

## MEDICO-LEGAL EXAMINATIONS.

In cases of suspected *poisoning*, the following practical directions are given by Professor Reese, of the University of Pennsylvania, to be observed by those who have charge of *post-mortem* examinations:—

1. Ascertain whether the individual has labored under any previous illness; and how long a time had elapsed between the first suspicious symptoms and his death; also, the time that had elapsed after death before the inspection is made.

2. Note all the circumstances leading to a suspicion of murder or suicide—such as the position and general appearance of the body, and the presence of bottles or papers containing poison about his person, or in the room.

3. Collect any vomited matters, especially those *first* ejected, and preserve them in a clean glass jar, carefully stoppered and labelled. The vessel in which the vomited matters have been contained should be carefully inspected for any *solid* (mineral) matters which may have sunk to the bottom, or adhered to the sides. If no vomited matters be procurable, and vomiting has taken place on the dress, bed-clothes, furniture, etc., then portions of these must be carefully preserved for future examination.

4. Before removing the stomach, apply *two* ligatures beyond each extremity, dividing between each pair, so as to prevent the loss of any of the contents.

5. If the stomach be opened for inspection, this should be performed in a perfectly clean dish, and the contents collected carefully in a graduated vessel, so as to properly estimate their quantity. [Note here, also, the presence of blood, mucus, bile, or undigested food.] These contents should be preserved in a perfectly clean glass jar, securely stoppered, covered over with bladder, and sealed. The contents of the *duodenum* should be collected and preserved separately.

6. Carefully inspect the state of the *throat*, *œsophagus*, and *wind-pipe* for the presence of foreign substances, and for marks of inflammation or corrosion.

7. Observe the condition of the *large intestine*—especially the *rectum*; the presence of hardened *fæces* would indicate that purging had not very recently taken place.

8. Note any morbid changes in the *lungs*, as congestion, inflammation, or effusion; in the *heart*, as contraction, flaccidity, presence of a clot; and the condition of the contained blood.

9. Examine the state of the *brain* and *spinal marrow*, and, in the female, the condition of the uterus, ovaries, and genital organs. (Poisons have sometimes been introduced into the vagina.)

10. Along with the contents of the stomach and duodenum, the viscera that are to be reserved for chemical analysis are the stomach and duodenum (to be kept separate from the others), the liver and gall-bladder, spleen, kidney, rectum, and urinary bladder with its contents. Sometimes, also, a portion of the *blood* may be required for the examination.

11. As the legal authorities will rigorously insist upon the proof of the *identity* of the matters alleged to be poisonous, it is of the greatest importance to preserve such matters from all possible contamination by incautious contact with calico or paper for wrapping up the specimens. When once the suspected articles are deposited in the hands of a medical man, he must preserve them strictly under lock and key, and confide them only to a trusty agent for transportation. Many cases are on record where the chemical evidence failed simply from a want of power clearly to establish the *identity* of the matters analyzed.

Actual testing for poisons in cases of suspected criminality ought to be undertaken only by those whose chemical knowledge and skill are considerable.