

Crabbe's Practice

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Published in the Christmas edition of The Boy's Own Paper in December 1884.



No. 400.—Vol. IX.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1887.

Price One Penny.
(and more elsewhere)



A DOG WITH A BAD NAME

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Author of "Roguish Crabbe," "By Filbert Smith," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XL.—A POOR LETTER-WRITER.

SCARLE descended to the drawing-room, where he found Mrs. Resbolt alone.

"I am so sorry you are going," said she. "Your visit has been

"Well, I shall if you will call a 'pardon' again."

CRABBE'S PRACTICE

I wonder how many men remember Tom Waterhouse Crabbe, student of medicine in this city. He was a man whom it was not easy to forget if you had once come across him.

Geniuses are more commonly read about than seen, but one could not speak five minutes with Crabbe without recognising that he had inherited some touch of that subtle, indefinable essence.

There was a bold originality in his thought, and a convincing earnestness in his mode of expressing it, which pointed to something higher than mere cleverness.

He studied spasmodically and irregularly, yet he was one of the first men — certainly the most independent thinker—of his year. Poor Crabbe—there was something delightfully original even in his mistakes.

I can remember how he laboriously explained to his examiner that the Spanish fly grew in Spain. And how he gave five drops of Sabin oil credit for producing that state which it is usually believed to rectify.

Crabbe was not at all the type of man whom we usually associate with the word "genius." He was not pale nor thin, neither was his hair of abnormal growth.

On the contrary he was a powerfully built, square-shouldered fellow, full of vitality, with a voice like a bull and a laugh that could be heard across the Meadows.

A muscular Christian too, and one of the best Rugby forwards in Edinburgh.

I remember my first meeting with Crabbe. It gave me a respect both for his cool reasoning powers and for his courage. It was at one of the Bulgarian Atrocity meetings held in Edinburgh in '78.

The hall was densely packed and the ventilation defective, so that I was not sorry to find that owing to my lateness I was unable to get any place, and had to stand in the doorway.

Leaning against the wall there I could both enjoy the cool air and hear the invectives which speaker after speaker was hurling at the Conservative ministry.

The audience seemed enthusiastically unanimous. A burst of cheering hailed every argument and sarcasm.

There was not one dissentient voice. The speaker paused to moisten his lips, and there was a silence over the hall.

Then a clear voice rose from the middle of it: "All very fine, but what did Gladstone?" There was a howl of execration and yells of "Turn him out!" But the voice was still audible. "What did Gladstone do in '63?" it demanded. "Turn him out. Show him out of the window! Put him out!"

There was a perfect hurricane of threats and abuse. Men sprang upon the benches shaking their sticks and peering over each other's shoulders to get a glimpse of the daring Conservative.

"What did Gladstone do in '63?" roared the voice; "I insist upon being answered."

There was another howl of execration, a great swaying of the crowd, and an eddy in the middle of it.

Then the mass of people parted and a man was borne out kicking and striking, and after a desperate resistance was precipitated down the stairs.

As the meeting became somewhat monotonous after this little divertisement, I went down into the street to cool myself.

There was my inquisitive friend leaning up against a lamp-post with his coat torn to shreds and a pipe in his mouth. Recognising him by his cut as being a medical student, I took advantage of the freemasonry which exists between members of that profession.

"Excuse me," I said, "you are a medical, aren't you?"

"Yes," he said; "Thomas Crabbe, a 'Varsity man."

"My name is Barton," I said. "Pardon my curiosity, but would you mind telling me what Gladstone did do in '63?"

"My dear chap," said Crabbe, taking my arm and marching up the street with me, "I haven't the remotest idea in the world. You see, I was confoundedly hot and I wanted a smoke,

and there seemed no chance of getting out, for I was jammed up right in the middle of the hall, so I thought I'd just make them carry me out and I did—not a bad idea, was it? If you have nothing better to do, come up to my digs and have some supper."

"Certainly," said I; and that was the foundation of my friendship with Thomas Crabbe.

Crabbe took his degree a year before I did, and went down to a large port in England with the intention of setting up there.

A brilliant career seemed to lie before him, for besides his deep knowledge of medicine, acquired in the most practical school in the world, he had that indescribable manner which gains a patient's confidence at once.

It is curious how seldom the two are united. That charming doctor, my dear madam, who pulled young Charley through the measles so nicely, and had such a pleasant manner and such a clever face, was a noted duffer at college and the laughing-stock of his year.

While poor little Doctor Grinder whom you snubbed so, and who seemed so nervous and didn't know where to put his hands, he won a gold medal for original research and was as good a man as his professors.

After all, it is generally the outside case, not the inside works, which is noticed in this world.

