

XXXVII. *Extracts of several Letters from John Huxham, M.D. of Plymouth, F.R.S. and Mr. Tripe, Surgeon, at Ashburton in Devonshire, concerning a Body found in a Vault in the Church of Staverton in that County: Communicated by Thomas Stack, M. D. F. R. S.*

Extract of a Letter from Dr. Huxham to Dr. Stack, dated, Plymouth, June 29, 1750.

Read July 5. ^{1750.} I THINK the inclosed account is very extraordinary. You may depend upon it, that it is altogether true. Mr. Tripe is a very ingenious and observing surgeon at Ashburton near Staverton. Besides, I have had it from several other persons of great probity and honour.

Mr. Tripe to Dr. Huxham.

S I R,

Ashburton, June 28, 1750.

THERE having been a great diversity of reports relating to a body lately discover'd in a vault in Staverton-church, I have taken the liberty of communicating to you the few following particulars; in hopes thereby to induce you to inform yourself more fully by your own inspection.

As it does not appear by the register of burials, that any person has been deposited in this vault since October 15, 1669, it is certain, that a body has lain there

there upwards of fourscore years: yet, when the vault was open'd about four months ago, it was found as perfect in all its parts, as if but just interr'd. The whole body was plump and full; the skin white, soft, smooth, and elastic; the hair strong, and the limbs nearly as flexible as when living.

A winding sheet, which was as firm as if but just applied, inclosed it from head to foot; and two coarse linen cloths, dipp'd in a blackish substance like pitch, infolded the winding-sheet. The body thus protected was placed in an oaken coffin, on which, as it was always cover'd with water, was found a large stone and a log of wood, probably to keep it at the bottom.

Various have been the conjectures as to the cause of its preservation; and as it has been reported, tho' probably without foundation, that the person was a Roman-catholic, there have been some of that religion, who, not having philosophy enough to account for it from natural causes, have attributed it to a supernatural one, and canonized him; and, in consequence of this, have taken away several pieces of the winding-sheet and pitch-cloths, preserving them as reliques with the greatest veneration.

In my opinion, the pitch-cloths and water overthrow the miracle, and bring it within the power of natural agents; the former, by defending the body from the external air, and the latter, by preserving the tenacity of the pitch. The left side, from the middle of the forehead to the *scrotum*, having been for some time exposed to the air, is now grown black, and moulders away; but where the pitch-cloths remain, the parts underneath are perfectly fresh and firm. As the coffin is now pretty much injured,
tho'

tho' intirely found, when the vault was first open'd, the body is order'd by Mr. Worth, of Worth near Tiverton, whose ancestor he is, to be speedily removed to another, and then nailed up. I am

Yours, &c.

Nicholas Tripe.

Dr. Huxham to Dr. Stack.

Dear Sir,

Read Octob. 24. 1751. I AM very sorry I could not myself attend the dissection, which I had designed, but was hinder'd. Mr. Tripe however told me, he found the heart and lungs as found, as if the person had not been dead above four days, but much more flat and compressed than usual; the joints very flexible and supple; the knees in particular, the *patella*, tendons, ligaments, and the whole articulation being as smooth, unctuous, and flexible, as in a body newly dead. He also gave me a piece of the pitch-cloth, which enveloped the whole body wrapp'd up within in the linen sheet, as mention'd in the letter I formerly sent you, of which you took a copy, and to which I refer you.

I have inclosed a piece of the pitch, or tar, resin, and turpentine, with which the outer *involucrum* was besmeared. I take it to be pitch or tar, and turpentine; as it readily dissolves in *sp. vini*, and smells like it when melted.

Simon

Simon Worth Esq; whose corps this is, died at Madrid, and was sent home in the manner described, and so buried. His wife's coffin, who was buried in the same vault two years before, and two of his children about 11 years after (as appears by the register) were quite rotten. The oaken coffin, pitch-cloth, and water, seem greatly to have contributed to the preservation of this body. His coffin was found very sound. I am, Sir,

Your very affectionate

May 21, 1751.

obliged humble servant,

J. Huxham.

Mr. Tripe to Dr. Huxham.

S I R,

Read Octob. 24.
1751.

AS in a former letter I gave you some particulars relating to the external parts of the body, and its preserving apparatus, in this I shall give you an account of the internal. But before I enter upon this description, I must beg leave to observe to you, that as a great number of people resorted to the vault, on the fame of this extraordinary corps, the anterior parts of the body, from the middle of the forehead to the *pudenda*, except the right side of the *thorax*, the right *hypochondrium*, *ile*, and *inguen*, were soon stripped of the tar-cloth and winding-sheet, in order, as the different motives of curiosity or superstition prevail'd, to be preserved as reliques,

reliques, or to commemorate so remarkable an event.

