FOOTLOOSE IN FARM SERVICE:
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL RECOLLECTIONS
OF JOHN DICKIE

EDITED BY MARJORY HARPER
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The world into which John Dickie was born in November 1824 was one of transition and transformation. Less than a decade had elapsed since the end of the Napoleonic wars, and his childhood and teenage years were to encompass significant political and ecclesiastical upheavals, as well as ongoing agricultural and industrial development, and the launch of Queen Victoria’s long reign. It was also an age in which the daily lives of ordinary individuals in obscure locations were remarkably well documented, thanks not least to the fashion for information-gathering established by Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster, MP for Caithness, at the end of the eighteenth century. His famous 21-volume *Statistical Account of Scotland*, published in the 1790s, has left us with a detailed snapshot of Scotland through the eyes of the 938 parish ministers whom Sinclair badgered to answer his 160 questions. Sinclair’s survey also helped to set a pattern of statistical investigation and reporting that was adopted or adapted by generations of royal commissions, select committees and census planners, and replicated in the *New Statistical Account* half a century later.¹

This wealth of sources allows us to enter in a small way into the lives of John Dickie and his contemporaries. The two *Statistical Accounts* in particular provide a geographical context for a tantalisingly brief, partial autobiography, which documents Dickie’s migration from Aberdeen to Balquhain as a child and then around the Garioch and Formartine as a labourer until his story ends abruptly with his imminent move back to Aberdeen just before his wedding on 20 December 1847.

Little is known of his later life. He outlived two wives: Catherine Mitchell, who died after only five years of marriage, leaving him with one daughter; and Margaret Simpson, to whom he was married from 1856 until 1884, and with whom he had four daughters and a son. He was employed at a variety of low-level jobs in Aberdeen, including warehouseman, grocer’s assistant and coppersmith’s labourer, and lived in a number of fairly humble city-centre locations. After the death of his second wife, he stayed in Ann Street with three of his daughters, two of whom were jute workers, presumably at the adjacent Broadford mill. He continued to dabble in literary pursuits until, on 5 May 1903, he died from chronic bronchitis at the home of his son-in-law in St Peter Street.

Dickie was by no means the only working man to pen a memoir: such a pastime was akin to a Victorian cottage industry. Some of these accounts found
their way into print at the time, while others have been resurrected from family history cupboards and published in recent years. The particular value of Dickie’s observations is that they demonstrate—albeit implicitly—the impact of regional and national issues on everyday life in rural Aberdeenshire.

Constant mobility is arguably the dominant default theme woven into the tapestry of Dickie’s recollections. Over the course of little more than a decade he had eleven engagements as a fee’d labourer, all of them within a fifteen-mile radius of Inverurie. Farm service at Harlaw, Thainstone, Daviot, Tarves, Udny and Oldmeldrum made up his employment portfolio. A generation earlier, his mother too had been a peripatetic child, born in Aberdeen and raised in Montrose, from where at the age of ten she and her sister ran away to a relative at the Blair of Fintray after being orphaned and left to the mercies of a ‘hardhearted stepmother’. His father’s family, however, had a long association with crofting in Balquhain, a community which in 1793 allegedly supported seventy residents out of a total of 986 in the parish of Chapel of Garioch.

Dickie’s experience was not unusual, for short distance migration had always been part and parcel of Scottish life. By the nineteenth century, it was also common practice for Highlanders to secure seasonal agricultural work in the Lowlands, in some cases returning to the same employer year after year, and using the wages from their six-month sojourns to help pay the rent of their croft back home. For some, however, the destabilising effect of itinerancy was the first step on the road to permanent migration, within Scotland, across the border, or overseas. That the tempo and scope of migration were increasing is confirmed by frequent references to the mobile Scot in both Statistical Accounts, as well as in contemporary newspapers and journals.

How do we account for this floating population of farm labourers, who, like John Dickie, frequently changed their place of employment at the Whitsunday and Martinmas feeing markets? The nineteenth century was an era in which farm life in north-east Scotland—and throughout the rural Lowlands—underwent the climax of a fundamental restructuring that had begun in the mid-1700s. New ideas generated by the economists and scientists of the Enlightenment brought about a greater variety of crops, farmed in carefully planned rotation on land which was efficiently drained, artificially fertilised, and cultivated with new, labour-saving implements. The drive for commercialisation saw East Lothian become the girnel of Scotland, and the south-west its dairy heartland, while the north-east corner, thanks to systematic enclosure policies and improved feeding regimes, emerged as a renowned beef cattle centre. High prices for stock and crop until the 1860s encouraged farmers to invest in improvements, and the amount of land under cultivation was extended by constant reclamation, accompanied by the steady consolidation of small farms into bigger and bigger units.
Of course, it was not only the physical appearance of the landscape that was transformed by the new ideas and practices. So were the lives of the armies of tenant farmers and farm servants who made their living from the land. There was no single template of change: in the Border hills, levels of depopulation were comparable to the experience of the Highland clearances, while in the dairying districts of the south-west the retention of small family farms meant that the population remained relatively stable. The profitability of grain-growing in the south-east created a clear division between farmers and labourers at a relatively early date, while on the less hospitable soils of Aberdeenshire the need to reclaim land led to fragmentation of holdings and the emergence of battalions of smallholders. By the time of John Dickie’s memoir, however, that pattern of smallholdings was fast disappearing, replaced as a consequence of the expanding acreage of reclaimed land. Proprietors, eager to maximise efficiency, cancelled leases, consolidated their properties and imposed higher rents on the larger farms that they created.

Such a situation inevitably produced winners and losers. Those who stood to gain most were the landlords and the emerging elite of capitalist tenant farmers, that minority of men who had the resources necessary to invest in profitable development of their land. Those who lost out were the small subsistence farmers on the bottom rung of the ladder, who saw the manageable rents and nineteen-year leases that had characterised the first phase of restructuring replaced by vastly increased rent demands and much more exacting leases, or—even worse—eviction as a consequence of the disappearance of their holding.

Equally unsettled were the farm servants—men like John Dickie—who in an earlier, more patriarchal, era, had been able to look forward to the day when they would graduate from wage labour to tenancy of the family smallholding, or a croft of their own. By the time Dickie entered into farm service, however, any such ambitions had become a fanciful pipedream, as farm servants saw themselves condemned to a lifetime of drudgery and insecurity in the employment of a class-conscious, profit-driven minority of tenant farmers. Many workers were now hired publicly rather than privately, no longer on the basis of their reputation for reliability or their family links with the area, but at impersonal biannual feeing markets, where farmers recruited strangers for the half-year simply on the strength of outward appearance.

The farm servants’ disillusionment was grounded in social insults as well as thwarted economic objectives and the spectre of impoverished old age. As a handful of big farmers grew richer, an ever-widening wedge was inserted between their lifestyles and those of the smaller farmers and labourers with whom they had been closely associated in the earlier phases of agricultural change. While the farmer and his family lived—often in a degree of self-imposed isolation—in the relative comfort of the farmhouse, the servants were consigned to the discomfort
of a succession of chaumers or bothies, the often squalid tied accommodation that accompanied their six-month employment contracts. ‘It is clear’, declared an editorial in the *Aberdeen Herald* in 1854, ‘that the cold and damp bothy – without a fire till the men light it … with the single dish unwashed from term to term – with stepping-stones to walk over pools of water and mud to bed – and with the everlasting meal and milk from Whitsunday to Martinmas, and from Martinmas to Whitsunday, will not induce our young ploughmen to remain at home and give up their chance of comfort, if not wealth, in America or Australia’.6

Two years earlier, the same newspaper had claimed that consolidation of farms was destroying the backbone of rural society in north-east Scotland by driving farm servants off the land, a situation which had been created, according to that Liberal-leaning newspaper, by the landed interest.

They were honest, plain, industrious men, who looked forward to the day when they or their sons would be able to get larger and larger farms as their honest savings increased. These men, in many cases, have been obliged, along with their families, to take refuge in our towns, or have emigrated to countries where their skill and industry will be more highly appreciated. And a farm servant, who may have saved fifty or sixty pounds, can get no small farm upon which he might lay out his little capital. His only refuge is a foreign land; and thus it is that our very best agricultural labourers are driven from the country by the folly of a ‘penny wise and pound foolish’ landocracy.7

The *Aberdeen Herald* put its editorial finger on the demographic consequences of disillusionment among farm servants. John Dickie and those with whom he worked were remarkably mobile, but their mobility was confined to a relatively small area of Aberdeenshire. Others spread their wings much further afield, as far as America or Australia, creating a haemorrhage that was of recurring concern to employers and politicians throughout – and beyond – the nineteenth century. Discontent and restlessness were easily converted into emigration, not least because the hardships and injustices of life on the land in Scotland were frequently contrasted (sometimes disingenuously) with glowing promises of freehold land and abundant farming opportunities across the Atlantic, or in the Antipodes.8

But the employers did not hold all the aces. The farm servants’ trump card in lobbying for better terms and conditions was the threat of a ‘clean toon’. This was when every hired servant on a farm left the farmer’s employment at term day, and in Whitsun 1843 it became part of John Dickie’s experience. In leaving his employment at West Fingask, Daviot, he was showing solidarity with other farm servants in not breaking ranks, though it is not clear that he had any particular quarrel with the farmer, John Strachan. It may have been that Dickie felt under
some moral obligation to leave, especially if the lead had been taken by the
grieve. For there was, says sociologist Ian Carter, an ‘unwritten law’ that existed
to protect the foreman in his crucial position as intermediary between farmer
and farm servants, and if he signaled his intention to leave, the others would
follow suit, effectively blackmauling the farmer into offering better conditions.9 ‘A
farmer who repeatedly suffered a clean toon would find great difficulty in hiring
new servants and would find it impossible to hire good servants’.10

The significance of solidarity in the farm servant community is demonstrated
in the fictional tale of a grieve who did not shift at a clean toon, and lost his
reputation as a result. In William Alexander’s classic novel of north-east farming,
Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk, the foreman at Clinkstyle farm, Tam Merrison—already
out of favour because he had not stood up to the harridan farmer’s wife in a
dispute over food—then lost his credibility entirely.