Crabbe went down with his young degree, and a still younger wife, to settle in this town, which we will call Brisport.

I was acting as assistant to a medical man in Manchester, and heard little from my former friend, save that he had set up in considerable style, and was making a bid for a high-class practice at once.

I read one most deep and erudite paper in a medical journal, entitled "Curious Development of a Discophorous Bone in the Stomach of a Duck," which emanated from his pen, but beyond this and some remarks on the embryology of fishes he seemed strangely quiet.

One day to my surprise I received a telegram from Mrs. Crabbe begging me to run down to Brisport and see her husband, as he was far from well.

Having obtained leave of absence from my principal, I started by the next train, seriously anxious about my friend. Mrs. Crabbe met me at the station.

She told me Tom was getting very much broken down by continued anxiety; the expenses of keeping up his establishment were heavy, and patients were few and far between.

He wished my advice and knowledge of practical work to guide him in this crisis.

I certainly found Crabbe altered very much for the worse. He looked gaunt and cadaverous, and much of his old reckless joyousness had left him, though he brightened up wonderfully on seeing an old friend.

After dinner the three of us held a solemn council of war, in which he laid before me all his difficulties.

"What in the world am I to do, Barton?" he said. "If I could make myself known it would be all right, but no one seems to look at my door-plate, and the place is overstocked with doctors. I believe they think I am a D.D.

"I wouldn't mind if these other fellows were good men, but they are not. They are all antiquated old fogies at least half a century behind the day.

"Now there is old Markham, who lives in that brick house over there and does most of the practice in the town. I'll swear he doesn't know the difference between loco-motor ataxia and a hypodermic syringe, but he is known, so they flock into his surgery in a manner which is simply repulsive.

"And Davidson down the road, he is only an L.S.A. Talked about epispaetic paralysis at the Society the other night—confused it with liquor epispaeticus, you know. Yet that fellow makes a pound to my shilling."

"Get your name known and write," said I.

"But what on earth am I to write about?" asked Crabbe. "If a man has no cases, how in the world is he to describe them? Help yourself and pass the bottle."

"Couldn't you invent a case just to raise the wind?"

"Not a bad idea," said Crabbe thoughtfully. "By the way, did you see my 'Discophorous Bone in a Duck's Stomach?'"

"Yes, it seemed rather good."

"Good, I believe you! Why, man, it was a domino which the old duck had managed to gorge itself with. It was a perfect godsend. Then I wrote about embryology of fishes because I knew nothing about it and reasoned that ninety-nine men in a hundred would be in the same boat. But as to inventing whole cases, it seems rather daring, does it not?"

"A desperate disease needs desperate remedies," said I. "You remember old Hobson at college. He writes once a year to the British Medical and asks if any correspondent can tell him how much it costs to keep a horse in the country. And then he signs himself in the Medical Register as 'The contributor of several unostentatious queries and remarks to scientific papers!'"

It was quite a treat to hear Crabbe laugh with his old student guffaw. "Well, old man," he said, "we'll talk it over to-morrow. We mustn't be selfish and forget that you are a visitor here. Come along out, and see the beauties (save the mark!) of Brisport."

So saying he donned a funereal coat, a pair of spectacles, and a hat with a desponding brim, and we spent the remainder of the evening roaming about and discussing mind and matter.

We had another council of war next day. It was a Sunday, and as we sat in the window, smoking our pipes and watching the crowded street, we brooded over many plans for gaining notoriety.

"I've done Bob Sawyer's dodge," said Tom despondingly. "I never go to church without rushing out in the middle of the sermon, but no one knows who I am, so it is no good. I had a nice slide in front of the door last winter for three weeks, and used to give it a polish up after dusk every night. But there was only one man ever fell on it, and he actually limped right across the road to Markham's surgery. Wasn't that hard lines?"

"Very hard indeed," said I.

"Something might be done with orange peel," continued Tom, "but it looks so awfully bad to have the whole pavement yellow with peel in front of a doctor's house."

"It certainly does," I agreed.

"There was one fellow came in with a cut head one night," said Tom, "and I sewed him up, but he had forgotten his purse. He came back in a week to have the stitches taken out, but without the money. That man is going about to this day, Jack, with half a yard of my catgut in him—and in him it'll stay until I see the coin."

"Couldn't we get up some incident," said I, "which would bring your name really prominently before the public?"

"My dear fellow, that's exactly what I want. If I could get my name into the Brisport Chronicle it would be worth five hundred a year to me. There's a family connection, you know, and people only want to realise that I am here. But how am I to do it unless by brawling in the street or by increasing my family? Now, there was the excitement about the discopherous bone. If Huxley or some of these fellows had taken the matter up it might have been the making of me.