July 9, 1749, having in the first place remov'd the body, half-cover'd with water and mud, to a convenient part of the churchyard, divested it of its coverings, and wash'd off the filth, I made an incision thro' the integuments and muscles of the left buttock, and found the *membrana adiposa* pretty near an inch thick; its *adeps* of a pale yellow, very dry, hard, and friable, and the membranous parts, except the cellular coat of the muscle, which was scarce sensibly altered, quite indistinct. The water having probably made its way thro' the *vasa absorbentia* to the *glutæus maximus*, its *fasciculi* were thin, pale, and flaccid, exhibiting the appearance of beef macerated in water; but those of the *medius* and *minimus*, especially the latter, to which it had no access, with their proper moisture and softness, still retained their natural fulness, red colour, strength, and elasticity.

In order, in the next place, to inform you of the state of the *peritonæum* and abdominal *viscera*, I made a crucial incision thro' the integuments and muscles of the *abdomen*, carrying the longitudinal section from the *cartilago ensiformis* to the *os pubis*, and the transverse from the right side of the *regio lumbaris* thro' the *umbilicus* to the left; and as the *abdomen* had been so long expos'd to the air, its integuments and muscles, except the *aponeuroses* in immediate contact with the *peritonæum*, which had undergone no material alteration, were grown very black, dry, hard, and like rotten timber void of smell, and mouldering into dust. On dividing the *peritonæum*, which throughout its whole extent was of a natural

colour, found, firm, smooth, and extensible, I found the *omentum* nearly in a similar state to that of the *membrana adiposa*, full an inch thick, and extended to the lower part of the *hypogastrium*. The left lobe of the liver was of a pale brown complexion, dry, hard, and shrunk; but the right still preserved its natural dusky red colour, softness, and extension. The *vesica fellis* was quite empty, but in all other respects in a natural state; as were likewise the *ductus cysticus hepaticus* and *communis choledochus*, the *vena porta*, *ligamentum latum* or *suspensorium*, and *rotundum*. The spleen was of a pale bluish grey colour, lax incoherent texture, rough unequal surface, very dry, hard, crisp, and contracted. The stomach was somewhat inflated, and its *villi* in consequence imperceptible. There was no appearance of aliment in it, or of *faeces alvinæ* in the intestines, but in both, as well the *intestina tenuia* as *crassa*, a blackish liquid inflammable tar-like substance, wholly soluble in oil; and for the most part in spirits of wine dephlegmated, but absolutely immiscible with water: their internal surface, especially where it was cover'd with this tar-like matter, was of a brown complexion, and somewhat rough and indurated, but their external was of a natural colour, perfectly smooth and soft. The *pancreas* was almost cover'd with a pale-colour'd dry indurated coat, and of a pale reddish complexion, but not altogether so moist and soft as in a natural state. The mesentery was wholly encompassed with a pretty large quantity of pale-colour'd fat, which in the left side of the *abdomen*, especially near the *omentum*, was quite dry and hard, and the mesentery itself in a manner indistinguishable, but in the right somewhat

what less dry and hard, and the mesenteric glands and *laminæ* more distinct. The kidneys and *glandulæ renales* were involved in a very plentiful portion of fat; and for the most part the ureters; that of the left kidney and *glandula renalis* resembling the fat of the mesentery in the left side of the *abdomen*, and that of the right, the fat of the mesentery in the right side: the left kidney and *glandula renalis* were nearly of the same brown complexion, but in every other respect in a state analogous to that of the spleen: the left ureter was of a natural colour, soft, smooth, and flexible; but where enveloped with fat, something hard, rough, and inflexible: the right kidney and *glandula renalis*, together with the right ureter, were in all respects in a natural state, as was likewise the *vesica urinaria*, except that it was quite empty, and its coats considerably thicken'd and contracted. The *aorta* and *vena cava*, together with their capital branches, the *receptaculum chyli* and *vesiculæ seminales*, being cover'd with fat, which was likewise of a pale complexion, and more or less dry and hard, as it was situated in the right or left side of the *abdomen*, I was obliged to content myself with inspecting the large and more obvious parts; it being altogether impracticable to remove the *viscera*, as I was surrounded and press'd by near an hundred people, during the whole time of dissection.

I come now to acquaint you with the condition of the *pleuræ*, and contents of the *thorax*: and in order thereto, I extended the longitudinal section of the *abdomen*, quite thro' the *parietes* of the *thorax*, on the left side of the *sternum* to the clavicle; and tho' the integuments and muscles of the *thorax* were in a

