

investigation. All that the public really knew was that fifteen or sixteen murders had been committed.

The withdrawal of the bill was a great satisfaction to many, both in and out of Parliament; but the agitation for some such alteration of the law continued unabated. It required another severe lesson to bring public opinion into a state ripe for the change.

CHAPTER XLI.

“Burking” in London—Apprehension of Bishop, Williams, and May—Their Trial, Confession, and Execution—Re-introduction and Passing of the Anatomy Act.

THIS other lesson, to which reference was made at the close of the last chapter, was given through the medium of a case which occurred in London. In many features the case was similar to that against the West Port murderers, with the notable difference that the Englishmen did not go about their desperate work with quite so much method and cunning as did their prototypes in Edinburgh. They used a brutal violence which, fortunately for the community, cut them short almost at the very outset of their murderous career.

Shortly after noon, on Saturday, the 5th of November, 1831, John Bishop and James May, both well-known body-snatchers, called on the porter of the Dissecting Room at King's College, London. May was the spokesman, and he informed the porter that he had a subject which he would give him for twelve guineas, and he then proceeded to declare its qualities, much in the same way as he would have spoken of an ordinary piece of merchandise—“it was very fresh, and was a male subject of about fourteen years of age.” Mr. Hill, the porter, said he was not particularly requiring it, but he would see the demonstrator, Mr. Partridge. There was some haggling about the price.

Bishop offered it for ten guineas, but was ultimately forced to abate the sum by another guinea, promising at last to send the body for nine. In the course of the afternoon the two men, accompanied by a colleague of the name of Thomas Williams, returned to the college, and with them was a street porter, who bore on his head a large hamper. Taken into a room, the hamper was found to contain the body of a young lad wrapped up in a sack. Hill saw there were some suspicious marks about the head, and, besides, it was not in such a form as bodies usually were when taken from a coffin, the left arm being bent and the fingers clenched. The porter asked them what the lad had died of, but May, who was in a drunken state, said that was neither his business or theirs. He then informed Mr. Partridge of what he had seen and suspected. That gentleman, without seeing the men, examined the body, and found there were about it some marks and circumstances of a suspicious nature. There were the swollen state of the jaw, the bloodshot eyes, the freshness of the body, and the rigidity of the limbs. There was also a cut over the left temple. Having made this examination, he sent for the police, and returning to the men he produced a fifty pound note, telling them he must get that changed before he could pay them. Bishop saw that Mr. Partridge had some gold in his purse, and he said to him: "Give me what money you have in your purse, and I will call for the rest on Monday." May, on his part, offered to go for the change, but Mr. Partridge declined both proposals, and left the room on the pretence of seeking the change himself. All this was but a blind to detain the men until a strong body of police had time to arrive, when all three were apprehended, and the body taken to the police office. A subsequent examination of the corpse by three surgeons, one of them being Mr. Partridge, showed that the lad must have met his death through violence. The only external mark—that on the temple—was superficial, and did not injure the bone; but between the scalp and the bone there was a patch of congealed blood about the size of a 'crown-piece, which, from its appearance, must have been caused by a blow given during life. On the removal of the skin from the back part of the neck, a considerable quantity—about four

ounces—of coagulated blood was found among the muscles, and this also, in the opinion of the surgeons, must have been effused when the subject was alive. A portion of the spine having been removed for the purpose of examining the spinal marrow, a quantity of coagulated blood was found lying in the canal, and this, it was stated, from its pressure on the spinal marrow, must have caused death. All these appearances, and death, would, in the opinion of the surgeons, have followed a blow from a blunt instrument of any kind. Subsequent inquiries by the police brought to light the fact that the body had been offered to the curator of Guy's Hospital and of Grainger's Anatomical Theatre, both of whom declined to purchase it. They also discovered that May had called upon a surgeon-dentist in Newington on the morning of the day he was apprehended, and had offered for sale, at the price of a guinea, twelve human teeth, which he said had belonged to a boy between fourteen and fifteen years of age, whose body had never been buried. Some of the flesh and pieces of the jaw adhered to the teeth, showing that great force had been used to wrench them out.

