

Cromarty, whose collection of books, chiefly poetical, amounted to from about eighty to a hundred. I used to be often at nights in the workshop of the cabinetmaker, and was sometimes privileged to hear him repeat his poem. There was not much admiration of poets or poetry in the place; and my praise, though that of a very young critic, had always the double merit of being both ample and sincere. I knew the very rocks and trees which his description embraced—had heard the birds to which he referred, and seen the flowers; and as the hill had been of old a frequent scene of executions, and had borne the gallows of the sheriffdom on its crest, nothing could be more definite than the grave reference, in his opening line, to

“The verdant rising of the *Gallow-hill*.”

And so I thought a very great deal of his poem, and what I thought I said; and he, on the other hand, evidently regarded me as a lad of extraordinary taste and discernment for my years. There was another mechanic in the neighborhood,—a house-carpenter, who, though not a poet, was deeply read in books of all kinds, from the plays of Farquhar to the sermons of Flavel; and as both his father and grandfather,—the latter, by the way, a Porteous-mob man, and the former a personal friend of poor Fergusson, the poet,—had also been readers and collectors of books, he possessed a whole pressful of tattered, hard-working volumes, some of them very curious ones; and to me he liberally extended, what literary men always value, “the full freedom of the press.” But of all my occasional benefactors in this way, by far the greatest was poor old Francie, the retired clerk and supercargo.

Francie was naturally a man of fair talent and active curiosity. Nor was he by any means deficient in acquirement. He wrote and figured well, and knew a good deal about at least the theory of business; and when articled in early life to a Cromarty merchant and shopkeeper, it was with tolerably fair prospects of getting on in the world. He had, however, a certain infirmity of brain which rendered both talent and