

"Familiar in their Mouths as HOUSEHOLD WORDS."—SHAKESPEARE.

# HOUSEHOLD WORDS.

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## USE AND ABUSE OF THE DEAD.

ONE does not forget in a month or two the scandalous details recently made public as to the manner in which masters of workhouses and petty undertakers may, by the disregard of honesty, decency, and common human feeling, increase the supply to the London hospitals of subjects for dissection. The time has not gone by for a discussion of this subject; it never can go by until there shall have been made those further changes in our law which will not only secure the feelings of the poor from outrage, but at the same time will consult to the utmost degree possible or right in England, the interests of a science upon which all who live have to depend for aid in some hour of affliction. It is not so difficult as may at first sight appear to consult alike the national feelings of humanity and the interests of science upon the question that arises out of the imperative necessity that human anatomy should be studied diligently by our surgeons and physicians. As the law now stands, "that is received with the left hand which is reached with the right," and a straight intent makes a wry deed. Nevertheless all praise is due to the Anatomy Act, for though it has left open a door for sordid and inhuman fraud, it shut the door and barred it most effectually against many crimes.

Let us show how the case stands by help of a brief retrospect. Thirty years ago the anatomist in this country was in a position hardly better than that of the bold man who first disdained to study the construction of man's body from dogs, and who, stealing his subjects from the gallows, kept them concealed in his bed, while he dissected them in spite of the denunciations of the Church against impiety that hacked into the divine image with a scalpel. It was impious to dissect the dead for the well-being of society; it was heroic to cut down the living images and temples of the Deity for the pampering of pride in an earthly king, and for the spreading of wretchedness among his subjects. Vesalius first boldly taught that the man who would heal afflictions of the body, must know the construction of the body upon which he is to operate, and that the dead may be made a blessing to the living

when they are made to reveal to surgeons and physicians those exquisite secrets of the wisdom of the Great Artificer which all flesh holds contained within itself. To the glory of God and to the well-being of man even this earthly body, when the soul has passed from it, may serve. Vesalius knew that, and taught it to his brethren.

Thirty years ago, in England, it is hardly exaggeration to say, that there no more existed honest means of studying the Divine handiwork in our own frame than in the days of Vesalius, three hundred years ago. The necessity of dissection was indeed admitted, but the power to dissect, except by encouragement of desecration, was denied. Churchyards were robbed, sick chambers were robbed; the high price that anatomists were compelled to pay for means of study tempted wretched men to commit murder. But still it was necessary for all students of surgery who desired an ample course of study to repair to Paris. In those days the calling of the resurrectionist was followed as an independent business by men who took pride in it, scorned the clumsiness of amateurs, and even resented all intrusion on the churchyards over which they had established claims. The professional resurrectionist chose for himself a well-filled city graveyard, and then worked it, with a miner's industry, in the most systematic manner. The vast majority of the bodies taken in this way were those of paupers, who, being buried near the surface, were accessible, and upon whose undistinguished graves a skillful robbery could be made with little or no chance of detection. The practice was to remove carefully the soil at the head of the grave and expose one end of the coffin, open that, and with an instrument contrived for the purpose, draw out the body by the head. The coffin was then closed again, and the grave also closed again, so neatly that no sign of its desecration could be easily perceived. The value to the resurrectionists of each body so stolen was ten, twelve, and, sometimes even fifteen pounds. Then, the night scenes in a well-filled pauper graveyard were horrible to think about. Rival gangs of resurrectionists would meet sometimes and fight. Vanquished plunderers, envious of the rich mine worked by some rival

company, would enter the ground secretly, rob a grave, and leave it exposed, to awaken horror in the parish. Thus they begot night-watches, and spoilt the market of their enemies. Again, the dead were stolen sometimes from their beds, out of the chambers of death, and this was the only manner of desecration by which the poor were not the chief sufferers. The window of the darkened chamber being usually left a little way open, and watchers by the corpse not being customary in houses of the rich, thieves entering by the window laid their hands on the unburied.

