# A LETTER

TO

# JOHN ABERNETHY, ESQ.

WRITTEN

IN CONSEQUENCE OF A PARAGRAPH WHICH APPEARED IN MOST OF THE LONDON PAPERS, STATING HIS HAVING ADDRESSED

## "A LETTER

TO

## THE SECRETARY OF STATE,

ON THE NECESSITY OF REPEALING THE LATE ACT OF PARLIAMENT WHICH SUBJECTS RESURRECTION MEN (AS THEY ARE CALLED) TO SEVERE PUNISHMENT FOR VIOLATING THE SANCTUARY OF THE TOMB."

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BY

## HUMANUS.

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"By the rubrick before the burial office, persons who have laid violent hands upon themselves shall not have that office used at their interment.

"And the reason thereof given by the canon law is, because they die in the commission of a mortal sin; and therefore this extendeth not to idiots, lunaticks, or persons otherwise of insane mind, as childern under the age of discretion, or the like; so also not to those who do it involuntarily, as where a man kills himself by accident: for in such cases it is not their crime, but their very great misfortune."—*Burn's Ecclesiastical Law.*

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# A LETTER

TO

# JOHN ABERNETHY, Esq.

ON

# STEALING DEAD BODIES.

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Sir,

The Sun Newspaper published a few days ago a paragraph, of which the following is a copy, and which has since appeared in most, if not all, the London papers:—" Mr. Abernethy has addressed, it is said, a letter to the Secretary of State, on the necessity of *repealing* the late Act of Parliament, which subjects resurrection men (as they are called) to severe punishment for violating the sanctity of the tomb. Under the present restrictions, dead bodies are become very scarce in London, and some of the dissecting rooms are absolutely without an

adult subject."—Whether the information is correct, or whether it is a libel upon you, I cannot determine; I hope, however, for your own sake, that you have not offered so gross an insult to the known feelings of the nation at large, upon a point in which every one feels concerned, and upon which all minds have been anxiously dwelling, on account of the many disgusting instances the public prints have of late recorded of attempts to STEAL THE BODIES OF THE DEAD for the use of professors and students of anatomy. You may, perhaps, call it a vulgar prejudice; be it so; no name can lessen the horror every man, alive to the feelings of man, must experience on hearing of such revolting acts; of atrocities alike the shame of a civilized age, and a moral country, as of the persons who encourage the base and detestable traffic. I am willing to believe that you are actuated by a wish to encourage anatomical researches for the benefit of mankind, and that your known zeal in your profession induces you for the good of your pupils, to wish that the dissecting room may be plentifully supplied with "adult subjects:" but why violate the sanctuary of the dead? why encourage the most impious of thefts? why tear up from the bowels of the earth the bodies of those of whom it has pleased an all wise and merciful God to recall the souls? Are

the humble graves of the mechanic or of the pauper, or the more costly tombs of the rich and the noble, less sacred and less worthy of protection than their more worldly dwellings? No, Sir; the earth in which we are doomed to rest should remain unbroken and unmolested, and the dead should be as much protected by the laws of the land, as the living. It is not so now, for there is no security for the dead, and they are liable to be dug up by the impious hands of resurrection men, until sheltered from outrage by the gradual decay to which all nature is sooner or later subject.

It is not long, since the public gave a pretty decided proof of their feelings respecting the sanctity of the grave, and their respect for the dead, in the memorable struggle for the introduction of iron coffins, and it is well known that had government meddled in a manner to make it appear that the legislature were willing to protect the violators of the tomb, troubles of a most serious nature would have followed; for the lower classes, who are not to be argued into the necessity of so much dissection, and who do not relish the idea of serving as subjects for the knife of the dissector, would have risen in favour of any plan likely to secure the bodies of their friends from the justly abhorred practice.

The public mind is far from being tranquillized, and circumstances daily conspire to revive the hatred and abomination in which the lower classes hold the prevailing rage for dissection. An affair which occurred a few weeks ago, in a disgraceful bargain between a surgeon and his patient for an unborn child, naturally inspired all classes of society with a belief, that the poor are often called upon to pay for medical assistance in the same horrible manner, and revolting as it is, have no alternative between the heart-rending bargain and being abandoned to their fate in the perilous hour of labour. To the honour of the profession in general, it must be owned, that the respectable members of it are generally willing to visit and assist the poor; but some of the needier practitioners who have their bread to get, and who have perhaps but just left the dissection table, are anxious to become more perfect in the art, and sometimes are not over scrupulous by what means they obtain a subject upon which they may keep themselves in practice. If it is not owing to some clandestine contrivance of the kind, how is it that "some of the dissecting rooms are absolutely without an adult subject." If bodies are stolen from public burial grounds, adults must be as easily procured as infants, and if there is a scarcity of the former, there must be some secret means by which

the faculty become possessed so much more readily of the latter.