On the question of the identity of the body found in the possession of the three men, the authorities had what was apparently satisfactory evidence that it was that of Carlo Ferreer, who had arrived from Italy two years before, and who went about the streets of London with a cage, containing two white mice, slung from his neck by a string. On the night of Thursday, the 3rd of November, the boy and Bishop and Williams were all three seen in the vicinity of the Nova Scotia Gardens, where Bishop resided, but they were not in company. That same evening one of Bishop's neighbours heard sounds of a scuffle proceeding from his house in Nova Scotia Gardens, but paid little attention to it, as he considered it was simply a family quarrel. A search through this house by the police led to the discovery of two crooked chisels, a brad-awl, and a file. There appeared to be fresh marks of blood on the brad-awl. Then in May's house in Dorset Street, New Kent Road, there were found a vest and a pair of trousers, both marked with what were evidently fresh stains. Buried in Bishop's garden were found several articles

of men's clothing, all of which were stained with blood. Another incident that seemed to show that the body was that of the poor Italian boy was that on the 5th of November Bishop's boys were seen in the possession of a cage in which were two white mice. When the productions were taken to Bow Street Police Office, where the accused were confined, May said, when he saw the brad-awl, "That is the instrument with which I punched the teeth out;" and the dentist, in his evidence at the trial, said the teeth had been forced out, and he thought the brad-awl produced would afford great facility for doing so.

This, in brief, was the case upon which the prosecution rested for the conviction of the three men. The trial took place at the Old Bailey Sessions on the 1st of December, and created the most intense interest among all classes of the community. The court was crowded, and outside an immense multitude had assembled. After a long trial the jury found the three prisoners guilty of murder. The verdict was received in court with silence, but when the result was known outside the people cheered vociferously, and this they continued so long that the officers were obliged to close the windows of the court, that the voice of the judge might be heard in passing sentence of death. Only four days' grace was given to the unhappy men, for their execution was fixed for the 5th of December.

The day before their execution, on the 4th of December, Bishop and Williams made confessions before the under-sheriff. In these documents, which will be found at length in the appendix, they acknowledged to the murder of the lad whose body was found, but they stated that he came from Lincolnshire, and was not the Italian boy to whose identification so many witnesses had sworn. Subsequent investigation, however, led to the belief that the condemned men, and not the witnesses, had made the mistake. They also declared that they had been concerned in the murder of a woman and of a boy of about eleven years of age. Their method was to get their intended victims to drink beer or gin, which they had drugged with laudanum, and then, when they were in a stupified state, to lower them by a rope attached to the heels, head foremost into a well at the back of the Bishop's house. This act completed the work, and, it was

thought, allowed the drugged liquor to run out of the mouth. They thus acknowledged to three distinct acts of murder, but they both declared that May was wholly ignorant and innocent of all of them. Bishop had been a body-snatcher for twelve years, and he had during that time obtained and sold over five hundred bodies.

The evidence against May had all along been deemed defective, and this full and unequivocal statement that he was unconnected with the murder, procured a respite for him. When sentenced in court he turned to the jury and said: "I am a murdered man, gentlemen." The communication of the news that his life had been saved was itself almost the cause of his death. He fell to the ground in a fit, and while he was in contortions it took four of the prison officers to hold him; but he recovered in a quarter of an hour.

By one o'clock on the morning of Monday, the 5th December, a great crowd had assembled in front of the scaffold at Newgate, and by daybreak as many as 30,000 persons were present to witness the last act of the law. Bishop's appearance on the scaffold gave rise to a scene similar to that at the execution of Burke at Edinburgh. The people hooted and yelled in a terrible manner while the executioner put the rope round the murderer's neck, and fixed it to a chain depending from the beam; and the demonstration was renewed with vigour when Williams was brought out. When the drop fell Bishop died instantaneously, but Williams struggled in the death agonies for several minutes. The crowd then broke through the barriers, and a scene that baffles description ensued. Forgetting itself in the excitement of the moment, the mob rushed towards the scaffold, and in the struggle with the police large numbers were injured. Many were trampled under foot. By half-past seven o'clock that morning between twenty and thirty persons were carried to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, all seriously maimed. "Thus died," says a broadside published at the time, "the dreadful Burkers of 1831." The author of the production called "The Trial, Sentence, Full Confession and Execution of Bishop and Williams, the Burkers," furnishes a very pertinent comment on the whole transaction. "The month of November, 1831," he remarks, "will be recorded in the annals of crime and

cruelties as particularly pre-eminent, for it will prove to posterity that other wretches could be found base enough to follow the horrid example of Burke and his accomplice Hare, to entice the unprotected and friendless to the den of Death for sordid gain." In accordance with the terms of sentence, the bodies of the executed criminals were "delivered over for dissection and anatomization."

