Life and Adventures

OF THAT NOTORIOUS

Robber and Murderer,

ICHARD TURPIN,

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF HIS

EXECUTION

Tyburn, on the 10th April, 1739, for Horse Stealing and Murder.



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The villian commonly called Dick Turpin must be regarded as one of the most distinguished public characters familiar to the country in which he figured; at all events, it a happy circumstance that few "public characters" a phrase to which individuals of a certain 'order' have evinced strong attachment) have become so distinguished as the delinquent whose history we are about to relate in the following pages, and it no less

fortunate that some of our public characters (using the term in the sense referred to) have been equally distinguished for their virtus, as Turpin and his compeers have been for their deeds of abomination; though the blackest crimes touch the public mind more forcibly, and not less transiently, than the brighest amiabilities, the latter being limitee to the circle in which the possessor moved while the former is rung in heavy numbers upon the lisfening ear of the populace at large, wyo catch the sounds as they vibrste with

the tensest anxiety and perturbation.

Dick Tuspin was for a long time the dread of travellers on the Essex road, an account of the daring robberies he daily committed; he was also a noted housebreaker; and though for a considerable time remarkably successful in his desperate career of robbery he was brought to an ignominious end, by circumstances which, in themselves, may appear trifling: he was apprehended in consequence of shooting a fowl; and his brother refusing to pay 6d. for the postage of his letter occasioned his conviction. He was the son of a farmer and grazier at Thaxted, in Essex, the place of his birth; and, having received a common school education, he was apprenticed to a butcher in White-chapel, in whose house he was conspicuous for gross impropriety of behaviour, and brutality of manners. On the expiration of his apprenticeship, at the persuasion of his friends, who hoped such a course would restrain his evil pursuits, he t wedded a young woman of East Ham, in roles in the following pages and the less Essex, named Hester Palmer, of a respectable family: but he had not been long married before he took to the practice of stealing his neighbours' cattle, which he used to kill

and cut up for sale.

Having stolen two oxen belonging to Mr. Giles, of Plaistow, he drove them to his own house; but two of Giles's servants, suspecting who was the robber, went to Turpin's. where they saw two carcases corresponding with the beasts which had been lost: as the hides were stripped from them, it was impossible to say that they were the same: but learning that Turpin used to dispose of his hides at Waltham Abbey, they want thither, and saw the hides of the beasts that had been stolen; when, no doubt remaining as to who was the robber, a warrant was procured for the apprehension of Turpin, who learning that the peace-officers were in search of him, made his escape from the back minddow of his house at the very moment the others were entering the door. Having retreated to a place of security, he found means to inform his wife where he was concealed; on which she furnished him with money, when he travelled into the hundreds of Essex, where he joined a gang of Smugglers, with whem he was for some time successful, till a set of the custom-house officers, by one successful stroke, deprived him of all his illacquired gains. His association with these smugglers commenced under strange circumstances: at a loss, in his retirement, to find means of replenishing his pocket, he hit upon the expedient of robbing the smugglers he might meet on the road, taking care not to attack a gang, but only a solitary traveller, as chance might throw such in his way; and even then his robbery was effected with a show of justice, as he represented himself to be deputed by the customs, and seized the

property in the king's name.

Thrown out of this kind of business, he formed one of a gang of deer-stealers, the principal part of whose depredations were committed on Epping Forest and the parks in its neighbourhood; but this business not succeeding to the expectations of the robbers, they determined to commence housebreakers. Their plan was to fix on houses which they presumed contained any valuable property; and while one of them knocked at the door, the others were to rush in, and seize whatever they might deem worthy of their notice. The first attack of this kind was at the house of Mr. Strype, an old man, who kept a chandler's shop at Watford, whom they robbed of all the money and other valuables in his possession, bu! without offering the inmates any personal abuse.

In one night this gang robbed Chinkford and Barking churches of all the moveables left in the vestries; but the plate at both places being in the hands of the respective churchwardens, they got an indifferent booty. Turpin and some of his companions cluded the search that was made after them three of the gang, however, were taken, one of whom turned evidence, and the other two

were transported."