In those days, too, if anybody was found drowned in a canal and brought to shore, it was a common thing for some ruffian to affect loud grief, to claim the corpse as that of a dear wife or daughter, and cause it to be carried to the lodging, out of which it presently departed in a sack to be exchanged for nine or ten pieces of gold. The body was thus in every sense disposed of. After a few days under the hands of the dissector all trace of its identity had vanished. Here was, for society, the most terrible fact of all. When the value of a dead body was great, when towns were full of unconsidered friendless men whom nobody would miss, and whose muscles and bones were as valuable as those of kings, the last hindrance to crime in the minds of those who feared only the vengeance of the law was removed, for the perplexing question, how to destroy the evidence of crime remaining in the body of the victim, was removed entirely, and the price of blood was paid by the same hand that destroyed the evidence of guilt.

For some time murder had been one source—of course a comparatively small source, still a source—of supply to the dissecting-rooms, and had not been suspected by the surgeons, though there were some few of them whom the habit of receiving into schools of anatomy subjects for the use of pupils without any close inquiry into the manner of obtaining them, led to a degree of negligence unquestionably criminal. The truth first flashed upon the country at Edinburgh. A half-witted man, friendless, but well known to sight in Edinburgh streets, was no more seen. Edinburgh is not so large a town but that a man well known by sight can be missed, and his disappearance talked about. Some question arose as to the disappearance of Datt Jamie, into the midst of which a medical student brought the news that he had seen him on a certain day and at a certain time laid out in a certain dissecting-room. Nearly about the same time he was known to have been in the street alive and hale as usual. Clamour arose. The house of Dr. Knox (to whom the dissecting-room in question belonged) was stormed by the populace, and the doctor was mobbed.

The trial of William Burke, whose name has added a word to the English language,

took place at Edinburgh, on the day before Christmas Day in the year eighteen hundred and twenty-eight. He was tried for three murders, Hare being evidence against him, and confessed, after conviction, that within a few months he and Hare had committed sixteen murders, selling the body in each case to Dr. Knox in Surgeon's Square. When trafficking, they represented to the Doctor, to avert suspicion, that they had purchased these bodies, of relations of the dead in different parts of the town. No suspicion seemed to have been excited. Hare kept a lodging-house, and tried lodgers with drink. If they would drink till they lay powerless on the floor, they were then suffocated—one man holding the mouth, nose, and chin, the other holding the whole body down and pressing on the breast. It was only at the previous Christmas that Hare, having joined with Burke to sell the body of a lodger who had died in his debt, first learned with how little inquiries dead bodies were taken, and how well they were paid for. A twelvemonth contained everything; the temptation, the multitude of murders, the conviction, and the sentence to be hanged.

In eighteen hundred and thirty-one, a similar career of murder was cut short in London by the detection of Bishop and Williams. They were professed body-snatchers. Bishop had followed the business for twelve years, and had sold, he said, from five hundred to a thousand bodies; but he confessed to only three murders: that of a boy, which led to his detection, that of a wretched woman whom he found sitting desolate with a child in her arms on the step of a door near Shoreditch church, and that of a poor boy, whom he and Williams found sleeping in the pig-market in Smithfield. As professed resurrection-men, their appearance with a body at a London hospital tended more to deaden than excite suspicion of foul play; but Mr. Partridge, then demonstrator, now professor, of anatomy at King's College, when the body of one of their victims was brought to the dissecting-room of that medical school, perceived a double reason for suspicion. The body was recently dead, the rigidity of death was upon it, the limbs were doubled and had not been laid out; and, at the same time, one of the men, by whom it was brought, volunteered an obvious falsehood, in saying that it had been taken "in the regular way"—meaning, from a grave. The police were sent for; and, to detain the suspected men, until they came, Mr. Partridge produced a fifty pound note for their payment, and asked for change. They offered to go for change, but the anatomist preferred going himself, and bidding them await his return, went out to hasten the arrival of the officers of justice. There was a very bare case for suspicion. Had the men said, that the boy was found drowned (for indeed he had been suffocated in a well), it might have been supposed that he was

obtained by a trick common among body-snatchers, and no more question might have been asked. Suspicion was increased also in the mind of the police inspector by the fact that a youth—though as it proved another youth—was just then advertised as missing. The three men, much to their consternation, were accordingly arrested, and two of them, being proved murderers, were hanged. They themselves were sent afterwards to King's College for dissection, and the skeleton of Bishop stands in the museum there, holding a bit of his own skin, on which an indignant tanner had begged leave to exercise his art.

