

**Memories**  
of a  
**Seven Years' Apprenticeship**  
of  
**Half a Century Ago**

**Aberdeen**  
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1920

to R. T. Worthington, Esq., M.A., B.Sc.

With Compliments High regards  
William Wiles  
10/iii/20.

PRELIMINARY NOTE

Personal experience compels me to admit that when an old man undertakes to write memories of the recent and most impressionable period of his life, he would do well to follow the example of those who have done so before him. For, once assumed, the subject will come down upon him in a flood of that in all events. And the more complete the "paper" the more likely is the result to be a "paper" of course, like the beautiful "paper" which always comes in late in the autumn, that is, when I now usually think my fellow-Guildsmen ought to think their own. Otherwise, perhaps, as has been reported of "The" and to be "let riding". This "paper" was never meant to assume a durable form. It is a replica made for "copy" could not, however, be set aside. "Let it ride" written, said some. But "let it ride" is not in fact a composition and one of the best could decipher the manuscript. And this might cover the "strictest privacy" a very few copies and to appear in gold print.

MEMORIES

OF A

SEVEN YEARS' APPRENTICESHIP

OF

HALF A CENTURY AGO

W. W.

## PREFATORY NOTE.

PERSONAL experience compels me to affirm that, when an old man undertakes to write Memories of the keenest and most impressionable period of his boyhood, he would do well to follow the example of Noah. Let him first build an Ark. For, most assuredly, his subject will come down upon him in a Flood. That, at all events, is what happened to me. And the notes comprising this "paper" are simply flotsam and jetsam snatched from the Deluge! Of course, like the boastful anglers' "big salmon," which always breaks the tackle and gets away, not a few pet passages had to be left to their fate in the turbulent spate; a fact for which, I now candidly think, my fellow-Guildsmen ought to thank their stars. Otherwise, perhaps, as has been reported of "The Commons," our meeting might have had to be "left sitting!" This "paper" was never meant to assume a durable form. Certain requests made for "a copy" could not, however, be set aside. "Get it type-writtten," said some. But ("tell it not in Gath!"), none but a compositor—and one of the best—could decipher the manuscript! And, thus, under cover of "strictest privacy," a very few copies *had* to appear in cold print.

W. S.

## MEMORIES of a Seven Years' Apprenticeship in an Aberdeen Printing House in the Sixties of last Century.

(A PAPER read by Mr. WILLIAM SKEA at a Meeting of the Aberdeen Master Printers' Guild, in the Chamber of Commerce, Union Terrace,  
on 24th February, 1920.)

THE amenities of a Printing Office of fifty to sixty years ago were very different from those of to-day; and comparisons are odious. But it may be of interest to recall some of the conditions under which my apprenticeship was served. And perhaps some of us may find a parallel in these conditions to the state of our Highland highways in the days of "Bonnie Prince Charlie," as suggested by the rhyme:—

"If you'd seen these roads before they were made  
You'd fa' doun on your knees and bless General Wade!"

In the year 1860 there was not a single steam-driven printing press in the city of Aberdeen. At any rate, I neither saw nor dreamt such a thing when in that year my apprenticeship began in the printing office of Arthur King & Co.—an office of no mean importance in its day and generation. In that year (1860) the long time rival University Colleges of Old and New Aberdeen (King's and Marischal) became fused into one University, and Arthur King & Co. became printers to the united University. In that office the *Aberdeen Free Press* was printed for its Proprietors during the first dozen years or so of its bright and influential history. Besides a large amount of other original bookwork, the first editions of the late Professor Bain's numerous ethical, philosophical, and grammarian works were printed there; thence, also, there issued a flood of Parliamentary papers and reference books bearing upon the rise and extension of the Railway System of our Northern counties; dictionaries and other books—mostly reprints—including a royal quarto family Bible with references, were printed there in my time for London publishers; while the extent of the commercial and general printing

which passed through the press of Arthur King & Co. would even to-day be considered important.