A day or two before the freeing market day it had leaked out that Tam was bidin’, and
the fact considerably intensified the feeling of contempt which his fellow-servants
had been in the habit of occasionally displaying towards him. They had hoped to
leave Clinkstyle with a clean toon again, and they were angry at being disappointed.11

William Alexander was a contemporary of John Dickie, whose background as
a farm servant in Chapel of Garioch—where Dickie grew up—gave his writings
about rural life added authenticity. After losing a leg in an accident while in his
twenties, he joined the staff of the Aberdeen Free Press in the 1850s, subsequently
serving as its editor for twenty years. At the same time he pursued his interest
in writing vernacular Doric fiction, and Johnny Gibb, his best-known novel, was
initially serialised in the Free Press in 1869–70. Set in the imaginary Aberdeenshire
parish of Pyketillim in the 1830s and 1840s, it charts the lives of two very different
tenants on the estate of Sir Simon Frissal—the hero, Johnny Gibb, and the anti-
hero, Peter Birse, who is goaded by his ambitious wife to expend his farm of
Clinkstyle at the expense of his neighbour, Gibb. Integral to the narrative are
the jealousies inherent in rural life, and the negative impact of the agricultural
upheaval that Alexander and Dickie had experienced as they grew up.12

Central to the story of Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk are two other concerns that
preoccupied Scots in the 1840s: the Disruption of the Church of Scotland and
the reform of the poor laws. Johnny Gibb had become a ‘non-intrusionist’ and
subsequently a supporter of the Free Church after seeing the enforced ‘intrusion’
of an unwanted minister on the parish of Culsalmond. Neither Chapel of
Garioch nor Culsalmond was all that far from Marnoch, the parish which lay at
the hub of much of the so-called Ten Years’ Conflict that preceded the major
secession of 1843. The Presbyterian Church in post-Reformation Scotland had a
long and tortuous history of secessions, most of them triggered by the issue of
patronage. While the Disruption, and the events preceding it, were part of that traditional pattern of anti-patronage protest, the problem went much deeper, involving a complex interweaving of theological, political, constitutional, social and economic factors. The result, after ten years of wrangling in the General Assembly, presbyteries and the Court of Session, was a schism that split the Established Church in two, made all the more dramatic because it reversed the trend of the early nineteenth century, when reunion had begun to replace fragmentation.

Described as ‘the most important domestic event in Scotland during the nineteenth century’,\textsuperscript{13} the Disruption divided real families and communities, as well as the fictional parishioners of Pyketillim. Every congregation in the city of Aberdeen seceded from the Church of Scotland in 1843, while in the county the response was more mixed. It was in that momentous year that John Dickie moved to Tarves to work as a horseman on the farm of North Ythsie. Although church affairs did not loom large in his narrative, he did note that ‘the Church was at this time in a very unsettled state’. During the previous year he had intermittently attended meetings organised by supporters of both sides, whose arguments ‘were oft so far beyond my comprehension that I was in some measure left in obscurity’. Bombarded with conflicting opinions, Dickie was uncertain about where to cast his lot, but, feeling that ‘it was time for me to become a member of some Church’, he responded to an invitation from the parish minister of Tarves, Francis Knox, and joined the Established denomination.

It was partly as a result of the Disruption that kirk sessions lost their centuries-long control of parish-based poor relief and—later—of education. But the growth and redistribution of the Scottish population had already been subjecting the effectiveness of poor law administration to scrutiny for some time before the events of 1843 drastically eroded the Church’s financial resources and ushered in a new age of secular administration. Under the old Scottish poor law, which dated back to as early as 1424, a clear moral distinction was made between the ‘deserving’ and the ‘undeserving’, with an emphasis on support being provided in the form of ‘outdoor relief’ by communities and families, rather than in poor houses. It was an attitude that persisted well beyond John Dickie’s day. While ‘deserving’ or ‘regular’ poor (the disabled, sick, children and elderly) were entered on the poor roll and were eligible to receive relief in their parish of birth or settlement, the ‘undeserving’, able-bodied unemployed were classified as vagabonds who should earn their own living. If family support did not meet the needs of the first category, they were entitled to relief from half the income of church collections, supplemented by other dues received by kirk sessions in fees and fines.

The ‘undeserving’ had to rely on the benevolence of individuals, like John Dickie’s first employer, Mrs Alex Strachan, the ‘farmeress’ whom he commended,
both for the ‘deep interest’ she took in her servants’ welfare, and for the charitable way in which she responded to ‘itinerate beggars’ who frequented the district around West Mains of Harlaw. The ‘occasional’ poor constituted a third category of pauper. These were individuals who had fallen on hard times through illness or some misfortune other than unemployment, and who could be relieved, at the discretion of the kirk session, by contributions from the other half of the church collections. Their eligibility for relief was not codified, but they were generally supported, probably as an insurance against them coming on to the regular roll. In the last resort, if church contributions were inadequate, a parish could levy a voluntary or compulsory assessment to make up the shortfall from freewill offerings.

The system had been designed when Scotland was overwhelmingly rural, and it worked best in country parishes, where kirk elders could use local knowledge and discretion to bend the rules. But by the 1820s signs of strain were clearly evident, in town and country alike, as a result, not only of demographic shifts, but of post-war depression and the release of a flood of Napoleonic war veterans onto an overstocked labour market. John Dickie’s passing comment on the limitations of poor relief in Aberdeenshire was made at a time when the reconfiguration of life on the land was a response to anticipation of a new poor law as well as the dictates of farming manuals. Proprietors, fearful that they would be legally obliged to support paupers on their estates, eradicated smallholdings and forced eviction on tenants who might be seen as potential paupers. On the same grounds they refused to supply cottages to married farm workers, who were required to board their dependents in a nearby town. As we have seen, it was not a policy that appealed to evicted tenants or to farm labourers, whose only option was communal housing in a steading or bothy.

Five years after John Dickie had reflected briefly on the relief of beggars at West Mains of Harlaw, a royal commission was appointed to investigate the operation of the poor law in Scotland, and in 1845, two years after the Disruption, new legislation came onto the statute book in the shape of the Poor Law Amendment Act. Yet, despite the administrative changes, which took poor relief out of the control of the church and vested it instead in a national Board of Supervision, the basic philosophy remained unchanged. The system was still run from the localities, by locally elected parochial boards, whose members were often kirk session elders wearing different hats; there was still a distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor; and public allowances were still seen as supplementary to private charity.14

Also peppering the early pages of John Dickie’s narrative are recollections of his brief and intermittent schooling under William Smith, dominie of Chapel of Garioch parish school. Like the poor law, the much-vaunted system of ‘a school in every parish’, advocated by John Knox, worked best in the rural Lowlands, but
it too was coming apart at the seams by the mid-nineteenth century. According to the template devised at the Reformation, children were to be taught the fundamentals of reading, writing and catechism, with the objective of achieving universal basic literacy across the country, while at the same time creating a ladder of opportunity so that any ‘lad of pairts’ with ability could proceed, irrespective of circumstances, right up to university. Although education was not to be free, children whose parents were too poor to pay were to have their fees covered by kirk sessions or town councils, which were also to supervise the schools in country parishes and burghs respectively.

Opinions differ as to the quality of provision. As Dickie’s memoir demonstrates, absenteeism posed problems, as country children were removed for harvest work or other farm duties, while their urban counterparts were likely to be sent to factories rather than to school. Challenges of geography and demography meant that the parochial system was never adequate, and the 1851 Religious Census of Scotland identified only 25 per cent of scholars in parochial schools. But the remaining 75 per cent was not necessarily deprived of an education. The challenges were tackled by a variety of expedients, including the division of statutory funds to maintain two or more small schools in large parishes, and the plugging of gaps with private adventure schools or charity schools. Parish schoolmasters in the counties of Aberdeen, Banff and Moray benefited from the Dick Bequest, a £113,787 legacy bequeathed by Forres-born merchant James Dick, that encouraged and financed them to upgrade their qualifications. That in turn generated a direct and persistent link between the parish schools of the north-east corner and the University of Aberdeen, although the more common achievement of those schools was to bring about a literate class of small farmers and farm servants, as exemplified in the writings of John Dickie.

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Perhaps the responsibilities of marriage, and the upheaval of moving to the city, stemmed the flow of John Dickie’s autobiographical pen. At any rate, the trail runs cold at the end of 1847, when his memoir ends with a brief reference to his forthcoming wedding. He did not totally abandon his writing, for in later years he compiled a voluminous and ambitious ‘Date Book or Chronology of Remarkable Events Local and General from the Creation of the World to the Present Time’. The last of his wide-ranging entries was made in 1902, a year before his death. But while John Dickie’s later life remains largely a subject for speculation, the lively and illuminating—if patchy—record of his earlier years tells us much about the life of a peripatetic farm servant in Victorian Aberdeenshire.
Notes

1 The Statistical Accounts of Scotland, 1791–1845 http://edina.ac.uk/stat-acc-scot/

2 See, for example, Anon., Eleven Years at Farm Work, Being a True Tale of Farm Servant Life from 1863 Onwards (Aberdeen, 1879); J. Bryce, The Story of a Ploughboy (London, 1912); A. Gray, Talks with our Farm Servants (Edinburgh, 1906) G. F. B. Houston, ‘A farmworker’s journal of the 1890s’, Scottish Agriculture, 1960, XXXIX, pp. 124 – 6.