The poor know how constantly the bodies of their friends and relatives contribute to the edification of the frequenters of the dissection room, and hence arises their great horror of public hospitals, as they have a strong forboding that the dead are constantly removed from the bed to the table; the impression may have little foundation, but it is deeply rooted. By what the neighbours say of a celebrated anatomist, (I mean no allusion to yourself), it does not appear that adult subjects are quite so scarce. I am told (and you must know whether the fact is correct or not) that he has always a good supply, paying at the rate of four guineas for each adult subject; the bodies are removed to his laboratory, where he prepares them for dissection, for the trouble of which he puts a premium of two guineas upon each subject. The hapless body is then retailed amongst the students, and they again, if they do not want the whole, subdivide their share, and are paid for as much as they choose to sell. Now, Sir, you will of course argue, that these are necessary and consequent evils, but I will beg leave to observe that the evil is carried to a disgusting pitch, for little

recourse is had to artificial subjects, which might for a considerable portion of the time allotted to anatomical studies prove as efficacious as natural ones; no encouragement is given for the formation of perfect models of wax, which may be made to such an astonishing degree of perfection, that it requires the eye of a professor to make the distinction between the natural and artificial. You have doubtless seen or heard of the celebrated Museum of Anatomy at Vienna, in which numbers of the most difficult surgical operations are wonderfully represented. Surely pupils might make their preparatory studies upon such subjects, and might gain so large a stock of information as would render them the better calculated to attend occasional demonstrations upon natural subjects. They might from time to time practise upon the latter, and perfect themselves in the knowledge which they might have acquired in their earlier and less revolting studies.

It is not of an increasing scarcity of natural subjects that the faculty are to complain, but rather, of the extraordinary increase of students since the restoration of peace: when, turned from following military pursuits, they are sent from school to learn, and afterwards exercise the profession of surgeons,

as affording to some a respectable competency, and to others the hope of rising to it by dint of industry and labour.

That the profession is overburdened with practitioners and candidates you will readily agree; and it stands to reason, that a vast increase of pupils must create a vast demand of subjects for dissection, and a comparative scarcity. If subjects are principally wanted to perfect the pupil in the management of surgical instruments, why not let them exercise their fingers upon *brute* subjects. You will, I dare say, smile at the idea, but it is directed by a deep sense of humanity, and a wish to promote a less objectionable mode of study than the one which is now so generally and so barbarously in usage.

If human subjects *must* be had in such numbers, endeavour to obtain them in an open and lawful way; but, cease to tear up our graves, cease to produce the victims of sacrilegious theft upon your dissecting tables, and be content with the many awarded you by the laws of the land. Petition ministers rather, or bring a bill before Parliament, that a law may be passed by which all suicides shall be given for dissection; such an act would have a most beneficial effect, inasmuch, as

it would in a great measure tend to lessen the frequent commission of the crime, and be a greater bar to it than the power of morality and religion seem able to oppose. Who can without concern hear of the increasing number of misguided wretches, who prefer laying violent hands upon the life which is given them in trust, to making a courageous stand against adversity, disappointment, and sorrow? The act requires little comment in a religious point of view, for morally speaking, the murder of one's self, or of another, amounts to one and the same thing, and will not bear the shadow of distinction, unless it is that suicide is an aggravation of guilt, because the murderer puts himself beyond the reach of the law, and moreover, has no opportunity to make his peace with his offended God. The crime has acquired a degree of sanction by the common verdict of "Lunacy;" but it is folly to suppose, that self-destruction is so peculiar to the afflicting malady; and should it even be argued that *it is* one of its prominent features, it does not come on so suddenly but that the friends and relatives of the patient must nine times out of ten have warning to provide for his safety. We have seen by numberless recent cases of persons thwarted in the act, or snatched from the very jaws of death, that the attempted suicides were the effect of despondency, arising from various causes,

