

But the laws of tendency cannot be escaped; and if the people of this country continue in the same mind, if they expect their clergy to be, upon the whole, a married clergy, and moving in the full tide of such life as they live themselves, one or other of two alternatives must infallibly take place—either some vast and successful effort must be made, or, most disastrously and most paradoxically, the facts of modern life being what they are, the profession of a clergyman must in the future become a profession mainly for those who are rich.

H. T. ARMPFIELD.

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ART. II.—CLERICAL LIFE IN IRELAND A HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO.

SKETCHES of social life in the far past have always an interest for us. We propose in this and another article to furnish the readers of the *CHURCHMAN* with some outlines of clerical and church life in Ireland in the last century. In the present article we shall have space for but one record. We propose to sketch the life history of one of those ideal country parsons whom the brilliant author of the "Deserted Village" has immortalised. We rejoice in the conviction that there were not a few such men.

Philip Skelton graduated in Trinity College, Dublin, in 1728, the year of Goldsmith's birth. He came of farming parents in the County Antrim. His taste for books originally sprang from a device of his father's. The quaint farmer used to put Philip to all the most disagreeable farm duties, and at the same time to place books within his reach. Whether at first repelled by the drudgery of the hand-barrow, or attracted by the novelty of the books, it is certain that Skelton soon bade farewell to farming, and developed decided literary tastes.

A stormy undergraduate course was not uncommon in those days. Quarrels with the town and plots against the authorities were too frequent to be noteworthy. In all Skelton took his part. As he left college he is described as a man "of a figure somewhat odd and terrific, a large-sized man of a majestic appearance." He was an accomplished athlete in those days, and possessed great physical strength, which he found use for more than once in later years. There was no match for him in the game of "long bullets" in his native parish of Derriagh. On one occasion this game, which consisted in a contest as to who should "put" the bullet farthest along a country road, had nearly-proved fatal. On the first morning of his life on which he had omitted his prayers, he

was engaged in the game when a three-pound bullet struck a stone and, rebounding, hit him above the left eye, flattening in [the wall of the skull. The treatment for this dreadful wound was so severe that his constitution never recovered it.

Skelton was ordained in 1729 for the curacy of Newtown Butler. His clerical career was indeed a strange one, compounded of athletics, medicine and divinity, with a very large tincture of the love of controversy and of deep affection for his fellow-creatures who were exposed to any form of suffering.

It is related of him that the very evening of his ordination human nature was too much for the young divine. He and several other deacons "lay" at the Bishop's house, and one of them shared Skelton's bed. In the morning another came to these two as they lay in bed and "began lashing them in sport." So Skelton, rising of a sudden, caught this sportive deacon neck and crop and dropped him over the stairs. The Bishop, hearing the noise, emerged in his dressing-gown and slippers, and elicited, by his questions, from Skelton the information that the young deacon was so flushed with being ordained that he could not behave quietly, but must lash him, so he was forced to show him the shortest way downstairs. *The Bishop owned that he could not blame him.*

Another characteristic story of old-time ordination is related by Skelton himself. One candidate was asked how old the world was, and on receiving the answer that he could not tell, the Bishop declared he was of the same mind, and concluded the examination by asking how long it was since America was discovered. Coming into a room where the candidates were racking their brains for an answer to other eccentric questions, the Bishop observed: "Gentlemen, I have a piece of advice for you all relating to your clerical duties. You may think that good preaching will make you acceptable to your people. Not a bit of it. If you would please them well, keep a private jest-book; pick out all the drollest stories, and learn them by rote. Fix every witty remark you hear in your memory. Thus equipped, you will be fitted to go about in your parishes and be popular men. For when you go to christenings, wakes, or weddings, you may be the life of the party by your jokes. You will be sought for all over the parish. With respect to your conduct in church, I have a word for you. If ever you make a blunder, don't stop to rectify it, but go straight on. For 'tis ten to one if a single person in the church is listening to a word you say; but if you begin to hum and haw, your hearers will prick up their ears, and whisper to each other, 'The curate's out! the curate's out!' and thus you'll have yourselves to blame for your pains." What a picture of Bishop, curates, and congregations!