This new discovery of the iniquities of Bishop, following upon the revelations in the case of Burke, caused an end to be put to the existing state of things. Pending a parliamentary inquiry, public opinion, and opinion also among the members of an honourable profession, set its face against the resurrectionist in every form. It became more difficult than ever for the surgeon in this country to study his profession.

It was thought that subjects might be brought from France, and an attempt was made to begin their importation; but the smugglers seized their opportunity at the same time, and caused them to arrive with rolls of lace in their dead mouths. The desecration was intolerable, and that source of supply was abandoned. Physicians, zealous for their art, left their own bodies to dissecting-rooms. An eminent Anatomist was called upon by a professional friend who said to him, "Do you know Doctor— (we will say Doctor Smith) has left his body to you."

"Is he dead?"

"No; but he will be in a day or two, and he wants very much to see you."

The Anatomist went, and found the old physician lying in his window with the evening sun shining upon a thin face.

"I am glad you have come," he said, "I want you to hear this clause in my will." He pulled the will from beneath his pillow, and read the bequest of himself to the scalpel.

"But, my dear sir," it was urged, "does not this distress your wife? You are not called upon to sacrifice the feelings of those who are dear to you—"

"Enough, enough. That is all settled. I have one request to make. I am dying of some affection of the lungs, which I attribute to the irritation from a rib I broke some years ago. I wish you would remember to look and see whether I am right on that point. Also, one thing more. I am a bit of a phrenologist, and I should like to have a cast taken of my head before I die. Could you get that done for me?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"When?"

"This is Monday. Shall I send on Wednesday?"

"No; Wednesday may be too late. Send to-morrow."

The physician died, and the anatomist thought that his last wishes might be sufficiently respected without more outrage to the distracted feelings of his wife, if there were a simple post-mortem examination into the causes of death.

To this same Anatomist, there was made known, in a very remarkable way, the extent of the wretchedness of a poor creature who wrote to him at the Hospital with which he was connected, signing herself "Caroline W.," and telling him that she was an unfortunate woman weary of life, and eager to lay her burden down if she could quit the world able to pay the few pounds that she owed to creditors. For these reasons, she wished to sell her body. She was of such an age—so tall, so stout—of fair complexion; and she might be seen on the Strand side of Temple Bar at a certain hour on a certain day. If he would buy her for dissection she did not want any money for herself: only his word of honour that he would pay those who might bring her body to his rooms. If he did not accept her offer, she would find somebody who would. The opinion of the police-inspector of the district was taken on the letter. Was it a bad jest? The inspector declared his belief that it was terribly earnest, and undertook to do what he considered best. He appeared at the appointed place of meeting, and scared the wretched soul away. No more was heard of her.

The disclosures made before a parliamentary committee, led to the establishment of the "Act for regulating schools of Anatomy," commonly called the Anatomy Act, now in force. By that act, nobody can practice anatomy without a license from the Secretary of State, who appoints also inspectors of schools of anatomy. It is the duty of the inspectors to make quarterly returns of all subjects removed for anatomical examination, and to visit, at discretion, all dissecting rooms. By this act, any person, not an undertaker holding it for purpose of interment, who has lawful keeping of the body of a deceased person may permit anatomical examination of it, if no known relative objects, and if the deceased have not in the last illness expressed objection. In no case can a body be removed for such examination within forty-eight hours after decease, or without a certificate from the inspector of anatomy, which can be obtained only in return for a satisfactory medical certificate of the cause of death. No teacher of anatomy shall receive any body for examination with which the certificate of the inspector is not brought, and that certificate he shall send back to the inspector of anatomy together with a full return of various particulars. Contravention of these rules is punished with three months' imprisonment or with a fine of fifty pounds.

These regulations have entirely put an end

to the old forms of body-snatching, have made murder for dissection quite impossible, and have so far tended to supply the anatomist with better means of study, that the price of a subject to the student in this country is now four pounds, instead of ten. The Act, however, does not put an end to the villainous jobbing in corpses which is still within the power of an undertaker who can get the master of a workhouse to assist his views.