mostly pecuniary losses, want, and seduction; when awakened to a proper sense of their attempts by being restored to life, or prevented killing themselves, their very hearts have melted with gratitude, and they have proved that want of fortitude and not insanity has been the predominant cause of their rash and thoughtless attempts. The commandment is imperative, "THOU SHALT DO NO MURDER," and it becomes our bounden duty to lessen the crime by every possible method. Religion will of course never fail to operate upon a pious mind, and from the truly religious no fear of suicide is to be apprehended, however great the sufferings with which they are afflicted. The case of known lunatics is greatly to be pitied, and should they who are *really* insane commit the act of suicide in their uncontroulable ravings, *they* ought not of course to be denied their place in consecrated ground. But, what can be said of those who from worldly disappointments direct their steps towards the bridges, and precipitate themselves into rivers, or who deliberately plunge in from the shore? of those who write farewell letters and cut their throats or blow out their brains? of gamblers who pocket the last drawings of their exhausted purses, and who speculatively retire to a gambling house, with purse in one pocket and pistol in the other, determined to win back former

losings or to end their existence? and of those deluded wretches who purchase poison and take it, after having wound up their minds to the guilty act? What is to be said of such persons? And without a doubt, such melancholy cases have often come under your observation.

I may be accused of a weak mind, when I declare that my last moments would be full of misery if I thought that my remains would be minced at the will of a host of anatomical students, and that my flesh severed from my bones would be cast, God knows where, perhaps pell-mell with the mangled remains of an executed murderer. Yet I will venture to say, that I am but one of millions who feel in the same way, and who have as little anxiety of being made the subject of surgical criticism.

A distinction should in justice be made between those who *do* and those who *do not* deserve degradation after death. The remains of him who has been a worthy member of society and who did not end his life by the detestable act of self destruction, ought to rest in peace, respected and undisturbed; and let the remains of the murderer, whether murderer of himself, or of any fellow creature, be made over to the dissecting room for the pur-

pose of anatomical study. By such a custom, the sanctity of the tomb would be respected, there would be no more fear of disinterment, the minds of all ranks of society would be freed from the distressing uncertainty of the fate of their dead, and the faculty would be the more respected, as they would no longer be the patrons of the heartless resurrection man, as they would cease to be the professed receivers of the stolen dead, and would not be the promoters of such sacrilege by the reward they hold out to church-yard robbers.

Now, Sir, permit me to put the question more home to you. What would be your horror, if a day or two after the funeral of your wife, you were to enter a dissecting room and behold her body, quartered and mangled by young men, not the boldest of whom would with impunity have touched one hair of her head during her life time. Think of that fair form, which but a few days before you pressed closely within your arms, and who in the holy warmth of a husband's affection you would not have had torn from you for all the riches of the Indies. Think of that faithful heart which throbbed in doting fondness at the very sound of your voice, who gave up the rest of the world for you, and who by her tender care sweetened the happiest hours of your life, comforted you

in your adversity, and repaid you so richly for your fatigues and labours; think that such a heart should be torn from her breast and hacked a thousand ways at the will and mercy of your pupil! Behold those arms which so fondly hung about you at the very hour of death, and which in their last embrace seemed to claim protection in an unmolested grave; no longer respected, because no more alive; dismembered, and perhaps the very last drop of blood that so little time ago gave them strength to cling about your neck, whilst the faultering tongue bade you a last farewell, shed, and left to run from those sacred veins, down the pipe of the dissecting table into the common cesspool. Those eyes too, at whose last lingering look you stood trembling with the agonies of an almost breaking heart; cut out of their once graceful lids, and fingered with unmoved carelessness. See, that bosom, once your pride and glory, the life's spring of your infant, the guardian of your joys and woes; now dissected, and when done with, cast away! Those lips of which the touch would convey the thrill of extasy to your very soul, now disfigured and rejected. Could you bear a sight so dreadful? Could you stand a patient witness to such unholy carnage? No, Sir, you would forget your errand, you would in the agony of your heart curse the authors of such a barbarous scene,

you would spring forward and gather together the remains of the form you once so cherished, and exclaim in the bitterness of your anguish, "O spare that body."

Suppose, again, that instead of wife it should be your child that was stolen from its grave, would your horror be the less acute?—or, that the body should be that of a brother or a sister, a relation, or an intimate friend, would you stand unmoved?—no, Sir, the world knows you better than to suppose it.

But, others feel as well as you; others can likewise boast of wife, child, parent, and of friend; and if their hearts are not torn with being eye-witnesses to such scenes, they are rendered wretched by knowing, that the bodies of the dead are daily stolen, and that no grave is safe from depredation.