Mr. Skelton's first rector, on being presented to his living, was serving as a militia colonel in Dublin. Spite of this strange preparation for Holy Orders, we read that the Rev. Dr. Madden made an excellent incumbent of Drummully, and a most charitable one. Skelton lived in his rector's family as tutor to his sons. Three wild lads fell to him to teach. One was his mother's pet. These imps would give him no peace even while he wrote his sermons, and Skelton complains that he durst not look at any book but the Bible when preparing a sermon, or the boys would give it out in the parish that he stole his sermons. The country folk would never then listen to him again, for they would rather have any trash that was original than the finest divinity copied from a book.

We have said that a combination of charity and muscularity was a characteristic of Skelton. He was also as remarkable for his profound studies as for his prolonged devotions. Small as his stipend was, he began by making a rule of giving one half of it to the poor; of the remainder, the greater part went to his poor relations. Returning one evening from church, he reached the smoking ruins of a recently burned cabin. Three children had been burned, two fatally. The third survived in agonies. Touched with compassion, the curate stripped off his clothes on the road, and tearing his shirt to ribbons, gave it to the doctor who was dressing the burns.

An amusing story is told of a long correspondence which passed between the rector and his own curate living under his own roof. Skelton had published an anonymous pamphlet lauding a scheme of Dr. Madden's for the promotion of University Education. The doctor was so proud of the notice taken of him, that he sent a letter to the unknown author through the Dublin publishers, and received an answer through the same medium, and this correspondence continued for some time, the doctor never in the least guessing to the end who his correspondent was.

All was not, however, plain sailing here. The doctor's wife quarrelled often with Skelton, and finally drove him from the curacy. His next move was to Monaghan. Here he first displayed that genuine religious zeal which afterwards was so marked in a cold and worldly age. His labours, public and from house to house, never ceased, and "he ever mingled," says his biographer, "instruction and amusement." The children loved him as they did the typical parson of Goldsmith, and

. . . . . followed with endearing wile,  
And plucked his gown to share the good man's smile.

He catechised them publicly every Sunday evening in presence of the congregation, and when they knew the words of the Catechism perfectly, taught them its Scripture proofs. Every week he set apart one evening to receive at his lodgings all who came, for the purpose of direct spiritual instruction, and they thus "obtained a knowledge of their duty," which few of the clergy knew how to give. The Monaghan children in those days, it is said, knew more of the Christian faith than the adults of any of the parishes round.

"The preacher," says a contemporary, "placed, like a faithful servant of the Lord, heaven and hell before the eyes of the people." He stood in his pulpit a man of giant build, with "strong expressive action, clear distinct delivery, changing features and expression, and with a sincerity of manner which made an irresistible impression. His life," it is added, "was chaste, pious, humble, and abounding in charity. He held himself born to benefit the poor. His salary was at Monaghan literally that named by Goldsmith. Out of this £40 his aged mother received £10, the rest he divided as we have said. In Monaghan gaol lay many poor prisoners whom, though not the chaplain, he visited, and felt such an interest in their cases that once he saved the life of a convict in whom he was interested, by travelling to Dublin, and pushing his way into the Privy Council Chamber where the members were sitting. His eloquence prevailed, and his *protégé* received a free pardon.

About that time he helped a poor deaf and dumb man, by writing a little tale and giving it to the man to publish as his own. Whoever was most wretched or most wicked in the parish received from Skelton most attention. "One Craven, a notorious sinner, drove him out of his house with a kitchen spit on his first attempt to visit him; but Skelton, undeterred by this reception, went again and again, until after much danger, by long perseverance, by his awful lectures, and the Divine aid, he brought him to a sense of religion, and made him a good Christian." "He practised such a reformation in the manners of the Monaghan people that from thirty to forty attended daily prayers in church."

The divine, however, was ambitious also to be a healer of the body as well. He attended some medical lectures, and records that the doctor who taught him gave him advice never to prescribe anything unless he was sure he could do some good. "As for me," said this doctor, "I must prescribe something to every patient who comes, even though it be but brick-dust, to keep up my character; but you may use your good sense and do what you think best." In "doing what he thought best," Skelton's practice did not always follow the established customs. One old woman in Monaghan was per-

turbed in mind by visions of a little red demon in a hat and cloak, who paid her frequent visits. Skelton came to her cabin armed with a long pole, and wherever the tormentor was pointed out by the widow he made a vigorous stroke, until the illusion was finally chased out of the sufferer's mind. He thus won much distinction as being even better than a doctor.