4 House of Commons Parliamentary Papers 1851, [1397], XXVI, Report to the Board of Supervision by Sir John McNeill on the Western Highlands and Islands, Appendix, p. 80, evidence of Duncan Matheson, Free Church minister, Gairloch.

5 Drudgery and poverty as the lot of farm servants were highlighted by a Fife minister in ‘The Large Farm System’, Free Church Magazine, vol. V (1848), p. 112.

6 Aberdeen Herald, 3 June 1854.

7 Ibid., 4 December 1852.


10 Ibid., p. 154.


15 See, for example, R. A. Houston, Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity, 1600–1800: illiteracy and society in Scotland and northern England, 1600–1800 (Cambridge, 1977); D. J. Withrington, ‘Schooling, literacy and society’ in
Thanks to William Bauermeister of Edinburgh, a descendant of John Dickie, for information on Dickie’s later life.
Editor’s note

Dickie’s original spellings have been retained, as have his deletions, paragraph divisions, and his somewhat inconsistent use of initial capital letters and punctuation.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The author of the following rustic pages was born in Gerrard Street, Aberdeen on the 28 of November 1824.

Of my ancestry I can give the reader but a very brief account. My father was born in 1793 in the small hamlet of Balquhaine in the Parish of Chapel of Garrioch and County of Aberdeen. At that time there were twenty-one smoking chimneys and thirty-five children in Balquhaine or about seventy inhabitants. At the above mentioned place my forefathers have been residents for the long period of four centuries. I have been creditably informed that the first of the name of Dickie who lived in Balquhaine, came from Germany, a valet to one of the Leslies of Fetternear and Balquhaine.

My Grandfather, like a few more in Balquhaine, rented a small croft but its returns being too inadequate for the sustenance of his family he carried on a small business as Butcher and Cattle dealer. I have failed to ascertain at what age he died but that he died on the 2nd(?) of February, 1804 leaving my grandmother with a large family some of which was then only in childhood. It was in 1829 I first saw my Grandmother. As she lived at a short distance from my fathers and was always very kind to me I soon made myself no stranger in her humble domicile.

In fine weather she was oft to be seen sitting in her little garden knitting the factory stocking. When so employed many a fine old Scotch song did she sing to me in her native dialect. She was a woman of a kind and cheerful disposition in all the ordinary occurrences of life, her mind never was much elevated nor yet much depressed. She was born in the month of March 1750 and died in the month of May 1848 or in the 99 year of her age.
Footloose in Farm Service: Autobiographical Recollections of John Dickie

Having thus given a brief sketch on the Paternal side I shall proceed to do the same on the Maternal.

My Mother was born in the Hardgate, Aberdeen in 1787. Her Father was a Tanner and was employed at the New Bridge Tan Works where he continued only a short time after her birth. Previous to his leaving Aberdeen he had to mourn the loss of his partner in life, and she and an only sister three years older had to mourn the loss of a mother who died from the effects of a cancer in the breast.

Her Father having removed from Aberdeen to Montrose followed the same occupation as he did at New Bridge. He was remarried and died at Montrose, she being then in the ninth year of her age.

I just may mention how he came by his death. One night after the labour of the day was over, he and his fellow work-men had gathered to the gate of the works to leave for the night. He went back through the works for his coat and on his return, having missed his footing, fell into a pit full of water, his neighbours wondering what detained him went to see but before finding him life was extinct.

This sad fatal occurrence rendered my mother and her sister minus of father and mother and placed them under the subjection of a hard hearted step-mother whose parsimonious hand dealt them out their share of daily bread but too sparingly. This combined with her everyday maltreatment made them think of looking for a home in some other quarter. Accordingly they went to a carrier and asked if he would give them any assistance as they intended going to Aberdeen. The carrier having consented to do so they then both came to the resolution that they would take leg leave either for better or worse.

However they did so but before they reached Aberdeen my mother had almost entirely failed, her sister had every now and again to carry her a short distance on her back before they arrived at the above mentioned place where they got some refreshment and a nights rest. Starting out again next day with renewed vigour they wended on their way to the Blair of Fintry to a Paternal Aunt, Mrs David Walker, who received them with real unsophisticated hospitality, and who ever took a deep interest in their welfare, very soon put them in respectable service where they both continued till they got homes of their own.

I may just remark that these two orphan sisters ages were nine & twelve years at the time their father died and it was not a year after when they left Montrose but their lot being cast among kind Christian friends they never had the slightest reason to repent of their long journey to the north.
Autobiography

Upwards of twenty years having elapsed my mother was in the service of Mr James Stephen Conglass but previous to that time she was nine years in the service of Mr John Maitland, Balhagarty, Chapel of Garrioch whom she ever had a great favour for. My father also being in that locality, they were married in Balhagarty in 1822 and then lived in a house in the Borough Muir at Inverury, my father being previously engaged as a Greive to Mr Robert Lyon at Little Conglass where he continued for a year. Removing from Inverury to Aberdeen he was employed for sometime with Mr Benzie a wood merchant. His next engagement was with Messrs. Smith Irvine & Coy. Brewers, Old Aberdeen where he continued for about 5 years until a croft of about twenty acres on Mains of Balquhaine became tenantless and he, being anxious for a place of his own in the Country, made application for it to Capt Andrew Johnston who was the subletter. His offer being satisfactory and an agreement being made out he commenced with it at Whitsunday 1829 with the sum of one hundred and thirty pounds with which he purchased a small bestial stock and the necessary implements of husbandry that such a place would require. It being of a cold damp clay soil he commenced improving it but his capital being too inadequate for thoroughly improving it, it was little or no better of all he spent on it. In wet weather it was in such a state with water that little could be done and in fine dry weather it got in such a hardened clayey state that it was a difficulty to get a crop.

In fact it never yielded a worth crop all the time he had it. A distemper came among his cattle and cut off one after another, till after 5 years he became bankrupt. A meeting of his creditors being called, it was agreed that his effects should be put to public roup and all accounts paid ready money. This proposition was soon put in execution. His bestial stock, his crops & implements and all outside effects were sold. His principal creditors ordered the Clark to make a calculation before they should bring any thing out of the Dwelling house. The Clark did so and stated that there was enough to pay all debts and three pence over.

These circumstances in which he was now placed of course at this time ended his farming speculation. His capital was gone and his credit ere this time was but very limited, so that he had no other alternative but look for work from any one who would employ him. However he got employment during the winter months from his late landlord Captain Johnston who was much like the majority of seafaring men, a kind and warm hearted man and a man and a man [sic] who was ever ready to do a good turn to the poor either by word or deed.

The Captain also kindly granted him the privilege of stopping in the house till the ensuing witsunday term, also the privilege of keeping a milch cow which was
purchased at the roup by a near friend and complemented to my Mother, a very generous act indeed especially to the mother of a young family.

In the following spring the Captain made another agreement with my father for a piece of waste land on the hill head of Balquhaine which was at that time covered with whins and broom. There he commenced farming again with renewed vigor and with but little encouragement. The whins and broom at an average was from three to six feet in hight and scarcely a foot of ground surface to be seen. However his first commencement was to set it on fire and as it was in the spring of the year and in fine dry weather it made a most splendid blaze. I remember well on the large quantities of partridge and wild Duck Eggs that was got after it was burned, some of them little or none the worse, others roasted hard enough to the full and not a few of the nests burned to sinders. After the fire having done its part his next proceeding was to collect stones for the building of some houses with the assistance of a wheelbarrow and some kind neighbouring farmers and others. By the Whitsunday term a dwelling house and a byre built of stone and turf was completed. I may just remark that these houses and a barn that was added the following summer altho built of dry stone only limed outside and inside and the gabel walls built of turf have stood since 1835 and is in a pretty good condition still, although now nearly 30 years have elapsed since then. In the spring of the same year a small portion of the land was got partially improved by seed lime. Notwithstanding its rough state it yielded a crop beyond the anticipation of all who saw it. Year after year little and little was added till now some eight or ten acres of well improved land at a moderate rent rewarded the industrious labour of my now aged father.

I have now to the best knowledge given a short cursory sketch of my predecessors and the positions in life in which they were placed. I shall now as leisure time and convenience permits me, give a short narrative of my own.

As soon as I was capable of being teached the alphabet my mother bought a horn book for me and through her assiduity I was not long or I could master its few pages. Being thus so far advanced, it was proposed that I should be put to school. Accordingly one fine summer morning I was rigged out in a new dress which made me think everyone was not my equal, altho I had neither stockings nor shoes on my feet, yet I was proud as a lord and I went off with my mother to the Parish School of Chapel of Garrioch which was at that time under the superintendance of William Smith. On our entering the School house all the boys and girls stared at my mother and me as if we had fallen from the clouds.
During a short conversation between Mr Smith and my Mother I was showed into a seat near the door, my book placed on the desk before me. I took a sly look round me but saw no one that I knew but thinking the school a curious looking place, immediately on my mothers leaving I there and then commenced crying at the full pitch of my voice which made every one in the school take a real hearty laugh at my childishness which of course added to the gloom of my new position. However I did not sit long in this downcast condition, Mr Smith very kindly asked me if I could read any. It was some time or he got me to make a commencement but on after reading a short lesson my spirits begun to elevate by his telling me to be a good boy and read my lesson over and over and flattering me as far as saying I would soon be the best schollar in the school, the thing I never attained. I remained at school during the summer months but had little desire for education so that I made but very little progress altho I had spent about six months at school.

