

# Smith Cracks, &c.

By James Hogg

“Have you heard anything of the apparition which has been seen about Wineholm Place?” said the Dominie.

“Na, I never heard o’ sic a thing as yet,” quoth the smith; “but I wadna wonder muckle that the news should turn out to be true.”

The Dominie shook his head, and uttered a long “h’m—h’m— as if he knew more than he was at liberty to tell.

“Weel, that beats the world,” said the smith, as he gave over blowing the bellows, and looked over the spectacles at the Dominie’s face.

The Dominie shook his head again.

The smith was now in the most ticklish quandary; eager to learn particulars, and spread the astounding news through the whole village, and the rest of the parish to boot, but yet afraid to press the inquiry, for fear the cautious Dominie should take the alarm of being reported as a tatler, and keep all to himself. So the smith, after waiting till the wind-pipe of the great bellows ceased its rushing noise, and he had covered the gloss neatly up with a mixture of small coals, culm, and cinders; and then, perceiving that nothing more was forthcoming from the Dominie, he began blowing again with more energy than before—changed his hand put the other sooty one in his breeches-pocket—leaned to the horn—looked in a careless manner to the window, or rather gazed on vacancy, and always now and then stole a sly look at the Dominie’s face. It was quite immovable. His cheek was leaned on his open hand, and his eyes fixed on the glowing fire. It was very teasing this for poor Clinkum the smith. But what could he do? He took out his glowing iron, and made a shower of fire sweep through the whole smithy, whereof a good part, as intended, sputtered upon the Dominie, but he only shielded his face with his elbow, turned his shoulder half round, and held his peace. Thump, thump! clink, clink! went the hammer for a space; and then when the iron was returned to the fire, “Weel, that beats the world!” quoth the smith.

“What is this that beats the world, Mr Clinkum?” said the Dominie, with the most cool and provoking indifference.

“This story about the apparition,” quoth the smith.

“What story?” said the Dominie.

Now really this insolence was hardly to be borne, even from a learned Dominie, who, with all his cold indifference of feeling, was sitting toasting himself at a good smithy fire. The smith felt this, for he was a man of acute feeling, and therefore he spit upon his hand and fell a clinking and pelting at the stithy with both spirit and resignation, saying within himself, “These dominie bodies just beat the world!”

“What story?” reiterated the Dominie. “For my part I related no story, nor have ever given assent to a belief in such story that any man has heard. Nevertheless, from the results of ratiocination, conclusions may be formed, though not algebraically, yet corporately, by constituting a quantity, which shall be equivalent to the difference, subtracting the less from the greater, and striking a balance in order to get rid of any ambiguity or paradox.”

At the long adverb, *nevertheless*, the smith gave over blowing, and pricked up his ears, but the definition went beyond his comprehension.

“Ye ken that just beats the whole world for deepness,” said the smith; and again began blowing the bellows.

“You know, Mr Clinkum,” continued the Dominie, “that a proposition is an assertion of some distinct truth, which only becomes manifest by demonstration. A corollary is an obvious, or easily inferred consequence *of* a proposition; while an hypothesis is a supposition, or concession made, during the process of demonstration. Now, do you take me along with you? Because if you do not, it is needless to proceed?”

“Yes, yes, I understand you middling wed; but I wad like better to hear what other fo’ks say about it than you.”

“And why so? Wherefore would you rather hear another man’s demonstration than mine?” said the Dominie sternly.

“Because, ye ken, ye just beat the whole world for words,” quoth the smith.

“Ay, ay! that is to say, words without wisdom,” said the Dominie, rising and stepping away. “Well, well, every man to his sphere, and the smith to the bellows.”

“Ye’re quite wrang, master,” cried the smith after him. “It isna the *want* o’ wisdom in you that plagues me, it is the owerplush o’t.”

This soothed the Dominie, who returned, and said mildly—“By the by, Clinkum, I want a leister of your making, for I see there is no other tradesman makes them so well. A five-grained one make it; at your own price.”

“Very weel, sir. When will you be needing it?”

“Not till the end of close-time.”

“Ay, ye may gar the three auld anes do till then.”

“What do you wish to insinuate, sir? Would you infer, because I have three leisters, that therefore I am a breaker of the laws? That I, who am placed here as a pattern and monitor of the young and rising generation, should be the first to set them an example of insubordination?”

