Ritchie Robson.

Tweddale Dialect.

Walking out by Jedwater with my grandfather, who liked to take a bit dander as he used to say, I noticed the broken-down walls of a ruined building on the brae-face about a mile out from Jedburgh. Without much interest, I asked what the place had been.

"Dad, lassie," said he, "it's queer ye should ask that; an' still queerer ye should ask me, the only bein' in Jeddart that can tell ee about it. It has been a ruin this mony a year. The last tenant was yin' Ritchie Robson, an' accordin' tae my granny, whae tells the story, a man fearsome craitter has never been seen in Jeddart either afore or since. Yin ce wad like tae hear, I'll just tell ee the story as I heard it free her, they sixty 'er back when it was a brae-lit 'cessel'."

I agreed eagerly, and my grandfather began.

"Sure," said he, "I mind fine o' bein' sent aff tae bed gey an' early, it bein' a wild, winter's night, an' me the youngest o' thrii by a guid few. I slept in the box-bed in the
kitchen, an' on this night the room was quiet, as ma father had gaun over tae Weel Scott's for a bit game at the dambrod, an' grannie an' ma twa brothers, Peter an' Gilbert, were sittin' dozin' in front o' a muckle log fire. The lamp wisna lichtit, but the lowe o' the fire gazed muckle, black sheddas lump about the wa', an' afore lang I was dozin' aff tae sleep. It was roused up, however, by 'ma ae brither, Peter, 'lettin' oot a good laugh an' roarin' oot: "Ghosts!" Man, dinna blather. I wonder at ee, listenin' tae sic rubbish. Ee should hae maar sense at your age.

At this ma grannie chippit in, sayin': "Now, Peter, dinna yeer be sic contramacious. There's naebody that kens a thing, an' few sae daft that they ken naethin', an' if ee'll haud er tounge a meenit, I'll just tell ee a story that'll show ee Gilbert's no sae daft as ee think."

At this I cockit up ma lugs, though keepin' ma een steeked, for grannie's stories were aye weel worth the listenin' tae.

Dweel, she began, I mind fine when I was a bit lassie about twel' year auld, a stranger cam' tae the toon. His name was Ritchie Robson, an' he cam' frae Northumberland, as onybody could tell
for the queer way he spoke, when he spoke at all, which wasna often.

Nobody in Jethart liked 'im. 'The first, an' I dinna wonder, 'twas ill-famed creature I never saw, what wi' his long yella face, an' snarlin' mou', an' his muckle growlin' een, an' dog-like teeth. By 'orsie, till he was, forbye, an' kima hunched i' the shoulther, an' gan ye passed 'im in the street, he wand glower at ee like a wullie cat.

Weel, he rentit a bit place no far oot the Jed an' set up as a farmer. He aye seemed tae hae plenty sillet, for his dooth were aye jinglin', an' nae doot hie wad tae need o'it, for naebody hae been able tae make a leevin' oot the place afore 'im. Deed, ilka field was sat wi' 0' stanes, he'd better hae started a quarry.

He hadna been long i' the toon afore folk begood tae notice that forbye his forbiddin' looks an' manner he was a perfectly Godless man. It lookit as if he never intended tae enter the Kirk door. Naturally the skyll toon was fair horriifid at sic heathenish conduct — as if 'bein' English wasna bad enouich in itseil'. The puir auld minister went aince tae try an' get Robson tae mend his ways, but never again.

Euphie Phaup,
what was maid at the manse in that day, told me mither that the pair, auld soul cam' hyein fair shaken. Seemins'by Robson had come tae the door in a black rage, and shoutin' oot: "Wha'd ye want wi' me?" had made tae shut the door in 's face.

When the minister, no deterred by this awful-like greetin', had begged him in the Lord's name tae come an' join the Kirk, Ritchie had broken oot in a sweit an' a tremble, an' roarin' oot the awful'est aiths, had shut the door ithoot mair ado.

This story wasna lang in bein' kenned a' ower the toon, an' bune folk begeod.

Tae say that Ritchie was in league wi' the devil, an' mair especially ab that year turned oot a bad yin for the farmers.

Beasts die'd, the crops were a 'diseased, an' in a' the bonny orchards o' Jethart there was scarce an apple tae be seen.

