A LAWNMARKET CONFLICT.*

A.D. 1640.

In 1640, the well known street in the Old Town of Edinburgh, called the Lawnmarket, was the scene of one of

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* Memorie of the Somervilles; Chambers' Traditions of Edinburgh.

those personal combats which peculiarly distinguished the Scotish capital for a long series of years. Major Somerville, a relation of *Broad Hugh Somerville of the Writes*, mentioned in a preceding narrative, and one Captain Crawford, had a quarrel, which originated in the following manner during the siege of Edinburgh Castle by the Covenanters. Somerville was devoted to the interest of the latter party, while Crawford was zealous for the Cavalier cause. The Castle had by this time been surrendered by General Ruthven to the Covenanters, who were in possession of the fortress, now commanded by Major Somerville. Nevertheless Captain Crawford, who is accused of considering himself to be a privileged person who might go into the Castle whenever he pleased, walked up one day to the gate, which was closed, and made a loud noise for admittance. The sentinels told him he could not enter until they acquainted Major Somerville with his name and quality. Irritated at this opposition, Captain Crawford designated Somerville by a very opprobrious epithet in French, and exclaimed in a towering passion—"Your Major is neither a soldier nor a gentleman; and if he were without this gate, and at a distance from his guards, I would tell him he was a *culzeon* (poltroon) to the boot." Having thus delivered himself, the valiant Captain began to march off.

It happened that Major Somerville immediately made his appearance, and was informed by the sentinels of the sentiments of Captain Crawford respecting him. The Major in a furious passion ordered the gate to be opened, and soon overtook Crawford, who was at no great distance from it. Coming up to him he seized him by the arm, and said—"Sir, you must allow me to accompany you a little way, and then you shall know more of my mind." The Captain, who it is said appeared "conscious of his own miscarriage,' told him that he would wait on him where

he pleased. They accordingly went down the south side of the Castlehill, crossed the Grassmarket, and proceeding up the Candlemakers' Row, they went to the back of the Greyfriars' Church, where there was then a retired green between the church and the city wall. Here Major Somerville drew his sword, and said—"I am now, Sir, without the Castle gate, and at a distance from my soldiers; draw quickly, and make good your threat."

The valorous Captain Crawford, however, was by no means inclined to have a tilt with his antagonist, and, instead of putting himself in an attitude of defence, he civilly took off his hat, and begged the Major's pardon for saying anything to his prejudice, which he believed the soldiers had very much exaggerated. The Major was astonished at this unexpected submission, and pushing him with his left hand, said to him contemptuously—"You have neither the discretion of a gentleman nor the courage of a soldier; get you gone for a cowardly fool, fit only for Bedlam." He then left Captain Crawford, and returned to the Castle. On the way he met three of his own officers, who had followed to know the result of the quarrel. They found Major Somerville at the south end of the alley still in existence called the Castle Wynd, leading from the Grassmarket to the esplanade. When they were informed of what had passed between the Major and the Captain, they "marvelled much at the impudence and baseness" of the latter.

It appears that Captain Crawford had taken offence at not being invited to a dinner given that day in the Castle by Major Somerville to the Cavalier General Ruthven, after he had surrendered the fortress, and before he marched out with all the honours of war. Shortly after the Major had returned to the Castle, he sat down to dinner with his guests, and it is quaintly said that "there is no doubt, considering the quality of the giver and receivers, the entertainment was great, *and they drank liberally, most of them*

being soldiers!" Captain Crawford, with whose reputation for courage the public had probably taken sundry liberties in consequence of his conduct in the Greyfriars' churchyard, resolved to settle his affair of honour with Major Somerville, and to challenge and fight him on the High Street at the most public time of the day. An opportunity was afforded him about a week after the former offence had been committed. Major Somerville had occasion in the forenoon to wait on the Committee of Estates and General Leslie, then sitting in the Parliament House, on some important business, and when proceeding thither from the Castle, he was assailed by Captain Crawford in the Lawnmarket near the Weigh House—an edifice which stood in the middle of the street at the head of the West Bow. Having previously left his cloak in a shop at the south side of the Lawnmarket, the Captain, armed with a long broadsword and a Highland dirk, came up to Major Somerville and said—"If you are a pretty man, draw your sword"—at the same time pulling out his own sword and dagger. The Major was at first startled by this bold interruption while in discharge of his duty, more especially as his immediate attendance on the Committee of Estates was necessary—a fact which probably Captain Crawford well knew, and which his Cavalier principles would induce him to hold in great contempt. The result of the encounter is given in a graphic and picturesque manner by the Noble author of the "Memorie of the Somervilles." We are told that the Major's "honour and preservation gave him no time to consult the convenience or inconvenience he was now under, either as to the present charge or disadvantage of weapons, having only a large cane in his hand, which he usually carried when walking, and the sword which General Ruthven had recently given him. It hung in a shoulder-belt far back, as the fashion then was, and he was forced to guard two or three strokes with his cane before he got out his sword, which

being now drawn, he soon put his adversary on the defensive, by bearing up so close to him, and pressing his thrusts, that the Captain, for all his courage and advantage of weapons, was forced to give way, with difficulty parrying the redoubled thrusts which Somerville made at him.

"The combat, for so in effect it was, although accidental, began about the middle of the Lawnmarket. Somerville drives down the Captain, still fighting, near to the goldsmiths' shops, where, fearing to be nailed to the boards, these shops being then all of timber, he resolved a notable blow to revenge all his former affronts. Making, therefore, a feint, having parried Somerville's thrust with his dagger, the Captain suddenly turns his hand, and by a back blow with his broadsword he thought to have *hamshekelled* (hamstringed) him on one if not both of his legs, which Somerville only prevented by nimbly leaping backward, interposing the thick cane in his left hand, which was cut in two by the violence of the blow. And now Providence so ordered it that the Captain, missing his mark, overreached himself so far that he could not recover his sword in time to a fit posture of defence before Somerville, having beaten up the dagger in the Captain's left hand with the remaining part of his own stick, instantly closes with him, and with the pummel of his sword he strikes him to the ground, and at first, because of his baseness, he was inclined to transfix him, but his heart relented. At that moment some of his own soldiers happened to come up, who were so incensed at this attack on their commanding officer, that they were ready to cut the Captain in pieces, if he had not been rescued out of their hands, and safely conveyed to prison, where he was put in irons, and continued in a most wretched condition somewhat more than a year. But at length, having written a most submissive and pitiful letter to this gentleman's lady, who then resided at Gilmerton, which she communicated to him, being at that time in England as

governor of the town of Durham, he was pleased to write in the Captain's favour to the Committee of Estates and Magistrates of Edinburgh that he might have his liberty, which was granted after he had brought upon himself perpetual banishment."