“Ye ken, that just beats a’ in words! but we ken what we ken, for a’ that, master.”

“You had better take a little care what you say, Mr Clinkum; just a little care. I do not request you to take particular care, for of that your tongue is incapable, but a very little is a necessary correlative of consequences. And mark you don’t go to say that I said this or that about a ghost, or mentioned such a ridiculous story.”

“The crabbitness o’ that body beats the world!” said the smith to himself, as the Dominie went halting homeward.

The very next man who entered the smithy door was no other than John Broadcast, the new laird’s hind, who had also been hind to the late laird for many years, and who had no sooner said his errand than the smith addressed him thus: “Have *you* ever seen this ghost that there is such a noise about?”

“Ghost? Na, goodness be thankit, I never saw a ghost in my life, save aince a wraith. What ghost do you mean?”

“So you never saw nor heard tell of any apparition about Wineholm-place, lately?”

“No, I hae reason to be thankfu’ I have not.”

“Wed, that beats the world! Whow, man, but ye are sair in the dark! Do you no think there are siccan things in nature, as fo’k no coming fairly to their ends, John?”

“Goodness be wi’ us! Ye gar a’ the hairs o’ my head creep, man. What’s that you’re saying?”

“Had ye never ony suspicions o’ that kind, John?”

“No; I canna say that I had.”

“None in the least? Wed, that beats the world!”

“O, bauld your tongue, bauld your tongue! We hae great reason to be thankfu’ that we are as we are!”

“How as you are?”

“That we arc nae stocks or stones, or brute beasts, as the Minister o’ T’raquair says. But I hope in God there is nae siccan a thing about my master’s place as an unearthly visitor.”

The smith shook his head, and uttered a long hem, hem, hem! He had felt the powerful effect of that himself, and wished to make the same appeal to the feelings and longings after immortality of John Broadcast. The bait took; for the latent spark of superstition was kindled in the heart of honest John, and there being no wit in the head to counteract it, the portentous hint had its full sway. John’s eyes stelled in his head, and his visage grew long, assuming meanwhile something of the hue of dried clay in winter. “Hech, man, but that’s an awsome story!” exclaimed he. “Fo’ks hae great reason to be thankfu’ that they are as they are. It is truly an awsome story.”

“Ye ken, it just beats the world for that,” quoth the smith.

“And is it really thought that this laird made away wi’ our auld master?” said John. The smith shook his head again, and gave a strait wink with his eyes.

“Wed, I hae great reason to be thankfu’ that I never heard siccan a story as that!” said John. “Wha was it tauld you a’ about it?”

“It was nae less a man than our mathewmatical Dominie, he that kens a’ things,” said the smith; “and can prove a proposition to the nineteenth part of a hair. But he is terrified the tale should spread; and therefore ye maunna say a word about it.”

“Na, na; I hae great reason to be thankfu’ I can keep a secret as wed as the maist part o’ men, and better than the maist part o’ women. What did he say? Tell us a’ that he said.”

“It is not so easy to repeat what he says, for he has sac mony lang-nebbit words. But he said, though it was only a supposition, yet it was easily made manifest by positive demonstration.”

“Did you ever hear the like o’ that! Now, have we na reason to be thankfu’ that we are as we are? Did he say it was by poison that he was taken off, or that he was strangled?”

“Na; I thought he said it was by a collar, or a collary, or something to that purpose.

“Then, it wad appear, there is no doubt of the horrid transaction? I think, the Doctor has reason to be thankfu’ that he’s no taken up. Is not that strange?”

“O, ye ken, it just beats the world.”

“He deserves to be torn at young horses’ tails,” said the ploughman.

“Ay, or nippt to death with red-hot pinchers,” quoth the smith.

“Or harrowed to death, like the children of Ammon,” said the ploughman.

“Na, I’ll tell you what should be done wi’ him—he should just be docked and fired like a farciéd horse,” quoth the smith. “Od help ye, man, I could beat the world for laying on a proper poonishment.”