While this terrible example of the dangers to the community under the existing state of the law as to the study of anatomy was still fresh on the minds of the people, Mr. Warburton again introduced his bill, slightly altered in respect of details, into the House of Commons. On the 15th of December, 1831, he obtained leave to introduce the bill, and it was then read a first time. He moved the second reading on the 17th of January, 1832, but when the question was put that the bill be read a second time it was found there were not forty members present, and the House had to adjourn. However, on the 29th of the same month he was more successful, and gained the second reading. After it had passed through several stages in committee, Mr. Warburton, on the 11th of April, moved that it be re-committed, and stated that he had been waited upon by deputations from the College of Surgeons in Dublin, and another medical body, who desired that the provisions of the measure should be extended to Ireland, which he had not originally intended should be included within its scope. In committee it was agreed to extend the bill to Ireland. On the 18th of April, when it was again in committee, an amendment to the effect that the disposal of the bodies of executed murderers for dissection should be left to the discretion of the judges was negatived. The bill passed the House of Commons on the 11th of May, and shortly afterwards received the approval of the Upper House.

CHAPTER XLII.

The Passing of the Anatomy Act—Its Terms and Provisions.

SUCH were the circumstances that led up to the passing of what was familiarly known as the Anatomy Act. In view of the long course of restriction to which it put an end, and of the fact that this measure is still operative as regards the matter of which it treats, it is proper that it should be reproduced here. It received the Royal assent on the 1st of August, 1832, and is technically known as 3 and 4 Geo. IV., c. 75, the short title being "An Act for regulating Schools of Anatomy." The following are its terms and provisions :—

"Whereas a knowledge of the causes and nature of sundry diseases which affect the body, and the best methods of treating and curing such diseases, and of healing and repairing divers wounds and injuries to which the human frame is liable, cannot be acquired without the aid of anatomical examination: And whereas the legal supply of human bodies for such anatomical examination is insufficient fully to provide the means of such knowledge: And whereas in order further to supply human bodies for such purposes, divers great and grievous crimes have been committed, and lately murder, for the single object of selling for such purposes the bodies of the persons so murdered: And whereas, therefore, it is highly expedient to give protection, under certain regulations, to the study and practice of anatomy, and to prevent, as far as may be, such great and grievous crimes and murder as aforesaid: Be it therefore enacted by the King's most excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the lords spiritual and temporal, and commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, that it shall be lawful for his Majesty's principal secretary of state for the time being for the home department in that part of the United Kingdom called Great Britain, and for the chief secretary for Ireland in that part of the United Kingdom called Ireland, immediately on the passing of this Act, or so soon thereafter as may be required, to

grant a license to practise anatomy to any fellow or member of any college of physicians or surgeons, or to any graduate or licentiate in medicine, or to any person lawfully qualified to practise medicine in any part of the United Kingdom, or to any professor or teacher of anatomy, medicine, or surgery, or to any student attending any school of anatomy, on application from such party for such purpose, countersigned by two of his Majesty's justices of the peace acting for the county, city, borough, or place wherein such party so applying is about to carry on the practice of anatomy.

“ 2. And be it enacted, that it shall be lawful for his Majesty's said principal secretary of state or chief secretary, as the case may be, immediately on the passing of this Act, or as soon thereafter as may be necessary, to appoint respectively not fewer than three persons to be inspectors of places where anatomy is carried on, and at any time after such first appointment to appoint, if they shall see fit, one or more other person or persons to be an inspector or inspectors as aforesaid; and every such inspector shall continue in office for one year, or until he be removed by the said secretary of state or chief secretary, as the case may be, or until some other person shall be appointed in his place; and as often as any inspector appointed as aforesaid shall die, or shall be removed from his said office, or shall refuse or become unable to act, it shall be lawful for the said secretary of state or chief secretary, as the case may be, to appoint another person to be inspector in his room.

“ 3. And be it enacted, that it shall be lawful for the said secretary of state or chief secretary, as the case may be, to direct what district of town or country, or of both, and what places where anatomy is carried on, situate within such district, every such inspector shall be appointed to superintend, and in what manner every such inspector shall transact the duties of his office.

