

17
Correct Account

OF THE

LIFE, CONFESSION,

AND

EXECUTION

OF

Wilm. Burke,

Who was Executed at Edinburgh on

Wednesday, **28 Jan. 1829.**



Burke and Hare.

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WILLIAM BURKE.

WILLIAM BURKE, was aged 32 or 33 years, was born in the parish of Orrey, county of Tyrone. His parents were of the order of peasantry, but respectable in their station. He was educated in the Catholic faith; but, as a worthy Irishman, of the same religion, observed to us—"Since he came to Scotland his person was never known to darken a chapel door." He received good education for one of his rank, this fact is proved, in a certain degree, by the circumstance of Burke having, at one period, made considerable sums of money in the West Port, writing begging petitions. Burke was originally brought up a weaver, in the town of Straban, but, tiring of that sedentary employment, he became a baker. The board being too oppressive for his head, he deserted the baking trade, and entered himself a private soldier in the Donegal Militia, in which his brother Constantine was a non-commissioned officer, and in which he himself served for five years. During most of that time he was a servant to one of the officers, and acquitted himself with such propriety as gained the respect of all who knew him. He married, during the same time, a woman in Ballinza, county of Mayo, by whom he had two children, who are now dead, but his wife still survives, and resides in Ireland. When his regiment was disbanded, he deserted his wife and children, and came to Scotland, and picked up from the streets of Glasgow the woman McDougal, with whom he has since cohabited. Her place of nativity is the Reddings in Stirlingshire; she still speaks the dialect of that place; and when her connexion with Burke commenced, she was a common prostitute, though a married woman, and her husband still living. She has always been and still is most eloquent in her praises of the kindly disposition of her paramour.

Soon after his arrival in Scotland, he engaged as a labourer on the Union Canal, when he came to reside in Edinburgh, which was about eleven years ago; but he has been occasi-

ly absent from that city for long periods. He pretended to be a cobbler, but how he learnt the trade, or whether he ever learnt it, is known to no one. When he was upon the canal, he engaged in the trade of resurrectionist, and practised it more or less until he entered upon the more horrible one of murder, the one, from its brutalizing tendencies, being a fitting preparative for the other. Previously to 18 months ago, he lived at Peebles, and went daily to road-making in the neighbourhood of Inverleithen. He then came to reside at Hare's house, and it was there, we believe, he was first initiated by him in the mysteries of kidnapping and murder. After having a dispute with Hare, Burke went to reside in the house of a relation of the name of Brogan, the father of the witness of that name. Brogan being unable to pay the rent, Burke became tenant of the house; and it was there that the crime was committed for which he died.

THE CONFESSION.

He was asked how long he had been engaged in this disorderous traffic? To which he answered, "From Christmas, 1827, till the murder of the woman Docherty, in October last." "How many persons have you murdered or been concerned in during that time? Were they thirty in all?" "Not so many; not so many; I assure you." "How many?" He answered the question, but the answer was, for a reason perfectly satisfactory, not communicated to us, and reserved for a different quarter.

"Had you any accomplices?"—"None but Hare. We always took care, when we were going to commit murder, that no one else should be present—that no one could swear to have seen the deed done. The women might suspect what we were about, but we always put them out of the way when we were going to do it. They never saw us commit any of our murders. One of the murders was done in Brogan's house, while he was out; but before he returned, the thing was finished, and the body put into a box. Brogan evidently suspected something, for he appeared much agitated, and requested us to 'take away the box,' which we accordingly did; but he was not in any way concerned in it."

You have already told me that you were engaged in these

atrocities from Christmas 1827 till the end of October 1828 were you associated with Hare during all that time?" "Yes we began with selling to Dr. — the body of a woman who had died a natural death in Hare's house. We got £10. for it. After this we began the murders, and all the rest of the bodies we sold to him were murdered."

"In what place were these murders generally committed?" "They were mostly committed in Hare's house, which was very convenient for the purpose, as it consisted of a room and a kitchen; Daft Jamie was murdered there; the story told of this murder is incorrect; Hare began the struggle with him, and they fell and rolled together on the floor; then I went to Hare's assistance, and we at length finished him though with much difficulty: I committed one murder in the country by myself; it was in last harvest; all the rest were done in conjunction with Hare."

