

BOOK REVIEW

E. M. Gross,¹ M.D.

A Review of *Autopsy—The Memoirs of Milton Helpern*

REFERENCE: Helpern, Milton and Knight, Bernard, *Autopsy—The Memoirs of Milton Helpern*, St. Martin's Press, Inc., 175 Fifth Ave., New York, 1978, 273 pages, \$10.00.

The Scalpel of Scotland Yard, Mostly Murder, Where Death Delights, and now *Autopsy* are books that will readily lure any medical student into being a forensic pathologist.

Milton Helpern was a physician and teacher who enjoyed relating autopsy findings at clinical pathologic conferences on deaths from traumatic injuries; a public official who, for 20 years, managed the largest medicolegal investigative agency of its type and was a nonpareil raconteur.

Autopsy reflects these attributes. Helpern's descriptions of the complications of narcotics addiction and of the vagaries of ice pick wounds through the chest or heart and their manifestations as infectious disease reflect the enjoyment he had when lecturing to a group of residents or interns at a hospital.

Chapter 3, "I Call It the Office," reflects the operations of the medical examiner's office and its importance vis-à-vis the public health and the public safety. In this and in other chapters Dr. Helpern stresses the importance of the independence of the office.

As the storyteller, he relates challenging cases in which he participated both directly as the pathologist (the Copolino cases in New York and Florida) and indirectly as the consultant and expert witness reviewing autopsy findings (the defense of Peter Reilly in Connecticut). Reading *Autopsy* brings a reminiscence of Dr. Helpern talking after dinner to a group of physicians or others interested in legal medicine, delineating facts with occasional embellishments.

Autopsy is vintage Helpern and well worth reading by law enforcement personnel, attorneys, physicians, and anyone interested in learning about a physician who devoted so much of his lifetime to the investigation of sudden, unexpected, and suspicious deaths.

¹Chief medical examiner, State of Connecticut, P.O. Box 427, Farmington, Conn. 06032.