“ 4. And be it enacted, that every inspector to be appointed by virtue of this Act shall make a quarterly return to the said secretary of state or chief secretary, as the case may be, of every deceased person's body that during the preceding quarter has been removed for anatomical examination to every separate place in his district where anatomy is carried on

distinguishing the sex, and, as far as is known at the time, the name and age of each person whose body was so removed as aforesaid.

“5. And be it enacted, that it shall be lawful for every such inspector to visit and inspect at any time any place within his district, notice of which place has been given, as is hereinafter directed, that it is intended there to practise anatomy.

“6. And be it enacted, that it shall be lawful for his Majesty to grant to every such inspector such an annual salary not exceeding one hundred pounds for his trouble, and to allow such a sum of money for the expenses of his office as may appear reasonable, such salaries and allowances to be charged on the consolidated fund of the United Kingdom, and to be payable quarterly; and that an annual return of all such salaries and allowances shall be made to Parliament.

“7. And be it enacted, that it shall be lawful for any executor or other party having lawful possession of the body of any deceased person, and not being an undertaker or other party intrusted with the body for the purpose only of interment, to permit the body of such deceased person to undergo anatomical examination, unless, to the knowledge of such executor or other party, such person shall have expressed his desire, either in writing at any time during his life, or verbally in the presence of two or more witnesses during the illness whereof he died, that his body after death might not undergo such examination, or unless the surviving husband or wife, or any known relation of the deceased person, shall require the body to be interred without such examination.

“8. And be it enacted, that if any person, either in writing at any time during his life, or verbally in the presence of two or more witnesses during the illness whereof he died, shall direct that his body after death be examined anatomically, or shall nominate any party by this Act authorized to examine bodies anatomically to make such examination, and if, before the burial of the body of such person, such direction or nomination shall be made known to the party having lawful possession of the dead body, then such last mentioned party shall direct such examination to be made, and in case of any such nomination as aforesaid, shall request and permit any

party so authorised and nominated as aforesaid to make such examination, unless the deceased person's surviving husband or wife, or nearest known relative, or any one or more of such person's nearest known relatives, being of kin in the same degree, shall require the body to be interred without such examination.

“ 9. Provided always, and be it enacted, that in no case shall the body of any person be removed for anatomical examination from any place where such person may have died until after forty-eight hours from the time of such person's decease, nor until twenty-four hours notice, to be reckoned from the time of such decease, to the inspector of the district, of the intended removal of the body, or if no such inspector have been appointed, to some physician, surgeon, or apothecary residing at or near the place of death, nor unless a certificate stating in what manner such person came by his death, shall previously to the removal of the body have been signed by the physician, surgeon, or apothecary who attended such person during the illness whereof he died, or if no such medical man attended such person during such illness, then by some physician, surgeon, or apothecary who shall be called in after the death of such person, to view his body, or who shall state the manner or cause of death according to the best of his knowledge and belief, but who shall not be concerned in examining the body after removal; and that in case of such removal such certificate shall be delivered, together with the body, to the party receiving the same for anatomical examination.

“ 10. And be it enacted, that it shall be lawful for any member or fellow of any college of physicians or surgeons, or any graduate or licentiate in medicine, or any person lawfully qualified to practice medicine in any part of the United Kingdom, or any professor, teacher, or student of anatomy, medicine, or surgery, having a license from his Majesty's principal secretary of state or chief secretary as aforesaid, to receive or possess for anatomical examination, or to examine anatomically, the body of any person deceased, if permitted or directed so to do by a party who had at the time of giving such permission or direction lawful possession of the body, and who had power, in pursuance of the provisions of this Act, to

permit or cause the body to be so examined, and provided such certificates as aforesaid were delivered by such party together with the body.

“ 11. And be it enacted, that every party so receiving a body for anatomical examination after removal shall demand and receive, together with the body, a certificate as aforesaid, and shall, within twenty-four hours next after such removal, transmit to the inspector of the district such certificate, and also a return stating at what day and hour and from whom the body was received, the date and place of death, the sex, and (as far as is known at the time) the christian and surname, age, and last place of abode of such person, or, if no such inspector have been appointed, to some physician, surgeon, or apothecary residing at or near the place to which the body is removed, and shall enter or cause to be entered the aforesaid particulars relating thereto, and a copy of the certificate be received therewith, in a book to be kept by him for that purpose, and shall produce such book whenever required so to do by any inspector so appointed as aforesaid.