And yet, that once busy printing house is to-day only a distant memory. Every stone, even, of the house itself vanished long ago—"Like the baseless fabric of a vision, and left not a rack behind." I do not venture to discuss the question of the why and the wherefore of "this thusness." I have asked myself that question, have ruminated upon it, and noted that, when the Proprietors of the *Free Press* set up an office to print their own paper, the business of Arthur King & Co. was shaken to its foundation. Among my other notes on this subject there is also the fact that Mr. King's manager was assisted in the office by his father and two brothers, and that none of the four was the type of man we generally associate with Church Eldership! Indeed, when my private thoughts fly out to solve the problem they sometimes—in a mysteriously "wireless" sort of way—pick up the refrain of the favourite capstan chant of Robert Louis Stevenson's pirates:—

"Fifteen men on The Dead Man's Chest,  
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum;  
Drink and the devil had done for the rest,  
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"

Situated in the Broadgate, opposite the end of Netherkirkgate, the premises of Arthur King & Co. straddled across the inner ends of two *cul-de-sac* closes, called respectively Concert Court and Well Court—the latter because, once upon a time, a natural spring existed there which contributed to the town's water supply; the former because the first Aberdeen Musical Association had a concert hall there; but at the time referred to that hall was used as a stock room by Messrs. Anderson & Thomson, Clothiers, it being immediately behind their shop in Broadgate on the south side of the entrance to Concert Court. You can easily imagine, from the necessarily patched kind of its architecture, that Mr. King's office was a place of ups and downs in respect of levels. The main entrance was in Concert Court, pretty nearly in the position of the door into the Advocates' Hall to-day. For the Advocates' Buildings stand on the ground formerly covered by Mr. King's printing house.

The area between Concert Court and Union Street—the whole of which was swept away to make room for the stately Municipal Buildings—was a quaintly interesting quarter of the city up to 1863-4. Through that old-time area, from West to East, ran Huxter Row, an angular thoroughfare, springing off Broad Street and debouching by an elbow on Castle Street. In one of the houses on the South side of Huxter Row—No. 4 if I remember aright—a noted Aberdonian, Robert Gordon, retired Dantzig merchant, spent the closing years of his eventful and successful life; and there he died, leaving his fortune to found Robert Gordon's Hospital, which enjoyed a quiet jog-trot career for over 80 years as a conventual institution for the lodging and education of sons of burgesses of trade. And, when such institutions were abolished by more enlightened legislation, the still familiar "Gordon's" soon became transmogrified to meet modern educational requirements, and eventually blossomed out into Aberdeen's now famous, and still beneficent, Robert Gordon's Technical College and Secondary School.

In Huxter Row, too, were situated the Town House (to which was conjoined the Court House), and the "Watch House," as the Police Office was called—both places of interest to me and my fellow apprentices, mainly because of big Bob Barnett, chief clerk at the Watch House, and a Mr. Burnett, a sheriff's officer, of big nose fame. Barnett, a man of prodigious size and weight, was a hero in our boyish imagination, he having once pledged the watch and chain from his fob to save a poor misguided lassie from passing a night in the cells! Our interest in Burnett stopped at his terribly enlarged red and pimply nose, which oscillated when he walked. Burnett was fond of posing at the door of the Court House, and one day a passer by—a lady be it whispered—came to a halt in front of him to glower up into his face; but she got the surprise of her life when Burnett, returning her point blank stare, took his misshaped proboscis 'twixt finger and thumb, gave it a tweak to one side, and remarked: "D'ye think ye'll win by noo, wifie?"

But Huxter Row was also famed for its two inns or taverns—the Lemon Tree and the Rising Sun. Both were on the North side of the Row, each ensconced in an inner Court which was entered through a pend under the front houses; so that both hotels offered their guests complete seclusion from the “madding crowd.” And, as the back premises of both abutted upon Arthur King’s printing office, we apprentices could, and did, survey the ongoings there from the caseroom windows.

