

he had himself heard told, he was accustomed to extemporize with great success the wildest biographies. Meantime, other branches of his education had been going on outside of the school. He was the leader in excursions along the precipices and into the caves on the coast. He had learned to collect on the beach and to distinguish from each other the various rocks

of the locality, as porphyries, granites, gneisses, quartz, and mica schists, and had discovered for himself that Cromarty possessed among its minerals one precious stone, the garnet; and his observations in other departments had been encouraged and corrected by his uncle Sandy, who, as he always claimed, knew more of living nature than many professors of natural history. He had studied scenery, customs, and physiognomies in the highlands of Sutherlandshire, among his Gaelic cousins; had heard the story of Culloden from men who fought in the battle; had conversed with an old lady who witnessed the last witch-burning in the north of Scotland; and had acquired a habit, which marks his life and his writings, of studying historical monuments as well as geological formations, collecting local legends as well as fossils, delighting as much to discover a kelpie as a pterodactyl, and regarding types of character and phases of society in connection with the facts of science. The foremost youth in the district, his uncles wished him to prepare for Aberdeen college, and there to study for the church; but he demurred, declaring that he had no call to the sacred office, and they admitted that he had better be anything than an uncalled minister. A trade was therefore resolved upon, and he was apprenticed for three years to one of his relatives, who was a stone mason. From his 17th till his 34th year he led the life of an operative mason, journeying in summer to pursue his labors in different parts of Scotland, devoting all his leisure to earnest intellectual cultivation, reading all kinds of books on summer evenings and at home during the winter, and cherishing a belief from the beginning that literature and perhaps natural science would after all prove his proper vocation. During the first part of this period (1818-'25), as an apprentice and journeyman, he was subjected to all the coarse and rough experiences of his trade, working as one of a gang in quarries or in sheds, and passing his evenings in wretched highland bothies or in hovels in lowland villages. He afterward exchanged the life of a journeyman, working season after season for different masters, for that of a jobbing mason, undertaking private commissions in the way of his trade, such as the sculpturing and lettering of tombstones, stone dials, and the like; yet his habits of work continued in all respects to be those of a common mason, and his domestic accommodations those