

my term of apprenticeship, for fifteen years,—no inconsiderable portion of the more active part of a man's life; but the time was not altogether lost. I enjoyed in these years fully the average amount of happiness, and learned to know more of the Scottish people than is generally known. Let me add,—for it seems to be very much the fashion of the time to draw dolorous pictures of the condition of the laboring classes,—that from the close of the first year in which I wrought as a journeyman, up till I took final leave of the mallet and chisel, I never knew what it was to want a shilling; that my two uncles, my grandfather, and the mason with whom I served my apprenticeship,—all working men,—had had a similar experience; and that it was the experience of my father also. I cannot doubt that deserving mechanics may, in exceptional cases, be exposed to want; but I can as little doubt that the cases are exceptional, and that much of the suffering of the class is a consequence either of improvidence on the part of the competently skilled, or of a course of trifling during the term of apprenticeship,—quite as common as trifling at school,—that always lands those who indulge in it in the hapless position of the inferior workman. I trust I may further add, that I was an honest mechanic. It was one of the maxims of Uncle James, that as the Jews, restricted by law to their forty stripes, always fell short of the legal number by one, lest they should by any accident exceed it, so a working man, in order to balance any disturbing element of selfishness in his disposition, should bring his charges for work done, slightly but sensibly within what he deemed the proper mark, and so give, as he used to express himself, his “customer the cast of the baulk.” I do think I acted up to the maxim; and that, without injuring my brother workmen by lowering their prices, I never yet charged an employer for a piece of work that, fairly measured and valued, would not be rated at a slightly higher sum than that in which it stood in my account.

I had quitted Cromarty for the south late in November, and landed at Leith on a bleak December morning, just in time