"But they took it all in with a disgusting complacency as if it was the most usual thing in the world and dominoes were the normal food of ducks. I'll tell you what I'll do," he continued, moodily eyeing his fowls. "I'll puncture the floors of their fourth ventricles and present them to Markham. You know that makes them ravenous, and they'd eat him out of house and home in time. Eh, Jack?"

"Look here, Thomas," said I, "you want your name in the papers—is that it?"

"That's about the state of the case."

"Well, by Jove, you shall have it."

"Eh? Why? How?"

"There's a pretty considerable crowd of people outside, isn't there, Tom?" I continued. "They are coming out of church, aren't they? If there was an accident now it would make some noise."

"I say, you're not going to let rip among them with a shot gun, are you, in order to found a practice for me?"

"No, not exactly. But how would this read in to-morrow's Chronicle? —'Painful occurrence in George Street.—As the congregation were leaving George Street Cathedral after the morning service, they were horrified to see a handsome, fashionably dressed gentleman stagger and fall senseless upon the pavement. He

was taken up and carried writhing in terrible convulsions into the surgery of the well-known practitioner, Doctor Crabbe, who had been promptly upon the spot. We are happy to state that the fit rapidly passed off, and that, owing to the skilful attention which he received, the gentleman, who is a distinguished visitor in our city, was able to regain his hotel and is now rapidly becoming convalescent.' How would that do, eh?"

"Splendid, Jack—splendid!"

"Well, my boy, I'm your fashionably dressed stranger, and I promise you they won't carry me into Markham's."

"My dear fellow, you are a treasure—you won't mind my bleeding you?"

"Bleeding me, confound you! Yes, I do very much mind."

"Just opening a little vein," pleaded Tom.

"Not a capillary," said I. "Now, look here; I'll throw up the whole business unless you give me your word to behave yourself. I don't draw the line at brandy."

"Very well, brandy be it," grumbled Tom.

"Well, I'm off," said I. "I'll go into the fit against your garden gate."

"All right, old man."

"By the way, what sort of a fit would you like? I could give you either an epileptic or an apoplectic easily, but, perhaps you'd like something more ornate—a catalepsy or a trade spasm, maybe—with miner's nystagmus or something of that kind?"

"Wait a bit till I think," said Tom, and he sat puffing at his pipe for five minutes: "Sit down again, Jack," he continued. "I think we could do something better than this. You see, a fit isn't a very deadly thing, and if I did bring you through one there would be no credit in it. If we are going to work this thing, we may as well work it well. We can only do it once. It wouldn't do for the same fashionably dressed stranger to be turning up a second time. People would begin to smell a rat."

"So they would," said I; "but hang it, you can't expect me to tumble off the cathedral spire, in order that you may hold an inquest on my remains! You may command me in anything reasonable, however. What shall it be?"

Tom seemed lost in thought. "Can you swim?" he said presently.

"Fairly well."

"You could keep yourself afloat for five minutes?"

"Yes, I could do that."

"You're not afraid of water?"

"I'm not much afraid of anything."

"Then come out," said Tom, "and we'll go over the ground."

I couldn't get one word out of him as to his intentions, so I trotted along beside him, wondering what in the wide world he was going to do. Our first stoppage was at a small dock which is crossed by a swinging iron bridge. He hailed an amphibious man with top-boots. "Do you keep rowing-boats and let them out?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said the man.

"Then, good day," and to the boatman's profound and audible disgust we set off at once in the other direction.

Our next stoppage was at the Jolly Mariner's Arms. Did they keep beds? Yes, they kept beds. We then proceeded to the chemist's. Did he keep a galvanic battery?

Once again the answer was in the affirmative, and with a satisfied smile Tom Crabbe headed for home once more, leaving some very angry people behind him.

That evening, over a bowl of punch, he revealed his plan—and the council of three revised it, modified it, and ended by adopting it, with the immediate result that I at once changed my quarters to the Brisport Hotel.

I was wakened next day by the sun streaming in at my bedroom window. It was a glorious morning. I sprang out of bed and looked at my watch. It was nearly nine o'clock.

"Only an hour," I muttered, "and nearly a mile to walk," and proceeded to dress with all the haste I could. "Well," I soliloquised as I sharpened my razor, "if old Tom Crabbe doesn't get his name in the papers to-day, it isn't my fault. I wonder if any friend would do as much for me!"

I finished my toilet, swallowed a cup of coffee and sallied out.

Brisport seemed unusually lively this morning. The streets were crowded with people.

I wormed my way down Waterloo Street, through the old Square and past Crabbe's house.

