

Embalming A Corpse

From the Cincinnati Enquirer

By Lafcadio Hearn

The Process to Which the Body of Mr. Labrot Has Been Subjected.

The process of embalming the body of M. Auguste Labrot, whereof mention has already appeared in our columns, was yesterday afternoon completed, and the remains were seen by the friends of the deceased, at the Ohio Medical College, yesterday afternoon. The system of embalming determined upon appears to have been most thoroughly successful, and the features of the deceased look wonderfully natural and well preserved. All the friends of M. Labrot who inspected the remains yesterday expressed themselves thoroughly satisfied.

The work was not, of course, of a character to be intrusted to most city undertakers; indeed, it is probable that there is no undertaker in the city who could embalm a body except under the supervision and direction of some expert physician or chemist. Accordingly the services of two prominent doctors were obtained by friends of the deceased, the medical gentlemen regarding the work much in the light of a scientific experiment.

The first stage of the process consisted in the removal of the viscera and the brain. The latter is extracted by opening the skull at the back with a fine saw. The abdominal and thoracic cavities were emptied through an incision made in the manner usual at *post-mortem* examinations. It seems that this *post-mortem*, if it can be so termed in this instance, presented some very extraordinary pathological facts—so extraordinary that they occasioned considerable sensation at the Academy of Medicine, before which some report of the case was recently made. There was fatty degeneration extraordinary of most of the internal organs; the heart was in such a condition that the finger could be pressed through it with the least effort; several of the blood-vessels were calcified and brittle as pipe-stems, and in the brain patches of softening were observable, which could not have been of less than six months' existence. Yet the only symptom of the latter disease during life seems to have been drowsiness and headache at intervals of a few days. But the most curious fact discovered was a rupture of the heart—a rupture that occurred shortly before death undoubtedly; yet the indications seem to be that M. Labrot actually lived for a considerable interval subsequent to this rupture. The pericardium was found filled with blood, but immediately about the heart itself the fluid had clotted into a species of thick coating, which peeled off under the fingers like bark, exposing to view the fissure underneath.

As soon as the removal of the brain and the viscera had been accomplished the next work was the removal of blood from the veins. After death, it is well known, the blood leaves the contracting arteries and lies in the veins. It was thoroughly washed out with a powerful syringe, and the body subsequently saturated with chloride of zinc, of which nearly two hundred hypodermic injections were made. The head was treated with corrosive sublimate and arsenic, and the cavities of the skull and body filled with oakum saturated in chloride of zinc. After the incisions were carefully closed a student, who is something of an artist, touched the lips with a solution, which produced a very natural effect.

Of course this is a very different process from the embalming of the ancient Egyptians, who possessed a seemingly endless variety of processes, by almost any of which they could preserve a body indefinitely. Egyptian corpses preserved with bitumen maintain, according to Pettigrew,

an extremely full and perfect condition, even to the features, to this day. The Egyptians could likewise preserve bodies without making any incision for the removal of the viscera; and numbers are found thus preserved. An examination of certain mummies by Pettigrew proved the truth of the statement of Herodotus, to the effect that the brain was removed through the nostrils by means of a curved instrument. Resinous substances and pitch seem to have been the chief ingredients used by the Egyptian embalmers.

The body of M. Labrot will be sent to France, inclosed in a double casing of lead—a precaution, we believe, insisted upon by the French health laws and regulations. In this instance such a precaution is needless; but the regulation is generally considered a very wise one.