

of women (not to speak it profanely) has greatly improven, like that of milch cows, and draught mares—and as a natural and logical consequence, witchcraft has been diminished in an equal proportion! With this simple key the lock of the problem is opened with ease, and the question set at rest in the most satisfactory and philosophical manner!

In corroboration of the foregoing, I may add that in Lancashire (as I am certiorated by responsible witnesses), where the natives batten upon fat pork, and such like unorthodox viands, the women are as ill-favoured as sin. And what is the consequence? Why, sorcery there abounds to such a rampant extent, that at their revellings people are in the habit and repute of shamelessly proclaiming the profane and unblushing toast of "*The Witches of Lancashire!*"

But it is high time that I proceeded to wind up the clock of my narration!

Mr. Benjamin Balderston for many a long year enjoyed the undisputed reputation of being the "cock of the walk" in the Royal Burgh town of Dreepdaily, so far as manners and refinement were concerned.

Of his *antecedents* (to use one of the new coined *whigmaleerie* terms of the day) comparatively little was known. A tradition currently prevailed, that he had spent the summer of his life in the King's Court at London, where he had some office, the nature of which I could never clearly expiscate. Be that as it may, he was as perfect a sample of the old world beau as you could hope to see between Whitsunday and Martinmas. His dress, (mind you that I am speaking of the last century) consisted of a red coat trimmed with lace, the richness whereof made many a comely maiden's teeth to water;—blue silk knee-breeches—white stockings;—and high-heeled shoes, with buckles in the scam, of the dimensions of tea saucers, or overgrown oyster shells. His hair was as white with powder as the top of Ben Nevis after a snow-storm;—and he sported a tie like a rat's tail, which reached half way down to his back settlements. Such another conceit I never saw before or after, except, may be, in a troop of tumblers and rope-dancers;—and, indeed, a stranger meeting with him for the first time, would naturally have set him down as a runaway journeyman of the play-actering craft!

The naked truth was that Benjamin was a Tory of the ancient school, and had as great a detestation of change in any shape or form as a certain personage entertains towards consecrated water. Hence the dogged determination with which he retained the style of garmenture which had been current fifty years before the epoch of which I speak. Verily do I believe that he would sooner have undergone the operation qualifying him to be the great Mogul, than cover his person with the degenerate raiment of modern times!

In full keeping with his habiliments were the manners of the illustrious Beau Balderston!

You could have sworn that his language had been gathered from "*The Academy of Compliments*," or "*The Court Letter Writer*,"—it was so perjink and precise. If he chanced to run against you in the street, off would fly his three-cornered cocked-hat, even though it should be raining cats and dogs, and he would have bowed and palavared for the larger balance of ten minutes, before permitting you to pass on your way!

I recollect a comical passage connected with this head of my discourse, which once happened to him. He had gone out one dour misty October morning, before breakfast, about some business or another, and on suddenly turning the gavel of Saunders Smayill's public house, he ran right against some body, who immediately commenced to beat a retreat before him. As a matter of course, the wee cocked-hat was doffed instanter, and out came a gush of apologies as long as the Balled of Chevey Chace, or the "Death and Burial of Cock Robin." Still, the mysterious unknown continued to retrograde, and Benjamin to advance, till all of a sudden he found himself up to the middle in the mazes of Saunder's dung-pit—which had not been emptied within the memory of man—and a huge sow prostrate before him in all the spasmodic agonies of terror and suffocation!—From which came the proverbial saying still current in Dreepdaily, "*I beg your pardon, as the Beau said to the sow!*"

I need hardly indoctrinate you with the fact that Mr. Balderston was far too grand and magnificent a personage to keep company—that is in a social hob-nob-way—with the plebeian community of our town. Indeed, when I mention the Minister, Doctor Scougall,