This consideration brings me back to my argument, and I maintain, that giving suicides for dissection would be the means of saving the lives of numberless misguided beings, who from the horror of the idea connected with their guilt, and the fear of leaving a lasting stain upon their families, would think better of their rash resolutions,

and would be content to seek less criminal means of bettering their condition. No one knows how far the suicide *betters* himself, for he dies with all his iniquities upon his head, and must have a long reckoning to make up.—Did he but think one moment of futurity, he would fall prostrate upon his knees, and beg forgiveness of his insulted Maker.

I do not believe that a person of your abilities and good understanding would ever have committed himself so far, as to write to any of his Majesty's ministers, begging the "REPEAL" of the late act of Parliament, for the punishment of resurrection men; and I do not, therefore, take the liberty to address you in the language of remonstrance, which, however, I would not scruple to do, if I thought it possible that you would offer such an insult to the feelings and morals of the country; for, the stealing of dead bodies cannot be less criminal than the stealing of any thing else; and pleading for the repeal of a law intended to punish the crime, is boldly advocating the cause of the thief, and the legality of the theft. The position is severe I own; but it is true, and as such I cannot disguise it. Your reputation as a man of talent is known, and has been earned by long studies, and an indefatigable use of them, for the

benefit of your fellow creatures:—your profession is justly respected, and the more admired, where surgical perfection is combined with other acquirements of the mind and endowments of the heart. Your zeal in your particular pursuits will never go unnoticed or unapplauded, and I gladly pay my humble tribute with a sincere wish that many may rise under your auspices to claim similar homage; but your laurels must not be tarnished by a want of respect for the feelings of the community; those laws which the wisdom of Parliament has enacted for the benefit of mankind, and the punishment of crime, must not be broken or evaded; they are peremptory and must be obeyed; for the houses of Parliament are filled with men of talent and sound understanding, who do not pass acts without due consideration, and who certainly weighed the merits of the one alluded to before they passed it into a law.—It would be weakness to make a law one day and break it the next, and, in the present instance, it would amount to rashness to tamper with the known feelings of the country; or, in other words, with a loudly manifested national prejudice. Respect for the dead is a natural consequence of civilization, of which a rapid moral improvement must always be a prominent feature. The ground that is consecrated should be as religiously inviolate as the church it-

self; and sacrilege of any kind ought, upon all occasions, to be punished with the utmost severity of the law. Those cold blooded midnight robbers, called "Resurrection Men," are even a thousand times more despicable than common hangmen, and it lowers the dignity of the surgical profession, that they should avail themselves of their services. To this the hacknied objection of "what are they to do?" will, doubtless, be opposed; but I maintain, that though the evil is a necessary one, it ought to be as much limited as possible; and that no honourable pursuit warrants crime. The tombs of the rich are generally too well secured to leave much fear that their remains will be visited by sacrilegious thieves; the poor are oftener the victims, and their slender graves offer little resistance, and, of course, greater inducements to disinterment. As a philanthropist I cannot see why the poor should be less protected than the rich, and why their dead should not be equally respected and sacred. The wholesome effects of an act of Parliament must, of course, be general, and applying to the one as well as to the other, without preference or distinction; therefore the punishment awarded to resurrection men will in all cases be treated on the same equitable footing. As a friend of humanity I would rather petition for an increase, than a decrease of punish-

ment, and for an act of Parliament in support of the foregoing one, than for the repeal of it. In all cases it should be transportation for life; and were I not an advocate for the less frequent infliction of capital punishment, in all cases but murder, I would say, that the violation of the tomb ought to be punished with death. I conceive house-breaking to be a very minor offence to the one just mentioned, and cannot see why the receivers of stolen goods in the one instance, should not be as liable to punishment as in the other.

It would, I confess, be downright folly to throw an unreasonable obstacle in the way of a profession so eminently useful to society as yours; but at the same time the facility must be afforded with prudence, and the class who are to be doomed to the dissecting room should be unequivocally defined. In order, therefore, to effect this purpose, in support of which the papers have given you the credit of having addressed a letter to ministers, I again recommend the punishment of self-destruction, by directing that the bodies of all suicides (except known lunatics, whose cases can be proved by their medical attendants) shall be delivered over to the surgeons for the purpose of dissection. The beneficial effects of such a law would be soon perceptible, and the check the fear of dissection

would give to the frequent recurrence of the crime would save numberless families from sorrow and disgrace.

