

Three Famous Autopsies

ÜÇ ÜNLÜ OTOPSI

Farid S HADDAD MD FACS DABU CNOC*

*The Sami I Haddad Memorial Library Paradise Valley, ARIZONA

Summary

Without autopsy medical science would still be where it was left in 12th century, shrouded in convoluted theories. Medical science has reached its present high level of development because of the opportunities afforded for such studies in the past. The increased average span of life today was purchased by the sacrifices of our forebears. In this article, autopsies of George II, King of England, Napoleon Bonaparte and Frederick III, King of Prussia and Emperor of Germany are given as an example.

Key Words: Autopsy, History of Medicine, European Medicine

T Klin J Med Ethics, Law and History 2003, 11:116-119

Özet

Tıp bilimi, otopsi olmasaydı hala 12. yüzyılda bırakıldığı yerde, zor anlaşılır teorilerin ardına gizlenmiş olarak kalacaktı. Geçmişte bu tıp çalışmalarına verilen fırsatlar nedeniyle tıp bilimi bugünkü yüksek gelişim seviyesine ulaşmıştır. Günümüzde ortalama yaşam süresinin artması atalarımızın fedakarlığına bağlıdır. Bu makalede, İngiltere Kralı II. George, Napoleon Bonaparte, Prusya Kralı ve Almanya İmparatoru III. Frederick'in otopsileri örnek olarak verilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Otopsi, Tıp Tarihi, Avrupa Tıbbı

T Klin Tıp Etiği-Hukuku-Tarihi 2003, 11:116-119

The post-mortem examination has been one of the most fruitful tools at the disposal of the student of medicine. Without it Medical Science would still be where it was left in 12th century, shrouded in convoluted theories.

The reluctance of the relatives of the deceased to consent to an autopsy is quite understandable, and has been, in major part, responsible for a very low autopsy rate. The medical profession, as a whole, should, by enlightening the general public on the necessity of more autopsies, endeavor to raise the autopsy rate. It has been said: «Each person owes a duty to humanity to permit the post-mortem study of the bodies of those who die. Medical Science has reached its present high level of development because of the opportunities afforded for such studies in the past. The increased average span of life today was purchased by the sacrifices of our forebears. We, of the present generation, must not halt this progress»

George II, King of England (1683-1760) (1)

He is the son and successor of George I, the first monarch of the house of Hanover to rule Eng-

land. He had the advantage over his father of being able to speak English. During the last years of his life, he witnessed British victories in India, Canada, and on the seas.

On the morning of Saturday, October 25, 1760 «a noise was heard, as if a large billet had tumbled down; and upon inquiry, his Majesty was found fallen on the ground, speechless and motionless, with a slight contused wound of the right temple. He appeared to have just come from his necessary stool, and as if going to open his escritoire».

Nichols, who described the death of the king, was directed to open and embalm the royal body. He states that the «pericardium was found distended with a quantity of coagulated blood, nearly a pint; and upon removing this blood, a round orifice appeared in the middle of the upper side of the ventricle of the heart, large enough to admit the extremity of the little finger. Through this orifice, all the blood brought to the right ventricle had been discharged into the cavity of the pericardium; the whole heart was very soon necessarily so compressed as to prevent any blood contained in the

veins from being forced into the auricles; therefore the ventricles were found absolutely void of blood, either in fluid or in coagulated form ... the right ventricle and the two great arteries of the heart stretched beyond their natural state; and in the trunk of the aorta, we found a transverse fissure on its inner side, about an inch and a half long, through which some blood had recently passed under its external coat and formed an elevated ecchymosis. This appearance showed the truer state of an incipient aneurism of the aorta».

This autopsy protocol is of great interest. It is one of the first written records of a case of dissecting aneurisms of the aorta to be found in the literature.

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) (2, 3)

While in exile on the island of St Helena, Napoleon had, up till July 15, 1818, for physician, Barry E. O'Meara, a fine ethical physician who refused to tell Sir Hudson Lowe, the governor of the island, of his conversations with the Emperor, and so fell into disfavor after violent quarrels with the governor who banished him from the island.