I was again put to school in the ensuing summer and continued during the winter and the summer following. During that time I improved greatly in reading and writing and also made a little progress in arithmetic. Some two years or so had elapsed or another opportunity was afforded me of getting back to the school as my father required my service at the humble but healthy occupation of keeping his sheep. Although a rather lonely and retired situation for one of my years yet I liked it very well in the summer season, but it was very disagreeable in winter as there was often much difficulty in getting meat provided for them in the time of storm. In the winter of 1837 & '38 there was a very severe storm which is still well remembered by many and I think will never be forgot by me. My father and me had to cast the snow off the whins and broom every day, Sabbath not accepted, of upwards of two months, the snow lying too deep for them to provaid for themselves. When engaged in this employment one day through over exertion I so severely hurt my back that the effects bowed me down so much as my parents feared it would render me an object of pity through life but fortunately I was not very long or I recovered.

About the middle of May 1838 I was engaged to Mrs Alexr Strachan, West Mains of Harlaw for the sum of one pounds ten shillings to attend to her cattle. From a little preivous acquaintance with Mrs Strachan and those who were to be my everyday associates the thought of leaving my father's home gave me little or no trouble as I had the bright prospects of a good place and my wages at the term, and also as I had at that time some reason to believe that my father more lightly esteemed me than my sister and brother, although in justice I cannot say but I enjoyed every comfort that the posisition my parents were placed in could afford.
On leaving my father’s house I was accompanied a short distance by my father and mother, my mother being the last to return lost not the opportunity of giving me in all earnestness and with the keenest feelings of a mother a very affectionate advice which has ever since retained a place in my memory.

I had not filled my new situation but a short time when I found to my happy experience that I had got a good mistress and also kind neighbours, and so long as I continued in her service, which was two and a half years, I enjoyed every comfort which any one in a servant’s place could have wished for.

I may by the way mention a few of the most prominent features in the character of this noble farmeress. The first then is in regard to the deep interest she took in the welfare of her servants. It was on rare occasions that all did not sit at the same table where she sat and I may add “fared sumptuously every day” and when any of her servants became sick she always understood the duty of nurse and a very kind and attentive sick nurse she was. But this good woman’s hospitality was by no means all lavished on her servants. The needy who resided in her locality (although few) were often extricated when in difficulties through her liberality. But there was another class of poor which in those days were not few, I mean itinerate beggars of such I have known as many as eight or ten receive alms from her own hand in the course of one day.

Indeed all the time I was in her service I never saw or heard of a beggar being put away unserved with the exception of one sturdy fellow who, on asking alms, she kindly offered him six shillings a week bed and board to stop and lend a hand at the hoeing of the turnips. But instead of accepting such a generous offer he, with an air of dignity, said “I’ll not give up the chance of begging for ‘A’” and there and then he slunk away.

In the Martinmass market at Inverury 1841 I engaged to Mr Alexander Christie, Mill of Thainston, in the Parish of Kintore for the sum of £2 10s. As he at that time occupied the above mentioned mill and also the small farm of Little Fullerton my work was chiefly at the farm but I had to occasionally assist in the Mill, a sort of work I cared little about, as I always got my clothes filled with dust, and frequently catched the cold also. Although I stayed a year with Mr Christie I never liked the place. It was altogether on account of good neighbours and a handsome rise in wages that induced me to renew terms. As for the houses, such houses as they were, had all fallen into such a state of dilapidation that a timid minded person would not have run the risk of sleeping one night under the roof of the best one about the farm.
I shall give a short sketch of the interior of our sleeping apartment which at one time had been a four stalled stable or byre but on the principle of economy had been so constructed as to serve the double purpose of stable and bedchamber. The houses were all built in a range, the doors fronting the north. The four stalls stood two against two, the first was occupied with our chests the second with our bed, in the third stood the horse and the forth, stable furniture &c, &c. But the most notable thing connected with our dormitory was its ample number of ventilators such as crevices in the walls, rat holes in the roof some of which did not even hold out the rays of the sun far less the stormy winds in winter.

My bedfellow, William Murdoch and I, before going to bed in the time of storm as a means of making ourselves as comfortable as possible were under the necessity of stuffing up different parts about the door with straw and putting our boots under the chaff bed to prevent them from getting frozen. In some instances in the time of blowing storm in the course of the night we got an addition to our bedclothes in the shape of a snow coverlet.

In the course of the summer I began to see my deficiency in arithmetic and writing, especially in the latter. It was a very disagreeable task for me to write an occasional letter to my father and mother, and when I did write one I would rather have carried it for days in my pocket waiting the chance of a carrier or any one rather than put my curious looking epistle into the Post Office. By this time I had managed to save nearly four pounds which in my estimation was not a very small sum. But my having on not a few occasions experienced the want of a better education, with the above sum at my command I proposed going to school during the winter and made an appointment with my father in the Inverury market with a view of taking his advice on the subject, and likewise coming to terms in regard to hours and such like. My father and I having come to an understanding on these points I immediately after the term placed myself under the instruction of my late schoolmaster Mr William Smith, Chapel of Garrioch, where I resumed my studies in real earnest. Having a strong propensity for becoming better acquainted with the minor rules of arithmetic I was foolish enough to confine my studies chiefly to that useful branch of education although Mr Smith urged on me the necessity of Grammar, Geography etc. etc. yet I retained the strange notion that these branches were useful to those only in the higher ranks of society. But the fruits of my selfish aversion to these important branches has often given me cause to regret my noncompliance to Mr Smith’s command as the many grammatical errors contained in this book will plainly show.
While passing on I may by the way remark that at the same time I was a member of the Sabbath school under the superintendence of the Rev. Henry Simpson the esteemed Pastor of the Parish, who was an excellent teacher. His questions were always put in such a free easy style and his explanations so simple that he soon won the affection and esteem of all who shared the benefit of his instructions. I remember on him putting a question to me from the New Testament which I without thinking a single thought gave an answer so directly opposite to that which he asked till I set the whole school a laughing, the Minister not accepted. On order being called his gentle reply to me was “Oh fy na Johnny man its no that” and then briefly explained it for me.

There was another Sabbath school incident in which I was concerned worthy of remark. It was Mr Simpson’s practice in opening the school to engage in prayer, or to request some of the male scholars to do so, each scholar being provided with a small copy of prayer extracts in such form as he could add or diminish at pleasure. One Sabbath on taking my seat in school I was so unexpectedly requested to engage in prayer that I, through timidity or bashfulness, could not utter one single word, indeed I was not even conscious of where I stood. Mr Simpson, on observing me in this dilemma, kindly expressed his sympathy for me, adding that I should never be ashamed to worship God either in public or in private.

The next and last incident in my school history, although scarce worthy of remark, was on one fine mild day about the middle of May while in school I was sized with headache and slight sickness. On making my complaint known to a comrade he told me he felt much in the same condition attributing the cause of our complaint to the close sitting in the school and our being formerly exposed to the open air. But said he, as we have both been very diligent in our studies all winter there would be little harm in us taking part of a days rambel on Benachie.

This proposal was no sooner made than put in execution, leave was asked and given, of course on the grounds of not being well. We then set out, walking at a tardigradual pace till we reached the summit of the above named mountain which is 2000 feet above the level of the sea and where there are several monuments of antiquity, including a large and strong fortification erected by the Picts.

After sauntering about for some time looking at these curiosities on this windy elevation we took our descent southward till we came to a hut generally termed after its occupier “Willie Jamiesons hoose” which was at one time occupied as a smithy for the convenience of an adjoining quarry. From its external aspect we
were through curiosity prompted to pay a visit to its inmates which consisted
of a Husband, Wife, Daughter and Grandson who all on our entering stared at
us as if we had been apparitions from the regions below, especially the little boy
who instantly made his exit to the furthest corner in the house. My friend being
in possession of a tobacco pipe he, as a favour, asked a light and I by way of
introducing myself asked what o’clock it was, although at the same time I had a
watch in my pocket which kept time tolerable well. The interior of this humble
and solitary habitation had a very gloomy appearance. Its furniture was remarkably
scant and of the meanest description. The only window it had was on the skylight
principle, a hole through the apex of the roof serving the combined purpose
of window and “lum”. Meeting with a rather indifferent reception from these
mountaineers, we understood we were not altogether welcome guests. However
we graced them with the parting compliment and renewed our perambulation
by way of the Linn where we was overtaken by a heavy shower of rain and hail
which made us retreat under a sort of ruined fog house that stood on the ledge
of a rock and where we had an excellent view of the linn. Though scarcely in a
half comfortable position we waited patiently for a change in the weather, but
were at last obliged, notwithstanding our being accompanied with succeeding
showers, to pursue our course direct for home where we both arrived hungry,
wet and weary.

On the approach of the Whitsunday term I again had to attend the Inverury
feering market in quest of a master, my object to engage with some farmer in
that locality. Fortune favouring me with a few choices, I at last after a good many
questions had been asked and answered on both sides, came to terms with Mr
John Strachan, West Fingask in the Parish of Daviot. By this time my propensity
for education had become very strong. Yet I was under the indispensible necessity,
but reluctantly compelled, to bid a final farewell to my academical studies.

On the afternoon of the term day I left my father’s house in good spirits, taking
along with me nearly half the contents of my wardrobe on my back which my
mother had carefully packed in a bag, and also the handsome sum of fourpence
halfpenny in my purse which was the whole amount of capital I had at command.
However I got no more and I required no less for the ensuing six months pockit
money. My neighbours were all jolly carekilling sort of fellows some of them, if
I may use the expression, a well thing given to the “spree”.

However as I was engaged for orra work and not having the charge of either cow
or sow after the regular working hours I enjoyed the full advantage of being quite
at liberty. In such spare times I would have placed my service at the command of
my neighbours which was sometimes required in such as going an errand to the
grocers shop, taking home the horses from the park or the cows for the kitchen maid at eight o’clock in the evening.

