

of the deceased. The medical practitioner is wrongly treated as an ordinary witness.

Your Committee strongly approves of the plan adopted in many of the United States, of admitting a written medical deposition of fact or opinion as evidence at inquests in cases where the personal attendance of a medical witness is not considered necessary by the coroner.

7. *The Performance of Autopsies.*—In all the large class of cases now investigated before juries where sudden death occurs without the slightest external lesion, an autopsy is advisable. Nevertheless, with an exception to be presently noted, no autopsy can be performed unless it be demanded by the majority of the jury. That is to say, the jury has to express itself willing to waste an hour or more in the middle of its proceedings, so that a competent medical man may be called, who shall make an examination into the state of the viscera. As a consequence, the jury, in the first place, shows the greatest unwillingness to allow the performance of autopsies, and will the rather return a wholly unreliable verdict. In the second place, the medical man performing the post-mortem is at a great disadvantage, for he is expected to keep the jury waiting as little as possible, and his examination, instead of being deliberate and careful, is hasty and liable to be imperfect. Your Committee feel assured that were the coroner allowed full power himself to order an autopsy in all doubtful cases, a very large proportion of cases would be discovered in which there would be no necessity for holding an inquest and summoning a jury. Thereby a very large expenditure would be prevented, and at the same time the cause of death would be satisfactorily established. The exception referred to above is that by the present law the coroner is permitted to order an autopsy if he makes an affidavit that he holds the autopsy to be necessary. Unfortunately, coroners do not seem to have taken advantage of this permission, but prefer to shelter themselves by leaving the matter wholly in the hands of the jury.

A great source of difficulty in connection with the performance of medico-legal autopsies is the absence of any suitable