

The place was visited by an itinerant lecturer on elocution,—one Walsh, who, as his art was not in great request among the quiet ladies and busy gentlemen of Cromarty, failed to draw houses; till at length there appeared one morning, placarded on post and pillar, an intimation to the effect, that Mr. Walsh would that evening deliver an elaborate criticism on the lately-published volume of “Poems written in the leisure hours of a Journeyman Mason,” and select from it a portion of his evening readings. The intimation drew a good house; and, curious to know what was awaiting me, I paid my shilling with the others, and got into a corner. First in the entertainment there came a wearisome dissertation on harmonic inflections, double emphasis, the echoing words, and the monotones. But, to borrow from Meg Dods, “Oh, what a style of language!” The elocutionist, evidently an untaught and grossly ignorant man, had not an idea of composition. Syntax, grammar, and good sense, were set at nought in every sentence; but then, on the other hand, the inflections were carefully maintained, and went rising and falling over the nonsense beneath, like the waves of some shallow bay over a bottom of mud and comminuted sea-weed. After the dissertation, we were gratified by a few recitations. “Lord Ullin’s Daughter,” the “Razor Seller,” and “My Name is Norval,” were given in great force. And then came the critique. “Ladies and gentlemen,” said the reviewer, “We cannot expect much from a journeyman mason in the poetry line. Right poetry needs teaching. No man can be a proper poet unless he be an elocutionist; for, unless he be an elocutionist, how can he make his verses emphatic in the right places, or manage the harmonic inflexes, or deal with the rhetorical pauses? And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, I’ll show you, from various passages in this book, that the untaught journeyman mason who made it never took lessons in elocution. I’ll first read you a passage from a piece of verse called the ‘Death of Gardiner,’—the person meant being the late Colonel Gardiner, I suppose. The be-