Turpin next acquainted his associates that there was an old woman at Leighton, who was in possession of a great sum of money, which he was sure was hoarded in her house; whereupon, agreeing to rob her they proceeded to her house, when one of them knocked at the door; and the rest forcing their way into the house, tied handkerchiefs over the eyes of the old woman and her maid, and fastened a boy, her son, to the bedstead. This being done, Turpin demanded what money was in the house: and the owner hesitating to tell him, he threatened to set her on the fire if she did not make an immediate discovery: still she declined to give them any information; on which the villains actually placed her on the fire, where she sat till anguish compelled her to discover her hidden treasure; when the robbers possessed themselves of above 400l. and decamped with the booty!

Some little time after this they agreed to rob the house of a farmer at Rippleside, near Barking; and knocking at the door, the people declined to open it; on which they broke it open; and having bound the farmer, his wife, his son-in-law, and the servant-maid, they robbed the house of about 700l, which delighted Turpin so much that he exclaimed, "Ay, this will do! this is the thing, if it would but always be so!" and the robbers retired with their prize, which amounted to above 80l. a'man.

This desperate gang, flushed with success now determined to attack the house of

Mr. Mason, keeper of Epping Forest; and the time was fixed for carrying the plan into execution; but Thrpin having gone to London to spend his share of the former booty, intoxicated himself to such a degree, that he totally neglected the appointment. Nevertheless, three of the gang (Fielder, Rose, and Rust) resolved that the absence of their companion should not frustrate the proposed design; and having taken a solemn oath to break every article of furniture in Mason's house, they set out on their expedition. Having gained admission, they beat and kicked the unhappy man with great severity, finding an old man sitting by the fire-side, they permitted him to remain uninjured; the daughter of Mr. Mason escaped their fury, by running out of the house, and taking shelter in a pig-sty. After ransacking the lower part of the house, and doing much mischief, they went up stairs, where they broke everything that came in their way-among the rest a china punch-bowl, from which dropped 120 guineas, with which they immediately decamped. They set out for London, in search of Turpin, with whom they shared the booty, though he had not taken an active part in the execution of the villany.

On the 11th of January, 1735, Turpin and five of his companions went to the house of Mr. Saunders, a wealthy farmer of Charlton, in Kent. Arriving between seven and eight o'clock in the evening, they knocked at the door, and inquired if Mr. Saunders was at home. Being answered in the affirmative,

they rushed into the house, and found Mr. Saunders, his wife, and a few friends, playing at cards in the parlour. They told the company that they should remain uninjured, if they made no disturbance. Having made prize of a silver snuff-box which lay on the table, a part of the gang stood guard over the company, while the others compelled Mr. Saunders to accompany them through the house, whence they stole above 100l., exclusive of plate and other articles, which amounted to a considerable value. During these transactions, the servant-maid ran up stairs, and, barring the door of her room, called out, "Thieves!" with a view of alarming the neighbourhood; but the robbers broke open the door of her room, secured her, and then robbed the house of all the valuable property they had not before taken. Finding some minced pies, and some bottles of wine, they sat down to regale themselves; and meeting with a bottle of brandy, they compelled each of the company to drink a glass of it; when, on Mrs. Saunders fainting through terror, they administered some drops in water to her, and recovered her to the use of her senses. Having stayed in the house a considerable time, they packed up their booty and departed; having first declared, that if any of the family gave the least alarm within two hours, or advertised the marks of the stolen plate, they would ere long return and murder them.

On the 18th of the same month, they went to the house of Mr. Sheldon, at Croydon, in Surrey, where they arrived about seven in the evening. Having got into the yard, they perceived a light in the stable, where they found the coachman attending his horses. Having bound him, they quitted the stable, and met Mr. Sheldon in the yard, whom they compelled to conduct them into the house, whence they stole II guineas, and the jewels, plate and other valuables, to a large amount. Having committed this robbery, they returned Mr. Sheldon a couple of guineas, and apologised for their conduct!

