

medico-legal matters is the means in France of securing inviolable secrecy of practicing physicians.

Deaths from natural causes are as a rule harder to interpret than those from violence, and of all natural deaths those which occur suddenly are usually the most difficult to explain. Often even a post-mortem does not fully clear up the matter, since the detection of structural lesions, except when these from their nature are obviously incompatible with the continuance of life, does not fully explain why the vital function was arrested at a given moment.

Vibert, (*Précis de Médecine Légale*) has made an excellent classification of sudden deaths into the following four groups:—

I. The lesions are such that there can be no doubt that death was due to a natural cause, as, for instance, in cerebral hæmorrhage, rupture of aortic aneurysms, etc. In these the true cause of death is *demonstrated*.

II. The lesion found is such as is capable of producing sudden death but does not exclude the possibility to some other cause having intervened. Thus, although there is organic disease of the heart or kidneys it may be possible that death is really due to some other cause. These lesions may therefore be said to *suggest* rather than to demonstrate the cause of death.

III. The lesions found suffice to indicate a fatal disturbance of vital function but are of a general nature and common to several diverse causes. Thus fatal congestion of the lungs, or of the brain, is compatible with suffocation, alcoholism, narcotic poisoning and many other conditions. Here medical inquiry into the circumstances of the death with reference to the possible causes may make the proof fairly complete.

IV. Neither in the anatomical nor chemical examination of the body, nor in the circumstances of the death is there any explanation of the death. These unexplained cases of death are however rare.

Unexpected deaths occur most commonly among (1) drunkards, (2) old persons and (3) young children.

It must be remembered that because the body is found the death has not necessarily being sudden.