard her fall. Looking out, she saw her lying on her side on the sand. She called to her repeatedly, receiving no answer; upon which she alarmed the house, and search was made in various directions. Those who ran to the cellar could see nothing of Dinah, nor could any others hear of her. Mary and Mr. Thompson, and George Rutherford, shopkeeper to a mercer next door, and John Weatherburn, the barber, could nowhere find her. The print of her body in the sand was observed, but no traces were discovered of the road she had taken; the river was clear and smooth, and without mark of her whereabouts; "all the holes and chasms in the dry arches of the bridge" were examined in vain; nothing could be learnt in the lanes and back-yards adjacent; "and some boys who were fishing a few yards below the bridge" could give no intelligence of her. "She had leaped a height of about 13 feet; and the place she fell on was distant from the then stream (it being low water) only four or five yards." The family were perplexed, and knew not what to do. Dorothy Carr, servant-maid of Mrs. Milne, sent to Dinah's sister Jane, living in a gentleman's family in Newcastle, telling her what had happened, and asking her if she knew anything of the missing girl. She replied that she did not, and waited on Mrs. Oliphant, next morning, to learn the particulars, and inquire if anything had been heard of her; and before going away she said their sister Tamar lived at Long Benton, and probably Dinah might be there. The day after, she called again, with a companion, and took away the chest and clothes of her absent sister. It was now Thursday, the 19th of July, and nothing had yet been discovered. On Sunday morning, Joseph Barlow, a keelman, called at Dr. Oliphant's and inquired of Mary, who opened the door, if Dr. Erskine had a maid that was drowned lately. Mary said that they had a maid who was missing, but she hoped she was not drowned. Dr. Oliphant had now come to the door, and Barlow told him he had that morn-

ing, with one John Southeron, taken up a woman floating in the middle of the Tyne, and that he had carried the body ashore at Dunston. Dr. Oliphant could not say, by the description, whether or not the body was that of Dinah; but he gave him the address of Jane, who would no doubt go and see. The family meantime sent Mary to Dunston, who recognised the deceased as her late fellow-servant, and brought back the sad intelligence to Tyne Bridge.

The body bore the mark of "a circle, or scar, on the neck, which at first appeared whiter than the other parts of the skin, but in a short time turned into light purple colour." "Deceased always wore a black ribbon or necklace about her neck," and "had one or the other of them on at the time she left Dr. Oliphant's house." When found in the river the body of the poor girl was landed at Dunston, and brought many persons together, who viewed it with curious interest, and had their attention attracted by the marks on the neck. Their supposition was that "she had been hanged"; and "a young practitioner in surgery," coming to the spot, instantly declared that such had been the case. This was decisive with his audience; and it immediately became a clear point with them that she had so died, "and, as a necessary consequence, that her master and mistress were her murderers." Next day (Monday), Tamar Armstrong called on Mrs. Oliphant, indulging in "abuse and threats against the whole family." On Tuesday, the 24th, John Robson, one of the county coroners, came to Dunston to hold an inquest; and John Crozer, constable of Whickham, was sent to Gateshead with a summons for Mary Shittleton, fellow-servant of the deceased. By this officer Dr. Oliphant sent a message to the coroner, to the effect that Mrs. Oliphant and himself, and others, would also attend to give an account of what they knew, if he thought necessary. Afterwards, at noon, some of his friends called to inform Dr. Oliphant they had heard all was in confusion at the inquest, and advising him to go. He therefore went off, with Henry Thompson and John Weatherburn, and got to Dunston between two and three o'clock. He at once gave the coroner an account of the affair, but was told that "he should go talk to the jury." Acting on this suggestion, he found the jurors at some distance, "standing by a hedge in the open air, surrounded by a crowd of people, who frequently intermixed with them." He then began to repeat what he had before related to the coroner, experiencing frequent interruptions, "and particularly from Tamar, the sister of the deceased, who was there with her other sister Jane, busied in inflaming the populace." Unable to obtain a full hearing, he returned to the coroner, and requested that his evidence, and that of his companions, might be recorded; but he was told that he was charged with confining the deceased in his cellar from the Friday till the Tuesday; that when she leaped out of the cellar no measures

were taken to find her; that when Barlow came he threw the door in his face, and bid him begone; that he had not sent for him (the coroner), as was incumbent upon him; and, lastly, the marks of strangulation were hinted at. On all these points Dr. Oliphant replied, and offered to produce evidence on oath; but the coroner refused to examine the witnesses tendered. They waited, however, until about six o'clock, when they sent to know if the coroner had any occasion for them, and received in answer that he had not; "so they returned home, ignorant of the result of the coroner and jury's deliberations."

