

Book Review

FORENSIC MEDICINE (ed. 5). Keith Simpson. Edward Arnold, Ltd., London, and Williams and Wilkins Co., Baltimore. 1964 343 pages, 138 figures, many tables, and index.

I have had "Forensic Medicine" on my desk for several months during which I have picked it up from time to time; I have read it through once and have re-read portions a number of times. The book is a compilation of observations and directly stated opinions by an expert.

Prof. Simpson, "deals with a broad field where medical matters come into relation with the law, certification of the live and dead, the study of sudden or violent or unexplained deaths, scientific criminal investigations, matters involving the coroner, and the like." These topics are fully covered, plus an excellent section on toxicology.

The material arises from extensive experience in England and Wales and centers around "a body, often a dead body," called by the author the "centre-piece."

Medical students are not apt to be exposed to much forensic medicine these days. If they were this monograph would be useful, and could become a text book. Anthropologists, students and the police should be especially interested. All manner of situations are portrayed from murder to rape.

There are seventeen chapters that range between signs of death, what to do with a dead body, its identification and parts of the human remains. Blood stains, blood grouping, paternity and identity are briefly discussed. Types of injuries including fire-arm and stab wounds are covered in useful chapters. Asphyxia, shock, starvation, exposure, burns, electrocution, infanticide, child destruction, abortions and a chapter on sexual offenses are well written and informative.

Natural diseases, trauma and regional injuries are in turn discussed together with the indications in medical-legal

aspects of insanity round out a good composition.

General facts about poisons, the doctors' duties in cases of poisoning to the patient and to the community, and special poisoning by corrosives such as carbolic acid and arsenicals, plus inhalation poisons are significant. Over-doses of commonly used medications are discussed.

There is an excellent section on carbon monoxide poisoning and alcoholism. The action of strong materials on the human body by chemicals that are used in our industrial processes, are listed in detail. The final chapter deals with poisoning by plants, flora and fungi.

All testing of blood and tissue to detect the presence or absence of a poisonous substance, according to the author, should be left entirely to the expert. There is nothing in the monograph to teach the average person how to take care of these situations. The head of a Police detection crime laboratory has advised this reviewer that too many amateur "experts" are around who try their hand. This they should not attempt.

At any rate, this monograph is a significant contribution to forensic medicine. It is compact, well written, detailed and explicit. The illustrations drive home the importance as well as the horror of some sudden deaths of man. In these instances the forensic specialists must be able to deal with probabilities. Every Coroner, Coroner-physician, every physical anthropologist, and any one who has to do in any way with the pursuit of crime, cannot easily get along without this monograph. However, it should be kept out of the hands of children, and adolescents who are prone to be morbidly curious. Illustrations in this monograph are not good to look at for those who are unable to understand. It gives this reviewer pleasure to recommend this fine monograph.

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