John Broadcast went home full of terror and dismay. He told his wife the story in a secret—she told the dairymaid with a tenfold degree of secrecy; and as Dr Davington, or the New Laird, as he was called, sometimes kissed the pretty dairymaid for amusement, it gave her a great deal of freedom with her master, so she went straight and told him the whole story to his face. He was unusually affected at hearing such a terrible accusation against himself and changed colour again and again; and as pretty Martha, the dairymaid, supposed it was from anger, she fell to abusing the Dominie without mercy, for he was session-clerk, and had been giving her some hints about her morality, of which she did not approve; she therefore threw the whole blame upon him, assuring her master that he was the most spiteful and malicious man on the face of God’s earth;

“and to show you that, sir,” said Martha, wiping her eyes, “he has spread it through the hale parish that I am ower sib wi’ my master, and that you and I baith deserve to sit wi’ the sacking-gown on us.

This enraged the Doctor still farther, and he forthwith dispatched Martha to desire the Dominie to come up to the Place and speak with her master, as he had something to say to him. Martha went, and delivered her message in so exulting a manner, that the Dominie suspected there was bad blood a-brewing against him; and as he had too much self-importance to think of succumbing to any man alive, he sent an impertinent answer to the laird’s message, bearing, that if Dr Davington had any business with him, he would be so good as attend at his class-room when he dismissed his scholars. And then he added, waving his hand toward the door, “Go out. There is contamination in your presence. What hath such a vulgar fraction ado to come into the halls of uprightness and science?”

When this message was delivered, the Doctor being almost beside himself with rage, instantly dispatched two village constables with a warrant to seize the Dominie, and bring him before him, for the Doctor was a justice of the peace. Accordingly, the poor Dominie was seized at the head of his pupils, and dragged away, crutch and all, up before the new laird, to answer for such an abominable slander. The Dominie denied everything anent it, as indeed he might, save having asked the smith the simple question, *if he had heard ought of a ghost at the Place?* But he refused to tell why he asked that question. He had his own reasons for it, he said, and reasons that to him were quite sufficient, but as he was not obliged to disclose them, neither would he.

The smith was then sent for, who declared that the Dominie had told him of the ghost being seen, and a murder committed, which he called a *rash assassination*, and said it was obvious, and easily inferred that it was done by a collar.

How the Dominie did storm! He even twice threatened to knock down the smith with his crutch; not for the slander, he cared not for that nor the Doctor a pin, but for the total subversion of his grand case in geometry; and he therefore denominated the smith’s head the logarithm to number one, a term which I do not understand, but the appropriation of it pleased the Dominie exceedingly, made him chuckle, and put him in better humour for a good while. It was in vain that he tried to prove that his words applied only to the definition of a problem in geometry, he could not make himself understood; and the smith maintaining his point firmly, and apparently with conscientious truth, appearances were greatly against the Dominie, and the Doctor pronounced him a malevolent and dangerous person.

“O, ye ken, he just beats the world for that,” quoth the smith.

“I a malevolent and dangerous person, sir!” said the Dominie, fiercely, and altering his crutch from one place to another of the floor, as if he could not get a place to set it on. “Dost thou call me a malevolent and dangerous person, sir? What then art thou? If thou knowest not I will tell thee. Add a cipher to a ninth figure, and what does that make? Ninety you will say. Ay, but then put a cipher above a nine, and what does that make? ha ha—ha I have you there. Your case exactly in higher geometry! for say the chord of sixty degrees is radius, then the sine of ninety degrees is equal to the radius, so the secant of 0, that is nickle-nothing, as the boys call it, is radius, and so is the co-sine of 0. The versed sine of 90 degrees is radius, (that is nine with a cipher added, you know,) and the versed sine of 180 degrees is the diameter; then of course the sine increases from 0 (that is cipher or nothing) during the first quadrant till it becomes radius, and then it decreases till it becomes nothing. After this you note it lies on the contrary side of the diameter, and consequently, if positive before, is negative now, so that it must end in 0, or a cipher above a nine at most.”

"This unintelligible jargon is out of place here, Mr Dominie, and if you can show no better reasons for raising such an abominable falsehood, in representing me as an incendiary and murderer, I shall procure you a lodgement in the house of correction."

"Why, sir, the long and short of the matter is this—I only asked at that fellow there, that logarithm of stupidity! if he had heard ought of a ghost having been seen about Wineholm-place. I added nothing farther, either positive or negative. Now, do you insist on my reasons for asking such a question?"

"I insist on having them."

