

“The labourers gathered around me ; the masons conferred together. One of them said, speaking for the rest, that he must put a stop to this : the privileges of masons were not to be questioned by labourers ; and I must either submit to that reproof or punishment which they thought fit to inflict, or leave the works ; if not, *they* must all leave the works. The punishment hinted at was, to submit to be held over one of the blocks of stone face downward, the feet held down on one side, the head and arms held down on the other side, while the mason *apprentices* would whack the offender with their leathern aprons knotted hard. I said that, so far from submitting to reproof or punishment, I would carry my opposition a great deal farther than I had done. They had all talked about parliamentary reform ; we had all joined in the cry for reform, and denounced the exclusive privileges of the anti-reformers ; but I would begin reform where we then stood. I would demand, and I then demanded, that if a hewer wanted his stone turned over, and called labourers together to do it, they should not put hands to it unless he assisted ; that if a hewer struck a labourer at his work, none of the labourers should do anything thereafter, of any nature whatever, for that hewer. The masons laughed. ‘And farther,’ said I, ‘the masons shall not be entitled to the choice of any room they choose, if we go into a public-house to be paid, to the exclusion of the labourers ; nor, if there be only one room in the house, shall the labourers be sent outside the door, to give the room to the masons, as has been the case. In everything we shall be your equals, except in wages ; that we have no right to expect.’ The masons, on hearing these conditions, set up a shout of derisive laughter. It was against the laws of their body to hear their privileges discussed by a labourer ; they could not suffer it, they said, and I must instantly submit to punishment for my contumacy. I told them that I was a quarryman, and not a mason’s labourer ; that, as such, they had no power over me. They scouted this plea, and said that wherever masons were at work they were superior, and their privileges were not to be questioned. I asked if the act of a mason striking a labourer with a rule was not to be questioned. They said, by their own body it might, upon a complaint from the labourer ; but in this case the labourer was insolent to the mason, and the latter had a right to strike him. They demanded that I should at once cease to argue the question, and submit, before it was too late, to whatever punishment they chose to inflict. Upon hearing this, I put myself in a defensive attitude, and said, ‘Let me see who shall first lay hands on me ?’ No one approaching, I continued, ‘We have been reading in the newspaper discussions about reform, and have been told how much is to be gained by even one person sometimes making a resolute stand against oppressive power. We have only this day seen in the papers a warning to the