The cathedral bells were chiming ten o'clock as I reached the above-mentioned little dock with the iron swinging bridge. A man was standing on the bridge leaning over the balustrades. There was no mistaking the heart-broken hat rim and the spectacles of Thomas Waterhouse Crabbe, M.B.

I passed him without sign of recognition, dawdled a little on the quay, and then sauntered down to the boathouse. Our friend of yesterday was standing at the door with a short pipe in his mouth.

"Could I have a boat for an hour?" I asked.

He beamed all over. "One minute, sir," he said, "an' I'll get the sculls. Would you want me to row you, sir?"

"Yes, you'd better," I replied.

He bustled about, and in a short time managed to launch a leaky-looking old tub, into which he stepped, while I squatted down in the sheets.

"Take me round the docks," I said. "I want to have a look at the shipping."

"Aye, aye, sir," said he, and away we went, and paddled about the docks for the best part of an hour. At the end of that time we turned back and pulled up to the little quay from which we had started.

It was past eleven now and the place was crowded with people. Half Brisport seemed to have concentrated round the iron bridge. The melancholy hat was still visible.

"Shall I pull in, sir?" asked the boatman.

"Give me the sculls," said I. "I want a bit of exercise—let us change places," and I stood up.

"Take care, sir!" yelled the boatman as I gave a stagger. "Look out!" and he made a frantic grab at me, but too late, for with a melodramatic scream I reeled and fell over into the Brisport dock.

I hardly realised what it was I was going to do until I had done it. It was not a pleasant feeling to have the thick, clammy water closing over one's head. I struck the bottom with my feet, and shot up again to the surface. The air

seemed alive with shouts. "Heave a rope!" "Where's a boat-hook!" "Catch him" "There he is!"

The boatman managed to hit me a smart blow on the head with something, an oar, I fancy, and I went down again, but not before I had got my lungs well filled with air.

I came up again and my top-booted friend seized me by the hair of my head as if he would tear my scalp off.

"Don't struggle!" he yelled, "and I'll save you yet." But I shook him off, and took another plunge. There was no resisting him next time, however, for he got a boat-hook into my collar, and though I kept my head under water as long as possible I was ignominiously hauled to land.

There I lay on the hard stones of the quay, feeling very much inclined to laugh, but looking, no doubt, very blue and ghastly. "He's gone, poor chap!" said someone. "Send for a doctor." "Run, run to Markham." "Quite dead." "Turn him upside down." "Feel his pulse." "Slap him on the back."

"Stop," said a solemn voice—"stop! Can I be of any assistance? I am a medical man. What has occurred?"

"A man drowned," cried a score of voices. "Stand back, make a ring— room for the doctor!"

"My name is Doctor Crabbe. Dear me, poor young gentleman! Drop his hand," he roared at a man who was making for my pulse. "I tell you in such a state the least pressure or impediment to the arterial circulation might prove fatal."

To save my life I couldn't help giving a very audible, inward chuckle at Tom's presence of mind. There was a murmur of surprise among the crowd. Tom solemnly took off his hat. "The death rattle!" he whispered. "The young soul has flown—yet perchance science may yet recall it. Bear him up to the tavern."

A shutter was brought, I was solemnly hoisted on to the top of it, and the melancholy cortege passed along the quay, the corpse being really the most cheerful member of the company.

We got to the Mariner's Arms and I was stripped and laid in the best bed. The news of the accident seemed to have spread, for there was a surging crowd in the street, and the staircase was thronged with people.

Tom would only admit about a dozen of the more influential of the townspeople into the room, but issued bulletins out of the window every five minutes to the crowd below.

"Quite dead," I heard him roar.

"Respiration has ceased—no pulsation—but we still persevere, it is our duty."

"Shall I bring brandy?" said the landlady.

"Yes, and towels, and a hip bath and a basin—but the brandy first."

This sentiment met with the hearty approbation of the corpse.

"Why, he's drinking it," said the landlady, as she applied the glass to my lips.

"Merely an instance of a reflex, automatic action," said Tom. "My good woman, any corpse will drink brandy if you only apply it to the glossopharyngeal tract. Stand aside and we will proceed to try Marshall Hall's method of resuscitation."

The citizens stood round in a solemn ring, while Tom stripped off his coat and, climbing on the bed, proceeded to roll me about in a manner which seemed to dislocate every bone in my body.

