

direction for poetry has not prevented me from acquiring the skill of at least the common mechanic. I am not more ignorant of masonry and architecture than many professors of these arts who never measured a stanza. There is also some satisfaction in reflecting that, unlike some would-be satirists, I have not assailed private character, and that though men may deride me as an unskilful poet, they cannot justly detest me as a bad or ill-natured man. Nay, I shall possibly have the pleasure of repaying those who may be merry at my expense, in their own coin. An ill-conditioned critic is always a more pitiable sort of person than an unsuccessful versifier; and the desire of showing one's own discernment at the expense of one's neighbor, a greatly worse thing than the simple wish, however divorced from the ability, of affording him harmless pleasure. Further, it would

think, not be difficult to show that my mistake in supposing myself to be a poet is not a whit more ridiculous, and infinitely less mischievous, than many of those into which myriads of my fellow-men are falling every day. I have seen the vicious attempting to teach morals, and the weak to unfold mysteries. I have seen men set up for freethinkers who were born not to think at all. To conclude, there will surely be cause for self-gratulation in reflecting that, by becoming an author, I have only lost a few pounds, not gained the reputation of being a mean fellow, who had teased all his acquaintance until they had subscribed for a worthless book; and that the severest remark of the severest critic can only be, 'a certain anonymous rhymist is no poet.'

As, notwithstanding the blank in the title page, the authorship of my volume would be known in Cromarty and its neighborhood, I set myself to see whether I could not, meanwhile, prepare for the press something better suited to make an impression in my favor. In tossing the bar or throwing the stone, the competitor who begins with a rather indifferent cast is never very unfavorably judged if he immediately mend it by giving a better; and I resolved on mending my cast, if I could, by writing for the *Inverness Courier*—which was now open to me, through the kindness of the editor—a series of carefully prepared letters on some popular subject. In the days of Goldsmith, the herring-fishing employed, as he tells us in one of his essays, "all Grub Street." In the north of Scotland this fishery was a popular theme little more than twenty years ago. The welfare of whole communities depended in no slight degree on its success: it formed the basis of many a calculation, and the subject of many an investment; and it was all the more suitable for my purpose from the circum-