The undertakers combine to extort money from the hospitals under the name of burial fees, which they raise from time to time; and the raising of which, hospitals resist as well as they can. Though the Anatomy Act specially forbids undertakers charged with the burial of a body to exercise any influence that shall concern the anatomist, he, nevertheless contrives, whenever the master of a workhouse will assist in procuring for each body surreptitiously obtained the necessary documents, to play the part of body-snatcher.

Most of our readers will remember the details made public at the late trial of the master of the Newington workhouse, for supplying bodies of the poor to Guy's Hospital in an illegal manner; the undertaker, who was chief offender, being released from prosecution on condition that he would bear witness against his accomplice. The undertaker said, that he could go to the dead-house when he pleased. He was in the habit of taking the bodies of paupers who had died out of the workhouse into this dead-house. The relieving-officer authorised him to do this. He also used to bring the remains of the dissected paupers from the hospital to be buried. In these cases the hospital paid the expense of the funeral. Three pounds ten shillings was paid by the hospital for each case. The parish only paid him five shillings and sixpence. For all the cases where the substitution took place, he was paid both by the parish and the hospital. He received two payments by this means for the burial of the same body. He was not aware that he had no right to do this. The amount allowed by the parish for the burial of the paupers would be utterly insufficient, if it were not for the additional sum received from the hospital for the unclaimed bodies.

That last statement is true, and no sane man can doubt that the low payment was made with the tacit understanding that there were valuable perquisites of fraud and extortion connected with the undertaker's office. The treasurer of Guy's Hospital testified that he had paid the master of the workhouse nearly twenty pounds in one year, twenty-seven in another, "as a gratuity for the trouble he had in obtaining the necessary certificates relating to the bodies that were sent to the hospital for dissection." It was proved that at that particular workhouse twelve or fourteen times in a year, friends of a deceased

pauper were allowed to see the body in its coffin, and then sent as mourners to the churchyard in the train of a dissected body, carried to the grave in place of that which they had seen. The most sacred feelings were thus made the subject of a secret mockery, sordid and infamous.

That is the present blot upon the working of the Anatomy Act. Room is left for the atrocious jugglery of undertakers, and for the dishonesty of workhouse masters, by the clause which makes it simply permissive in those who have the custody of an unclaimed body, to give it for dissection. Beadledom does as it pleases. One board incites to imaginary claims, and throws every obstacle in the way of the anatomist, another favours this hospital or that; and to procure anything like an equitable distribution of the subjects for dissection needs all the tact—for it is beyond the legal powers—of the inspector of anatomy.

The remedy for this is not the adoption of the French system, under which every person dying in a hospital by so doing bequeaths his body to the furtherance of knowledge. In this country let no man alive or dead be denied bodily freedom. Let there, however, be not simply an option left to the discretion of the beadles and the undertakers, but a plain and fixed rule, that if any man die without having expressed a wish to be dissected after death rather by worms than by his student brethren; rather to rot than be spiritualised into knowledge that shall dry hereafter many a tear, ease many a pain; if any man die without having testified a desire that his body should be useless rather than useful to society when he is gone, then let society have the benefit of the doubt. But, if there be living one dear friend, no matter of what condition, to whom the touch of the anatomist upon his dead body would be a cause of grief, then let the grief be sacred, and let the natural feeling or the prejudice be revered.

Let it then be an ordinance, not a permission, that the unclaimed dead shall supply the needs of science and humanity, whenever the body is not that of one who, in life, prohibited its use for such a purpose. By this form of enactment, no feeling is outraged, and all mockery is swept away. The whole swarm of undertakers, who now traffic in the bodies of the poor, could be swept aside. All bodies free to the dissector should be carried with becoming reverence and delicate respect, into one building, whence they could be distributed impartially by the inspector of anatomy to the several medical schools according to their needs. To the same place they could be returned for burial; and thence they could be carried to the grave under the superintendence of an undertaker, paid only by a defined salary, and compelled to confine himself to the business of his office. Irregularity, and irreverence,

would under such a system meet with easy and immediate exposure—they cannot, in such awful association, be too vigilantly exposed, or too heavily punished—and there would be an end for ever of all selling of the dead. The cost of dissection to a student would be simply the cost of removal and burial. Now, it is at least twice as much; and exact anatomical knowledge being costly to obtain, it is, perhaps, acquired only by tens, when there is sore need that thousands should possess it.