“ 12. And be it enacted, that it shall not be lawful for any party to carry on or teach anatomy at any place, or at any place to receive or possess for anatomical examination, or examine anatomically, any deceased person's body after removal of the same, unless such party, or the owner or occupier of such place, or some party by this Act authorised to examine bodies anatomically, shall, at least one week before the first receipt or possession of a body for such purpose at such place, have given notice to the said secretary of state or chief secretary, as the case may be, of the place where it is intended to practise anatomy.

“ 13. Provided always, and be it enacted, that every such body so removed as aforesaid for the purpose of examination shall, before such removal, be placed in a decent coffin or shell, and be removed therein; and that the party removing the same, or causing the same to be removed as aforesaid, shall make provision that such body, after undergoing anatomical examination, be decently interred in consecrated ground, or in some public burial-ground in use for persons of that religious persuasion to which the person whose body was so removed

belonged ; and that a certificate of the interment of such body shall be transmitted to the inspector of the district within six weeks after the day on which such body was received as aforesaid.

“ 14. And be it enacted, that no member or fellow of any college of physicians or surgeons, nor any graduate or licentiate in medicine, nor any person lawfully qualified to practise medicine in any part of the United Kingdom, nor any professor, teacher, or student of anatomy, medicine, or surgery, having a license from his Majesty's principal secretary of state or chief secretary as aforesaid, shall be liable to any prosecution, penalty, forfeiture, or punishment for receiving or having in his possession for anatomical examination, or for examining anatomically, any dead human body, according to the provisions of this Act.

“ 15. And be it enacted, that nothing in this Act contained shall be construed to extend to or to prohibit any post-mortem examination of any human body required or directed to be made by any competent legal authority.

“ 16. And whereas an Act was passed in the ninth year of the reign of his late Majesty, for consolidating and amending the statutes in England relative to offences against the person, by which latter Act it is enacted, that the body of every person convicted of murder shall, after execution, either be dissected or hung in chains, as to the court which tried the offence shall seem meet, and that the sentence to be pronounced by the court shall express that the body of the offender shall be dissected or hung in chains, whichever of the two the court shall order. Be it enacted, that so much of the said last recited Act as authorises the court, if it shall see fit, to direct that the body of a person convicted of murder shall, after execution, be dissected, be and the same is hereby repealed ; and that in every case of conviction of any prisoner for murder the court before which such prisoner shall have been tried shall direct such prisoner either to be hung in chains, or to be buried within the precincts of the prison in which such prisoner shall have been confined after conviction, as to such court shall seem meet ; and that the sentence to be pronounced by the court shall express that the body of such prisoner shall

be hung in chains, or buried within the precincts of the prison, whichever of the two the court shall order.

“ 17. And be it enacted, that if any action or suit shall be commenced or brought against any person for anything done in pursuance of this Act, the same shall be commenced within six calendar months next after the cause of action accrued; and the defendant in every such action or suit may, at his election, plead the matter specially or the general issue Not Guilty, and give this Act and the special matter in evidence at any trial to be had thereupon.

“ 18. And be it enacted, that any person offending against the provisions of this Act in England or Ireland shall be deemed and taken to be guilty of a misdemeanour, and being duly convicted thereof, shall be punished by imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months, or by a fine not exceeding fifty pounds, at the discretion of the court before which he shall be tried; and any person offending against the provisions of this Act in Scotland shall, upon being duly convicted of such offence, be punished by imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months, or by a fine not exceeding fifty pounds, at the discretion of the court before which he shall be tried.

“ 19. And in order to remove doubts as to the meaning of certain words in this Act, be it enacted, that the words ‘person and party’ shall be respectively deemed to include any number of persons, or any society, whether by charter or otherwise; and that the meaning of the aforesaid words shall not be restricted, although the same may be subsequently referred to in the singular number and masculine gender only.”

CHAPTER XLIII.

Conclusion—Review of the Effects Produced by the Resurrectionist Movement—The Houses in Portsburgh—The Popular Idea of the Method of Burke and Hare—Origin of the Words “Burker” and “Burking.”