By such optional services as these I not only gained the favour of my master and fellow servants but was well re-numerated besides. In the time of harvest I had the misfortune to have two very sore boils on one of my hands the first being scarcely whole when the second began. They being both of the whitlow kind gave me much acute pain, especially the first which deprived me of enjoying the comfort of one hours sound sleep for three successive nights, a thing one of my years, performing the same duties, could ill spare. According to engagement I should have filled the place of a bandster but being unable for that part of the work I with much difficulty discharged the duties of a raker.

Previous to the Martinmas Term there was a general anticipation of a decline in wages which those who were not engaged previous the feeing markets found such to be the case.

However we all with one exception renewed terms at a slight reduction in wages on the morning of the Inverury market. I undertaking the honerable duties of “Bailiff” having no less than sixty one cattle under my charge during the winter months and receiving little assistance except in time of storm, so I think anyone aquainted with farm work will say I had ample work for my wages which was no more than £3 5s.

The Whitsunday term of 1843 was now close at hand. On the morning of the Old Meldrum feeing market Mr Strachan again requested me to renew terms. But as we had all previously made up our minds not to stay longer, or to use the expression of farm servants “give him a clean town” which we did, with the exception of a female servant. I with an air of independence said I’m not inclined to stop, but without waiting an answer was outside the door on my way to the above refered market where I engaged to Mr William Knox, North Ythsie, Parish of Tarves for the sum of four pounds seven and sixpence, to work the fourth pair of horses which I on entering my new service, found to be no more than half a pair and that same only an old mare which had eaten the grass of some twenty summers.

In this state of affairs I was sadly disapointed and besides it was the cause of some hard words between the Greive and me which ended in a bad feeling existing between us for some time after. However with this old mare I was kept constantly at all sorts of drudgery cart work except in harvest when she was put in charge and worked by another whose name was Alex Cruickshank and who
had the presumption to order me to feed and clean her for him, the thing I was old enough to sternly deny.

A few weeks after I went to North Ythsie the Rev. Mr Francis Knox Minister of the Parish intimated from the pulpit that he would meet with intending communicants in the church on certain nights of the week and as I was at this time in the nineteenth year of my age I thought it was time for me to become a member of some Church but as the Church was at this time in a very unsettled state, meetings were held in different places the advocates for the Free Church holding her out as the only true Church, but of course the advocates for the Established doing the same for her, but as these meetings were for most part held in the evenings I had an opportunity of attending a good few of them, and so strong was the spirit of controversy that many of them were kept up until an early hour and many of those who attended them as well as me had on some occasions to travel for miles homewards in the silent hours of the night. And altho I had attended these meetings occasionally for more than a year I had not till this time made up my mind which Church I would join. The advocates arguments on both sides were oft so far beyond my comprehension that I was in some measure left in obscurity. However I at last made up my mind to join Mr Knox’s Class and become a member of the Church of my Fathers which I did; and has continued so ever since, in the full belief that the Established Church is freest Church of the two.

But before bidding farewell to North Ythsie I may mention that between harvest and Martinmas the work assigned for me was chiefly driving turnips with the old mare above mentioned and while employed at this drudgery sort of work I often yearned for the term, and having my mind fully made up not to renew terms I went to the Old Meldrum feeing market and there engaged to Mr John Rae, Innkeeper, Green of Udny, undertaking in my single person the various duties of Greive, Horseman, Cow Baillie and Hostler, and also on particular occasions to assist at waiting the table, a rather complicated situation for one so unexperienced as me. However I entered on my new service in the evening of the term day and was very much surprised to see my new Master suffering so severely from the effects of asthma that I thought he could not survive many hours. And what surprised me even more was to see his better half sitting besides him amusing herself by singing a sentimental song. Mr Rae’s being so often attacked with this sad malady it became a matter of course and thereby little thought of.

I remained in Mr Rae’s service at this time only six months which time I had spent in excellent health and happiness enjoying every comfort I could have
wished for, and it was altogether owing to a difference between us in wages that I did not renew terms.

In the Whitsunday seeing market at Ellon 1844 I engaged with Mr John Machray, Greive to Mr George Garden, Woodland, Udny to discharge the duties of orraman. I did not fill my new situation long when I found I had made a poor exchange, although my neighbours were the finest and jollyest fellows any one could have wished to to live with. But there was as mighty a difference between the dispositions of my present and former Mistress as there is between the North and South Poles. Woodland, comparitively speaking, was but a small farm, yet its farmeress viz Mrs Garden had much magnanimity of spirit as might have served an Empress, and on the other hand her spirit of parsimony would have served the poorest beggar.

In regard to this would be Lady’s frugality I shall make one or two remarks. There was scarcely ever a meal prepared for the table without her superintendence, and in justice to her I cannot say she dealt out our portions of daily bread too sparingly. But I will say altho wholesome enough it was often remarkably mean. Such a thing as butter or cheese never graced our table on any occasion. Sundays and weekdays were all alike, and as for harvest home we got none.

The next thing worthy of mentioning connected with this farmeress during my service, happened, I think, about the beginning of July.

One night as we began to supper we were a little surprised on finding the spoons we had previously used replaced by a set of old rusty worn out ones. James Watt, who was second horseman on making a commencement stopped and said to the kitchen maid whose situation was in no wise an enviable one, “Maggy where is my spoon, if I have often to sup with [this] one I will soon be mouth from ear to ear”. But Maggie, being rather slow in giving an answer I said, “It’s of no use trying us on with the like of that. For the first time we get why brose this thing I’ve got will not stand three raps of them, for I am sure the why brose we get a fellow might walk a mile on them without leaving the marks of his tackits.” This sarcastic expression instantly upset the gravity of us all, some taking the liberty of trying who could laugh highest.

But this hubub did not and here, the Mistress’s sitting room being ajoining to the kitchen and she overhearing all that passed, flew in a towering passion, and as soon as supper was over called the Greive and there and then commenced pouring out her indignation on him for tolerating such conduct, insisting that the brose was really good &c, &c. To this the Greive gave the following mild
rejoiner “Well I dassay it was, but the truth he said in a joke after all, for I never got broke no where like them, and then quit the room. However from that date as long as I remained in her service the why broke continued much improved. There were several similar incidents occured in the course of the half year, but I think I have said enough and will therefore conclude by stating how we left this house of bondage. When the long looked for term day arrived no sooner did the clock announce the hour of twelve than we intimated to the Greive that our time was “up” and that we wished to get away, the Greive then handed us our well earned penny fee and before the Clock had reached the hour of one we all, with the exception of the Greive and kitchen maid “took the road that pleased oursel” and bade farewell to Woodland.

About a week previous to the Martinmas term of 1844 or before leaving Woodland I again made my appearance in the Old Meldrum feeing market in search of a master for the winter. Scarcely had I entered that well known fair when I was met by my old master Mr John Rae who asked for my welfare and if I was to “fee”. I of course told him I was. “Well Jack said he, I think you might do worse than come back to me.” To this proposal I was at first somewhat dry, the bargaining being hardly begun and I being bent on having the charge of a pair of horses. However after a good deal of argle gargling and he promising what I considered liberal wages, we at last came to a proper understanding and a bargain struck, which of course according to a too common practice had to be sealed with a half “mutchkin”. I entered my service on the night of the term and found everything about the place in a very disordered state so much so that it took me some weeks to get things to my mind. The weather continuing favourable for outdoor work untill about the first of January I succeeded in getting the work in a pretty well advanced state. So, all went right and well with me until about the end of January or the beginning of February when I was seized with a severe cold attended with a bad cough. While labouring under this complaint my Mistress, one night before I went to bed, asked me if I would have a warm drink as she thought she could prepare one that would do me good. This kind offer I heartily accepted, the effects it produced was when I awoke I found myself as if I had been rolled in wet sheets and the sweat running from every part of my body.

Finding myself in this unexpected position and having nothing pressing to do before daylight I kept my bed rather longer than usual. After getting up washed and dressed I declared I had got a perfect cure and was now as well as ever I was in my life, But I had not long to boast about my cure, about ten o’clock that same day I was asked by a friend of my Masters if I would oblige him by bringing him a load of coals from the Newburgh. As him and I were on very intimate terms this I readily agreed to do, on getting my Master’s consent, which
I did and was soon on my way to the above named seaport. The weather was intensely cold accompanied with a hard black frost, or according to a common expression “blowing through the storm,” which was anything but favourable for me under such circumstances. Before reaching home I felt unusually cold, a severe headache and sickness followed.

In this state I continued for two or three days when I was at last compelled to keep my bed where I lay for three weeks attended by Dr Ruxton and still getting worse and occasionally very absent in mind. One night about ten o’clock my mistress, whose ineffable kindness to me I will never forget, asked if there was anything I wanted before she went to bed. “O no, no” said I, “but why are you not preparing for Church, Don’t you hear the bell ringing, you are shure to be behind”. My mistress on receiving this answer immediately wrote my Father intimating that they thought it necessary for me to be removed where I would have more quietness and where I would have more attention paid me than they could give.

As soon as this note reached its destination my mother went to Pitcaple Inn and hired a Post Chaise in which I was conveyed to my father and mother’s home, where I was nursed with a Mother’s care, and where I had the skill of Dr Davidson of Wartel who generally visited me once a day for about three weeks, at which time I began to recover, but was in so weak a state as could scarcely walk without being supported. In the course of little more than another week or about a month after leaving my Master’s house I started on foot to resume my service. The distance I had to travel was about eleven miles, a long enough journey for me in such a weak state even had the route been good, the thing it was not, for in many places the snow lay ankle deep which not only greatly impeded my progress but also fatigued me so much till on reaching the Green of Bonny Udny I was completely worn out and besides my stomach had got as empty as a drum and my purse as light’s a beggars.