Deed, the only place that seemed tae dae away fine was Robson's 'quarry', as folk ca'ed it, though it was war bin than any ither in Jed Valley, an' he'i kent little or naething aboot fermin' as the day-labourers could tell that workit 'ill 'im.

Forbye that, frae the first day he
derkened the Valley o' the Jed, sic a number o' fa is an' accidens befell both man an' beast as had never been kennd afore. It seemed that ilka man, wumman or ba' m nae crossed Ritchie Robson's path wad suffer for't. The little laddie Trumple shouted efter 'im in the street ae day, juist ba' m like, see ken, an' the mornin' efter the pur ba' m was fund tae hae gane clean daft, ravin' an' demented, an' remained sae till the end o' his days, pur critter.

An' there was inld Jean Trapp, a werra relieigious, weel-allein wumman, though skinna naaer-begann. Weel, she stoppit in front o' him in the street ae day, an' shouted oot:

"Ritchie Robson, blaejard as ee is, it's no ower late for ee tae seek the Lord's salvation, an' I'm willin' tae guide eer fit-steps in the way they should goin'!"

Ritchie jist glowered in silence for a meanit, then he gae a bit laigh lauch, that made her bluid rin cauld.

"Mind whaur ee's gaun eer sel' auld wife," says he, "Jist guide eer ain steps wi' care or mebbe ee'll hae a fa'!"

An' shair eneuch, the week efter,
dirdn' auld Jean fa' doon the steps o' her hoose, an' brake her hid-bane?
cty, an' never raise oot her bed again frae that day, putt crumman.

Ded aye, I could tell o' mony mair sic queer things, but A menna be a' richt, so A' ill content maseal wi' sayin' that what wi' ae thing an' another, folk beyound tae hae ma' clot that Rolston was a servant o' the devil. Indeed, some went fasser an' said he was the Evil Jin' imself.

Aweel, however that may be, the fear o' 'im grew on us a' till seerch anybody in the toon daured look 'im in the face. 'Nane wad hae dealin' wi' 'im, and sune 'nane wad work till 'im, an' A mind weel ho ma' mither used tae gliff the younger bairns by threatnin' tae bring Ritchie Rolston tae them when they didna dae what they were telt.

Ilka day there was a new story about 'im, an' as the simmer passed an' winter drew in these grew mair an' mair uncanny. 'I was even said he'd been seen dancin' naked on the Denion Moor wi' a wheen auld screechin' witches at midniecht, an' that on Christmas Eve his hoose was lit up a' nicht lang, an' wild skirlin' an'
screechin', an' eerie music that gared their heets, turn cauld was hard by a
the terrified folk for a mile around.
Some even said Ritchie was the leadin'spirit at the Witches' Convention
supposed tae be held in the ruins o'
old Sourden Kirk. The cauld doctor
whae kept the schule for gentry's sons
was nae much interested in thae stories.

"Black magic," says he, and off he gae'd
intae a lang harangue aboot devilish
practices. His skin o' crack is beyond
my comprehension, but o'ae thing
I'm certain—if Ritchie Robson had
leaved much danger he would hae had
a' the folk in Jethart losin' their
reason, for fear is a queer thing
an' aye growin' greater. But the
black devil was tae dee, an' this
is hoo it cam aboot: When the
next summer cam round, Ritchie,
haein' nae men tae wark for im,
had tae slave baith nicht an' day,
an' he sune began tae wark on the
Sabbath an' a.

On a fine Sunday mornin', when
the Kirk bells were singin', twae-three
men walkin' in the Jed saw Ritchie on
tap o' a hay-stook, whistlin' tae
"Din' sees ye?" said yin o' them. "Ther'll be a judgment passed on' em yet. Workin' on the Lord's day, an' a-lustlin' his wicked lungs." Scurshed were the words oot o his mou' when Ritchie slippit an' fell doon frae the stook. Weel, they stude a while till seif if he wad rise up again, an' when he didna', they creepit forrit, handin' their braith, an' went round the stook, an' there was Ritchie wi a gashly look on his face, lyin' deid wi a broken neck. "Gettin' ower their fricht, they carriect 'im intae the hoose, an' streakit 'im oot on the bed, yin sinnin' tae the loon for a doctor, though weel they kenned he was past mortal aid. After the kirk seailed, the news spread like wild-feer, an' naebody could speak aboot anythin' else a' day. No that anybody was sorry he was deid. Na! Na! Relief was onermaist in a' our minds. But the manner o' his death, ee ken, was kenna fearsum tae think aboot, for there could be little doot but that it was a judgment o' the Lord. There was muckle argyment aboot 'is
burial; the feck o' the folk were for buryin' him on the Gallows Hill, among the rogues an' suicides, maintainin' he was due nor burial, but the minister held out stooply for Christian burial in the kirk-yaird, little though he deserved it.