This being done, they hastened to the Black Horse, Broadway, Westminster, where they concerted the robbery of Mr. Lawrence, of Edgeware, near Stanmore, in Middlesex. Their robberies had hitherto been carried on entirely on foot, with only the occasional assistance of a hackney coach; but now they aspired to appear on horseback, for which purpose they hired horses on the 4th of February following, at the Old Leaving Bar, in High Holborn, whence they set out about two o'clock in the afternoon, and arrived at the Queen's Head, near Stanmore, at four, where they stayed to regale themselves; by which means Mr. Wood, the landlord of the house, had so good an opportunity of observing the horses as to remember them when he saw them afterwards in King Street, Bloomsbury. where they were taken. Leaving the Queen's Head, they arrived at a public-house in the village of Stanmore, about five o'clock in the evening. From hence they went to Mr. Lawrence's house which they reached about seven o'clock, just after be had discharged

some workmen. Having quitted theirhorses at the outer gate, one of the robbers going forward found a boy who had just returned from folding his sheep; the rest of the gang following, a pistol was presented, and instant destruction threatened if he made any noise. They then took off his garters, and tied his hands; bidding him to direct them to the door, and when they knocked, to answer, and bid the servants open it, in which case they would not hurt him: but when the boy came to the door, he was so terrified that he could not speak; on which one of the gang knocked, and a man-servant, imagining it was one of the neighbours, opened the door, whereupon they all rushed in, with their pistols in their hands; when one of them exclaimed to the servant, "D- your blood! how long have you lived here?" Having seized Mr Lawrence and the servant, they threw cloths over their faces; and taking the boy into another room, they demanded what firearms were in the house; to which he replied; only an old gun, which they broke in pieces. They then bound Mr. Lawrence and his man, and made them sit, by the boy; when Turpin commenced searching the master by cutting down his breeches, from the pockets of which they obtained a guinea, a Portugal piece of 36s. value, and about 15s. in silver; not being satisfied with this booty, they forced him to conduct them up stairs, where they broke open a closet, whence they stole some money and plate; but this not being yet sufficient to satisfy them, they threatened to murder Mr. Lawrence, each of them destining him

to a different death, as the savageness of his own nature prompted him. At length one of them took a kettle of water from the fire, and threw it over him; but it providentially happened not to be hot enough to seald him. In the interim, the maid-servant, who was churning butter in the dairy, hearing a noise in the house, apprehended some mischief; on which she blew out her candle to screen herself, but being found in the course of their search, one of the miscreants forced her up stairs, where he insisted upon gratifying his brutal passion; at the same time endcavouring to prevail upon her, by alternate threats and promises, to divulge the secret hoard of money, though she persisted in her ignorance of any such hoard being in the house. Lawrence being ordered down stairs, one of them took a chopping-bill, and threatened to cut of his leg: they then brutally fractured his head with their pistols, and dragged him about by the hair of his head, swearing they "would do for him," if he did not immediately inform them where the rest of his money was hid. They then ransacked every part of the house, and found 201. in a box belonging to Mr. Lawrence, jun.; and robbing the house of all the valuable effects they could find, they locked the family in the parlour, threw the keys of the house into a water-closet, and took their plunder to London.

The particulars of this atrocious robbery being represented to the king, a proclamation was issued for the apprehension of the offender is promised a pardon and a reward of 50l. to any one of them who would impeach his accomplices. This, however, had no effect on the villains, who continued their depredations, and, flushed with their success,

seemed to bid defiance to the laws.

On the 7th of February, six of them assembled at the White Bear inn, in Drury Lane, where they agreed to rob the house of Mr. Francis, a farmer, near Mary-la-bonne. Arriving at the place at dusk, they found a servant in the cowhouse, whom they bound fast, and threatened to murder, if he was not perfectly silent: this being done, they led him into the stable, where they found another servant, whom they bound in the same manner. Mr. Francis happening to come home in the interim, they presented their pistols to his breast, and threatened instant destruction to him, if he made the least noise or opposition. Having bound the master in the stable with his servants, they rushed into the house, and found Mrs. Francis, her daughter, and the maid-servant, beating them in a most cruel manner. One of the thieves stood as sentry, while the rest rifled the house, in which they found a silver tankard, a medal of Charles the First, a gold watch, several gold rings, a considerable sum of money; and a variety of valuable linen and other effects, which they conveyed to London.