Robert Somerville, of Swalwell, surgeon, one of the witnesses examined, deposed that he had inspected the body of Dinah Armstrong. "She had," he said, "a circular mark on her neck, about half an inch in breadth, which has been made (to my judgment) by a rope, or might have been done by a ribband necklace or the like nature, but there was no such thing found upon her neck when taken up. Her face was quite black, occasioned by a stagnation of the blood, which is a concomitant of strangling or suffocation, there being no other appearance of violence which I observed."

Not the slightest evidence was given that implicated any of the inmates of the house on Tyne Bridge as the authors of Dinah's death; but, on the contrary, it was the testimony of Jane Armstrong that Mary Shittleton told her the girl "leapt out of the cellar window or door," and so left the house; which statement Mary repeated to the coroner and jury on oath. Yet, without any proof whatever, the jury found that James Oliphant, Margaret Oliphant, and Mary Shittleton had strangled the girl in the cellar with a cord, and so murdered her.

This verdict was given on the 24th of July. On the 25th, Mr. and Mrs. Oliphant and their maid were arrested and conveyed to Durham; whither, also, Dr. Wilson, of Newcastle, and a great number of their friends besides, proceeded to offer them assistance. They were suffered by the coroner to return home in the custody of the constable; and on the 13th of August, the day preceding the assizes, "at their own request they were again carried to Durham," and the coroner committed them to gaol. On Friday, the 17th, they were arraigned on a bill of indictment, and also the coroner's inquisition. Ten or eleven witnesses were heard for the prosecution, Somerville stating that he could not say positively the stricture was the cause of death; the body might have swelled so in the water that any ligature on the neck would have occasioned the mark, and the necklace or ribbon might have broken. The other witnesses called for the prosecution were John Southeron (and his wife Jane), Joseph Barlow, Jane and Tamar Armstrong, Thomas Dinning, Isabella Nickson, Susannah Wilcock, Sarah Ward, Jane Grieve (Long Benton), and Thomasine Elwell (Swalwell). Two witnesses were examined for

the defence, Henry Thompson and Margaret French, who testified that the girl was going about the house at perfect liberty; and Mr. Thompson, lodging with the family as a patient, stated that as they sat at dinner on the Tuesday, "they were alarmed by the prisoner Shittleton calling out from below stairs that the deceased had jumped out of the cellar window into the bed of the river." "He never saw the least ill-usage from any of the family towards the deceased."

An immediate verdict of acquittal was returned by the jury; and the judge before whom the case was tried, Mr. Justice Bathurst, expressed his sorrow for Mr. Oliphant's misfortune, and said he believed him to be as innocent of the crime laid to his charge as himself.

The following brief notice of the case appeared in the *Newcastle Chronicle* on the 25th August, 1764:—

On the 17th inst., came on at Durham, before the Hon. Mr. Justice Bathurst, the trial of Mr. and Mrs. Oliphant, and their maid, for the alleged murder of Dinah Armstrong; when the parties being justified by the very evidence brought against them, the judge declared his sense of their unmerited sufferings, in public court, by saying he believed them as innocent of the crime laid to their charge as himself. The late unmerited misfortunes and uncommon sufferings of a worthy family, who have always deservedly enjoyed the esteem and affection of all who knew them, are too glaring to be passed over in silence. Their innocence is now clearly demonstrated, not only by their fair and honourable acquittal, and the public declaration of the judge in court, but also by the particular respect and attention paid to their cause by a number of gentlemen of the most respectable character, who have, during this unhappy affair, so warmly interested themselves in their vindication. Besides, the delicacy of all the publishers of the newspapers in agreeing to pass over in silence the scandalous, false, and malicious reports so industriously propagated against them, is a further demonstration of the sense of the world, and sentiments of the thinking part of mankind, on this melancholy occasion. The humanity and good-nature of the parties in endeavouring to reclaim an unfortunate girl from vice and infamy, was the original cause of their cruel and unparalleled persecution. But to enter into a detail of the injustice done them would be equally tedious and unnecessary here, as we are informed a full and genuine statement of the facts will be soon published, when the treatment they have received will appear in its proper colours.