The Lemon Tree was, at the time referred to, one of the principal guest-houses in town, it having been the first to inherit the reversion of the patronage of His Majesty’s Circuit Judges after the New Inn—(the house, by the bye, in which the redoubtable Dr. Samuel Johnson and his Biographer lodged when on their way to visit the Isle of Skye)—had been demolished to provide a site for the North of Scotland Bank, at King Street corner. For good eating and deep drinking the Lemon Tree had been famous for two centuries. Even in the early sixties of last century, judging by the sounds that occasionally reached us at our frames, the shade of the old-time “fourteen tumblers of toddy” man still sometimes haunted the dining room of that hearty tavern, and woke the echoes of “the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow.”

From our frames we looked out upon the back windows and back door of the Rising Sun, while the whole courtyard and front elevation of the Lemon Tree Hotel lay before us like an open book; so that we could plainly perceive how the world wagged in that quarter. We even knew the hour when mine host of the Lemon Tree should emerge from his front door carrying a live rabbit or leveret wherewith to feed the splendid Highland eagle that winked and languished in a huge cage on the opposite side of the paved courtyard. Not many moments passed after the great bird swooped down upon his prey till he had finished his meal and hung the coney’s empty skin over one of the cross struts of the cage.

Entering by the Concert Court door, the *Free Press* counting-house was on the left and the *Free Press* machine room on the right side of the passage. The floor above these was occupied by Mr. King’s

offices and the jobbing caseroom. Over that again was the news caseroom—the full length of the house; and the attic above, also the full length of the house, was fitted up on both sides with lines for drying the printed sheets of books in process. When thoroughly dried, these sheets were taken down to the wareroom, and finished between “glass-boards” in the screw press. For in those days it was the custom to damp all paper, except writings, before printing. (That was caustic old Jeems Petrie’s job.) The large wash-up trough in the pressroom was thoroughly cleaned out, and filled with freshly drawn water. The reams were then opened up, and, quire by quire, the paper was passed through the water—quite submerged—after which, while still dripping, it was spread out on a large plank. When the whole had received the order of the bath, another big plank was placed atop of the pile, and weights—generally heavy stones—added to give down pressure. In this position the paper would lie at least a couple of days. It was so soft and impressionable when taken out to be printed that little “make ready” was thought necessary.

The pressroom occupied the lower floor of the Well Court house. There were seven “Columbian” hand presses of different sizes, on which all the book and job printing was executed—for in 1860, as already indicated, and for a few years thereafter, not a single printing machine existed in the city. There was none in Arthur King & Co.’s. at all events, except the ponderous one-cylinder Kirkcaldy machine, on which the *Free Press*, then a weekly, was printed.

The floor over the pressroom was occupied by the *Free Press* literary staff, whose rooms were reached by a stair, and a covered gangway over the top of what I have called the one-storey tie apartment in Well Court.

The foreman pressman was Mr. William McVicker, who managed the printing of the *Free Press*, as well as all the press work of the office. McVicker was a very old man when I met him in 1860, but as nimble of foot, and as intelligently capable as any man in middle life. Perhaps he might have been the prototype of Bairnsfather’s “Ole Bill.” Always clear-headed and severely sober, although never morose, I cannot recall ever having heard McVicker laugh. Ever intent

upon his work, he had sometimes a sharp word for interrupters. A lad named Wishart essayed to "draw him out" while engaged printing off a sheet of Grubb's "Ecclesiastical History of Scotland." Wishart was rolling for him, and William was slacking the quoins in the forme to insert a thin card to obtain perfect register of the second side. Turning half round—"sheepfit" in hand—McVicker sized up his querist in a keen glance, said simply: "Whae cut yer mou', laddie?" and turned again to his work. As Henry Wishart's mouth was of generous proportions, that remark stuck to him afterwards like a burr thistle.