"Then what will you say, sir, when I inform you, and depone to the truth of it, that *I saw the ghost myself?*—yes, sir—that I saw the ghost of your late worthy father-in-law myself, sir; and though I said no such thing to that decimal fraction, yet it told me, sir—Yes, the spirit of your father-in-law told me, sir, that you were a murderer."

"Lord, now what think ye o' that?" quoth the smith. "Ye had better hae letten him alane; for od, ye ken, he's the deevil of a body that ever was made. He just beats the world."

The Doctor grew as pale as a corpse, but whether out of fear or rage, it was hard to say at that time. "Why, sir, you are mad! stark, raving mad," said the Doctor; "therefore for your own credit, and for the peace and comfort of my amiable young wife and myself, and our credit among our retainers, you must unsay every word that you have now said regarding that ridiculous falsehood."

"I'll just as soon say that the parabola and the ellipsis are the same," said the Dominie; "or that the diameter is not the longest line that can be drawn in the circle; or that I want eyes, ears, and understanding, which that I have, could all be proven by equation. And now, sir, since you have forced me to divulge what I was in much doubt about, I have a great mind to have the old Laird's grave opened to-night, and have the body inspected before witnesses."

"If you dare, for the soul of you, disturb the sanctuary of the grave," said the Doctor vehemently; "or with your unhallowed hands touch the remains of my venerable and revered predecessor, it had been better for you, and all who make the attempt, that you never had been born. If not then for my sake, for the sake of my wife, the sole daughter of the man to whom you have all been obliged, let this abominable and malicious calumny go no farther, but put it down; I pray of you to put it down, as you would value your own advantage."

"I have seen him, and spoke with him—that I aver," said the Dominie. "And shall I tell you what he said to me?"

"No, no! I'll hear no more of such absolute and disgusting nonsense," said the Laird.

"Then, since it hath come to this, I will declare it in the face of the whole world, and pursue it to the last," said the Dominie, "ridiculous as it is, and I confess that it is even so. I have seen your father-in-law within the last twenty hours; at least a being in his form and habiliments, and having his aspect and voice. And he told me, that he believed you were a very great scoundrel, and that you had helped him off the stage of time in a great haste, for fear of the operation of a will, which he had just executed, very much to your prejudice. I was somewhat aghast, but ventured to remark, that he must surely have been sensible whether you murdered him or not, and in what way. He replied, that he was not absolutely certain, for at the time you put him down, he was much in his customary way of nights, very drunk; but that he greatly suspected you had hanged him, for, ever since he had died, he had been troubled with a severe crick in his neck. Having seen my late worthy patron's body deposited in the coffin, and afterwards consigned to the grave, these things overcame me, and a kind of mist came ower my senses; but I heard him saying as he withdrew, what a pity it was that my nerves could not stand this

disclosure. Now, for my own satisfaction, I am resolved that tomorrow, I shall raise the village, with the two ministers at the head of the multitude, and have the body, and particularly the neck of the deceased minutely inspected."

"If you do so, I shall make one of the number," said the Doctor. "In the mean time, measures must be taken to put a stop to a scene of madness and absurdity so disgraceful to a well regulated village, and a sober community."

"There is but one direct line that can be followed, and any other would either be an acute or obtuse angle," said the Dominie; "therefore I am resolved to proceed right forward, on mathematical principles, in the diagonal, and if the opposite vertices of the quadrilateral fall in with these, the case is proven;" and away he went, skipping on his crutch, to arouse the villagers to the scrutiny.

The smith remained behind, concerting with the Doctor, how to controvert the Dominie's profound scheme of unshrouding the dead; and certainly the smith's plan, viewed professionally, was not amiss. "O, ye ken, sir, we maun just gie him another heat, and try to saften him to reason, for he's just as stubborn as Muirkirk ir'n. He beats the world for that."

While the two were in confabulation, Johnston, the old house-servant, came in and said to the Doctor "Sir, your servants are going to leave the house, every one, this night, if you cannot fall on some means to divert them from it. The old laird is, it seems, risen again, and come back among them, and they are all in the utmost consternation. Indeed, they are quite out of their reason. He appeared in the stable to Broadcast, who has been these two hours dead with terror, but is now recovered, and telling such a tale down stairs, as never was heard from the mouth of man."

"Send him up here," said the Doctor. "I shall silence him. What does the ignorant clown mean by joining in this unnatural clamour?"