"By what means were these fearful atrocities perpetrated?" — "By suffocation. We made the persons drunk, and then suffocated them by holding the nostrils and mouth, and getting on the body; sometimes I held the mouth and nose while Hare knelt upon the body; and sometimes Hare held the mouth and nose, while I placed myself upon the body. Hare has perjured himself by what he said at the trial about the murder of Docherty; he did not sit by while I did it, as he says; he was on the body assisting me with all his might while I held the nostrils and mouth with one hand, and choked her under the throat with the other; we sometimes used a pillow, but did not in this case."

"Now, Burke, answer me this question. Were you tutored or instructed, or did you receive hints from any one as to the mode of committing murder?" — "No, except from Hare. We often spoke about it, and we agreed that suffocation was the best way. Hare said so, and I agreed with him. We generally did it by suffocation." — Our informant omitted to interrogate him about the surgical instrument stated to have been found in his house; but this omission will be supplied.

"Did you receive any encouragement to commit or persuade others in committing these atrocities?" — "Yes; we were frequently told by Paterson that he would take as many bodies

re could get for him. When we got one, he always told to get more. There was commonly another person with of the name of Falconer. They generally pressed us to more bodies."

"To whom were the bodies so murdered sold?"—To Dr. —. We took the bodies to his rooms in ———, and went to his house to receive the money for them. Sometimes he paid us himself; sometimes we were paid by his agents. No questions were ever asked as to the mode in which we had come by the bodies. We had nothing to do, to leave a body at the rooms, and to go and get the mo-

Did you ever, upon any occasion, sell a body or bodies by other Lecturer here!" "Never. We knew no other." "You have been a resurrectionist (as it is called), I understand?" "No, neither Hare nor myself ever got a body out of a churchyard. All we sold were murdered, save the 1st one, which was the woman who died in Hare's house. We began with it: our crimes then commenced. The victims we sold were generally elderly persons. They could be more easily disposed of than persons in the vigour of youth."

HIS EXECUTION.

On this morning, between 8 and 9 o'clock, William Burke, the Edinburgh Murderer, paid the forfeit of his many crimes at the head of Libberton's Wynd, Edinburgh. As the executioner approached which was to terminate his career, the excitement, which has been so deep in that place, was greatly increased; and great fear was entertained that some tumultuous exhibition of public feeling would be made at the execution. Fortunately, however, no such occurrence took place.

For some days past, tickets had been exhibited on the windows in the neighbourhood, intimating them to be present on the occasion at from five shillings to 1 and 2 guineas. Burke was removed from the Calton Jail yesterday morning at 10 o'clock with the strictest privacy, and was lodged in a lock-up-house behind the Parliament Square, and in the neighbourhood of the place of execution. Here he was attended by the Catholic Priests, and received from them every attention. The measures adopted by the authorities did

not afford any opportunities to those in attendance on, to inquire any information nor did he seem inclined to communicative. He exclaimed at one time, "O that hour was come, which is to separate me from the world." He ascribed the commencement of his enormities to a vesting, which, it is presumed, was meant the formation of his intimacy with McDougal. On being asked on the subject of Daft Jamie's murder, he said that Hare's wife deceived him into Hare's house, and that Hare and his wife murdered him. During the night he slept soundly for several hours. In the afternoon, measures were begun to rail a portion of the street for the erection of the scaffold, & crowded the place all the time of its erection; and at midnight, and in the midst of a heavy rain, the crowd gave three cheers, when the cross beam to which the rope is fixed was placed in its position. By half-past six the walk of the Lawn Market and High Street, as far as a view could be obtained, were crowded, as well as the windows and tops of the adjoining houses; and the number was generally estimated at about 35,000. At about half-past seven o'clock the crowd began to exhibit symptoms of impatience, and gave a series of loud and long continued shouts, which were repeated at intervals till Burke was brought out. About eight o'clock this morning he complained to Mr. Christie, keeper of the lock-up, of the weight of his fetters, and requested that they might be taken off. This was instantly granted, and on holding up his leg to let them off, he exclaimed, "So may all my earthly fetters fall." He was attended afterwards in his cell by his instructors, and at seven was ushered into the keeper's room, where the magistrates and others were in waiting. To this room no reporters or one belonging to an Edinburgh paper was admitted; Magistrates having positively refused their permission.