SUCH were the resurrectionist times in Scotland, and such the crimes committed by Burke and Hare, and their English imitators. Now-a-days it may seem strange that events like these were possible in a country professing a civilizing christianity, but no one with a knowledge of the depths to which humanity can descend will deny that even in our much boasted time, with all our social advancement, men could be found who would dare to put their consciences under the burden of such terrible iniquities, were the other circumstances and necessities still the same. There was little wonder that the public sense of security was alarmed, that the heart of the nation was touched, at the shocking disclosures made at each successive trial, and at the daily actions of men who seemed to be safe from the law. We have seen how the people of Scotland felt under the constant robbing of their churchyards; how they were awe-struck at the mysterious disappearance from among them of some unfortunate, whose whereabouts was never found out; and how they rose in righteous anger when the mystery was cleared up in the High Court of Justiciary. The wonder, indeed, is that considering the reverential regard for the dead which has always characterised them, that they bore the terrible pillage of their Golgothas so long; and that when the end came they did not work more mischief than they did. But the times, hard as they were at the best, and suffering under such a shocking blemish, were productive of real and lasting good to the nation, socially, scientifically, and even spiritually.

For a long time after the execution of Burke and the flight of his accomplices, the houses in Wester Portsburgh were objects of horror and detestation; and having acquired a

ghastly interest from the horrible crimes of which they were the scene, were among the best visited places in Edinburgh, until at last they were knocked down as eyesores to the community, and as perpetuating a series of crimes which were too deeply impressed on human memory to be easily forgotten. But the tradition clung long to the district, and even to this day the locality is pointed out to the stranger as being notable. The interest taken in these buildings and their internal arrangement was so great, that paintings of them on canvas were taken through the country, and shown at village fairs and markets.

But an annoying and reprehensible practice arose out of the actions of Burke and Hare, which while certainly not so serious, was not without its dangerous element. This was a habit which many young men dropped into of attempting to put pieces of sticking-plaster over the mouths of unsuspecting passengers on the streets. Most commonly this prank was played upon girls, many of whom were almost out of their wits, and who would not venture out of the door at nights. This practice obtained not only in Edinburgh but also in Glasgow and the other large towns in Scotland, and though examples were made by the miscreants being apprehended and punished by the police magistrates, it became after a time such an intolerable nuisance, that the strictest measures had to be taken for its repression. One case of this kind in Glasgow created an extraordinary commotion. A servant girl was attacked in the street, and a sticking-plaster of so strong an adhesive nature was placed over her mouth that it could not be removed without taking a great portion of the skin of her face with it. There was little wonder that the *Glasgow Chronicle*, in a comment on the occurrence, said that the "wretches who can behave thus at any time, and more especially in the present state of public feeling, are a disgrace to society." But it is curious to note how this silly imitation of the method of Burke and Hare came to be regarded as the actual mode in which these men had performed their manifold murders. The fact that so many terrible crimes had been committed by them kept a firm hold on the mind of the people, but, gradually, the method, which had been made so public through the medium of the news-

papers, was forgotten, and the impression as gradually gained ground that slipping up to their intended victims on the streets, Burke and his accomplice gave them their quietus by skilfully placing a piece of sticking-plaster over their mouths. Of course the preceding narrative, and the confessions of the condemned criminal, show that it was far otherwise, but the impression, amounting latterly to an absolute belief, became so fixed that even yet it still holds sway, though certainly in a less degree now than a generation ago.

Allusion has already been made to the remarkably strong hold the whole plot took upon the minds of the Scottish people, and to the fact that it has exercised an influence on the inner life of the Scottish mind down to the present. This is generally acknowledged, but perhaps a better idea of the original character of the impression made by the discoveries of 1829 may be gained when the great events and movements going on all around at and after the time are taken into consideration. In the year 1829 the country was agitated not only by stirring news from the Continent, where armies were marching to and fro, and there was a tendency to a general European conflagration, but also by the Catholic Emancipation movement, and parliamentary reform. Every one knows the interest the people of Scotland took in these matters, and especially in the Reform Bill, and how many suffered on the scaffold for over boldness in the struggle. These were events that might have absorbed all the attention the people could spare from their daily toil for the sustenance of life; but yet the Burke and Hare tragedies were always to be heard repeated by some fireside, and the tales of the resurrectionists were rehearsed to willing listeners. Such great events affected the rights of the people as citizens of the empire, as freemen in the state; but the violation of churchyards, the murder of poor human beings for the sale of their bodies, touched the heart, it related to the home-life of the man, independent of his citizenship. It was the same with the other great political movements of the early half of the century. The stories went from mouth to mouth, from father to son, from nurse to child, and the horrid memory of the foulest series of murders on the criminal calendar of Scotland was kept fresh, young minds

grew up in fear of a terrible unknown something of which the preceding generation had had a full realization, a something which happily was impossible, but which exercised a baneful and dwarfing influence all the same. The old bogles of superstitious times were thrown aside, the stern realities of human criminality were used in their stead. Many still remember their youthful impressions and shudder. It is well that these influences are losing their power, but it would be unfortunate if the lessons taught by these awful times were forgotten by the country.