At that time, Napoleon was suffering considerably from nausea, and seemed in very poor health; despite this considerable illness, Napoleon received no medical care until the arrival of Dr Antonmarchi on September 19, 1819. Napoleon became progressively worse, and by September 1820, the attacks of anorexia, gastric pain, vomiting, and constipation became progressively more frequent. By the first of April 1821, the fever, prostration, and weakened heart-action became much more pronounced, and the anguish and depression, noticeable for many months, became aggravated. On the night between the 24th and the 25th, the Emperor commenced to vomit incessantly; and on the 27th the vomited material had a coffee ground color, and the stools were of a black color. On the 29th he became delirious. Chateaubriand writes on the 3rd of May: «The silence of the room was interrupted only by the hiccup of death mingled with the regular noise of a clock. The shadow, before stopping on the dial, made still a few turns; the star that was drawing it had some reluctance to go out». On May 4th the pulse was intermittent and weak;

singultus, cold sweat and dyspnea were present. «The weather was hideous, the rain fell without interruption, and the wind threatened to destroy everything. The willow, under which Napoleon was in the habit of breathing fresh air, gave way; our plantations were uprooted; a single gum-tree still resisted when a whirlwind seized it, blew it up, and laid it in the mud. Nothing of what the Emperor loved was to survive him. May 5 saw him still delirious, the body cold with tetanic spasms, the pulse imperceptible, the dyspnea excessive, the respiration stertorous, coma supervening, Napoleon is near his end; a light foam covers his lips; he speaks with difficulty, he utters inarticulate interrupted words. At eleven minutes to six, Bonaparte gave up the most powerful breath that ever animated the human clay. The last words reaped from the lips of the conqueror were 'tête d'armée'. His thought still wandered in the midst of battles».

One week before his death he gave his final instruction to Dr Antonmarchi as follows: «After my death I wish you to do an autopsy. Do not let any English physician other than Dr. Arnott touch my body. Preserve my heart in alcohol and deliver it to Marie Louise in Parma. Give her all the details of my death. Examine well my stomach, and make a detailed report to my son. Indicate to him what remedies or mode of life he can pursue which will prevent his suffering from a similar disease. This is very important, for my father died of a cirrhosis of the pylorus with symptoms very much like mine».

The autopsy revealed that, on the anterior surface of the stomach, at the lesser curvature, near the pylorus, there was a complete perforation large enough to admit the little finger. This opening was completely closed with adhesions. On opening the stomach, it was filled with a large quantity of coffee ground material of an acid putrefying odor, and the internal surface of the stomach was almost completely covered with a carcinomatous mass; only a small part of the cardiac extremity seemed free of the disease. All the adjacent lymph nodes were greatly enlarged and cancerous. There were many adhesions between the stomach and the liver, which with the spleen was engorged with blood, but otherwise these two organs were normal. The urinary bladder contained small calculi.

Frederick III, King of Prussia and Emperor of Germany (1831-1888) (4, 5)

This story has no parallel as an example of the far-reaching influence of a single disease case on the destiny of the world. In order to understand how, it is worth while to review briefly the political arena.

Prussia, the most powerful of the German States, was the center of the struggle for German unification. Under F William IV the Prussian constitution was adopted as a result of the revolution of 1848. The men who led it, including the great Virchow (who subsequently played such an important role in the medical history of the case to be reported) were backed by Crown Prince Frederick (our patient) who favored the restoration of the German Empire as was largely accomplished through the efforts of Bismarck, but who hoped that this might come without armed forces. Bismarck's policies of «blood and iron» were naturally opposed to the ideas of the Crown Prince.

In 1870 during the war against France, Frederick commanded the third Army. His pacific and humane outlook was always evident. He opposed the siege of Paris. In Nancy and Rheims, at his hand, the population received the most indulgent treatment possible; the Tours cathedral was kept well out of the line of fire; many art treasures at Versailles were saved from fire. In the peace discussions, he insisted that Metz be given back to France.

The untimely death of Frederick and the succession of William II were largely responsible for the great catastrophe of 1914. Had Emperor Frederick lived longer, he might have found an honored place in history. This story has another interesting aspect. Frederick married Victoria, the daughter of the Queen of England. His wife had such an «idée fixe» about the German physicians who, she believed, were to blame for her son's disability (William II) and clung so stubbornly to this nonsensical idea, that it was through her intentions to underline her distrust in German therapeutics, that an Englishman Morrell Mackenzie was called to attend to her husband Frederick.

The German physicians were hit in their pride and a bitter controversy arose between the two sides. The Germans diagnosed cancer early on. The Englishman refused to concur before a microscopical diagnosis was made. Finally, it was too late and the Emperor died of cancer. This permanently ruined the health and the reputation of the greatest laryngologist of the time: Morrell Mackenzie. Even after the death of the Emperor, the controversy was still rife. From medical circles it invaded the daily press of many countries where till the present day we read new articles about the subject.

Here are in some detail, the particulars of the case 5:

Following an attack of measles in 1866, Crown Prince Frederick had a persistent and progressive hoarseness. Dr E Gerhardt, Professor of medicine at the Royal University of Berlin and a recognized authority, examined him on March 6, 1887, and diagnosed a polypoid thickening of the left vocal cord which he cauterized. On May 15, 1887 it was found that the mass had recurred and was larger than the previous growth. As a result of these developments, Ernst von Bergmann, Professor of Surgery at Berlin, was called into consultation, a diagnosis of cancer of the larynx was made; an operation was decided upon and scheduled for May 21. It was decided that von Bergmann should perform the operation, and Hahn, the most celebrated laryngologist in Germany, was to guide him. Three days later, six German physicians, each a renowned specialist, met in consultation. On the eve of the 20th, the day before the operation was scheduled, there arrived at the Palace of Postdam, Morrell Mackenzie. In the words of Ludwig: «with him stepped Fate into the House of Hohenzollern».