Had it not been for the "statement" thus promised, and afterwards printed, we should not have now been able to narrate the story of James Oliphant; for, with the exception of the preceding notice, and the brief paragraph printed on July 23, the newspapers of the day did not, so far as we are aware, contain any account of the death of Dinah Armstrong, and of the prosecution of her master, mistress, and fellow-servant. The publication announced above appeared in 1763, under the title, "The Case of Mr. James Oliphant, Surgeon, respecting a Prosecution which he, together with his Wife and Maid-Servant, underwent in the year 1764, for the Supposed Murder of a Female Domestic." It was "printed for Mr. Oliphant," and "published by his appointment," one of the publishers being Benjamin Fleming, bookseller and stationer under the Magazine Gate on the Tyne Bridge.

This little book of 88 pages is now rare. After a pre-

face or "advertisement" and an "introduction," there is a statement of the whole case, with the evidence given before the coroner and judge, and an account of the steps taken to obtain redress, founded on "the coroner's refusal to hear evidence, by which defendant had been involved in such a dangerous, expensive prosecution." The Bishop of Durham was written to; lawyers were consulted; application was made to the Court of King's Bench. All in vain. The end aimed at was not achieved.

The Court of King's Bench, moved by Mr. Wedderburn on the affidavits for an information against the coroner, did not think proper to grant the motion, but referred Dr. Oliphant to the Grand Jury, as the subject, matter of complaint appeared to be more proper by way of indictment in the county. The suggestion, however, did not commend itself to the mind of the applicant. There was one more course open to him—that of a special action for damages; but the great expense, and other reasons, deterred him.

"Thus unhappily circumstanced," says Mr. Oliphant, "I resolved to avail myself of the liberty of the press in my own vindication, and in making my case known to the world; and then it was that the following narrative was written. Unwilling, nevertheless, to expose the conduct of a man who, I flattered myself, would have had candour enough to acknowledge his error, and justice to repair the ill effects as far as lay in his power, I have since that time waited in silent expectation that the spontaneous convictions of his own mind would have voluntarily induced him to render me every satisfaction which I had to hope for from compulsory methods; but in that expectation I have hitherto waited in vain. I can now, after having struggled with my misfortunes for three years and upwards, estimate my losses with the greater exactness, and judge of the consequences of those events that have proved so destructive to my happiness; and it is with a heartfelt concern that I here declare them to be ruinous in the highest degree. Before my disasters in 1764, my affairs were prosperous, my practice extensive, my mind at ease, my good name unblemished, my friends numerous, and the fairest prospects of future felicity opening to my view. But, good God! what a reverse have I experienced, to what a scene of misery reserved! what a change did a few days produce! I leave the humane, judicious part of mankind to judge of the cause I have to complain. I leave them to inquire what were my feelings, when life, liberty, character, and fortune, were all at once so rudely attacked. On returning to the inspection of my domestic affairs after my acquittal, what a melancholy view did they exhibit! A considerable part of my small fortune, the fruits of years of honest industry, dissipated in a necessary defence, and ineffectual endeavour to obtain redress; my business greatly reduced; my reputation sullied; my peace of mind deeply wounded; my wife's health much impaired; and, to complete my affliction, deprived of the kindest and best of fathers, who, after languishing a few months in all the bitterness of sorrow, fell a victim" (in May, 1765) "to his great sensibility of the injuries of his son. These are some of the triumphs of my persecutors, a few of the long train of evils that have resulted from this most oppressive prosecution, the effects whereof I must severely feel to the last moments of my life."

To the death of Dr. Oliphant's father, in May, 1765, succeeded that of Dr. Erskine, father of Mrs. Oliphant, in December, 1766. In November, 1771, came the overthrow of Tyne Bridge, depriving the family of their home. The Oliphants then removed to Church Chare,

the narrow thoroughfare which preceded the Church Street of the present day. This, however, was but a temporary place of sojourn. The disaster which had destroyed their dwelling-place, following the calamity that overshadowed its peace and happiness, led the way to their departure from the banks of the Tyne. At what precise period they crossed the Borders does not appear, but it was within the year subsequent to the fall of the bridge; for the municipal records of Newcastle show that they were in Scotland in October, 1772. Mr. John Green appeared in the Mayor's Chamber, in the course of that month, "for and on behalf of Mr. James Oliphant, in Scotland, owner of a house at the south end of the old stone bridge," and represented that "the present slanting stays were not sufficient to support it," and that it was consequently "in danger of falling into the river"; whereupon Mr. John Stephenson, at that time employed in the construction of a temporary viaduct across the Tyne, was instructed to apply additional props, if necessary.*

Mr. Oliphant, for some time after his return to Scotland, was Professor of Medicine at St. Andrews. He afterwards settled at Irvine, and was private physician to Lords Eglintoun and Glasgow. Lord Justice Boyle, who was living in advanced years when Dr. Oliphant's heir-male was advertised for in 1848, well remembered him as in practice there. The advertisement ran thus :—

SUCCESSION TO AN ESTATE IN SCOTLAND.