I must frankly acknowledge, that my main object in addressing this letter to you is, to counteract, as far as lies in the power of an humble individual, the melancholy effects which would follow a compliance with the request which is attributed to you. Should ministers grant that petition, we may as well save the expense of funerals, and send our dead relatives to the dissecting-room at once; for the number of pupils in anatomy is so increased, and the fashion of attending anatomical demonstrations so prevalent, that the connivance of government at church-yard robberies would be followed by the reduction of the price of bodies, and a superabundant supply of the market.

In these enlightened days ministers will not cloud the glory of the crown, by an act of wanton barbarity, and by putting the community to contribution for a portion of their dead: neighbouring countries may not think the practice derogatory; and God be praised, that it is not the only point in which we differ from our worthy allies, who, though very brave and very good sort of people in their way, are not over nice in their notions of pro-

priety. Indeed so easy is it on the Continent to procure a constant supply of dead bodies, that they are to be had for a few shillings; and a proof how little our neighbours care what becomes of them is, that they pack them off with little or no attendance; and in Belgium they are trundled off in a close cart, without a single mourner but the driver, and in a slender unornamented shell, which any child could demolish. It is no part of my business to interfere with people who I care very little about, and they are of course at liberty to act as they please; but at home it is a different thing, and it becomes every man to enter into the feelings of his countrymen, and to resist, as every Englishman has a right to do, such practices as are likely to be productive of evil.

Should you really, contrary to my best expectations, have addressed the stated letter to ministers, requesting the repeal of the late act, let me entreat you to reconsider the subject, and to recant such an unconstitutional step. The grave is as much the property of the dead as any thing you may have is yours, the violation of the tomb is as great an outrage as the breaking open of your house, and is as irreligious and reprehensible as any other kind of sacrilege. The promoters of the crime become parties concerned in the offence,

and I declare that were I informed that a relative or friend of mine was torn from his grave, I would try the question, whether the purchaser is not as liable to punishment as the seller, and would endeavour, as far as my feeble endeavours would go, to make such an example as would somewhat deter the parties from future speculations of the kind. The disgusting traffic of human flesh is not to be wondered at in Africa and other uncivilized parts of the world, but that such a trade should exist in a country like this, is one of those enormities which cannot be accounted for, unless it is that we are really not so civilized as we appear.

I know that many persons think it does not signify what becomes of the body after death. The indulgers of such ideas are not a single degree better than Hottentots, and ought upon their several final departures journey straight forward to the dissecting room, or any other such place of rendezvous. Our bodies have a right to Christian burial, and it is unquestionably wicked to remove them for the purpose of degradation and of gain.

What right have the professors of anatomy to the bodies of their fellow-creatures? Who has

ever given them leave to make free with what does not belong to them? Do they suppose, that because they think proper to commit such outrages, and because they have done it for a time with impunity, that they are to continue, and flatter themselves that government will assist them? There is a time for all things, and a medium for all things, and the faculty have hitherto found means to get a much larger supply of subjects than the nation would allow them; let them now exert their ingenuity in the production of artificial substitutes, and let them lecture upon them, when natural subjects are not forthcoming from the hands of the law. From no other source should they obtain subjects, unless it be the bodies of suicides; and if the houses of Parliament do not award a greater punishment to resurrection men, I heartily hope the just interference of the public will put an end to the unfeeling trade. In no way could parish officers make themselves more popular, than by uniting their efforts, for the more frequent detection of "body snatchers;" and if the friends of humanity and the abhorrers of sacrilege were to raise a fund for the better reward of persons apprehending these impious delinquents, the evil would gradually decline, and body stealers would be compelled to turn their industry to some other pursuit. I

would gladly contribute with money and might, and have no doubt but the increasing scarcity would make the faculty hit upon some less criminal expedient, and make Parliament sensible of the necessity of sentencing suicides to the dissecting-room. It would be no great matter of regret, that the difficulty of procuring subjects should lessen the number of anatomical students, for the profession is overburdened, and would flourish the better for less competition. Competition is unquestionably a spur to perfection, and excites people to endeavour to surpass each other; but in the medical line it may be carried too far, and may occasion a boldness of practice, which seldom produces sufficient good to counteract the evil. No one can reflect on the vast number of bodies that must be stolen to meet the demand of such a host of students as now attend the dissecting-rooms, without the liveliest emotions of grief and indignation; and there is no knowing to what extent the evil will be carried, unless the practice of stealing the bodies of the dead is more effectually checked, and unless the faculty are dissuaded from offering pecuniary temptation, by being made parties in the theft, and punishable as receivers of the stolen dead.