He kept himself in robust health by exercise. He would lift and throw heavier weights than any man in the parish. He could wind a fifty-pound weight round his head, and could throw the sledge farther than any local competitor.

He has been known to resort, when trying to convince a sinner, to the argument of the fist. He beat a troop of tinkers who profaned Sunday with horrible oaths, and was complimented by a neighbouring squire for resorting to the only argument they could understand. In this function of the ministry he was no respecter of persons. A young officer, proud of his uniform, swore vigorously in his presence in some country inn parlour. Philip's gentle remonstrances proved vain, though he begged him to desist, as he was swearing in the presence of a clergyman. "You scoundrel curate!" was the reply, "what is it to you?" "Young man," quoth the parson, "this is not proper language to a man of my profession, merely for giving you good advice." "You puppy," replied the lieutenant, "you deserve to be kicked for your impertinence;" and then he blasphemed worse than ever. "Well, sir," says Skelton, "since fair means will not prevail, we'll see what foul can do," and so cuffed him through the hall and into the street, which soon cooled his courage, and kept him quiet for that evening at least.

Coming to more serious matters, we must refer to Skelton's picture of the condition of religion at the time. A thinly-veiled Deism, a real Arianism, prevailed on both sides of St. George's Channel. Against all forms of this heresy, so degrading to our Redeemer's Person and work, our divine waged energetic conflict. "I found leisure," he wrote, "to switch the Arians now and then." A well-known Bishop printed a pamphlet on the side of error, and Skelton, under pretence of defending his character, exposed him thus:

It is very unjust to suspect that a Right Reverend Prelate, who is more pious, judicious, orthodox, and learned than any that ever was, or will be, who has subscribed our Articles, and has a tender conscience, should be capable of writing such a book. It is a scandalous age which ascribes such a work of darkness to such an apostolic messenger of light.

For this reply to the Bishop his own Bishop sent him a present of ten guineas.

About 1738—just a century and a half ago—Skelton's fame as a preacher began to be noised abroad. But he was some-

what strangely passed over by those who had patronage to bestow. Livings were given away by the dozen to his juniors and inferiors in all ministerial gifts. After some years he resolved to leave the diocese, where he felt he had no hope of promotion. He was just about to take a Dublin living which offered, when his Bishop promised him the next "good thing" that was vacant. Trusting to this promise, Skelton declined St. Werburgh's, and found the Bishop a traitor to his word. Monaghan parish soon fell vacant, and it was given to a young Mr. Hawkshaw, only recently ordained. This gentleman retained Skelton, now a dozen years in orders, as his curate, and, indeed, treated him with all respect, following his advice in all important matters. Skelton refused thenceforward to attend Bishop Sterne's visitations, and the Bishop never even asked for him. It is hard to guess at the reason for such treatment of a man so deserving.

There were fanatics in the North of Ireland even in those days of cold and dry religion. One of Skelton's churchwardens "presented" him to the Bishop for shaving on Sunday.

The charms of ladies' society were not for this poor and lonely curate. He dreaded the consequence of a hasty marriage. An absurd story, however, is related about a courtship of Skelton's. He was actually engaged to a Monaghan lady, when the whole thing was broken off on account of a singular conversation between the affianced pair. "How," she asked, "do you mean to provide for your children, should we have any?" "Why, my dear," he answered gaily, "suppose we have three sons; I'll make one a weaver, another a tailor, and another a shoemaker. Very honest trades, my jewel, at which they cannot fail to earn their bread." On which the indignant fair one hastily dissolved the match. She soon afterwards was captivated by a red coat, and died in delirium tremens. Skelton often blessed God for the fortunate escape which his half-jesting speech had brought him. Another courtship was put an end to by Skelton himself, who, finding the young lady giving too kind attention to the compliments of a rival, took the young man up in his arms, dropped him over the balusters, and returning to the astonished lady, terminated the courtship on the spot. It was his last.

The same year (1743) a widow with some means offered him the position of tutor to her sons, with the probable ultimate design of matrimony. He took a night to consider the offer, and lying sleepless in his bed, he declared he had a vision. A wig-block rose from the floor, rolled its eyes, and murmured, "Beware what you are about!" He took it as a sign, refused the offer, was engaged to select a tutor, did so, and saw the

new tutor marry the lady, who, like his first *fiancée*, died a drunkard. Skelton always after that looked kindly on a wig-block when he chanced to see one.