THE heir-male of the body of the deceased Doctor James Oliphant is first called and entitled to the estate of Gask, in the county of Perth, under the settlement of its late proprietor, James Blair Oliphant, Esq., of Gask and Ardblair. Doctor Oliphant is understood to have resided for several years preceding and subsequent to 1764 at Gateshead, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and to have removed from Gateshead to Irvine in Scotland, and to have died in 1791. Failing heirs-male of the body of the said Doctor James Oliphant, the heir-male whomsoever of the said James Blair Oliphant is entitled to succeed to the estate. The trustees appointed by Mr. Oliphant to carry the destination in his settlement into effect make this public intimation, and request that claimants may communicate with their agents, Messrs Hunter and Conning, writers, Perth.

Perth, July 5, 1848.

Dr. and Mrs. Oliphant had several children; and Mr. Blair Oliphant supposed there might be male issue of their sons living. The *Gateshead Observer*, however, recalling, some years ago, the incidents of the eighteenth century, stated that the only grandchild remaining in 1848 was a daughter of Janet Oliphant, the young lady on whom Mrs. Margaret French was waiting, on the sad 17th of July, 1764, "to try on a pair of stays." One son of Dr. Oliphant died in Canada, another in Tobago. Two were impressed in a time of war, one of whom was supposed to have perished

* The number of houses on the bridge when the flood came exceeded twenty, their yearly value being £236. One was of the value of £22; three (including Dr. Oliphant's), £20; while two of the places of business occupied on the crowded roadway were so small as to bear no higher rentals than £6 and £7.

in an engagement with the French; and the career of the other, "which ended at Workington, was marked by even stranger passages than those which chequered the life of the father." Chequered, indeed, was the life of the household established on Old Tyne Bridge; and when, about sixty years subsequent to the death of Dr. Oliphant, Fortune seemed disposed to smile, there was no son of his line to succeed, and enjoy her sunshine.

JAMES CLEPHAN.

A Contemporary Account of the Fall of Tyne Bridge.

Mr. Joseph Crawhall has published, in one of his wonderful books, a contemporary account of the destruction of Old Tyne Bridge. This account, Mr. Crawhall informs his readers, was copied from a manuscript now in the possession of George H. Haydon, Esq., Bethlehem Hospital, London. As the story is short, and is more-over told in a way that would not have disgraced Defoe, we have taken the liberty to transfer it to our pages.

On Saturday morn, Nov. 16th, 1771, when I came down to breakfast, I never remember so dark and dull a day, attended with a mizling kind of rain which rather encreased: I passed the evening with some friends at the Coffee-house on the Sandhill, from whom I parted after 11 o'clock, and in coming home heard the Watchman call the hour without any observation about a high tide: at 4 o'clock in the morn I was suddenly awakened by a loud rap at the door: starting from my bed, Mr. Joseph Robinson called out in the street—pray arise, Sir, for the River is swell'd prodigiously and encreasing very fast: glad to know it was not a fire which I apprehended, I came downstairs, and having got half-a-dozen of the workmen together, with each of us a candle, we came into the room with the bow-window, where the water had rose to about our knees: as it had been the same height in 1763 and I had no idea of its rising higher and hurting my library &c., I only removed upstairs my violin and the Family Bible, and resolving on walking along the Close and alarming some of my friends, I perceived ere I came to the Gate that the River was so high in the street as to render this step impracticable; on this I took a servant with a lanthorn went up the Forth Banks and down the Side to the Sandhill and to my astonishment found very few people in the streets, and even on the Sandhill not above a dozen were stirring: I called on Mr. Wallis and some other wine merchants and was glad to know they had taken precautions in time: as the water continued rising I returned home between 5 and 6 o'clock, and when I was at the Forth Banks my ears were alarmed with the falling of the Bridge which gave me the most shocking sensations imaginable: The idea of the sleeping inhabitants rushing in a moment into eternity, the rending of the houses, with the crush and noise made by their falling, added to the dreadful gloom and darkness of the night created most terrible reflections, and brought to my mind all the horrors which must have attended the earthquake at Lisbon: On my return home I found the water was upwards of 5 feet high in my rooms next the River, that it had broke all the pots in the Bottle-house furnace, and as it continued to rise the White-house furnace was in danger: at eight o'clock it was on a level with the second step of front door to the street: and now watching it with eager attention I perceived with great joy that it abated: on this I returned again to the Sandhill, which was covered with water, and hearing that some friends were pent up at the King's Head Tavern on the Keyside I rowed over the Sandhill to their relief. In going hither