A well-knit man of slightly under medium height, with the "cut" of a sailor, William McVicker always wore a short reefing jacket, and took his walks abroad by himself, to see shipping, around the harbour and pier. He was reticent. Gossip he abominated. But somehow he and I took to each other from the first, and, although he called me "only a youngster," he spoke more to me personally than he did to any of the others. Unfortunately, I had not then learned the value of Captain Cuttle's advice to "make a note" of things; and distant memories are elusive. But I gathered that he was a native of Edinburgh; and he retained to the last the accent peculiar to the folk of that famous city. He had nearly finished his apprenticeship as a pressman in Ballantyne's Works, when, hurrying along Leith Walk to his work early one cold January morning, he was held up by a Press Gang party, armed with cutlasses. He was at once commandeered to serve in His Majesty's Navy, and put aboard the frigate "Bulwark," which chanced to be lying in the Firth of Forth ready to sail for the coast of North America, under the command of Prince William.

At least four years elapsed ere McVicker again reached a home port, although for some time his ship served in home waters—fighting, or in search of fighting, all the time.

After the battle of Waterloo, William's ship joined the squadron which formed the convoy of Napoleon Bonaparte to exile in St. Helena, and McVicker saw the fallen Emperor on the broad quarterdeck of the "Bellerophon," in something like the setting adopted by W. Q.

Orchardson, R.A., in his famous painting of that interesting historical subject.

Besides McVicker, there was another link with the Napoleonic wars in the Office. Old John Vigrow (or *Vigrois*) was the son of a French soldier taken prisoner in one of the Peninsular battles, and interned in Perth until the return of peace set him free, when he chose to remain in Scotland rather than return to La Belle France! But, whereas McVicker was brightly intelligent, capable and highly respected, Vigrow was a dull man, and subjected to much teasing on the part of his fellow workmen. The Victorian wars, too, were represented. Tom Carlan, a pressman, had been a sergeant of Marines in the Black Sea Fleet off the Crimea, and William Burgess had been all through the Indian Mutiny.

When demobilised, McVicker found his way back to Edinburgh, where he was employed in Oliver & Boyd's press department. While still there he was engaged by the late Mr. Wm. Bennett to join the staff of his printing office in the Castlegate of Aberdeen. McVicker afterwards printed the *North of Scotland Gazette*—the Aberdeen newspaper from whose ashes the *Free Press*, phoenix-like, arose. He had come from the *Gazette* Office to that of Arthur King & Co., along with the Kirkcaldy machine—which, in youth's flippant way, we called "The Road Roller!"

Any printer can imagine that the printing of the newspaper by hand on such an implement was a Herculean task. But old McVicker tackled it always successfully. Every Thursday night at 11 o'clock saw him—as I see him now in my mind's eye—on duty in the machine room beside old "Kirkcaldy," preparing for the "hebdomadal impression," as he used to call it. When at work, William always wore a neat four-cornered paper cap on his head, made by himself. Although the old man had been at work in the press room for ten hours during the day, he was trig and light of foot as a young man—shirt sleeves rolled up to the elbow, and his white apron always—well—passing clean for a pressman's.

Just before midnight the motive power—six stalwart members of the Shore Porters' Society—arrived, and proceeded to cast their coats.

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Just before midnight the motive power—six stalwart members of the Shore Porters' Society—arrived, and proceeded to cast their coats.

The first side, four formes, were due to come down from the caserom at twelve, and only once that I can remember were they half an hour late. That delay was occasioned by the death, in January, 1863, of the Prince Consort, and certain pages had to be mounted with "black border."

There was a large and strong crank at each side of the machine, near the ink-duct end, and two men on each crank, relieved by the other two at intervals—as these fine men do when assisting at obsequies—turned off the requisite number of copies in a little over two hours. The second side, four formes, came down at four in the morning, and a fresh batch of "hand power" worked them off. There were not so many hundreds of copies of the *Free Press* then as there are a multiple of thousands now; and the impression comprised stamped and unstamped copies—for the Newspaper Stamp Duty was not abolished for three years after my apprenticeship began.

