

Ballad: Phrenology

In "Phrenology," a ballad from **The Bab Ballads**, we encounter a comedic scenario involving Sir Herbert White and a policeman, identified as James, Policeman Thirty-two, after an attempted crime. Sir Herbert, having been assaulted and nearly choked by a suspect, demands the immediate arrest of the perpetrator. However, the situation takes an unexpected turn upon the policeman's peculiar refusal to apprehend the alleged criminal. This refusal is not grounded in a lack of evidence or a procedural flaw but in an unconventional reliance on phrenology—the study of the shape and protuberances of the skull as a supposed indication of character and mental abilities.

The policeman, claiming expertise in phrenology, proceeds to analyze the suspect's head, identifying various 'bumps' that he interprets as indications of the suspect's inherent honesty, politeness, timidity, and a lack of animosity. He even goes so far as to claim the suspect's bumps of "Impecuniosity" (poverty), "Innocent Hilarity," alongside virtues such as faith, hope, and charity, revealing a man more saint than sinner, at least according to the contours of his cranium.

Sir Herbert, initially furious and demanding justice, finds himself bewildered by the policeman's diagnosis. The officer, leveraging his supposed phrenological wisdom, advocates for the suspect's release, arguing that the physical evidence on the man's head contradicts the very idea of him being capable of the crime accused by Sir Herbert.

The ballad humorously critiques both the reliability of phrenology as a science and the justice system's competence, possibly skewering the Victorian era's fascination with pseudosciences as methods for understanding human behavior. The policeman's bizarre justification based on the suspect's head bumps leads to an absurd conclusion that bemuses Sir Herbert and likely the reader as well. This tale encapsulates the whimsical and satirical tone characteristic of **The Bab Ballads**, employing sharp wit

and ironic humor to spotlight the absurdities of basing judgments on superficial and debunked scientific theories.

