

The FUNERAL DIRECTOR

VOL. IV.

MONTREAL, MARCH 15TH, 1890.

No. 3

English Mummies.

Rev. W. Gover, Hon. Canon of Worcester, writes to *The Times*:—"In 1849-50 I was curate resident in the rectory of St. Andrew's, Holborn. One day the grave-digger told me that there was a perfect body under the church, and offered to show it to me. I fell in with his offer. A wide passage north and south divided the space under the floor of the church, and opened by iron gates to the churchyard. On each side were ranged coffins east and west, piled one on the other to the ceiling, and chained together when belonging to one family, with a few scant spaces between the piles. We edged in between two piles. Then the rows of piles gradually decreased in height, and a brown dust, the decomposition of the lower coffins, grew thicker and deeper beneath our feet as we pushed on. We made our way almost close to the south-west end, where the coffins had disappeared and their mouldered dust rose knee deep. Among this the grave-digger searched, and, after removing it to the depth of several inches, exposed the face, head, and bust of a woman, apparently young, with long hair. The corpse was a dull cream colour. The hand, which I took in mine, felt plump and soft."

Mr. J. Graham Churcher writes.—"Upon the removal of the bodies from the vault of the Church of St. Benet, Gracechurch, at the corner of Fenchurch Street, in 1867 (of which at that time I

was churchwarden), we came upon a coffin over a hundred years old, which, on being opened, was found to contain the body of a girl in a perfect state of preservation—skin, hair, &c., exactly as perfect as in life, but within ten minutes of exposure to the air it was resolved into a grey powder, the whole of which could have been contained in a breakfast cup. This, of course, was no case of embalming, but of being hermetically closed."

Mr. J. Seymour Haden writes:—"Sixteen years ago, while making experiments with various substances possessed in a greater or less degree of this property, I found that, given the presence of air, oak sawdust would preserve a body, and oak charcoal (and perhaps any other charcoal recently burred) would cause its disappearance. In a church in the Minories, some years afterwards, I saw just such a box which had in it the mummified head of that Duke of Suffolk who was the father of Lady Jane Grey, and who had been beheaded in the Tower close by. Now, of that nobleman's head there is a fine portrait in oils, by Holbein, which, singularly enough, was exhibited at the Old Master Exhibition of the Royal Academy, in the very year in which the actual head was discovered in the Minories, so that anyone taking the trouble, as I did, to go from one exhibition to the other, might see for himself the likeness between the two. In that case, though the colour of the skin was dark, its follicles were well preserved, while at the back

of the neck were two distinct 'chops,' by no means in exact parallelism."

The Prebendary of Hereford writes:—"Gilbert Ironside, Bishop of Hereford, who had been Warden of Wadham, and Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, in the trying times under James II., died in 1701, and was buried in the city church of St. Mary, Somerset, where the Bishops of Hereford had a house. The church was taken down, under the Union of Benefices Act, in 1867, and Bishop Ironside's body now lies beneath the same grave stone in Hereford Cathedral; but it was necessary to identify the coffin, which was of lead only, without inscription, and which did not lie immediately beneath the stone. This was done under the direction of the learned and accomplished rector, the late Dr. Stepping, who told me that the coffin was found to be filled with sawdust. Some of this was removed from the hand, but as no episcopal ring was seen, the face was uncovered, and was in perfect preservation, recognised at once from the Bishop's portrait."—*Undertakers' Journal, London, (Eng.)*

HERE is a unique specimen of a medical certificate of death. It was tendered by a native apothecary at a recent inquest in India:—I think she died or lost her life for want of food or on account of starvation, and perhaps for other things of her comfortables, and most probably she died by drowning.