After the printing, the newspaper had to be folded—a rather troublesome piece of work, for, there being no folding machines in the early '60's, it had to be performed by hand. Nor did the folding end our day-and-night's continuous work, for each of us apprentices had to deliver a "round" of papers in town; and we did not get home to breakfast and bed on Friday before eleven o'clock forenoon. My own round jumped off the Castlegate at the S.E. corner and down the Hangman's Brae—a narrow, cobble-paved wynd, in which the decrepit remains of the little red-tiled cottage, once the official abode of the old time "Toon's Hangman," occupied a niche in the Barrack Hill. That disreputable wynd was long ago converted into the now spacious Castle Terrace, by lopping off a broad strip from Barrack Hill and building the present strong retaining wall. After traversing Footdee as far as the once famous Walter Hood's shipbuilding yard, my round looped the Victoria Dock *via* the Dock Gates and Regent Drawbridge, and proceeded up Commerce Street, where I sometimes met the late Dr. William Alexander striding actively towards the then passenger terminus of the Great North Company's line—now their Goods Station—on Waterloo Quay—to catch the 9:40 passenger train for Inverurie. The man had been at reporting and sub-editorial work from an early

hour on Thursday morning, yet there he was, hurrying along with a fishing basket slung over his shoulder; possibly looking forward to "a cast" in his native stream during the week-end. And on these occasions there invariably came to my mind the words in Genesis vi. and 4th: "There were giants in the earth in those days!"

The lot of the Aberdeen printerman in the sixties, like that of the Gilbertian policeman, was certainly "not a happy one." He worked 60 hours a week, and the 'stab wage was only 20s. a week nett. We apprentices were paid 2s. 6d. a week during the first year, rising at the rate of 1s. each successive year; so that in the seventh year our wages amounted to 8s. 6d. weekly. For overtime, we were paid at the rate of 3d. per hour. There were only two sources of perquisites, and these were hard-won: firstly, at Christmas time, those of us who regularly delivered a "round" of the newspaper weekly would receive in "tips" from readers about £3 to £4—more or less—a windfall which was generally earmarked in advance for a "new suit;" and, secondly, when ordered to deliver "pulpit intimations" to the ministers in town—a job which occupied at least three hours of our precious Saturday evening—and caused us "wander mony a weary foot"—all for the handsome reward of a fourpenny piece!

I "signed on"—to borrow a phrase from the Senior Service—as reading boy. And when I passed the test of reading, first of print then of manuscript, to the satisfaction of Mr. King, and he said, "You'll do," I took up my duties with feelings of hope and ambition. When, however, I afterwards found that "Reading Boy" meant also "Youngest Apprentice" I would have done well to exclaim with the ancient Roman: "I'd rather be a dog, and bay the moon!"

The first daily duty of the youngest apprentice was to get up before 5 o'clock in the morning, winter and summer, walk out to the master's house near Westburn Park for the key wherewith to open the Office, and have the fires burning in the composing rooms before the "comps" arrived at 7 o'clock. The penalty for failure to have the fires burning was—1st offence, a sound boxing of the

ears. For a second offence he was rudely seized by a ruthless punitive band, his arms held high above his head, and cold water from the sink poured down each sleeve! During my incumbency of the early morning mission I suffered the first penalty, and that made me careful not to offend again. But my immediate successor—a lad named Bob Cowie—incurred the extreme punishment, and he told me afterwards that he thought he was “done for” when the icy cold water rushed down his skin and into his boots!