Skelton was subject to extreme fits of melancholy. They have been attributed to the fearful accident to his head already recorded. He sometimes felt he was dying, and would not live to quit the spot on which he stood. He once asked a lady who was driving him in her carriage to stop the vehicle that he might get out and die. Her sharp but laughing refusal removed temporarily the fit of hypochondria.

He had some success in and about the year 1748 in a literary venture. He received £200 for a work entitled "Deism Revealed." He was offered permanent employment on the staff of a London review. The offer was very tempting, but he loved his flock too well to leave the direct ministry of the Gospel for any literary honours, and he refused. His ill-paid ministerial work had all his heart and soul, and from this incident we can judge accurately of his motives. A few months after the second edition of his book appeared, the Bishop of Clogher was dining with Sherlock, Bishop of London, who asked him if he ever had known the author. "Oh yes," exclaimed his Lordship of Clogher; "he has been a curate in my diocese these twenty years." "More shame for your lordship," replied the other, "to let such a man live for twenty years as a curate!"

The long-looked-for promotion came soon after. The Bishop presented him to the wild and mountainous parish of Pettigo, on the borders of county Donegal. The parish was worth £200 a year, and measured fifteen miles by ten.

To Pettigo Skelton now removed, taking with him from Monaghan one Robert Plunket as tithe-farmer and companion; and these two bachelors set up house together in the wild mountains of the west. The people were almost barbarians. They loved fighting and drinking. So bad was their reputation that on going down at first to settle among them our quaint divine invoked the aid of a notorious champion of the ring, a boxer named Jonas Good. When hiring Jonas he said, "I hire you to fight, for I hear you are clever with your fists." When Jonas owned that he could do a little in that way, Skelton replied, "If we have to fight, watch me; when I close my fists do you the same. Strike stoutly; but be sure you leave off when I do." He bought a good horse, holsters, and pistols, and a military saddle. When the rector rode through his new parish his man rode in front, who, being generally mistaken at first for the master, got all the bows.

The rector began to make the acquaintance of his wild flock at once. He found them in dismal ignorance. He said they

knew as much of the Gospel as the Indians of America; so that he felt he went as a missionary to convert them to Christianity. So totally ignorant were they of the use of books that when some of them crowded round his windows at night and saw him stooping over his tomes of divinity, they declared he was a conjurer, using these strange objects as instruments of the black art.

Diligent visitation, incessant catechizing, plain preaching were his missionary methods. A few months after he began the catechizing in church he one evening locked the church doors when the congregation were assembled, and let no one leave till he had thoroughly examined young and old on the subjects he had been teaching. Skelton meant that they should learn, and they did. A year or two of this work led to a general spread in the parish of at least, a mental knowledge of the Creator and Redeemer.

In times of poverty he induced the well-to-do to give liberally by promising to double the collection, whatever it was, out of his own pocket. He still practised physic, but added a doctor to his staff—one Dr. Scott, of Enniskillen, whom he caused to attend all difficult cases. It goes without saying that there were no poor laws or dispensaries in those days.

The rector, sharing the cottage with Plunket, had but one room for his own use as bedroom, dining-room, and study. It was divided by a curtain to conceal the bed when any persons of quality dropped in to dinner. Sir James Caldwell and other county gentlemen used to visit him sometimes. His principal meal was dinner. He ate little breakfast and no supper. Though he was a large man and had a good appetite, he lived a life of continual mortification. He was also abstemious in sleep. He slept generally about four hours, and passed the rest of the night in prayer and religious meditation. At times his old melancholy returned. He would go to the houses of the neighbours in the night and invite them to rise up and pray for him, as he was in mighty need of all good Christians' prayers. At this time again he often thought himself dying. Once he told the servant to get ready the horse quickly and to drive him to Dr. Scott's, that he might go and die there. The servant obeyed, but he had not driven far when the strange man began to whistle and sing most merrily. He was all right again, he said. Once Robert Johnson, of Pettigo, who had often heard these strange predictions of a death which never came off, said, "Make a day, sir; make a day, and stick to it, and don't be always disappointing us." This made him laugh, and the fit passed away.