### CALMUCK.

THE last summer's exhibition of the Royal Academy contained many wonders, quite apart from the gratifying display of wonderfully good pictures, by which different classes of the community were obviously impressed. But the wonder of wonders shared by all habitués whatsoever who glanced round the walls or hastily turned over their catalogues on entering the building, was the discovery that my friend Mildmay Strong had not exhibited at all.

For Mildmay is a great painter, and prolific withal. Whatever he chooses to paint is honourably exhibited. Whatever he exhibits is profitably sold; and it is pretty well known that, if he cares greatly for a single thing on earth apart from painting pictures, it is selling them. He is not dead, that is tolerably certain, or we should have heard of it. The world is far too much interested in his existence to allow him the privilege of a noiseless decease. Ill he is as little likely to be as any human being I know of. For Mildmay is a prudent Hercules, who measures his lions before tackling them, and who, if engaged on any scavenger business in the Augean stable line, takes care to provide plenty of chloride of lime. Laziness, in his case, is out of the question. My friend Strong would sit up painting all night, but for one objection. It would not leave him in a fit state to recommence painting at his usual early hour on the following morning.

Has Mildmay taken offence at some ill-treatment from that desperate gang of malefactors, the hanging committee, and has cut the Royal Academy in dudgeon?

By no means. Mildmay is remarkably fond of his nose. When you detect him in the act of cutting off that feature, to gratify a vindictive feeling towards his face, I will thank you to inform me of it. The ruffians in question, no doubt from interested motives, behave as a rule, rather well to Mildmay than otherwise. Indeed, considering what a very corrupt and iniquitous institution the Royal Academy is, as a hundred indignant critics and a thousand exasperated artists will assure you, its members appear to yield to public opinion, in the recognition of young merit, with a magnanimity that is rather

surprising; and which other governing bodies would do well to imitate. They hate Mildmay Strong, if you like, as one of a turbulent and firebrand race of young painters, who have come to disturb them in the placid enjoyment of their easy old tie-wig traditions of art; as cordially and as naturally as Wouter Van Twillen and his peaceful fellow burghers of the New Netherlands must have detested those restless invading hordes of Yankees, with their outlandish practices of asking questions and planning improvements. But the R.A.s hang my friend's pictures on the line for all that, and seldom in unfavourable situations.

The fact is (for, of course, I have been in the secret all along, and it is high time to make it public) Mildmay Strong is in Mexico. The circumstances are these: A few months ago, Mildmay got hold of Mr. Prescott's picturesque history of the Conquest of Mexico, which he read with an eye to subjects for painting. The latter remark, by those who know my friend, will be considered superfluous, it being notorious that he never reads, looks at, or thinks of anything whatsoever, except with an eye in that direction. Between ourselves, I believe that a certain beautiful young lady of my acquaintance owes her present engagement quite as much to the turn of her elbow, the colour of her hair, or to other external graces valuable for model purposes, as to any quality of her head or heart. However, to the Prescott question.

Mildmay liked the Conquest of Mexico, and was struck by some passage in it having reference to the loves of Cortez and that semi-mythical, wholly beautiful, Aztec girl, whom the grim conqueror is supposed to have converted from patriotism to Christianity. Mildmay saw a picture. The lithe, graceful, bronze-limbed warriors of Montezuma, with their fairy-like feather costumes, cotton breast-plates, rich golden ornaments, and obsidian weapons, contrasted with the sombre, velvet-draped, iron-bound, black-bearded Spaniards, the whole seen under the rarefied atmosphere of the wonderful tableland, whereon the mysterious old Aztec Venice stretched out its countless lakes and floating gardens. All this was suggestive to our friend of fresh fields and pastures new. He weighed the matter carefully in his mind, made a few ugly, unintelligible sketches, approved of them, provided for the comfortable subsistence of his mother and four sisters for the space of a year and a half, paid his landlord, invited all his bachelor friends to a jolly supper; and, drinking to all our healths in the only glass of wine I ever saw him put his lips to, informed us that he intended starting for Liverpool on the following morning, en route for Vera Cruz.

To those ignorant of what is required of, and in return what is awarded to, a great