As Robson had neither friend nor relation, the minister was sair perplexed as to what would prepare his corpse for burial. He needed hae worthit, for there were twae auld crofts whae were ay the fores at births an' daiths, especially if a dram was gaun. 'On this bein' promised, they swooshit doon like a pair o' vultures, an' ravin' a sheet frae Robson's bed, soon made short work o' the business. The funeral was arranged for the Tuesday at noon.

'Three the time o' Robson's daith, the heat grew mair an' mair oppressive, yeu uneasy, sultry skin o' heat that makes a body fair aiseless. On the mornin' o' the funeral it was suffokin'. The air grew hivier an' the sky blacker every minute. No a blade o' green, no a single leaf was stirrin'. It was plain tae be seen that a
The storm was comin'
Six men had been gotten tae carry
the coffin tae the kirk-yaird, an' so
they cam' sweetin' doon the lanely
road, no a soul follow'it ahint.
There was none tae mourn for Litchie
Robson. 'They had juist gotten tae
the fit o' the Rampart Brae when
the storm broke. The rain cam' doon
fair hale watter. Mortal man couldn'a
stand against it. Drippin' the coffin
they flew for shelter tae the nearest
close, whaur they stude lookin' oot at
the rain. Stottin' seawast high
of the casca.' Suddenly there was a
'blindin' flash o' lichtnin' that
lit up the by Jill sky, an' a rumble
o' thunner like the crack o' doom.
The terrified watchers bent their heads
in fear, an' when they liftit them
again they saw the coffin smashed
tae match-wood, an' Robson's body
lyin' in a swirl o' dirty watter
that cam' gushin' doon the brae.
The folk leavin' nearby, whae had
been keepin' free the corners o' their drawn
blinds left the windaw an' hid in the
ben-maist end o' their hooses,
whaur they remained in prayer a' day.
of claro the was the wrath o' God an' the day o' judgment. The storm passed, but it was long ere the terrified men found courage tae leave the close an' rin for their hymns, an' when they did, mane daured gie a second look at that gruesome thing lyin' there in the road.

In a' the toon no a body crossed their doorstep that day. An' when darkness fell, that awesome horror still lay in the glens an' the wees.

Next mornin', the minister, whae had shown the maest amazin' courage through oot the fearfu' business, rallied a ween o' the bolder spirits tae gang wi' him an' caisie the coffin tae its grave no a hunder yards away. But when they ca' tae the spot, there leet nae Stoffit. For there was naethin' there. Naething, no even a splinter o' wood. Well, they stude there fair dumb - scoondered, an' afore they could gither their wits, wee Geordie Bonn, the grave-digger, cam' rinnin' doon the brae wi' his een fair loudin' oot his heid. When he was jibble tae speak, he telt them he had gane tae gie the grave a bit look, an' had been
Fair flabbergasted tae see there was nac
grave there in a marnner o' speakin'. Just
a clair o' glaur, an' the wind filled
up tae the talp. No believin' his keen,
de aude thinkin' he mune be either
daft or dreamin'. Then, a' at yince, a
fearsome black dog wi' glowerin' een,
raise givrin' oot the grond, an' gae'd
robin' away like a shedda between the
heid-stones, the vainish through the
west door o' the chibbey, aroon the
wretch's wheel. At that he let out
a yell un' took tae his heels, haein' little dou - that the monster was Robson's
ghost.

Weel, it's no easy tae say,
and it's harder tae say what became
o' hitchie Robson. Whether his body
lay in the grave or no nac man could
tell, an' nane daured pit it tae the
proof. But there's the thing it
can still proof prove - frae that
day tae this no a blade o' grass
wad ever grow on that unhallowed
spot.