His life was a continual round of preaching, visiting, and written and *viva voce* controversy with Arians and infidels, varied by struggles with the physical inconveniences of his lot. On his uneven earthen floor it was impossible for any rightly-formed table to stand. But he spliced a piece on to one leg, and then it was better! About this time, when in Enniskillen, he bought a pair of tweezers to *pick the dirt out of his kale* (cabbage).

But his charities went on growing in extent. He found a club-footed youth in his parish; he taught him to read and write, bought him a wig-block, and taught him to shave men by means of this patient figure-head, and then sent him to friends at Monaghan to learn wig-making, and to Armagh to learn psalm-singing, after which he employed him as his parish clerk and barber for many a long year. Quaint lovable man! What did the great world know of this faithful servant of God?

The winters were cold in those northern wilds, and winds were boisterous, so the Rector of Pettigo might often be seen trudging through his parish with his rough coat girded round his waist by a straw rope. One's heart melts for the poor middle-aged bachelor, who had no buttons on his coat and no wife to sew them on.

The poverty of his flock in hard seasons lay like a heavy weight on the heart of Skelton. He found some of them pulling up and boiling the weeds out of the fields and roadsides, such as the "prushia," which his biographer describes as a "yellow-flowered weed that grows in cornfields" (query, the corn marigold?).

He ordered some of this "prushia" to be served at his own table, and finding it unendurable and sickening, he resolved on prompt action. He started off for Ballyshannon, and then travelled to the County Cavan, and in both places bought up large quantities of oatmeal, and this he distributed carefully until the next harvest. The people, wild with hunger, threatened to attack the waggons conveying the meal, so Skelton and his pugilist Jonas were obliged to go several miles on the road, armed with clubs, to meet the convoy and escort it home. The oatmeal he had to distribute weekly, and always took his club to defend himself and his stores. When all his money was spent and the famine continued, he sold his books, the only friends he had, for £80, and converted the proceeds into food for his poor.

Thus in dark times shines forth apostolic love in unexpected places, and we must be thankful that such traits have been put on record, and muse with wonder on the innumerable

examples of the power of love which, so far as earthly record goes, are lost for ever.

On the death of Bishop Sterne, Skelton was promoted to the living of Devenish by his successor. This was a rectory near Lough Erne. Dr. Scott, of Enniskillen, provided him with a house. The studies of the physician and parson over, each evening they used to sit up to a late hour playing piquet, and then a few prayers would be said, and they would separate for the night.

A wave of trouble broke over the Church of Ireland in 1763, and once again, as in 1641, the lives of the clergy were threatened. The "Oak Boys" caused many, among the rest Skelton, to fly for a temporary refuge to Dublin; but he soon returned to pursue his quiet diligent labours at Devenish.

At the age of fifty-nine—for Skelton had now attained thus nearly his third score, he found himself in his last ecclesiastical appointment. The living of Fintona, on the borders of Tyrone and Fermanagh, was given to him by Bishop Garnet, Sterne's successor. It was nominally worth £500 a year, and its net produce may have approached £400. Here the people were as a rule Dissenters, but an extraordinary thing happened. We doubt if a parallel can be cited in the history of the Church. The Presbyterian chapel being well-nigh emptied by Skelton's preaching in the old church in the market-place, he called the minister to him and settled on him £40 per annum as compensation for the loss of income he suffered from his diminished congregation! He went further. The local doctor complaining that his patients, many of them at least, went to the Rector to be drugged instead of to him, he settled an annuity of £40 also on him!

Many a striking incident is recorded of the later years of his life at Fintona, for which we have no space. Still, whether he saw sin among high or low, he was prompt and unfeeling in rebuking it. Still he would go out in the market-place with a hand-bell to summon passers-by to daily prayers. Still he would lock his congregation into church now and then on a Sunday afternoon and catechize them, whether they would or no. He found time at Fintona, and possessed means, to publish all his works in five volumes. In good times he gave half his income to the poor, in bad times very nearly the whole. He spared, but with no miser's spirit. He would save every penny he could, but then it was to give it all away. He has been seen sitting up in his bed, when some sixty-five years of age, mending his knee-breeches, by the light of a single candle. He kept what was then called a "trash-bag," stuffed with rags and scraps, needles, thread, and buttons, and this

was always ready to "tent" a hole or a rip in his garments. We should like to have seen the result.