parallel state with those of the *abdomen*, the cartilages of the ribs were pretty white, firm, smooth, and elastic. The *pleuræ*, together with its duplicatures, the *mediastinum*, which I separated from the *sternum*, in order to inspect the right cavity of the *thorax*, were found, and of a natural colour, firm texture, smooth equal surface, soft and pliable. The *pericardium*, except where it adher'd to the tendinous part of the diaphragm, was invested with fat, of a pale complexion, but not altogether so dry and hard as that in the left side of the *abdomen*, and throughout inseparably conjoined with the heart, which was very large, and of a depressed figure, dry, hard, and constricted. The left lobe of the lungs near the *pericardium* was of a very pale brown colour, with a faint cast of red, considerably collapsed, somewhat dry and hard, and the investing membrane of a rough uneven surface, quite dry and rigid; but the remaining part, together with the right, were of a redder complexion, lax spongy texture, soft and compressible, and their investing membrane of a smooth even surface, soft and flaccid. The *aspera arteria* and *oesophagus* were for the most part thinly cover'd with fat, like that of the *pericardium*, but in all respects in a natural condition, as were likewise the *aorta*, *vena cava*, pulmonary arteries and veins, and all their capital branches. The diaphragm was considerably relaxed, and of a concavo-convex figure; and except that its muscular part was a little paler than it ought, and its tendinous, where connected to the *pericardium*, a little harder, it was in every respect according to nature. The *viscera* of the *thorax* and *abdomen* were well-proportion'd, and quite free from any preternatural

preternatural adhesion to one another, or to the *pleura*, diaphragm, or *peritonæum*.

I shall now describe to you the state of the parts concern'd in the articulation of the knee; and having for that purpose remov'd the integuments and muscles from the joint, I found the tendinous ligaments covering the anterior convex surface of the *patella* of a whitish complexion, firm, smooth, and flexible, and the cartilage covering the posterior, white, solid, smooth, and elastic. The burfal and crucial ligaments, the femilunar cartilages, mucilaginous glands, and the adipose substance, in which the glands were seated, were all moisten'd with *sinophia*, and in their natural order. The anterior surface of the *patella* was somewhat rough and black; but the posterior, together with the processes and cavities in the superior part of the *tibia*, and the *apophyses* and cavity in the inferior part of the *os femoris*, were in all respects in a natural state.

I shall finish this account of the dissection with a description of the state of the tendons in the left arm, near the wrist, together with that of the *occipitalis* muscle, *pericranium*, and *os occipitis*. As to the former, tho' the integuments and muscles were black and mouldering, the tendons were of a whitish colour, close contexture, hard and smooth; and as to the latter, having separated the integuments in the *occiput*, I found the *occipitalis* muscle quite red, moist soft; strong, and contractile, the *pericranium* tolerably white, firm, smooth, and unelastic; and the *os occipitis* of a very firm and solid texture, somewhat rough and black, but, on scraping off the surface, smooth, and of a natural colour.

Having

Having thus given you the particulars of the dissection, I must impose yet a little more on your patience, while I communicate to you the state of the external parts of the body describ'd in the former letter, as it appear'd at the time of dissection; as likewise that of some others, which have hitherto been unobserv'd. To begin with the first: the body was somewhat extenuated, and the skin of a dark complexion; but, except where it was expos'd to the air, firm, soft, smooth, and flexible. The hair, for the most part, was separated from the scalp; it was pretty thick, and of a blackish colour, with a few grey ones intermix'd, about five inches in length, soft, strong, and elastic: there was no appearance of any besides in any other part of the body; but I was inform'd by Mr. Preston, the present proprietor of the vault, and a surgeon's apprentice in the neighbourhood, who saw the body, when it was first discover'd, that it had then a dark-colour'd beard, about three inches and a quarter in length. The joints were altogether as flexible as in a natural state. The *tunica adnata* of each eye was of a loose contexture, quite rough and discolour'd, and the *cornea* opaque, flat, and wither'd. As the head lay near the entrance into the vault, some one, in getting down, had probably stepp'd on his face, and thereby considerably depress'd all the lower part of the nose, and forced a few of the *dentes incisores* out of their sockets. The integuments and muscles, especially those of the depressed part of the nose, were quite consum'd, and the cartilages following their fate. The teeth were exceedingly hard, and firmly fix'd in their sockets, somewhat rough, and of a blackish colour. All the
tongue

tongue was consum'd, except its investing membrane, which was likewise of a blackish colour, and wasting away. The integuments and muscles of the face, from the middle of the forehead to the chin, were become black, and crumbling into dust. The *pu-denda* were quite reduced to their membranes, which were also become black, and mouldering away. The nails were grown about the third part of an inch beyond the fingers and toes, and excepting a little alteration in colour, in every respect in a natural state.

I shall now restrain my pen from being any further tedious, and hope what I have communicated will be acceptable to you.

Ashburton, Sept. 18.
1751.

Your most obedient servant,

Nicholas Tripe.

XXXVIII. *Extract of a Letter from Professor Euler, of Berlin, to the Rev. Mr. Caspar Wettstein, Chaplain to Her Royal Highness the Princess Dowager of Wales.*

S I R,

Read Oct. 24. **Y**OU have heard, without doubt, that
1751. that the Academy at St. Petersburg have fixed a prize of one hundred ducats, which they will give every year to him, who shall give the best answer to the question, that shall be proposed; and for the first time they have proposed this question:

“ Whether