Happily, however, the resurrectionist times were not without their good elements as well as their bad. Had such events not taken place two things would have been evident—first, that up to that time anatomical study and research had made little progress; and second, that the study would have continued in a state of stagnation under restrictions discreditable to the country and its rulers. But quite another state of matters existed and do exist. The scientific ardour which from an early period of its history had characterised the medical faculty in Scotland, and particularly in Edinburgh, may be said to have created the necessity for resurrectionists or body-snatchers, and the fact that the research so needful to the happiness and comfort of humanity was being conducted under such unfortunate auspices, and debasing restrictions, gradually awoke the community to a sense of what they owed to themselves and to those whose ultimate object was the general good. The churchyards were being robbed of their silent tenants, the poor were being surreptitiously bribed to part with the bodies of their dead relatives, and even the streets were being laid under contribution for their living wanderers. The exigencies of science had created a necessary evil; the natural and even justifiable prejudices of the nation, outraged and grieved, were against the seeking of a remedy. But the evil became so great, its worst and latest development was so shocking, that some steps had to be taken, even at the expense of human sentiment, to put matters on a right and proper footing. Men could not live without doctors who were thoroughly trained and experienced in all the intricacies and mysteries of the human frame; these doctors could not gain their experience

without "subjects," and "subjects" they must have by some means or other. Not, certainly, that the profession approved of murder to obtain their ends, but the result showed that the men upon whom the profession mainly depended had resorted to that terrible act to supply their patrons. The only feasible course open, therefore, was that made lawful by the Anatomy Act of 1832, which put upon a legal basis the purchase of bodies from relatives under certain wise and not too irksome conditions. It has been seen that notwithstanding the unhappy state of matters then existing, and the terrible scourge under which the country had so long suffered, there was a strong feeling against the passage of that measure; but on the other hand an interesting testimony was given in its favour when many of the highest in the land, amongst them the Duke of Sussex, the youngest son of King George III., and uncle of Queen Victoria, gave directions that if necessary their bodies should after death be anatomised. The science of anatomy, therefore, for the first time in its existence, made rapid progress, the art of healing and alleviating disease became more perfect, and although there is much still to be desired, research is unfettered, and the possibility of discoveries valuable to humanity are increased. It is curious, however, that in the last few years of these baneful restrictions, extraordinary results accrued from the researches of anatomists, and, strange though it may seem, the science was really put upon a scientific basis it had never occupied before.

But there was still another effect of the resurrectionist movement, and that was that it had a widening tendency on the religious beliefs of the people. The old idea is well expressed in the ballad written in 1711, and quoted in an early chapter in this volume, when the unknown author says:—

“Methink I hear the latter trumpet sound,
When emptie graves into this place is found,
Of young and old, which is most strange to me,
What kind of resurrection this should be.”

The people preferred to think of a resurrection which would in one respect and to a certain extent be comprehensible to them.

They thought they could understand the dead rising from the grave if their bodies were placed intact in the sepulchre, but they deemed that a body dissected and cut into pieces, probably portions buried in different places, was unlikely to be under the influence of the last call. In this they distrusted God in the belief of a doctrine which above all required a distinct act of faith in His almighty power. Their ideas, however, were widened, and they came to see that if it were possible for the Great Father of the human race to wake the dead on the judgment day when their dust lay peacefully beside the village church, it was also possible for Him to call them to Him though their particles lay far apart.

There is one other point which must not be omitted in a work of this kind. The transactions in the West Port of Edinburgh, in 1828, gave new words with a peculiar significance to the English language. A "burker" was unknown before the crimes of William Burke were made public; "burking" was an undiscovered art until he discovered it. This in itself is another testimony to the effect the crimes chronicled in this book had upon the minds of the men and women of the period. Many other words similarly derived have had a brief popularity, and dropped into oblivion, to be only hunted up by the philological antiquary, but these have retained their significance, and, by their aptitude to many actions in all phases of life, have attained to a classical position in the language to which their usefulness, rather than their origin, entitle them.



MRS HARE AND CHILD.
(From a Sketch taken in Court)