Hereupon a reward of 100l. was offered for the apprehension of the offenders; in consequence of which two of them were taken into custody, tried, convicted on the evidence

of an accomplice, and hanged,

The whole gang being now dispersed, Turpin went into the country to renew his depredations on the highway. On a journey toward Cambridge, he met a man genteelly dressed, and well mounted; and expecing a good booty, he presented a pistol to the supposed gentleman, and demanded his money. The party thus stopped happened to be King, a similar character, who knew Turpin; and when the latter threatened destruction if he did not deliver his money, King burst into a fit of laughter, and sail, What! dog eat dog? Come, come, brother Turpin; if you don't knew me, I know you, and shall be glad of your company." These brethren in iniquity soon struck the bargain, and immediately entering on business, committed a number of robberies; till at length they were so well known, no public-house would receive them as guests. Thus situated, they fixed on a spot between the King's Oak and the Loughton Road, on Epping Forest, where they found a cave large enough to provide shelter for themselves and horses. This cave was inclosed within a thicket of bushes and brambles, through which, unobserved, they could look and see passengers on the road. From this station they used to issue, and rob such a number of persons, that at length the very pedlars who travelled the road carried fire-arms for their defence; and, while they were in this retreat, Turpin's wife used to supply them with necessaries, and frequently remained in the cave during the night.

Having taken a ride as far as Bungay, in Suffolk, they observed two young women receive 147. for eorn, on which Turpin resolved to rob them of the money. King objected, saying it was a pity to rob such pretty girls; but Turpin was obstinate, and obtained the booty il is a sort a distant;

Upon their return home on the following day, they stopped a gentleman named. Bradele, of London, who was riding in his chariot with his children; and who, seeing only one robber, was preparing to make resistance. when King called to Turpin to hold the horses. They took from him his watch, money, and an old mourning ring; but returned the latter, as be declared that, though its intrinsic value was trifling, he was very unwilling to part with it. Finding that they readily parted with the ring, he asked them what he must give for the watch: on which King said to Turpin, "What say ye, Jack? Here seems to be a good honest fellow; shall we let him have the watch?" Turpin replied. "Do as you please;" You must pay six guineas for it : we never sell for more, though the watch should be worth, six and thirty." The gentleman promised that the money should be left at the Dial, in Birchin Lane.

At length, on the 4th of May, 1737, Turpin was guilty of murder. A reward of 100%. having been offered for apprehending him, Thomas Morris, a servant of Mr. Thompson, one of the keepers of Epping Forest, accompanied by a higgler, set out in order to apprehend him. Turpin seeing them approach near his dwelling, Mr. Thompson's man having a gun, he mistook them for poachers; on which he said, there were no hares near

that thicket. "No," said Morris; "but I have found a Turpin;" and presenting his gun, required him to surrender. The other thereupon spoke to him, as in a friendly manner, and gradually retreated at the same time, till, having seized his own gun, he shot him dead upon the spot, and the higgler ran

off with the utmost precipitation.

This murder being represented to the secretary of State, the following proclamation was issued by government.—"It having been represented to the King, that Richard Turpin did on Wednesday, the 4th of May last, murder Thomas Morris, servant to Mr. Henry Thompson, one of the keepers of Epping Forest, and the same Richard Turpin continually committing notorious fclonies and robberies near London, his Majesty is pleased to promise his most gracious pardon to any of his accomplices, and a reward of 2001. to any person or persons that shall discover him, so that he may be apprehended and convicted. Turpin was born at Thaxted, in Essex; he is about thirty, by trade a butcher, about five feet nine inches high, very much marked with the small-pox, his cheek-bones broad, his face thinner towards the bottom, his visage short: he stands nearly upright, and is broad about the shoulders."

Turpin, to avoid the proclamation, went farther into the country in search of his old companion, King; sending a letter to his wife, to meet him at a public-house at Hertford. She attended to this direction; and her husband coming into the house soon after she arrived, a butcher, to whom he owed 51.

happened to sec him, and assailed him with. "Come, Dick, I know you have money now; and if you will pay me, it will be of great scrvice." Turpin told him his wife was in the next room; that she had money, and he should be paid immediately: but while the butcher was hinting to some of his acquaintance, that the person present was Turpin, and that they might take him into custody after he had received his debt, the highwayman made his escape through a window, and rode off with great expedition.

Turpin having found King, and a man named Potter, who had lately connected himself with them, they set off towards London, in the dusk of the evening; and when they came near the Green Man, on Epping Forest, they overtook a gentleman of the name of Major, riding on a very fine horse, which Turpin compelled the rider to dismount, his own beast being jaded, and ex-

change.