However, through a kind Providence who ever orders all things well I soon regained my wonted strength, and also from two particular incidents which took place at my Master’s house I got the opportunity of getting extricated from the arrears into which the previous circumstances had cast me. The remaining part of the half year I spent in excellent health and happiness, and although I was pressed by both Master & Mistress to renew terms at Whitsunday, yet I sternly denied compliance to their request, on the grounds of it being high time for me to have charge of a pair of horses, and likewise get more insight in farming operations and accordingly left the service of a good Master and a kind warmhearted Mistress to whom I owe the deepest gratitude and esteem.
At Whitsunday 1845 on leaving Mr John Rae I engaged with Mr John Davidson (alias) and Provost undertaking the duties of third horseman. The horses I got in charge were much similar to their harness neither of them “bran new”. Their pedigree given by the residentors in the locality proved their different ages to be seventeen and nineteen; both of them were quite powerful and well trained animals, and no doubt had in their day turned over many a braw acre, and drawn many a heavy load; and still had the appearance of being much younger than they really were, I had no difficulty in taking my turn with them at whatever kind of work I was put to. There were a good few noteworthy incidents occurred during my service with the Provost.

The first I shall mention although it will add nothing to my own credit, happened on a Saturday evening or on the night we finished the turnipseed. A little after supper the Greive said “now as we have got the turnipseed finished, and well finished, and finished in good time, if you like to come up to Merchants shop I’ll give you a tumbler of Porter all round”. This invitation was no sooner given than complied with and all repaired to a room adjoining the shop where we was supplied with the real Glenlevit and also a drop of the best Jamaica.

But scarcely had we got well seated when no less a personage introduced himself into our company than Mr R. Machray who held the honourable offices of Bellman and sexton, and as we all well knew that Mr Robert was passionately fond of a glass it was proposed to give him a hearty one. As it was in the dusk of the evening we found no difficulty in getting him and another of our company, a rather faqapish [foppish?] fellow, to drink fully a double share. The effects of which soon made the latter abruptly leave the room, but this dignified functionary kept his seat. Getting fast under the mighty influence of the jolly Bacchus he began to get very loquacious. One of the company just asked him to fill the “stoup”. Na, Na, said he, “there’s nathing dein in the yardie noo and I’ve only had ae wee tatamy this three month and fat das the like o that signifie”. It getting well on to the long hours we drew our orgie to a close, but the fun of the thing was when on leaving the room we had to return and lent a hand in getting our friend up stairs to the flat next the sky where we saw him safely landed in his own home. Next day being Sabbath we kept an eye to see how Robert would perform his official duties after the previous nights fuddle. At eight o’clock we expected to hear the bell ring as usual but that morning she hung mute in the stepel until a little before twelve when his better half made her appearance with the keys and commenced to unlock the gate, but in spite of every effort she could make, had at last to give it up as a hopeless task. Who went to her assistance—opened the gate—and rang the bell I leave the reader to guess.
During the summer months I had a jolly time of it. The well known lime kilns at Udny was carried on by my Master. The coal used for burning the limestone had to be carted from the Newburgh, where they were chiefly imported from the County of Fife.

The driving of coal was not only a lightsome work but also a very diverting one as there was no pier where we discharged the ships, when the tide was ebbing or flowing it was not an uncommon thing for us to load our carts in three to four feet of water, and when thus employed we were often much amused with the fisher lassies, some of which were noways scrupulas in wading up to the waist, catching any piece of coal that might fall over the cart. As the seamen and us were generally on the best of terms we were some times invited to the cabin to dine with them and we in return complimented them with what we brought from home for our dinner. By this friendly exchange both parties had the pleasure of sharing a rare dainty.

Nothing of any importance occurred during the harvest until its close, when it was wound up with a hearty harvest home when between thirty and forty of ourselves and neighbours sat down to an excellent supper prepared under the superintendence of Mrs Davidson. On after ample justice having been done to the good things of this life Mr Davidson then with no stinted hand made and served round the Toddy. In the course of the evening some very appropriate toasts were drunk, and some fine songs sung some of which were well adapted for the occasion and so passed a happy evening.

After the harvest operations were completed the next thing was the plowing of stubble land. My much respected friend Sandy Lucas the second horseman and I made our first commencement in the field of some twenty acres of excellent soil. The plows we had were far from being first class implements, but the one I got was by far the worst. It was such a short rickity worn out sort of thing that it well ought to have been cut up for fire wood at least half a score of years before I had the pleasure of feasting my eyes on such a piece of antiquity.

However I had not long to whistle behind this half rotten tool, for scarcely had we got well commenced when our Master and a neighbouring Farmer on taking a stroll through the fields paid us a visit. Our Master then told us he had made up his mind to have the field plowed with a three horses plough and made us remove to an adjoining field. This was to us anything but welcome news. A new plough was ordered and made with all possible speed and on being tried was proved to be one of the first class order and then as my horses and one of the
second pair was best adapted for it I had the honour of getting the most part of the field to plow.

Here was I then in my full glory with three horses and a new plow before me, and as already stated, a field of excellent soil, in which I to the utmost of my ability tried to do my best. A few days after I had commenced with my new implement my Master paid me another visit and expressed himself so highly satisfied with my work that he promised to give me a glass of good toddy some night if I would finish as well as I had begun. But although I was quite satisfied that I had finished much better than I began yet I never had the pleasure of tasting his toddy, and I am perfectly sure never will, as he has paid the debt of all Nature years ago.

On the approach of the Martinmas term I was asked to make another engagement with the “Provost”. To this request I was at first somewhat indifferent to comply as my Master had by this time become tennant of an additional farm, viz North Coullie on which I from various indications could learn there was to be a good many improvements made in the course of the winter. However after a good deal of discussion of the subject, and on getting the promise of being advanced to second horseman I at last accepted his offer. Throughout the winter the weather for out door work was remarkably favourable, there was not so much snow lay on the ground at one time as scarcely covered its surface, so that with the exception of one or two days of hard frost there was no occasion for the plow to stand idle when required.

Immediately after the term our Master set about the improving of his new farm. The first commencement was made on a few acres of waste land which required the combined strength of four horses to plow. The plowing and sledging of stones and one thing or another connected with the improving of piece of land and the driving of stones to two adjoining fields, which was at the same time undergoing a thorough draining, occupied a considerable part of our time during the short days of winter so that when spring came round we were much behind with the ordinary operations of farm work, and by Whitsunday we were in no better a position and our horses which were but very so and so fed all as poor as new spawned herrings.

Under these circumstances there was nothing encouraging for any one to renew terms so that I and other four left “Bonny Udny” on the term day, I thus spent two and a half years in that Parish, two years in the Green and six months at Woodland.
This brings me now to Whitsunday 1846 or the memorable year of the Potatoes Disease. I engaged in the Oldmeldrum feeing market to Mr James Smith, Farmer, Blankits in the Parish of Bourtie, undertaking the charge of his horses and as there was but a boy and I, and sometimes a kitchen maid, the place was to me a very longsome one. Mr Smith was a man well advanced in years and had a very peculiar disposition and a staunch adherant to the old school principals some of which I was keen to have had inverted in order to meet the test of the times, but when ever I attempted to do anything in a style that had the least tendency to novility, my efforts was almost sure to be stifled in the outset or otherwise they never met his approval. So although it was very much against my inclination to lag on in this half a century behind sort of style yet I had just to put up with it although I had to resist many taunts and snarls that were cast at me by my neighbouring brothers in trade.

I will mention one or two peculiarities in the disposition of this eccentric old man. In harvest when our meal was brought to the field he was generally first on the spot where it was to be partaken of and should the day be dry wet or warm no matter he immediately divested himself of his coat, and I without the least scruple or apology had to array myself in my masters robe till such time as we rose to resume work.

I remember on one lovely evening on being within a few minutes work of being done with cutting down a field when he gave me orders to “Drop it for a night”. “Oh” said I “that wee bit is no worth the leaving I am shure we will cut it in ten minutes, and it is not late yet.” But he said “it doesn't matter. I am tired and we have done a good days work already. We can cut it tomorrow, or if their is not to be a tomorrow there is too much done already, go and put on your jacket.” Mr Smith wore a kind and warm heart, there was no spirit of tyranny in his breast he wished his servants to be as well and happy as himself. He had the richest store of well selected anecdotes and stories I think of any man I ever knew. He had something humorous for every occasion. In short I may say he was choke full of humour, But although Mr Smith was a good and kind master yet I never had the least relish for my situation, and thereby did not make another engagement but left Master and Mistress on the best of terms at Martinmas.

In the course of the time I was at Blankets I had formed a little aquaintance with the Messrs. Wilsons of Redhouse. Happening one day about a fortnight or so previous to the term to meet Mr John Wilson he requested me to come over at my earliest convenience and give them an “evening”. To this invitation I soon complied, and in the course of the evening’s converssession I was asked if I intended to stop with Mr Smith for the winter. My answer was that I had
fully made up my mind not to stop. The next question put to me was if I had any objections to take their second pair of horses. I said I had none provided we could agree on wages. “Well” said Mr Wilson, “we will meet in the Inverury market and no fear but we will make a bargain.” And so it happened, for before I was half an hour in the market I met Mr Wilson and we had come to terms in a few words. My wages to be £6 15s. On entering on my new service I found Redhouse to be a very different place from Blankets. The horses I got were two as fine well trained animals as any man could wish to follow or put harness upon. Their harness were almost new, and every thing about the place in excellent working order. The family consisted of a mother who had been some two years a widow, two sons, two daughters and an orphan grandchild, a smart boy about nine or ten years of age. But there was a peculiarity in this family I must not omit to mention and that is the eldest son and two daughters were deaf and dumb from their birth, certainly a very sore affliction on their parents and friends. I remember on their mother talking to me about them in regard to their loss in mingling in society etc. etc., but said she, we ought to be thankful, if they had been born fools it would have been much worse, sore as it is, and we ought not to repine against the doings of an all-wise providence. On my entering their service I at first felt it strange when in their company not understanding any of their signs and indications. I was just as dumb to them as they were to me so that I could take no part in the passing conversation, until one evening when I was requested by the youngest daughter to learn the dumb alphabet which I readily agreed to, and by that means I soon got tolerably well acquainted with their language and customs and so spent a half year in excellent health and happiness, receiving a good many useful lessons in the ordinary operations of farming. On the approach of Whitsunday I was urged upon to renew terms on former conditions a thing I was quite prepared for with the exception of wages, but on that point we differed widely. My neighbour Alexander Singer being previously engaged at the former rate of wages and as there was a considerable advance at that term which I was well aware of, my demand was one pound above what he had agreed to, so that we could not come to an agreement although both parties were loth to part.