"Hang it, man, stop!" I growled, but he only paused to make a dart for the window and yell out "No sign of life," and then fell upon me with greater energy than ever. "We will now try Sylvestre's method," he said, when the perspiration was fairly boiling out of him; and with that he seized me again, and performed a series of evolutions even more excruciating than the first. "It is hopeless!" he said at last, stopping and covering my head reverently with the bedclothes. "Send for the coroner! He has gone to a better land. Here is my card," he continued to an inspector of police who had arrived. "Doctor Crabbe of George Street. You will see that the matter is accurately reported. Poor young man!"

And Tom drew his handkerchief across his eyes and walked towards the door, while a groan of sympathy rose from the crowd outside.

He had his hand upon the handle when a thought seemed to strike him, and he turned back.

"There is yet a possible hope," he said, "we have not tried the magical effects of

electricity—that subtle power, next of kin to nervous force. Is there a chemist's near?"

"Yes, doctor, there's Mr. McLagan just round the corner."

"Then run! run! A human life trembles in the balance—get his strongest battery, quick!" And away went half the crowd racing down the street and tumbling over each other in the effort to be first at Mr. McLagan's. They came back very red and hot, and one of them bore a shining, brown mahogany box in his arms which contained the instrument in question.

"Now, gentlemen," said Tom, "I believe I may say that I am the first practitioner in Great Britain who has applied electricity to this use. In my student days I have seen the learned Rokilansky of Vienna employ it in some such way. I apply the negative pole over the solar plexus, while the positive I place on the inner side of the patella. I have seen it produce surprising effects; it may again in this case."

It certainly did. Whether it was an accident or whether Tom's innate reckless devilry got the better of him I cannot say.

He himself always swore that it was an accident, but at any rate he sent the strongest current of a most powerful battery rattling and crashing through my system.

I gave one ear-splitting yell and landed with a single bound into the middle of the room. I was charged with electricity like a Leyden jar. My very hair bristled with it.

"You confounded idiot!" I shouted, shaking my fist in Tom's face. "Isn't it enough to dislocate every bone in my body with your ridiculous resuscitations without ruining my constitution with this thing?" and I gave a vicious kick at the mahogany box. Never was there such a stampede!

The inspector of police and the correspondent of the Chronicle sprang down the staircase, followed by the twelve respectable citizens.

The landlady crawled under the bed. A lodger who was nursing her baby while she conversed with a neighbour in the street below let the child drop upon her friend's head.

In fact Tom might have founded the nucleus of a practice there and then.

As it was, his usual presence of mind carried him through.

"A miracle!" he yelled from the window. "A miracle! Our friend has been brought back to us; send for a cab." And then sotto voce, For goodness' sake, Jack, behave like a Christian and crawl into bed again. Remember the landlady is in the room and don't go prancing about in your shirt."

"Hang the landlady," said I, "I feel like a lightning conductor you've ruined me!"

"Poor fellow," cried Tom, once more addressing the crowd, "he is alive, but his intellect is irretrievably affected. He thinks he is a lightning conductor. Make way for the cab. That's right! Now help me to lead him in. He is out of all danger now. He can dress at his hotel. If any of you have any information to give which may throw light upon this case my address is 81 George Street. Remember, Doctor Crabbe, 81 George Street. Good day, kind friends, good-bye!"

And with that he bundled me into the cab to prevent my making any further disclosures, and drove off amid the enthusiastic cheers of the admiring crowd.

I could not stay in Brisport long enough to see the effects of my coup d'etat. Tom gave us a champagne supper that night, and the fur was fast and furious, but in the midst of it a telegram from my principal was handed in ordering me to return to Manchester by the next train.

I waited long enough to get an early copy of the Brisport Chronicle, and beguiled the tedious journey by perusing the glowing account of my mishap.

A column and a half was devoted to Dr. Crabbe and the extraordinary effects of electricity upon a drowned man. It ultimately got into some of the London papers, and was gravely commented upon in the Lancet.

As to the pecuniary success of our little experiment I can only judge from the following letter from Tom Crabbe, which I transcribe exactly as I received it:

"WHAT HO! MY RESUSCITATED CORPSE,

"You want to know how all goes in Brisport, I suppose. Well, I'll tell you. I'm cutting Markham and Davidson out completely, my boy.

"The day after our little joke I got a bruised leg (that baby), a cut head (the woman the baby fell upon), an erysipelas, and a bronchitis. Next day a fine, rich cancer of Markham's threw him up and came over to me. Also a pneumonia and a man who swallowed a sixpence.

"I've never had a day since without half a dozen new names on the list, and I'm going to start a trap this week. Just let me know when you are going to set up, and I'll manage to run down, old man, and give you a start in business, if I have to stand on my head in the water-butt.

"Goodbye. Love from the Missus.

"Ever yours,

*"THOMAS WATERHOUSE CRABBE, M.B. Edin.
81 George Street, Brisport."*