The robbers now pursued their journey towards London, and Mr, Major, going to the Green Man, gave an account of the affair; on which it was conjectured that Turpin had been the robber, and that the horse which he exchanged must have been stolen. Mr. Major being advised to print handbills immediately, notice was soon given to the landlord of the Green Man, that such a horse as Mr. Major had lost had been left at the Red Lion, in Whitechapel. The landlord going thither determined to wait till some person came for it; and, at about eleven at night, King's brother came to pay for the

horse, and take him away; on which he was immediately seized, and conducted into the house. Being asked what right he had to the horse, he said he had bought it; but the landlord examining a whip which he had in his hand, found a button at the end of the handle half broken off, and the name of Major on the remaining half; whereupon he was given into the eustody of a constable. As it was supposed, however, that he was not the actual robber; he was told he should have his liberty, if he would discover his employer; on which he said, a stout man, in a white duffil coat, was waiting for the horse in Red Lion Street; and the company going thither saw King, who drew a pistol and attempted to fire it, but it flashed in the pan: he then endeavoured to draw out another pistol; but he could not, as it got entangled in his pocket. Turpin was watching at a small distance, and riding towards the spot: King cried out, "Shoot him, or we are taken;" when Turpin fired, and shot his companion, owho called out, ""Dick, you have killed me!" on which the other rode off at full speed. King lived a week after this affair, and gave information that Turpin might be found at a house near Hackney Marsh; and, on inquiry, it was discovered that Turpin had been there on the night that he rode off, lamenting he had killed King. who was his most faithful associate.

For a considerable time Turpin skulked about the forest, having been deprived of his retreat in the cave since he shot the servant of Mr. Thomson. Examining this cave, it

was found to contain two shirts, two pair of stockings, a piece of ham, and a part of a bottle of wine.

Mons. C—, a Frenchman, was surprised on the road to Newmarket by Turpin, who, having repeated in vain the word of command, "Stand!" fired a pistol at him; but the ball happily missed him: fearing a second summons of the same kind, Mons. C. resolved to obey; when Turpin took his money, his watch and his snuff-box, leaving him only 2s. to continue his journey. Before he left him, he required his word of honour that he would not cause him to be pursued, nor inform against him before a justice, which being given, they parted very courteously.

Some vain attempts were made to take this notorious offender into custody; and among the rest the huntsman of a gentleman in the neighbourhood went in search of him with bloodhounds. Turpin perceiving them, and recollecting that the Second Charles evaded his pursuers under covert of the friendly oak, mounted one of these trees, under which the hounds passed, to his inexpressible terror, so that he determined to retreat into Yorkshire.

Going first to Long Sutton in Lincolnshire, he stole some horses, for which he was taken into custody; but he escaped from the constable as he was conducting him before a magistrate, and hastened to Welton, in Yorkshire, where he assumed the name of John Palmer, with the character of a gentleman. Hence he frequently went into Lincolnshire, where he stole horses, which he brought into

Yorkshire, and either sold or exchanged them:

He often accompanied the neighbouring gentlemen on their parties of hunting and shooting; and one evening, on a return from an expedition of the latter kind, he wantonly shot a cock belonging to his landlord. this, Mr. Hall, a neighbour, said, "You have done wrong in shooting your landlord's cock;" to which Turpin replied, that if he would stay while he loaded his gun, he would shoot him. Irritated by this insult Mr. Hall informed the landlord of what had passed; and application being made to some Magistrates, a warrant was granted for the apprehension of the offender, who was taken into custody, and carried before a bench of justices, then assembled at the Quarter Sessions, at Beverley, when security was demanded for his good behaviour; being unable or unwilling to give the same, he was committed to Bridewell.

Oninquiry, it appeared that he made frequent journeys into Lincolnshire, and on his return always abounded in money, and was likewise in possession of several horses; so that it was conjectured he was a horse-stealer and highwayman. On this the Magistrates went to him on the following day, and demanded who he was, where he lived, and what was his employment? He replied in substance, "that about two years ago he had lived at Long Sutton, in Lincolnshire, and was by trade a butcher, but that having contracted several debts, for sheep that proved rotten, he was obliged to abscond, and

came to live in Yorkshire." The magistrates not being satisfied with the tale, commissioned the clerk of the peace to write into Lincolnshire to make the necessary inquiries respecting the supposed John Palmer. The letter was carried by a special messenger, who brought an answer from a magistrate in the neighbourhood of Long Sutton, importing that John Palmer was well known, though he had never carried on trade there; that he had been accused of sheep-stealing, for which he had been in custody, but had made his escape from the peace officers; and that there were several informations lodged against him for horse-stealing. The magistrates thereupon thought it prudent to remove him to York Castle, where he had not been more than a month, when two persons from Lincolnshire came and claimed a mare and foal, and a horse, which he had stolen in that

After he had been about four months in prison, he wrote the following letter to his

brother in Essex.