Bob was a queer laddie. He got the master into an awful scrape with the late Professor Fuller of King's College. Cowie had been sent one evening to deliver a big blue envelope, thrice sealed with red wax, and marked “strictly private.” The envelope contained a proof copy of a University Maths. Examination Paper. Cowie had only proceeded as far as Gerrard Street when he threw the packet over a dyke into a bleachgreen, where it lay until late on the following day. Happily, the person who found it, struck by the sealed and secret aspect of the letter, took the trouble to have it delivered to its proper destination, all and whole, though besmeared with mud. But when enquiry brought the outrage home to the culprit, Bob stoutly denied the charge, and clinched the lie with a circumstance: “Mair than that,” he declared, “the servant quean was standing at the Professor's door with her lad when I gi'ed 'er the letter!” Poor Cowie! he was no use as a worker. He was always dodging. One morning came the news that Bob had “'listed,” and about a twelvemonth thereafter he was reported killed in a tribal scrap on the Indian Frontier.

Certain of the “comps” in the Office might have made good Bolsheviks, to judge by their hasty and cruel methods of dealing with underlings. For instance, one day, Tom Duncan, a big powerful man, dealt my fellow apprentice, the late Mr. Wm. Addie, a stunning blow with the “plainer” on the top of the head, while the lad was stooping to pick up the mallet he had inadvertently knocked off the imposing surface as he passed. Strange to tell, no immediate reprisals followed, although, you may be sure, we took effective means to pay back such outrages in unexpected, Puck-like

ways. No need in those days to look to the foreign mission field for “men benighted.”

Through the whole city, indeed, there echoed a voice from the 15th century. Up till 1865, the bell in the old Tolbooth Steeple continued to ring the citizens to Matins for a quarter of an hour every morning at five o'clock, and again to Vespers — or was it Curfew?—in the evening at eight. Shall I ever forget those bells? The morning one especially has left a hack in my memory—since it was to its sound that I set out, many a time and oft shivering, to fetch the office key.

There was no Saturday half-holiday then. An arrangement obtained in King's whereby other than news “comps” and pressmen worked till 9 o'clock on Thursday (the publication night), from 3 o'clock afternoon—six hours at a stretch; and again on Saturday from 10 a.m. till 4 p.m.—another stretch of six hours—in order to get a semblance of a Saturday half-holiday: from four o'clock! Not much kick left in a poor chap after such a week's work! But the football madness had not developed then!

These, however, were the days of cheap whisky. Need I say that there was a good deal of drinking among the rank and file of the office staff? Two Irishmen, especially, who had come with a bunch of “comps” from Edinburgh—Jimmie Blithe and “Paddy” Lynch—met the late Dr. Norman MacLeod's description of such characters. They were “terrible savages!” Albeit, *when sober*, they were crack “comps” both.

Yet, looking back, it seems to me there was among them a larger percentage of men of outstanding ability and intelligence than there is to-day. There was even an “upper crust” element in our midst. At any rate we deferred more (in point of respect) to a few than to the many. Two of the “comps”—Emslie Whitecross and Alexander Robertson — we invariably addressed as “Mr.,” a courtesy which one day led to a painful *contretemps*. The Master had come to the door of his office and ordered one of the lads in the job caseroom to call the first-named “comp”; and, when only half way up the open staircase, the ribald youth shouted up into the

news caserom above: "Maister Whitecross! King's wantin' ye!" The momentary silence that followed could be felt! With a grunt, the Master, who, like all the house, had heard, turned back into his private office.