I wish it to be clearly understood, that it is

not with a ridiculous notion of attempting to put a stop to dissection that I write; on the contrary, I wish every reasonable facility to be afforded anatomists, and cannot give a readier proof of my goodwill towards the profession, than by arguing the necessity of affording them subjects upon which to exercise their pupils, and by pointing out the method by which the supply could be procured, without reducing them to the necessity of employing the most hardened and abandoned of men. Could I but know that the grave would no longer be disturbed, that the dead would no longer be *stolen,* and that consecrated ground would no longer be sacrilegiously polluted by the unhallowed foot of the midnight robber, I would be satisfied, and leave you and government to fix upon what plans you please for the furtherance of your wishes.

It would be no trifling victory so to ordain matters, that good should arise out of evil; and by the expedient which I presume to propose, I am positive it would be completely achieved. On this ground I shall again have a formidable enemy to combat, for there are thousands of persons who believe, or pretend, that no one ever committed suicide but through insanity. Their motive in thinking so is, I doubt not, most charita-

ble, and arising from a too good opinion of the morals of the age; but almost daily experience shows, that it is not the case, and that suicide is generally the effect of despondency and want of fortitude. We have lately heard of a verdict of *felo de se;* surely it would have been more reasonable to have given the body to the surgeons for dissection, than to have driven a stake through it, and have buried it in a cross road, which could produce no other good than frightening people's horses, and causing them to break their riders' necks. The horrible spectacle may have made a lasting impression upon the few who witnessed it; but as such a verdict is scarely ever returned, the awful lesson can have but little effect in preventing future suicides.

In conclusion, permit me to ask you a few questions. Of every hundred unhappy beings who are resuscitated by the humane exertions of the faculty, after attempted suicide, how many have you ever known make a second attempt upon their lives?

When these persons were restored to life, what was generally their frame of mind? Did they rave?—Did they talk incoherently of matters unconnected with their situation?—Did they weep

with shame and remorse?—Were their hearts softened by the kindness shown them?—Were they submissive or furious?—Or, were they hardened and wild?—Did they confess their rashness, and tell their sorrows?—Did they express contrition, and promise not to lay violent hands upon themselves?—Or, were the great majority of them *decided lunatics*, and apparently satisfied with nothing but their own blood?

When persons so situated are kindly received by their families, or otherwise humanely provided for, do you ever know them repeat their attempt upon themselves?

If the heart-broken object of the villany of man, the poor unprotected victim of seduction, when in the act of suicide, was to hear that her seducer was ready to make honourable amends for his infamy, and had promised the maintenance of mother and child; would she destroy herself?

When a body is found, without a sixpence in either pocket, but on the contrary, with a packet of pawnbrokers' duplicates, what do you conclude, that want directed the rash act, or *lunacy?*

When a father can no longer get bread for his

wife and children; when he applies from friend to friend without relief; when he is too proud to beg, and too honest to steal; when such a man disappears from home, and commits suicide; what is it that urges him;—despair or madness?

When a man becomes the frequenter of gambling-houses, and having run through his fortune, is ashamed to show himself amongst his friends, and puts himself out of the way, by blowing out his brains, is it proper that a jury should return for verdict, "Shot himself in a fit of momentary insanity?"

If the honour of families is to be preserved by the connivance of friends, who may choose to perjure themselves through thick and thin, to prove the existence of previous insanity; and by the good-nature of juries, who do not like to return a disgraceful verdict; why should the verdict of *felo de se* ever be returned? It would be easy to name five hundred instances, within these few years, of persons having richly deserved such a verdict, and who have nevertheless escaped being buried with a stake through their bodies.

The questions I have taken the liberty to put you are tests for the definition of lunacy; and if

the subject is carefully investigated, and the state of the suicide impartially inquired into, I am much mistaken, whether a jury would not, nine times out of ten, return a verdict of "*unjustifiable suicide.*"

I have now stated the grounds upon which I am convinced, that the detestable practice of stealing the bodies of the dead, might be done away with; and the manner in which the faculty could obtain subjects for dissection, without being reduced to the necessity of becoming principals in the too common and revolting crime of churchyard robbery. A profession so eminently distinguished for talent, and so useful to all branches of society, cannot make itself too much respected, and be too cautious against trifling with the feelings of the nation, in a question which combines the united interests of religion, morality, and confidence.

I have the honour to remain,

Sir,

Your very faithful servant,

HUMANUS.

*London, Feb.* 12, 1823.

C. Baldwin, Printer,
New Bridge-street, London.