two ships broke from their moorings and were carried by the Torrent down the River: the water was dashing impetuously over the Battlements of the remaining Arches and exhibited a scene of horror and wild uproar, while every dismayed countenance indicated their apprehensions of the great calamity and loss of life and property to many of the Inhabitants of the banks of the Tyne, which were but too fatally confirmed in a few days: Six persons perished when the Bridge fell, and several others up the water were drown'd: it was Monday morn before the water abated, and left in mine and every house near the River an immense quantity of mud and ooze. Our loss

by it in the works was upwards of £300. Mr. Fenwick of Bywell was a great sufferer; and as several poor people had lost their all, a subscription was opened for their relief: for several months the River was crossed in Boats and Ferrys till the temporary Bridge was compleated; application was made by the Corporation to Parliament to assist them in the rebuilding the Bridge, but it was refused. This Bridge had stood near 500 years. Accounts mention it to have been originally made of wood: The stone piers I conclude must have been built in the time of the Romans, as in pulling down the old piers several coins of the Emperor Antoninus and Faustina were found.

Hawick Common-Riding.

HAWICK COMMON-RIDING is a festival which is held every year on the Friday and Saturday that fall between the 5th and the 12th of June, that is, on the Friday and Saturday after the first Monday in June. Before the adoption of the New Style in 1752, the last Friday of May was the day on which the Common-Riding was held. It is, as the name implies, the riding of the marches, or boundaries, of the town's lands. The custom of making an annual tour of the boundaries of town lands is one which has been observed in several other places. It is very probable that doing so would be resorted to when a community found that adjacent proprietors were overstepping the limits of their own land, and encroaching on, or appropriating, a part of the community's domains.

In the year 1537, James Douglas of Drumlanrig, Baron of the Barony of Hawick, granted a charter to the town of Hawick, in which he conveyed to it 1,400 acres of land. This land, though now considerably decreased in quantity, has ever since been known as the Muir or Common, and, as at the time when this bequest was made few boundaries of lands were fenced, the necessity of seeing that the adjoining proprietors did not encroach became very often an imperative duty. It is probable that the riding of the Marches would be begun very soon after the date of the Drumlanrig Charter, in order that the lands given by Douglas might be preserved and handed down intact to the descendants of the burgesses of the town.

The earliest reference to the Common-Riding occurs in an Act of the Bailies passed in the year 1640, the tenth clause of which is as follows:—"Item, whatsomever person that beis not present yeirlic at the common ryding and setting the faires, sal pay forty shillings, *toties quoties*, and wardit without license or ane lawful excuse." ("Annals of Hawick," by James Wilson. Edinburgh: Thomas George Stephenson, 1850, page 46.)

In order that none might escape compliance with this clause of the Burgh Act, the Burgess Roll was called

over at the Muir by the Town Clerk. Absentees were thus detected:—"A burgess charged with not being present at the riding and meithing of the common, pleads that he was at the *Watch-know*, and is assolizied." (Wilson's "Annals," page 62.) The following entry also occurs in the Council Books of Hawick in the year 1645:—"The said day Allan Deans, traveller, being accused for not being at the riding and *meithing* of the Common upon the 24th of May, 1645, compearing, confessit he was at the *Watch-know*, assolizies him of the penalty and fine, and actit himself gif ever he do the lyk he shall pay the double of the penalty, conform to the Act, and double punishment." (Wilson's "Annals," page 65.) In 1699, the following entry occurs in the Council Records:—"The sum of £4 Scots ordered to be paid to the town's officer for his common-riding coat, to be defrayed out of the first ready money that can be had out of the burgess money." (Wilson's "Annals," page 105.) There are a few other entries concerning the Common-Riding in the Council Records.

The *Watch-Knowe* was a height overlooking the town, from which a good view of the surrounding country could be obtained. It seems, from the occasional references made in the burgh and other records, to have been customary for certain of the citizens to betake themselves to the *Watch-knowe*, in order that they might guard against the town being surprised by roving parties of freebooters, and this was more especially necessary on the day when the Common-Riding took place. *Meithing* the Marches (or boundaries of the estate) meant making landmarks of some kind or other, at short distances, so that the boundary of the unenclosed lands might be known from point to point—that is, from *meith* to *meith*. A *meith* was a landmark. In some cases it consisted merely of a *stucken*, or *stab* (*Anglice*, a stake), which was driven into the ground. In other cases it was a large stone, set up on end. It was also customary at one time, before the Muir was enclosed, for a number of the burgesses to take slaughter-