

EXHUMATION OF A BODY.

STRANGE AFFAIR AT MIRFIELD.

An inquest was held in Mirfield on Tuesday night, before Mr. Taylor, coroner, touching the death of Hannah Hepworth, whose body had been exhumed a few hours before. The circumstances under which the inquest took place are somewhat peculiar in their nature. About a fortnight ago, a man walking along the turnpike road saw a paper fall out of the pocket of one of two gentlemen driving in a gig, and they passed out of hearing before he could recover it. On looking at the document, he saw it was a policy of insurance in the Prudential Office on the life of Hannah Hepworth, aged twenty-five years, who died on the 6th inst. It passed into several hands, and as the relatives of the deceased said that no insurance had been effected on her life, the police commenced making inquiries into the matter, when it was found that Dr. Whalley, who is the medical referee of the Prudential Insurance Company, had attended her in her last illness; that she had been in a bad state of health for some time. Some correspondence ensued with the Company in London, and a copy of the proposal having been obtained, it was found that the date was quite recent, and that the deceased was described as healthy, and only suffering from a cold. The fact was, she died of cancer of long standing, but in the certificate of death the decease was attributed to "two weeks' fever, two days' enteritis." The body was exhumed, and a post-mortem examination made by Dr. Carr, of Gomersal. At the inquest, Mr. Turner, solicitor, of Mirfield, and Mr. N. Learoyd, solicitor, of Huddersfield, watched the proceedings on behalf of Dr. Whalley. At the inquest, on Tuesday night, Ruth Hepworth, mother of the deceased, stated that her daughter had been ailing some years. Dr. Whalley had attended her for the last eight months.—Geo. Schofield stated that he had shown the papers which had been found to Mrs. Ruth Hepworth, and she said she knew nothing about them, and there had been no insurance. The same day he and a friend went to Dr. Whalley's, and asked him if he had signed any papers for Hannah Hepworth, for there was some money to be drawn by Ruth Hepworth. The doctor said, "Oh, no; oh, no;" and also that Hannah could not be insured without his knowledge, for he had been the person to pass people for seven years past. Witness said, "It's a strange thing! somebody must have been forging your name;" and he pulled the paper out and let him look at it. The doctor said, "I have signed this last week, and I have lost it and all." Witness then took back the paper, but the doctor said, "The papers will do you no good, Schofield, nor Ruth Hepworth neither; they belong to a person at Dewsbury." Witness did not ask for a reward, but he told the doctor the man who found it would want one. On Monday he took the paper, intending to see a person at Dewsbury named J. J. Taylor. The document was a certificate of the death and a claim purporting to be by Ruth Hepworth. Taylor was the agent of the company. When witness saw him he denied that one Hannah Hepworth had been insured in the company (British Prudential), but when witness asked, "Has not Dr. Whalley been here about the claim?" he said, "Oh, yes, its all nothing; there was one entry, but there has been no premium paid, and I stopped the policy." Witness told him there was something wrong, and he would hear of it another day.—William Oates, registrar of births and deaths, produced his book, showing that the cause of death of the deceased was, as given by Dr. Whalley, enteritis.—Mr. W. Carr, of Gomersal, F.R.C.S.E., said about noon that day he examined a corpse since viewed by the jury. First he noticed the extreme emaciation of the body. There were no livid spots or black exudation about the mouth or teeth. He had been told to look into every particular, and he therefore looked into the mouth to see if there were traces of irritant poison. It was perfectly healthy. He removed the stomach without opening it, the spleen, a kidney, and a portion of the liver, and so far as he could judge by such an examination, they were perfectly healthy. He placed them in a jar which he sealed up. There were no traces of inflammation or ulceration of the intestinal glands. There was no enteritis, in the ordinary sense of the term. About three inches above the seat was a mass of scirrhus cancer, forming a stricture, above which the bowel was dilated into a large pouch. On opening the chest he found all the organs perfectly healthy, except that the lungs showed traces of old bronchial affection, and he believed secondary cancerous deposits. He did not open the head. In his mind there had been no poisoning. He had no doubt cancer was the cause of death. The disease had been two years in progress. Inflammation of any part of the bowels might be called enteritis, but in this case the inflammation was secondary. The disease was incurable.—At this point the Coroner stated that the amount of the policy of insurance effected on the body of the deceased was £41 10s., and it was dated August last.—The room was cleared, and the jury consulted together. In a few minutes they returned as their verdict "Died from natural causes." The affair has caused intense excitement in the district.—[The neglect of the Railway Company to forward the parcel of our correspondent prevented the publication of the above case in yesterday's *Mercury*. EDS. L.M.]