The cold winters of the north were telling on his frame. He began about 1775 to winter in Dublin, and had rooms over the shop of a bookseller named Watson. As Easter approached he would return, like the eunuch sitting in his chariot, and studying his Bible by the way, to Fintona, and spend there a busy sixteen or eighteen weeks of visiting, preaching and catechizing. Still, the old fire was in him. He has rushed in to separate two men fighting in the street with all his youthful zeal. In Dublin he was frequently called on to preach during the winter, and his appearance as he preached a sermon on a day of public humiliation, December, 1776, is thus described :

His wig was brown ; it had not even the colour of powder in it. His gown was old and rusty. His face was furrowed with wrinkles, and very venerable from his age. His person tall, but bent with years. He bore a resemblance to one in mourning, commissioned to remind the world of the judgments of God brought on them by their sins.

The summer of 1777 was signalized by a remarkable dearth, similar to that which had occurred while he was at Pettigo ; and between May and September he distributed a hundred and twenty-five pecks of oatmeal every week among his poor people of all sects. Part of the cost he raised by subscription. Once, when some delay occurred and the poor were disappointed for a day or two, Skelton would eat nothing, until the waggons appeared and the poor were fed. Fearing after all that the supplies would not hold out, he denied himself every comfort, even to his favourite snuff-box. He made a sort of snuff for himself of dried heath, and so saved something. He ate but one meal daily, of a poor character, and his reward was not one life was lost in Fintona from starvation. Pretending he had no further use for books, he sold his library—that which he had purchased to replace the books sold years before—and the £100 which he obtained for it from Dr. Woodward all went to the poor.

In 1780, for the last time, he left Fintona, giving his carriage and horses away when he had done with the road for ever.

In Dublin he was for the few remaining years well-known. His life was very regular and self-denying. He used to rise about nine, to drink a "dish" of herb-tea; foreign tea he never tasted. Then he passed an hour at prayer, after which he read two chapters of the Old, and two of the New Testament, and four or five Psalms. He passed the time till dinner in general or light reading. He studied theology in the evening. He used to receive his friends at his lodgings, who came to listen to his mature wisdom, and sometimes to smart under his unexpected personalities. "You're a fine fellow, Burdy!" he cried to his future biographer, "with your

bright buttons. I thought you were a man of sense, but find I was mistaken. I always judge a man by his buttons." "My lord," he observed to a Bishop, "take care of your curates. They will be more attentive to their duties if they think you remember them, for there is not one of them that would not do more for a living of a hundred a year than for the whole kingdom of heaven."

He was offered a D.D. degree in 1781, but declined the honour. His portrait was painted by an artist in 1782, but he made the condition of sitting that the lady who gave the commission would destroy the picture before her death. He survived five years longer, but became very feeble. He was eighty-one years of age. The faithful Burdy, a very Boswell to this Johnson, records his having said to him, "I know I shall never see you again, but God be with you. Trust in Christ, and He will preserve you. Preach the Gospel to your people without any false refinements. Act always as God's minister, and He will reward you."

On May 4th, 1787, just a hundred and one years ago, this long and remarkable life was ended.<sup>1</sup> He left behind him a few trifling debts, which being paid, a sum of £700 remained, of which £540 was *uncollected* tithe, so that the total accumulations of his lifetime reckoned up at last in actual money to £160.

We shall not comment on the above unvarnished record. The life speaks for itself. We live in days of more superficial polish. We are all obliged to run in our groove, or feel the lash of an unsparing criticism. But are there in our age of knowledge, refinement, and boasted piety, many men who, taking them all in all, are serving God and His poor with more single-minded devotion than the subject of our sketch, who shines like a bright distant star in the obscure firmament of the Irish Church a century and a half ago?

G. R. WYNNE.



### ART. III.—"FACTS AND FICTIONS CONCERNING CHURCHES AND TITHES."

*Facts and Fictions concerning Churches and Tithes.* By the Earl of SELBORNE. Macmillans.

**L**ORD SELBORNE rendered excellent service by his "Defence of the Church of England against Disestablishment," and has now followed up that telling volume by another,

<sup>1</sup> He always had had a dread of being buried alive, so he enjoined on his physician not to let him be buried until marks of corruption appeared.