Mackenzie would not concur in the diagnosis of cancer without microscopic evidence of malignancy. Several pieces for biopsy were taken and sent to the greatest pathologist of the day, Rudolph Virchow, who could not find evidence of cancer. From now on Mackenzie managed the case « Through all that year, Victoria maintained the fiction that the Crown Prince was only slightly ailing, that he was better, that he would soon be well». Soon came her mother's Jubi-

lee. «Has she to be absent from that ? No. - And against the advice of her most trusted friends, Victoria forced her suffering, already well-nigh voiceless husband, to ride high upon his horse in the London procession, in the hope of silencing by that parade the whisperings of rumor».

In England, Mackenzie removed more than once remainders of the growth and new recurrences. Ludwig says: «Mackenzie declined to permit a prolonged supervision of the patient by Professor Gerhardt, and concealed the growth of the tumor from sufferer and physicians alike Š The English party prevented the Crown Prince's return to Berlin, and then wandered, without German physicians, from one spa to another».

A sudden change for the worse occurred on the 6th of November when the patient was in San Remo. Mackenzie recognized that the growth looked very much like cancer; he called a consultation of all physicians interested. They decided that the larynx should be removed; but the Crown Prince declined to have a laryngectomy. He agreed to submit to tracheostomy if the need should arise. On January 17 1888, laryngotomy had to be performed by Dr. Bramann, von Bergmann's assistant. On March 11, 1888, the Crown Prince was crowned Emperor Frederick III. Gradually he lost ground. A large slough came through the wound. The temperature rose and large amounts of pus were discharged from the canula. Mackenzie blamed the German physicians, and these retorted that he had injured the cord. Food began to come out of the canula; artificial tube feeding became necessary; pulmonary consolidation was inevitable, and after a reign of 99 days, the Emperor died.

Virchow did the autopsy: the greater portion of the larynx was destroyed by a «large, flat gangrenous ulcer The epiglottis and the left ary-epiglottic folds were all that remained. A nodule as large as a cherry and several smaller ones were found at the base of the epiglottis on the left side» Microscopic examination revealed «an alveolar structure with epidermoid contents, among which were nest cells. The cutaneous nodule removed from the neck also contained nest cells» Metastases were found in the lymph nodes on the left side of the neck.

Ludwig accuses Victoria «as nothing less than the indirect cause of the premature death of her husband» He quotes an article written by Bismarck in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*: «It is now established that an unimportant English physician of radical political opinions took upon himself to play Privy Councilor and interfere directly in the history of the German nation» He plainly hinted that Victoria «preferred to be the widowed Empress rather than the wife of an abjuring Prince, the victim of cancer».

«Since it was solely to the erroneous treatment of Mackenzie, that premature death ensued, and that Prince William's accession was thus brought about; with that misfortune of that one paralyzed arm are indirectly but indissolubly connected to the most grievous political consequences. So, as in a classical tragedy, we watch this doomed dynasty, and with it the German people, move, under the terrible hand of necessity, from one snare of the Olympian powers to the next; and with passionless logic, there follows upon an apparently trivial oversight over the birth of a Prince, the darkening of his courses, the premature death of his father, his too early accession, and everything which results therefrom, destroyed the security of millions of men».

Had Emperor Frederick lived to develop his liberal ideas there would have been lasting peace in Europe.

REFERENCES

1. Nichols: George II. *Phil Trans* 1761 52 265.
 2. Behcet PE: Napoleon; his last illness and postmortem. *Bull NY Acad Med* 1928 Apr 4 497-502.
 3. Chateaubriand: *Mémoires d'outre-tombes*.
 4. Ludwig E: *Kaiser Wilhelm*. GP Putnam's sons Ltd, 1928.
 5. Pack GT & Campbell R: Historical case records of cancer; laryngeal cancer of Frederick III of Germany. *Ann Med Hist* 1940 Mar 2(3rd s) 151-70.
 6. Ficarra BJ: Eleven famous autopsies in history. *Ann Med Hist* 1942 Nov 4 504-20.
-

Geliş Tarihi: 10.04.2003

Yazışma Adresi: Farid S HADDAD
4403 Clearwater Pky
Paradise Valley AZ 85253, USA
Tel in Paradise Valley: 480 596 1605
and in Prescott: 928 778 0860
haddadmd@earthlink.net