My next and last appearance in a seeing market in quest of a master was at Inverury, where I meet with George Hogg, Greive to Mr James Barnett, Inkeeper, Oldmeldrum with whom I engaged for the sum of eight pounds undertaking the duties of foreman on the farm of Gownor which was at time occupied by Mr Barnett.

On making my first appearance at Gownor I was rather astonished to see no fewer than eighteen stacks of corn and about eight or nine hundred stands of
straw and four to five hundred stones of excellent hay and what was more singular
the grain being worth from 36 to 38 shillings per quarter, but as there was no
threshing machine on the farm these eighteen stacks of oats had to be threshed
by the flail, a rather tedious process on such a large farm. However an Old Man-
a-war’s man undertook to thresh the whole at so much per quarter. The horses I
got in charge were two fine powerful animals, but their harness were so old and
ill kept that the contrast between the two was a very wide one. I was informed on
good authority that none of the harness about the farm had got cleaning of any
sort for years. And so to all appearances I left it just I got it, for there was not
anything about the stable to clean it with.

In the course of the summer there was a good many incidents well worthy of
remark, I shall just mention a few of the most interesting. One fine afternoon
as we were drawing to a close with the turnip seed, the Grieve and some two or
three women left the field to dress some corn which was about to be sent to the
market, Scarcely had they been well commenced when a very painful accident
occurred to my much esteemed neighbour George Hogg who as already stated
fulfilled the duties of Greive. It was the practice when dressing that one person
carried the grain up into a small loft in the end of the barn. This cock loft,
as it was called, having been left in an unfurnished state, was anything but a
convenient one. The front space being open from one side to the other with
neither door nor partition, and what was even worse there was no stair but a
common ladder which was used as a substitute.

Two or three bushels being all that a man could with convenience, not to speak
of safety, carry up at a time, the ladder having no bannister, it was necessary to
have something placed at the top to put the hand upon as a support on stepping
on the edge of the loft. On this occasion a bag of grain was used, probably the
first carried up. It so happened as he was in the act of stepping on to the loft
the ladder slipped on the floor, he then instantly cleared himself of the bag on his
back and grasped the one on the edge of the loft then falling heavily on the
floor partly across the ladder, bringing the bag in his hand right above him, the
contents of the same almost choking him, his mouth and nostrils were so full
of grain that it was some little time before he could get a gasp of breath. He then fell
into a faint, his countenance changed pale as death and although everything was
done for him that could be thought on, it was sometime or he felt conscious of
his sad condition. As soon as the accident happened there was no time lost in
procuring medical aid which was had in less than an hour, when it was discovered
that his injuries were a broken arm, a collar bone and two rib bones, besides
some others of a minor nature, the combined effects of which caused him much
pain and suffering, especially for the first five or six days. But it was almost three
weeks or he was so far recovered as to be able to get out of bed. During the
time of his sickness he was but very poorly nursed. Our kitchen maid who was
a half crazy sort of creature scarcely entered his appartment although she had
it well in her power. On one occasion as I was urging on her the necessity of
attending to his wants she told me that she could not do it for said she “if I were
to touch a man in his bed it would make my very flesh creep on my bones” so
much for her sainitity and humanity. But although uncareed for by her who had
the best oppertunity of ministering to his wants in his helpless condition, he
was not altogether neglected. There was a days woman who was occasionaly
employed about the farm and although her external appearance was by no means
fascinating, nor her previous moral character very commendable yet she wore a
warm and sympathizing heart feelling it a pleasure to administer the least thing
to his comfort throughout the day whenever an oppertunity was afforded her.
During the night my services such as I could render was at command at any
moment. The effects of this mishap he often keenly felt for long after.

The next person most worthy of notice was our kitchen maid Miss Mary Black
the above refered to. Mary was a lass who had by this time seen nature dressed
in her richest attire and felt the bitter blasts of stormy winter more than five and
twenty times over, and who had little in her external appearance or demeanour
that might be called prepossessing. As I was informed, she had for several years
previous to her engagement with Mr Barnett been in the service of the merchant
“Princes” and Tailors in Oldmeldrum and from whom she held testimonials of
character that might have procured her a situation worth at least fifty pounds
per annum. But Mr Barnett was not long in finding to his experience that the
fine testimonials she produced was so far as he was conscerned as worthless as
the paper they were wrote on. In proof of what I have stated, I shall give a few
instances conected with this servant and the discharging of her dutys. Only a few
days had passed with us in our new service when each began to whisper to his
neighbour that they feared we had got the wrong woman put in the right place as
she kept her house “aye in a steer” and never “red up”.

Before making the proposed remarks I would briefly adverd to how unconsistently
written certificates oftentimes agree with the character of the bearer. I have known
parties who had certificates of character in their possession which was nothing
else than a tissue of lies from end to end. There are some unprincipaled persons
who have aquired the arts of manufacturing certificates [and] do so regardless of
knowing anything of the merits or demerits of the bearer, or either of the partys
conscerned, and there are some who values a certificate by the givers wealth or
standing in society. Now I hold that a written character in either of these cases
is worse than useless, I hold it to be as nessssary to know the character of the
giver as that of the bearer. For my own part if it were convenient I would prefer a private talk before any other. But I am wandering from the subject on hand let us return to that of the Kitchen maid.

One fine Saturday’s evening about the end of June after getting over the labour of the day, I started for Inverury on some errands of my own in the tailor and shoemaker line. As these craftsmen are in general not over punctual in keeping their promises, it was not until close upon the long hour or I got my orders ready. The night being very warm and I falling in with some of my former acquaintances by the way was the means of impeding my homeward journey a good deal. However as I was passing through the town of Oldmeldrum I heard the towns clock strick the hour of two, and by the time another quarter of an hour elapsed I was safe and sound at home. This leads me now to the incident I intended to speak of.

On making my entrance towards our dormatory my attention was arrested by a strong light from the kitchen fire. As the door hapened to be standing a little agar I took the liberty of taking a look in, and to my amazement there was her ladyship busily engaged in the act of baking having around her some half-dozen parcels of bread each in its different process of manufacture. Such a scene at that hour on the Sabbath morning was too much for my gravity to withstand especialy when combined with the idea of her having only some six or eight persons to prepare bread for. After giving vent to a hearty laugh I gave her a salutation (still fresh in my memory) such as prudence forbids me to mention, and then bounded up stairs to bed, where I related the circumstances to my friend George Hogg, and had another round of laughter.

During the time of hay making and turnip hoeing it was a common practice in fine weather for the kitchen maids to bring the meal to the fields. Following the practice of the place our maid did the same, and on these occasions we were so frequently put on short allowance of bread that she was several times obliged to go home for a second supply leaving us to sit with empty mouths until her return. Our being placed under such unfavourable circumstances as these in regard to our cook made us sometimes think that if she would but take her “crawl” it might prove nothing to our disadvantage. However in this we were gratifyed sooner than we expected or was prepared for. One Sabbath morning according to her own statement she said she intended to go to the Dispensation of the Sacrament at a seceding Church in a neighbouring parish. Be that as it may, she dressed in her best toggery and wended her way to the place refered to. As it drew on to a late hour in the evening we began to get impatient for her to return to attend to the indispensable duty of milking the cows, that being the
only thing her service required for, for the night. After waiting till a late hour and our patience getting completely exhausted we called the service of another from a distance and so got the matters put right for the night or I may rather say for the morning, as by this time we had taken a pretty large slice off the long hour. Morning came but brought no appearance or tidding of our Mary, so that by this time we considered it our duty to report the case at head quarters, which we lost no time in doing so. The reply we got was they would be glad if she never returned. And so it happened for it was not until some four or five weeks elapsed when her left effects were called for, and even then there were but very few words exchanged between us and the party employed to do so.

Under these circumstances our master and we felt rather acquardly placed, as no other at that time, could be got in the locality to fill her place till the ensuing term. Some were got for a few days others for a few weeks and so on until no fewer than six occupied that important situation in the course of the half year.

In the time of harvest we had heavy work to perform. The crop in general was fully above the average and well brought to maturity. Even although large portions of it was “laid” the grain and straw were of excelent quality and got into the stackyard in good condition. But stiff as our harvest was neither of our party ever seemed to feel the effects of a hard days work–except our third cutter our party being mostly all of a humourous and cheerful disposition so that there was never no lack of song or sentiment which in a great measure lightened the labour and kept up the spirits of the whole party.

Shortly after having got the crop secured for the winter our master and the proprietor had a difference about a renewal of lease of the farm which was the cause of putting our master to much trouble, expence and inconvenience. The result of the matter was the whole movable effects on the farm had to be removed by Martinmas. This was not a very desirable undertaking at that season of the year, but such as required to be executed without delay, and so it was, for no sooner did the neighbouring farmers hear of the position Mr Barnett was placed in, than they requested him to give them notice when he intended to remove as all their assistance would be at his command. The day being very fine on which we began and if I mind right there were about twenty men and half as many horses started work, and that in real earnest, and in the short space of three days little of any importance remained about the farm which then gave it a very desolate appearance. But this was not all the inconvenience Mr B. was put to. New wooden erections had to be got up near the Inn for the accomodation of his cattle & these erections were just well begun when my engagement expired. I did not renew terms with Mr B. The reason was because he required only one
horseman and a cattle man. The former being accepted by the Grieve, the latter I refused.