John came up, with his broad bonnet in his hand, shut the door with hesitation, and then felt twice with his hand if it really was shut. "Well, John," said the Doctor, "what an absurd lie is this that you are vending among your fellow servants, of having seen a ghost?" John picked some odds and ends of threads out of his bonnet, that had nothing ado there, and said nothing. "You are an old superstitious dreaming dotard," continued the Doctor; "but if you propose in future to manufacture such stories, you must, from this instant, do it somewhere else than in my service, and among my domestics. What have you to say for yourself?"

"Indeed, sir, I hae naething to say but this, that we hae a' muckle reason to be thankfu' that we are as we are."

"And whereon does that wise saw bear? What relation has that to the seeing of a ghost? Confess then this instant, that you have forged and vended a deliberate lie, or swear before Heaven, and d n yourself, that you have seen a ghost."

"Indeed, sir, I hae muckle reason to be thankfu' —"

"For what?"

"That I never tauld a deliberate lee in my life. My late master came and spake to me in the stable; but whether it was his ghaist or himsell a good angel or a bad ane, I hae reason to be thankfu' I never said; for I do not—ken."

"Now, pray let us hear from that sage tongue of yours, so full of sublime adages, what this doubtful being said to you?"

"I wad rather be excused, an it were your honour's will, an' wad hae reason to be thankfu'."

"And why would you decline telling this?"

“Because I ken ye wadna believe a word o’t. It is siccan a strange story! O sirs, but fo’ks hae muckle reason to be thankfu’ that they are as they are!”

“Well, out with this strange story of yours. I do not promise to credit it, but shall give it a patient hearing, provided you swear that there is no forgery in it.”

“Wed, as I was suppering the horses the night, I was dressing my late kind master’s favourite mare, and I was just thinking to mysell, an he had been leevin’ I wadna hae been my lane the night, for he wad hae been standing over me cracking his jokes, and swearing at me in his am good-natured hamely way. Ay, but he’s gane to his lang account, thinks I, an’ we poor frail dying cratures that are left ahind hae muckle reason to be thankfu’ that we are as we are. When behold I looks up, and there’s my auld master standing leaning against the trivage, as he used to do, and looking at me. I canna but say my heart was a little astoundit, and maybe lap up through my midriff into my breath-bellows; I couldna say, but in the strength o’ the Lord I was enabled to retain my senses for a good while. ‘John Broadcast,’ says he, with a deep and angry tone.— ‘John Broadcast, what the d l are you thinking about? You are not currying that mare half. What a d—d lubberly way of dressing a horse is that?’

“ ‘L—d make us thankfu’, master!’ says I, ‘are you there?’

“ ‘Where else would you have me be at this hour of the night, old blockhead?’ says he.

“ ‘In another hame than this, master,’ says I; ‘but I fear me it is nae good and, that ye are sac soon tired o’t.’

“ ‘A d—d bad one, I assure you,’ says he.

“ ‘Ay, but, master,’ says I, ‘ye hae muckle reason to be thankfu’ that ye are as ye are.

“ ‘In what respects, dotard?’ says he.

“ ‘That ye hae liberty to come out o’t a start now and then to get the air,’ says I; and oh, my heart was sair for him when I thought o’ his state! and though I was thankfu’ that I was as I was, my heart and flesh began to fail me, at thinking of my being speaking face to face wi’ a being frae the unhappy place. But out he briks again wi’ a grit round o’ swearing about the mare being ill keepit; and he ordered me to cast my coat and curry her wed, for that he had a lang journey to take on her the morn.

“ ‘You take a journey on her!’ says I, ‘Ye forget that she’s flesh and blood. I fear my new master will dispute that privilege with you, for he rides her himsell the morn.’

“ ‘He ride her!’ cried the angry spirit. ‘If he dares for the soul of him lay a leg over her, I shall give him a downcome! I shall gar him lie as low as the gravel among my feet. And soon soon shall he be levelled with it at ony rate! The dog! the parricide! first to betray my child, and then to put down myself. But he shall not escape! he shall not escape!’ cried he with such a hellish growl, that I fainted and heard no more.”

“Wed, that beats the world!” quoth the smith; “I wad hae thought the mare wad hae luppen ower yird and stand, or fa’en down dead wi’ fright.”