"York, Feb. 6, 1739.

"Dear Brother—I am sorry to acquaint you, that I am now under confinement in York Castle, for horse-stealing. If I could procure an evidence from London to give me a character, that would go a great way towards my being accquitted. I had not been long in this county before my being apprehended, so that it would pass off the readier. For Heaven's sake, dear brother, do not

neglect me. You will know what I mean, when I say, not come established wire con

"I am yours affectionately,

"JOHN PALMER."

This letter being returned, unopened, tothe post-office in Essex, heeause the brother! would not pay the postage, it was accidentally, seen by Mr. Smith, a school-master, who, having taught Turpin to write, immediately knew the hand, on which he earried the letter to a magistrate, who broke it open; and it was thereby discovered that the supposed John Palmer was the real Richard Turpin. The magistrates of Essex consequently despatched Mr. Smith to York, who immediately selected him from all the other prisoners; in the Castle. This Mr. Smith and another gentleman afterwards proved his identity only

Among the elaimants of stolen horses was: Capt. Dawson of Farraby: his horse was that on which Turpin rode on his going to

Beverley. On the rumour that the noted Turpin was a prisoner in York Castle, persons flocked from all parts of the country to take a view of him, and debates ran very high whether he was the real person or not. Among the number that visited him, was a young fellow who pretended to know the famous Turpin; he regarded him a considerable time with looks of great attention, when he told the keeper he would bet him half-a-guinea that he was not Turpin; on which the prisoner whispering the keeper, said, "Lay him the wager, and I'll go your halves."

Being brought to trial, this notorious malefactor was convicted on two indictments, upon which he received sentence of death. After conviction he wrote to his father, imploring him to intercede with a gentleman and lady of rank to make interest that his sentence might be remitted, and that he might be transported. The father did what was in his power; but the notoriety of his character was such, that no persons would exert themselves in his favour.

This man lived in the gayest and most thoughtless manner after conviction, reckless of all considerations of futurity, and affecting to make a jest of the dreadful fate that awaited him. Not many days before his execution, he purchased a new fustian frock and a pair of pumps, in order to wear them at the time of his death; and, on the day before, he hired five poor men, at 10s. each, to follow the cart as mourners: he likewise gave hatbands and gloves to several other persons; and left a ring, and some other articles, to a married woman in Lincolnshire, with whom he had been acquainted.

On the morning of the 10th of April, 1739, this hero of highwaymen—for he was held to be the hero of any gang with which he connected himself—was put into a cart, and, followed by the mourners he had engaged, drawn to the place of execution; in his way to which he bowed to the spectators with an air of the most astonishing indifference and intrepidity. When he came to the fatal tree, on ascending the ladder, his right leg trembled, and he stamped it down with

an air of assumed courage, as if ashamed of discovering any signs of fear. Having conversed with the executioner about half an hour, he threw himself off the ladder, and expired in a few minutes. The spectators of the execution were affected at his fate, as he was distinguished by the comeliness of his appearance. He had attained the thirty-third year of his age. At the execution he had a fellow sufferer in the person of John Stead, who was also found guilty on a similar indietment—namely horse-stealing.

Turpin's corpse was taken to the Blue Boar in Castle Gate, York, where it remained till the next morning when it was interred in the churchyard of St. George's parish, with an inscription on the coffin, initials of his name, and his age. The grave was dug. remarkably deep; but notwithstanding the people who acted as mourners took such measures as they thought would secure the body, it was carried off about three o'clock on the following morning: the populace, however, got intimation where it was conveyed, and found it in a garden belonging to one of the surgeon's of the city. Gaining possession of it, they laid it on a board, and carried it through the streets in a kind of triumphal manner; after which they filled the coffin with unslackened lime, and buried it in the grave where it had been before deposited.