

**POST-MORTEM
EXAMINATIONS WITH
ESPECIAL REFERENCE TO
MEDICO-LEGAL PRACTICE**

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Post-Mortem Examinations with Especial Reference to Medico-Legal Practice by Rudolf Virchow

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RUDOLF VIRCHOW

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EXAMINATIONS

WITH

ESPECIAL REFERENCE TO MEDICO-LEGAL
PRACTICE.

BY

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OF THE BERLIN CHARITÉ HOSPITAL.

TRANSLATED BY

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THIRD AMERICAN

FROM

THE FOURTH GERMAN EDITION.

WITH ADDITIONAL NOTES AND NEW PLATES.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

IN the following paper Prof. Virchow gives some account of his early experience as Prosector in the dead-house of the Berlin Charité Hospital, and traces the subsequent development, under his auspices, of a systematic method of conducting post-mortem examinations. He also criticises, explains, and illustrates the regulations which have been promulgated throughout Germany for the guidance of medical jurists in performing autopsies and drawing up reports. (Regulativ für das Verfahren der Gerichtsärzte bei den gerichtlichen Untersuchungen menschlicher Leichname. Herausgegeben von der Königl. wissenschaftlichen Deputation für das Medicinalwesen, 8, 1875.) He also gives three interesting cases in which the post-mortem examinations were performed by himself, the order of sequence enjoined by the regulations being closely adhered to. An examination of these cases will show that nothing has been omitted which could throw any possible light on the cause of death.

They may be taken as examples of the way in which all post-mortem examinations for medico-legal purposes should be conducted. Lest the length of the notes should seem excessive, Prof. Virchow expressly states that three hours are sufficient, even for complicated cases. It will be obvious, on referring to the details, that only by following out a systematic plan could a thoroughly complete examination be performed in that time. Such an examination, however, would be infinitely more satisfactory than one in which important points were overlooked, and only discovered on subsequent investigation. It is much to be wished that a method similar to the one which has received the high sanction of Prof. Virchow were adopted in this country.

T. P. SMITH.

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METHOD OF
PERFORMING
POST-MORTEM EXAMINATIONS.

On taking up my appointment, in the year 1844, as assistant to Robert Froriep, the Prosecutor at the Charité, I found that the autopsies were at that time somewhat irregularly and unmethodically performed. The Prosecutor himself made but few examinations, and these only by special requisition; the greater number were performed, without any technical plan, by the Charité surgeons—young medical men, subsequently styled "assistants," who had not yet passed the State examination. No minutes of the proceedings were made at the time, and only when the examination was over were notes taken down from memory. Froriep himself but very rarely gave a course on post-mortem examinations; he did so only once during my experience. Notwithstanding his eminent scientific attainments and his great manual dexterity (perhaps, indeed, on account of these his qualifications—at any rate, as a consequence of their limited practical employment), there was but little thoroughness in Froriep's method; in many respects, indeed, it was so ill adapted for the purpose that it was a matter of difficulty to make any discoveries by its means.

Thus, to take only one example, it was his custom, when examining the spinal cord, to divide it longi-