“Na, na,” said John, “in place o’ that, whenever she heard him fa’ a-swearing, she was sae glad that she fell a-nickering.”

“Na, but that beats the hale world a’thegither!” quoth the smith.

“Then it has been nae ghaist ava, ye may depend on that.”

“I little wat what it was,” said John, “but it was a being in nae good or happy state o’ mind, and is a warning to us a’ how muckle reason we hae to be thankfu’ that we are as we are.”

The Doctor pretended to laugh at the absurdity of John’s narrative, but it was with a ghastly and doubtful expression of countenance, as though he thought the story far too ridiculous for any clodpole to have contrived out of his own head; and forthwith he dismissed the two dealers in the

marvellous, with very little ceremony, the one protesting that the thing beat the world, and the other that they had both reason to be thankful that they were as they were.

The next morning the villagers, small and great, were assembled at an early hour to witness the lifting of the body of their late laird, and headed by the established and dissenting clergymen, and two surgeons, they proceeded to the tomb, and soon extracted the splendid coffin, which they opened with all due caution and ceremony. But instead of the murdered body of their late benefactor, which they expected in good earnest to find, there was nothing in the coffin but a layer of gravel, of about the weight of a corpulent man!

The clamour against the new laird then rose all at once into a tumult that it was impossible to check, every one declaring aloud that he had not only murdered their benefactor, but, for fear of the discovery, had raised the body, and given, or rather sold it, to the dissectors. The thing was not to be borne! so the mob proceeded in a body up to Wineholm-Place, to take out their poor deluded lady, and burn the Doctor and his basely acquired habitation to ashes. It was not till the multitude had surrounded the house that the ministers and two or three other gentlemen could stay them, which they only did by assuring the mob that they would bring out the Doctor before their eyes, and deliver him up to justice. This pacified the throng; but on inquiry at the hall, it was found that the Doctor had gone off early that morning, so that nothing further could be done for the present. But the coffin, filled with gravel, was laid up in the aisle and kept open for inspection.

Nothing could now exceed the consternation of the simple villagers of Wineholm at these dark and mysterious events. Business, labour, and employment of every sort, were at a stand, and the people hurried about to one another's houses, and mingled together in one heterogeneous mass of theoretical speculation. The smith put his hand to the bellows, but forgot to blow till the fire went out; the weaver leaned on his beam, and listened to the legends of the ghastly tailor. The team stood in the mid furrow, and the thresher agaping over his flail; and even the Dominie was heard to declare that the geometrical series of events was increasing by no common measure, and therefore ought to be calculated rather arithmetically than by logarithms; and John Broadcast saw more and more reason for being thankful that he was as he was, and neither a stock nor a stone, nor a brute beast.

Every thing that happened was more extraordinary than the last; and the most puzzling of all was the circumstance of the late laird's mare, saddle, bridle and all, being off before day the next morning; so that Dr Davington was obliged to have recourse to his own, on which he was seen posting away on the road towards Edinburgh. It was thus but too obvious that the ghost of the late laird had ridden off on his favourite mare, the Lord only knew whither! for as to that point none of the sages of Wineholm could divine. But their souls grew chill as an iceberg, and their very frames rigid at the thoughts of a spirit riding away on a brute beast to the place appointed for wicked men. And had not John Broadcast reason to be thankful that he was as he was?

However the outcry of the community became so outrageous, of murder, and foul play in so many ways, that the officers of justice were compelled to take note of it; and accordingly the Sheriff-substitute, the Sheriff-clerk, the Fiscal, and two assistants, came in two chaises to Wineholm to take a precognition, and there a court was held which lasted the whole day, at which, Mrs Davington, the late laird's only daughter, all the servants, and a great number of the villagers, were examined on oath. It appeared from the evidence that Dr Davington had come to the village and set up as a surgeon—that he had used every endeavour to be employed in the laird's family in vain, as the latter detested him. That he, however, found means of seducing his only daughter to elope with him, which put the laird quite beside himself, and from



thenceforward he became drowned in dissipation. That such, however, was his affection for his daughter, that he caused her to live with him, but would never suffer the Doctor to enter his door—that it was nevertheless quite customary for the Doctor to be sent for to his lady's chamber, particularly when her father was in his cups; and that on a certain night, when the laird had had company, and was so overcome that he could not rise from his chair, he had died suddenly of apoplexy; and that no other skill was sent for, or near him, but this his detested son-in-law, whom he had by will disinherited, though the legal term for rendering that will competent had not expired. The body was coffined the second day after death, and locked up in a low room in one of the wings of the building; and nothing farther could be elicited. The Doctor was missing, and it was whispered that he had absconded; indeed it was evident, and the Sheriff acknowledged, that from the evidence taken collectively, the matter had a very suspicious aspect, although there was no direct proof against the Doctor. It was proved that he had attempted to bleed the patient, but had not succeeded, and that at that time the laird was black in the face.