In the course of his "seven long years," any printer's apprentice, with any claim to "smeddum," is bound to note many remarkable proof-sheet errors. I could recount a hundred, some even of the "battle-scared" and "bottle-scarred," instead of "battle-scarred veteran" sort. I shall mention one only. A widely-read column of the *Weekly Free Press* was the "London Letter," written by the late Mr. Andrew Halliday (son of a Strathspey manse), an accomplished Metropolitan journalist and playwright. One publication night I was called to read to the late Mr. Louis Kidd, foreman of the news caserom at that time, and afterwards sub-editor of the London *Echo* and *Weekly Times* respectively. Leaning my shoulders on Mr. Kidd's desk to get good light upon the "copy," I was reading off Halliday's easy-flowing manuscript, when, in a passage reviewing the week's doings in Parliament, there occurred the familiar contraction, "H. M. Govt.," which I read "Her Majesty's Government." No sooner had I pronounced these words than Mr. Kidd—normally a silent, discerning man—made me jump by exclaiming: "Good God!" He snatched the "copy" from my hand to look the number on the "taking." Then he shouted: "Who is No. 7?" Almost instanter, from a distant part of the large room, came the reply: "Shiprow Jock!" Mr. Kidd deliberately wiped his forehead, and resignedly said: "Oh, that accounts for it!" "Jock," a man of 50 and a recognised "duffer," had evidently considered Mr. Halliday's contraction hardly likely to be understood by the British public, and so, to make it plainer, had transcribed "H. M. Govt." into "Hugh McGovit!"

What, you will ask, did the apprentices of that time do with their leisure hours? I can only tell what I did with mine. Of leisure, actually, there was little—Sunday excepted. On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, I put "a piece" in my pocket at dinner time, and, after ceasing work at 7 in the evening, went straight to the Mechanics' Institute Classes in Market Street. There (besides

French and German), Higher English and English Literature, Arithmetic, Mathematics and Physics, were well taught. There was an excellent reference and lending library too—which afterwards laid the foundation of the Public Library; and dear old James Sinclair, the resident secretary and manager, was a veritable Father O'Flynn among the pupils—

"Coaxing the crazy ones,

Driving the lazy ones on with the stick!"

The classes were perhaps not so large as in those of some of the present day Evening Schools; but both teachers and pupils were in earnest, and the results were good—results that were tested at the close of the session by our sitting Examination on the papers prepared by South Kensington in the respective subjects.

Steam was introduced in the last quarter of 1863; the boiler and engine being installed in the sunk floor of the Well Court house. The newspaper was the first to be hitched on to the new power. Shortly thereafter the firm went in pretty largely for the execution of reprints for William Tegg & Coy., Publishers, London. The office was rearranged to accommodate the extra workers required. The upper floors of the Well Court house were utilised for a stereo foundry and a caserom, and requisite printing machinery was laid down in the one-storey tie building. The first machine to be built there, strange to say, was a massive quad-crown Platen. Then followed two of the early make of Wharfedales, a Demy and a Double Royal. A Double Crown was added later. The big Platen proved a terror to us all, for most of us were called upon to have a shot at feeding her, which we essayed to do at the imminent risk of having our hands nipped off by the sharp and sudden fall of the heavy iron-framed tympan as it was drawn under the great platen. Little Jamie Fraser alone succeeded in mastering the task. To see how deftly Jamie could not only feed the first side to "guages," but lay on the second side to "points," and dexterously get clear to hand down the tympan in rhythmic time, was the admiration of all on-lookers. But Fraser could only operate one of the two "feeds," and the efforts of all who tried to emulate him on the other side

of the platen only resulted in spoiling good paper, until there came a man whom the makers had selected for the job. For practical purposes, however, that big platen was a white elephant.

Four stereotypers were brought from Edinburgh to work the new plant, and they turned out excellent plates. One of the stereotypers—Mr. Louis Paul—was an expert at altering and correcting literal errors in plates, letting in accents, etc.; and he got plenty to do, for the press proof reading was far from perfect.

From first to last, the working staff of Arthur King & Co.'s Office, even now, passes before my mind's eye like the action of a kaleidoscope—depicting many curious and interesting groupings and dramatic scenes, ranging from pathos to romance, from tragedy to comedy. And for me there is subject for deep reflection in the fact that, of all those with whom I directly collaborated in those long past years, there remain alive, so far as I know, only Mr. John Lawson, who recently retired, with all the honours, from the management of the *Free Press* news caserom—and myself. To quote our boyhood's favourite author—Fenimore Cooper—John and I are "The last of the Mohicans."

