

The Canadian Practitioner and Review.

VOL. XXIX.

TORONTO, FEBRUARY, 1904.

NO. 2.

Original Communications.

THE MEDICO-LEGAL AUTOPSY.

By G. SILVERTHORN, M.D., TORONTO.

Autopsies are performed for two especial purposes: Firstly, in order to ascertain facts from a scientific standpoint, and secondly, for discovery for legal purposes.

With the first I shall not now deal, but I must say that there is no hard and fast lines between them, for every autopsy has some scientific interest, and it may be that the chief interest, from a scientific point, is not directly connected with the cause of death, whereas in the second class the main object is to arrive at the actual cause of death and how this cause was set in motion, along with a host of other questions that may arise, such as identification, time elapsed since death, the circumstances attending the death, etc.

I do not propose to enter into the usual order or method of performing a post-mortem, but wish for a few minutes to occupy your time as to a few of the especial features to be observed in a medico-legal autopsy.

It is well in the first instance to ascertain from the coroner or some other person, whether the question of identification is likely to arise, for if not, you may avoid much unnecessary detail such as a minute description of the clothing, minute examination of the teeth, bones for old fractures, moles, naevi, scars, etc. If it is possible to have some idea of the questions which will arise, it often simplifies matters very much.

The first duty of the examiner may be an examination of the surroundings of the body for blood-stains, foot-marks, signs of a struggle, etc., but this duty as well as a search of the clothing is usually performed by the police or coroner.

* Read at Meeting of Ontario Medical Association.