When it began to wear nigh night, and nothing farther could be learned, the Sheriff-clerk, a quiet considerate gentleman, asked why they had not examined the wright who made the coffin, and also placed the body in it? The thing had not been thought of; but he was found in court, and instantly put into the witness's box and examined on oath. His name was James Sanderson, a stout-made, little, shrewd-looking man, with a very peculiar squint. He was examined thus by the Procurator-fiscal.

“Were you long acquainted with the late laird of Wineholm, James?”

“Yes, ever since I left my apprenticeship; for I suppose about nineteen years.

“Was he very much given to drinking of late?”

“I could not say. He took his glass gayen heartily.”

“Did you ever drink with him?”

“O yes, mony a time.”

“You must have seen him very drunk then? Did you ever see him so drunk that he could not rise, for instance?”

“O never! for, lang afore that, I could not have kend whether he was sitting or standing.”

“Were you present at the corpse-chesting?”

“Yes, I was.”

“And were you certain the body was then deposited in the coffin?”

“Yes; quite certain.”

“Did you screw down the coffin-lid firmly then, as you do others of the same make?”

“No, I did not.”

“What were your reasons for that?”

“They were no reasons of mine—I did what I was ordered. There were private reasons, which I then wist not of. But, gentlemen, there are some things connected with this affair, which I am bound in honour not to reveal—I hope you will not compel me to divulge them at present.”

“You are bound by a solemn oath, James, which is the highest of all obligations; and for the sake of justice, you must tell everything you know; and it would be better if you would just tell your tale straight forward, without the interruption of question and answer.”

“Well, then, since it must be so: That day, at the chesting, the Doctor took me aside, and says to me, ‘James Sanderson, it will be necessary that something be put into the coffin to prevent any unpleasant flavour before the funeral; for, owing to the corpulence, and inflamed state of the body by apoplexy, there will be great danger of this.’ ‘Very well, sir,’ says I—‘what shall I bring?’

“ ‘You had better only screw down the lids lightly at present, then,’ said he, ‘and if you could bring a bucket-full of quicklime, a little while hence, and pour it over the body, especially over the face, it is a very good thing, an excellent thing for preventing any deleterious effluvia from escaping.’

“ ‘Very well, sir,’ says I; and so I followed his directions. I procured the lime; and as I was to come privately in the evening to deposit it in the coffin, in company with the Doctor alone, I was putting off the time in my workshop, polishing some trifle, and thinking to myself that I could not find in my heart to choke up my old friend with quicklime, even after he was dead, when, to my unspeakable horror, who should enter my workshop but the identical laird himself, dressed in his dead-clothes in the very same manner in which I had seen him laid in the coffin, but apparently all streaming in blood to the feet. I fell back over against a cart-wheel, and was going to call out, but could not; and as he stood straight in the door, there was no means of escape. At length the apparition spoke to me in a hoarse trembling voice, enough to have frightened a whole conclave of bishops out of their senses; and it says to me, ‘Jamie Sanderson! O, Jamie Sanderson! I have been forced to appear to you in a d—d frightful guise.’ These were the very first words it spoke; and they were far frae being a lie, but I haffins thought to mysell, that a being in such circumstances might have spoke with a little more caution and decency. I could make no answer, for my tongue refused all attempts at articulation, and my lips would not come together; and all that I could do, was to lie back against my new cart-wheel, and hold up my hands as a kind of defence. The ghastly and blood-stained apparition, advancing a step or two, held up both its hands flying with dead ruffles, and cried to me in a still more frightful voice, ‘O, my faithful old friend! I have been murdered! I am a murdered man, Jamie Sanderson! and if you do not assist me in bringing the wretch to a due retribution, you will be d—d to hell, sir.