Messrs. Reid and Stewart, the priests, administered such consolations as his religion afforded, and afterwards Burke thanked them and the Governor of the Jail for their kindness to him, and particularly thanked Mr. Christie, the keeper of the lock-up, for his attentions. He was then pinioned by the executioner, and shortly after he was about to retire to another apartment, but he was stopped by the executioner.

on this Burke coolly remarked, "It is not your time
After a short absence, he returned, and after some
er devotional exercises, was offered by one of the Mag-
es a glass of wine. This he accepted, and on drinking
"Farewell to all my Friends." Precisely at 8 o'clock
procession began to move up Liberton's Wynd from the
k-up, the City officers being first with their Lochaber
and the Magistrates following. Burke was next, and
supported by the two priests, and several others of the
ortities followed. He was dressed in a new suit of black
es which had been presented to him by the magistrates,
wore a white neckcloth. When the crowd discovered
ovement, consequent on the approach of the culprit,
raised a loud cry of exultation, mixed with groans and
ng, from every part of the dense mass of spectators.
e, who had walked at first with rather a firm but some-
undetermined step, seemed to understand the cause of
outing—his step became embarrassed and faltering,
his countenance displayed strong agitation. He shut
yes before he reached the head of the Wynd, and did
open them till on the scaffold: he seemed to be afraid
he reception he might meet with from the crowd, but
as assisted up the stairs to the platform. On his ap-
ance there the shouting was renewed; and Burke, turn-
his face towards the crowd, gave them a look of such
ful defiance, that the groans were redoubled: he then
t down with the priests, and the Rev. Mr. Marshall of-
l up a short but fervent and appropriate prayer. Even
ng this period of the public devotions, the crowd con-
ed to shout and groan, and persisted in so doing in des-
of the exertions of the Magistrates and others to keep
quiet. After Mr. Marshall finished, a few minutes
spent in conversation with the priest, during which
e seemed to be suffering dreadfully, but resumed a por-
of his firmness on receiving the handkerchief & mount-
he drop. On stepping up, he gave a singular look up-
ls to the hook to which the rope was affixed. The ex-
oner then proceeded to adjust the rope, upon which
ment cries were raised from every quarter, of "Burke
Burke him." here he seemed to have lost every feel-

ing; he repeated, as if unconsciously, the words whispered to him by the priest; his face assumed a colour as if he had been already suffocated, and he allowed his cap to be put over his face without a motion. At each step of the executioner's duty, the crowd raised another shout; and when the cap was drawn over the face, a cry was raised to keep it off altogether. The authorities then left the scaffold, and in half a minute the signal was given, and the drop fell. Here the shouting, groaning, and hissing, became louder than ever. The rope seemed to be too short, as it was evident he had but a very short fall, and the struggles which followed, shewed that he suffered much. His hands were extended convulsively, and once or twice he was observed to breathe deeply. The cry for punishment on Hare now became general. "Bring out Hare;" "Now for Hare" and one continued cry was kept up many minutes. The cry was kept up at intervals till he was cut down at nine o'clock. At this moment the crowd called for three cheers "for humanity," and one person from a window cried out "one cheer more," and was answered by the whole crowd. The crowd at this time seemed greatly agitated, and fear was entertained for the public peace, but they were fortunately unfounded. The strong body of police, indeed, which was present, under the charge of Captain Stewart, would have quelled any riotous movement, and the military were under arms in case of necessity. When the body was lowered to the coffin, previous to its being taken to the lock-up-hole, great anxiety was displayed by a number of persons to possess a piece of the Rope: and when disappointed in this they were content to secure a few of the shavings of which the coffin was stuffed. It should have been told, that it was the intention of the authorities to have had a psalm sung at the scaffold, and a preacher was there for that purpose, but the idea was prudently relinquished, on observing the state of feeling among the crowd, and the service was rendered as short as was consistent with the occasion.

FINIS

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