There is another with whom we two were in those years associated, one for whom we both still cherish feelings of high regard, and whose friendship we count precious. Though a colleague, he was not a collaborator. I am glad to say he still holds the stage of life as one of the most successful business men among the sons of Bon-Accord! I refer to our good friend, Mr. John Bruce. And mention of him leads me to my concluding paragraph.

In the beginning of the 60's, two noteworthy incidents were among my first experiences in this one-time important printing house. Both incidents refer to the *Free Press*. One was a case of midnight burglary. The thief—who was actually the night constable on our beat!—had broken in by wrenching off the news machine-room window shutter. He had then scrambled into the counting-house—goodness knows how!—through a small, square aperture in the wall, with sliding shutter, used for serving casual purchasers of the newspaper. Once inside, aided by his bull's-eye lantern, he rifled the cash drawer, after which he went out as he had entered, leaving behind, however, a small part of

his official equipment—a blunder which easily led to this Judas-like servant of the law being laid by the heels. He was tried for his crime before the High Court of Justice—found guilty—and, like Judas, relegated to "his own place"—Perth Penitentiary.

The second incident was a change in the personel of the counting-house staff. Mr. George Angus, a sagacious and far-seeing man, who had been chief clerk from the inception of the newspaper, resigned in the winter of 1860-61, to commence business on his own account in the grocer's shop which still bears his name at the foot of Bank Street, on Ferryhill, where, to use a Yankeeism, he "made good." At that time the fisher folk of the villages along our coast were very ill-off for capital, and barter was their chief medium of exchange. In course of time, by helping the fisher folk to help themselves, namely, turning Finnan Haddies and other kinds of fish into cash, Mr. Angus acquired an extensive knowledge of that trade. Ultimately, he established a fishcuring business of his own, and so became a pioneer in the now important fish trade of Aberdeen. In course of time, Mr. William Allan and Mr. Peter Dey, after serving apprenticeships with Mr. Angus, laid their heads together and founded the firm of Allan & Dey. This, by the way, however.

The late Mr. Alexander Marr succeeded Mr. Angus as chief clerk, and our friend Mr. Bruce—a beardless boy then, like myself—came as his assistant. The latter's strong personality and capacity for business were very soon revealed. Things commercial seemed to jump into new life when he laid hold of them. In a few years after Mr. Bruce's advent, the Proprietors procured premises in Broad Street—those occupied to-day by McKilliam's confectionery establishment—and at the back of that property (in Well Court) they built their first printing works, the front house being used for the counting-house, and for the accommodation of the literary staff of the paper. In this new office, in 1865, the *Free Press* became a bi-weekly—published on Tuesday and Friday. In the Tuesday issue, the late Dr. Alexander's now famous Scots classic, "Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk," made its first appearance, in serial instalments, and at once proved a popular feature. Thereafter the rise

of the *Free Press* became noticeably rapid. The present imposing building in Union Street became its home. And on 4th May, 1872—the year in which Lord Young's great Education Act came into operation—the *Free Press* blossomed out into a daily.

The Man of Affairs, like the Poet, is born, not made. Genius was defined by Carlyle, the sage of Chelsea, as "just an infinite capacity for taking pains," and, he added, characteristically: "Blessed is he who has found his work. Let him pursue Truth therein, and ask for no other Blessedness!" Genius cannot be confined to a district of which the legendary "Snaggleton" is the capital. Be it for good or evil, it influences the whole community. It is easy to perceive that Mr. Bruce's influence has tended to the betterment of industry and commerce throughout the whole of the North of Scotland, and his energetic brain has promoted other useful businesses than the *Aberdeen Free Press*.

I have witnessed more than one good deed of his, of which I like to think as Portia thought when treading the avenue leading to her home, on the evening of the day on which she had defeated the cruel purpose of Shylock's bond. Seeing a light burning in the hall of her house in front, Portia turned to her companion and remarked: "How far yon little candle throws his beams! So shines a good deed in a naughty world!"