“ ‘This is sheer raving, James,’ said the Sheriff, interrupting him. “ ‘These words can be nothing but the ravings of a disturbed and heated imagination. I entreat you to recollect, that you have appealed to the great Judge of heaven and earth for the truth of what you assert here, and to answer accordingly.’”

“ ‘I know what I am saying, my Lord Sheriff,’ said Sanderson; “ ‘and am telling nathing but the plain truth, as nearly as my state of mind at the time permits me to recollect. The appalling figure approached still nearer and nearer to me, breathing threatenings if I would not rise and fly to its assistance, and swearing like a sergeant of dragoons at both the Doctor and myself. At length it came so close on me, that I had no other shift but to hold up both feet and hands to shield me, as I had seen herons do when knocked down by a goshawk, and I cried out; but even my voice failed me, so that I only cried like one through his sleep.

“ ‘What the devil are you lying gaping and braying at there?’ said he, seizing me by the wrists, and dragging me after him. ‘Do you not see the plight I am in, and why won’t you fly to succour me?’

“ ‘I now felt to my great relief, that this terrific apparition was a being of flesh, bones, and blood, like myself; that, in short, it was indeed my kind old friend the laird popped out of his open coffin, and come over to pay me an evening visit, but certainly in such a guise as earthly visit was never paid. I soon gathered up my scattered senses, took my kind old friend into my room, bathed him all over, and washed him well in lukewarm water; then put him into a warm bed, gave him a glass or two of warm punch, and he came round amazingly. He caused me to survey his neck a hundred times I am sure; and I had no doubt that he had been strangled, for there was a purple ring round it, which in some places was black, and a little swollen; his voice creaked like a door-hinge, and his features were still distorted. He swore terribly at both the

Doctor and myself; but nothing put him half so mad as the idea of the quicklime being poured over him, and particularly over his face. I am mistaken if that experiment does not serve him for a theme of execration as long as he lives."

"So he is then alive, you say?" asked the Fiscal.

"O yes, sir! alive and tolerably well, considering. We two have had several bottles together in my quiet room; for I have still kept him concealed, to see what the Doctor would do next. He is in terror for him somehow, until sixty days be over from some date that he talks of, and seems assured that that dog will have his life by hook or crook, unless he can bring him to the gallows betimes, and he is absent on that business to-day. One night lately, when fully half-seas over, he set off to the schoolhouse, and frightened the Dominie; and last night he went up to the stable, and gave old Broadcast a hearing for not keeping his mare well enough.

"It appeared that some shaking motion in the confining of him had brought him to himself, after bleeding abundantly both at mouth and nose; that he was on his feet ere ever he knew how he had been disposed of, and was quite shocked at seeing the open coffin on the bed, and himself dressed in his grave-clothes, and all in one bath of blood. He flew to the door, but it was locked outside; he rapped furiously for something to drink; but the room was far removed from any inhabited part of the house, and none regarded. So he had nothing for it but to open the window, and come through the garden and the back loaning to my workshop. And as I had got orders to bring a bucket-full of quicklime, I went over in the forenoon with a bucket-full of heavy gravel, as much as I could carry, and a little white lime sprinkled on the top of it; and being let in by the Doctor, I deposited that in the coffin, screwed down the lid, and left it, and the funeral followed in due course, the whole of which the laird viewed from my window, and gave the Doctor a hearty day's cursing for daring to support his head and lay it in the grave. And this, gentlemen, is the substance of what I know concerning this enormous deed, which is I think quite sufficient. The laird bound me to secrecy until such time as he could bring matters to a proper bearing for securing of the Doctor; but as you have forced it from me, you must stand my surety, and answer the charges against me."

The laird arrived that night with proper authority, and a number of officers, to have the Doctor, his son-in-law, taken into custody; but the bird had flown; and from that day forth he was never seen, so as to be recognised in Scotland. The laird lived many years after that; and though the thoughts of the quicklime made him drink a great deal, yet from that time he never suffered himself to get quite drunk, lest some one might have taken it into his head to hang him, and he not know anything about it. The Dominie acknowledged that it was as impracticable to calculate what might happen in human affairs as to square the circle, which could only be effected by knowing the ratio of the circumference to the radius. For shoeing horses, vending news, and awarding proper punishments, the smith to this day just beats the world. And old John Broadcast is as thankful to Heaven as ever that things are as they are.