As on previous occasions I presented myself in the Mickle Saturday feeding market of Old Meldrum among the rest of my fellow[s] “I asking”, and although I had several tolerable good places in my offer neither of them came up to my terms. The market being rather stiff, the business of the day being over and the market ground being allmost deserted, farmers and farm servants had for most part found their way home or were at least well advanced on their homeward journey by the time we had got our horses and cattle all done up for the night. After which I and the rest of my fellow servants were invited by our Master and Mistress for a cup of tea and a glass of beer in their private room. To this we all readily gave consent and while we were enjoying a social conversation over the [illegible] incidents of the past half year the waiter entered the room and with a smile on her countenance fixed her eyes on me, says Jack, there is a gentleman wishes to speak to you in the kitchin. This gentleman turned out to be no other than my Master and his mother, or our mistress as she was generally called who asked me as a favour if I would accompany Miss Jane Walker now the wife of a blacksmith and the mother of a large family, who had come to lend a hand for the day as an assistant waiter, to her home at the Green of Udny. This was a favour I would much rather not been asked as it was by this time near eleven o’clock the weather and the roads anything but inviting besides the distance was about five miles. But on giving the matter a turn once in my mind I at once came to the conclusion that were I to decline complying with the request it would be disrespectful towards my master and also very ungentlemany towards the young lady. The answer I gave was, “I am quite prepared for that.” No sooner had I said so when the old Lady handed me a glass of wine and at the same time slipped a piece of money into the hand of her who desires it was to have my company home. Then just as we were leaving my mistress biding her a good night &c., next addressed herself to me saying “Now Johnnie be sure and take care of her and see her safe home”. My reply was “deed mistress I fear if she has not got wit to take care of herself she will not be very safe with me”, then bidding them both a good night, away we set. The night was very dark but soon cleared up. Pale Luna began to send out her silvery rays from the eastern sky shining brighter as we went along. This added to our no lack of pleasant conversation made the distance seem much shorter than it really was. Arriving at the Green and giving the nursery window a tap or two, admittance was soon obtained and on my asking for the welfare of all, and more especially those who two years previous were my neighbours, giving them all a turn over in bed and having a short chat all round, I bade them a good morning and retraced my steps homeward which I reached safe and sound at 5 a.m.
On the afternoon of the Termday I packed up my wardrobe which contained my whole effects with the exception of a few articles of clothing I took below my arm, making a few calls as I passed through Oldmeldrum and settling a few trifling accounts I proceeded for the home of my Father and Mother where I arrived in the course of the evening. Neither of them having learned whither I was engaged or not I had in the first place as on previous occasions to stand an unusual lengthy catechising. Some of the questions I had much rather they had not asked as I felt some delicacy in giving an answer more especially to such as refered to my intentions for the future. I may mention that my being unengaged at this term was not through the want of ample opportunities of being so. The first situation I was offered was at the Oldmeldrum Distillery, the next was a day labourer at Fyvie Castle and another much preferable to either which I would have got through the influence of my master Mr Barnett. It was that of an under land stewart upon a large Estate some fifteen miles out from Liverpool. The refusal of the latter I soon afterwards repented of as I considered that it would have been placing of my feet on the first step of the ladder of advancement.

After a stay of a week or so at my Fathers assisting him to cultivate a few roods of land which he wished to put in crop the following season I at last and with some reluctance explained to them my reason for not engaging, viz., that I had made up my mind to have a home of my own, and that I intended to live in Aberdeen providing a suitable house could be got there, also stating the day I had fixed upon for going in search of one. On after my Father and Mother having given my object their consideration it was purposed that my Father would bare me company, lending his assistance as he had some experience of that which was to me a very disagreeable business. He as was before stated once lived in Aberdeen.

The morning to which I looked forward to with much concern arrived and found us astir by three o’clock, the air frosty and the sky studded over with stars, and before the elapse of another hour we were both mounted on “Shanks Mare” and on our way to the Granite City never drawing bridle nor freeing our feet from the stirrups until we were in the centre of Bonaccord.

Having thus accomplished nineteen miles to the full for our morning walk, our stomachs although well don to before starting had by this time put in a clame for a supplemental or second breakfast. A coffee room was at once pitched upon, it being the breakfast hour there was no loss of time in our being supplied with such as our craving appetites required. Ample justice having been done to a substantial repast, we then proceeded in prosecuting our mission to town with seeking a house, which according to my idea in such a large town would have
been not a very difficult matter, as the majority of the houses appeared to me to have been built for the working people. But in this I was much mistaken, for as we walked along street after street gazing for lets, it was seldom one met our view and on such houses as a stray let was upon they were most frequently such as more rented a long way beyond what we considered in all probability my income would afford, or if moderately rented, they would be in some locality where as we suspected the morality of the people were not of the highest order. Some parties we called upon would have said “There is a house in such and such a street to let, you might just step over and see it, I know it was to let”, and on after inquiry being made according to the above directions the general reply we would have got was “Well, there was an apartment to let but was taken on such and such a day”, and like the above would have told us of another in some other part of the town.

Thus we trudged on from one street to another without rest or refreshment until past four in the afternoon meeting with no success. We then purposed that we before returning home should go to Nelson Street, and pay a visit to my Aunt, Mrs John Gill, who we was shure as was her usual would give us a friendly welcome. And where we would also enjoy a short time to rest, a thing we both by this time were not out of the need of. This proposal was soon put into execution and we seated by Aunt, or as she was generally designated Granny Gill’s fireside. Oh after the usual greeting and inquiry made as to the welfare of our near relatives &c my Aunt put the question “How are you here at this time o day, are ye new come in to the town”? “Oh, na na,” said my father “we was in by ten o’clock and for a the speed we hae come & our eerin [speerin?] we might hae sitten at hame”. “An you said and fat hae ye been after?” “Weil” said my father, “we jist come in seeking a hoose to him here”, refering to me, “an has travelt on a’ day and hisna got ane yet an suppose winna noo.” “Oh yea”, said she, “that’s yer eerin is’t, this is nae a guid time to seek a house a’noo?” Turning round to a little girl who apparently was an inmate under the same roof, and who was busy amusing herself with some toys on the floor, says “Run over and tell Miss C. to come over and speak to me, I want to see her”.

Scarcely had the words of the last sentence fallen from her lips when the girl was outside the door on her way to deliver her message which she punctually did reappearing in a few minutes accompanied with the said Miss C. who was soon made to understand the purpose of her message by Aunty asking her if a small room in her property was still unlet as this was a young nephew of hers in want of a house. To these words I listened with breathless anxiety, never yet having put in my word. Miss C. turning round to me with a smile said it is not let yet. But I feel it is too small for you but just come over and see it, the rent is only thirty
shillings it might do with you till the next term. Over we went and on looking at
the house the first thing I observed was that it was in excellent order, the floor
indicating that its previous tenant had been one of scrupulously clean habits. The
only fault I found was its exceeding smallness. Only a few words were exchanged
between the landlady and me when a bargain was effected, the earnest money
(one halfpenny) paid and the bargain settled.

Parting with her who was to be my future landlady, I returned to my Aunts
congratulating myself as I went upon my success thinking I had overcome the
first difficulty connected with my purposed new life. By this time my Aunt had
tea prepared and set of which we all heartily partook of. Another hour or so
passed in conversession and in making some little arraingements connected with
the “new” house when my farther said, “Well this wont do we must be going
we have a long road before us.” My Aunt pressed him to stay until morning.
I seconded her motion but neither of us got a hearing my father being bent
for home. I being quite a different mind as I well knew I was not his match at
travelling at any time and more especially after travelling all day.

My father was the first to rise and just as we were starting the factory bells all
over the town let us to understand that it was now six o’clock. The Banks of
Don coach and “Fly Boat” which in those days were the principal modes of
conveyance between Aberdeen and Inverury had previously departed leaving us
no other mode of locomotion other than we had in the morning, “Shanks Mare.”
We walked on at a steady brisk pace until we reached the shop of Mr Alexander
Taylor, Merchant Blackburn, who had at one time been a fellow servant with my
father and also some of my Aunts at the same farm. My father not wishing that
an old acquaintance should be forgotten walked into the shop abruptly saluting
his old friend in his off hand way. During our brief stay here a bottle of porter
(as dead as moss water) was discussed over. Starting again we walked on at our
usual steady pace the night getting very dark and foggy, the roads, the reverse
of what they were in the morning very wet and dubby, I may add that the time
occupied on the last miles of our journey did not exceed that of the first. Thus
including stoppages we performed our homeward journey in six and a half hours,
the distance being about twenty miles, which we walked vice versa, besides all our
wandering in town in the course of the day, on taking it all in all according to my
father’s statement, upwards of fifty miles. To this statement I have no hesitation
in giving full credit. Another thing I am quite sure of, and that is, that I never was
so tired after a journey before nor yet since. Next morning about eight o’clock
my father called on me to rise for breakfast, adding that it was far in the day and
I am anxious to get a day or two of you at the spade before you go away. The
latter part of this request was to me anything but complimentary my legs being
so sore that I could scarcely walk. However after breakfast we made a start at the trenching and quite contrary to my expectations the work produced a perfect cure for the ill effects of my previous days travelling as I felt quite refreshed by mid-day and in the course of a few days our object was gained in the addition of several rows of ------- land to that which had previously been in crop.

The time has now come when I had other matters to which I was more deeply concerned to attend to I mean the making of such arraingements as was on my part necessary in regard to my marriage which was fixed for Saturday 20 December.