

Charles E. Springmann (- 21 Jul 1897)

The Evening Star, July 23, 1897

Held An Autopsy

Studying the Cause of Young Springmann's Death

Brain Effects of Hydrophobia

Dr. Glazebrook Objects to the Presence of Reporters

The Funeral Services

For the first time in the medical history of Washington an autopsy was performed today on the body of a person who had died with a genuine, well-developed case of hydrophobia. The subject was the body of Charles E. Springmann, the young boy who died Wednesday night as the result of the bite of a stray dog received some time ago, as reported in Wednesday's Star, and the medical profession of the city are much gratified at being able to point to an operation of this character.

When it was first known that the attending physician, Dr. Millard F. Thompson, wished to make an autopsy, both Mr. Frederick Springmann, the boy's father, and Mrs. Springmann strenuously objected, on the ground that they did not want the remains of their beloved boy disturbed in any way. After hours of argument Mrs. Springmann gave in when the plea was put forth that it was not only for science but for the benefit of other mothers who might have children afflicted with the same dread disease. Then it was that she succumbed to the inevitable, and Mr. Springmann followed her opinion.

The autopsy was set for 11 o'clock this morning, but it was nearly 12 when the physicians who were to engage in it arrived. The operation was performed under the directions of Dr. Glazebrook, the acting coroner of the District, and he was assisted by Dr. Millard F. Thompson, the family physician of the Springmanns; Dr. H.H. Barker, Dr. W.C. Woodward, the health officer of the District; Dr. J.T. Winter and Prof. V.A. Norgaard of the Agricultural Department.

The body of the boy was taken from the casket where it had reposed and was placed on the operating table. The top of the skull was then removed and the brain exposed. This was found to be highly congested, even in as far as an eighth of an inch. The medulla oblongata was then removed. This part of the brain is the seat of the dread disease and will be subjected to tests, in order to find out the peculiar nature of the germs existing therein. It will be tested on various animals and in other ways and the results will be made known through the health office. When the autopsy was concluded and the remains placed in the casket again not the slightest evidence of the operation remained, so nicely had the operators done their work.

The First Case,

Dr. Thompson stated after the operation that within his recollection it was the only genuine case of hydrophobia that had offered the means to make an autopsy in the history of the city. He stated, however, that as the autopsy had been done after the body had been embalmed the fluids used in the latter operation might act negatively on the results by counteracting the effects of the poison that existed in the body of the subject. He could not tell whether this was the case at this time, but it might turn out so in the tests. Of course, no practical results could be obtained now, and nothing could be learned of the terms, their power or peculiarities, until after the proposed tests had been made.

Dr. Thompson further stated that young Springmann developed the evidences of having what is called hydropneumaphobia, which means afraid of both wind and water, and that these were symptoms shown by young Springman during the awful agony preceding his death. He was as much afraid of air as he was of water, and this is about the only case on record in which such symptoms have been

developed. He did not show any of the primary of the primary stages of the diseases, but gave evidence immediately of well-developed symptoms.

One thing to be commented upon during the course of the autopsy was the fact that the reporters were kept out of the room in which it was performed, Dr. Glazebrook giving orders for their being shut out. This was done, notwithstanding Mr. Springmann's desire to have them admitted and his strong argument to that effect. Mr. Springmann insisted that, as he had given over the body for the cause of science, that the autopsy should receive sufficient notice to insure its being heard of, but the doctors in charge did not see it that way, and the reporters had to go.

Mr. Springmann has been in receipt for several days past of a number of communications, all bearing upon the subject of hydrophobia, but they do not seem to contain any feasible means of stopping the progress of the disease, and if they had, as one of Mr. Springmann's sons remarked, "they all came too late."

Funeral Services

The funeral was held almost immediately after the autopsy, at 2 o'clock. A large number of the friends and acquaintances of the family--and they are legion--were present. Father O'Brien of St. Peter's Church conducted the services, after which the remains were immediately conveyed to Congressional cemetery for interment, without stopping at St. Peter's Church, as was at first proposed. The pallbearers were chums of the deceased. They were Louis Diggins, James J. Grace, Arthur Specht, Richard Quinn, Le Roy Paine and Walter Robinson. Of these, Le Roy Paine and Walter Robinson and Arthur Specht were with Springmann when he had the encounter with the dog. Le Roy Paine, it will be remembered, was also bitten, and he will go tomorrow to Baltimore for treatment.

The parlor was completely filled with the floral offerings, which were exceptionally handsome, and which completely hid the newly made grave at Congressional cemetery from sight.

Father O'Brien conducted the usual Catholic services at the house, and made some touching allusions to the life and character of the dead boy.

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Dying of Rabies

Charles E. Springmann of This City Develops the Dread Disease

His Physicians Abandon Hope

The Patient is Unconscious of His True Condition

Bitten Six Weeks Ago

Charles E. Springmann, nineteen years of age, son of Frederick Springmann, in the express business at 935 D street northwest, has a well developed case of hydrophobia, resulting from the bite of a stray dog, received about six weeks ago. The symptoms of the disease are all present, though the young man was not taken ill until Sunday. Dr. Millard B. Thompson, the family physician, who is attending him and who called in Dr. J. Taber Johnson for consultation, has told the family that there is little or no chance of the patient's recovery.

Young Springmann is at the residence of his father, No. 401 South Capitol street, where all possible attention is being given him by his relatives, who are almost heartbroken over the terrible affliction. The patient, who until a few hours ago was perfectly conscious, does not realize his condition which is pitiable in the extreme, as the physicians have been able to mitigate his sufferings but little.

Unaware of His Danger

The young man's throat is swollen, which led him to believe that he had simply contracted a heavy cold, no idea having entered his mind that he is afflicted with that most dreaded disease, and which

causes the patient untold suffering. It is with difficulty he can relax his jaws, showing the insidious progress of the disease. The sight of liquid in any form drives him frantic and the fatal convulsions which mark the end of the disease have already set in. Young Springmann is terribly restless, starting at the slightest noise. He is not confined to his bed at present, having so far shown no violence rendering this necessary, but he is allowed the liberty of the room. His restlessness is most marked. He reclines on the bed a moment, springs to his feet, sits on the edge, and suddenly throws his head back in a convulsion, gasping for breath, while distressing moans come from between his partly clenched teeth. For a day or so he has been unable to talk with members of the family, and has carried on conversation with them by writing on slips of paper. He has so far shown no desire to snap or bark at others, as is sometimes the case with hydrophobia patients, but his frantic fear of anything in the shape of water is one of the most evident symptoms of the disease.

Eyes Are Glaring

His eyes are glaring and bloodshot, and his father states his desire to get outside the chamber in which he is confined is very great. His mind, which was clear until early this afternoon, has become clouded and the traits of the animal, without the guiding brain of the patient afflicted with hydrophobia, are exhibited. So nervous and excitable has he become that if a member of the family enters the room and waves a hand the air from it has the effect of arousing and disturbing him.

The bites from which young Spingmann contracted the disease were received about six weeks ago on both hands, and have healed. Springmann one Sunday about that space of time ago, was seated on the B. and P. R.R. tracks with a friend or two from the road. While they were seated there a small dog, evidently astray, came along. Springmann was petting it when it suddenly sank its fangs into his left hand and then into his right. The dog was driven away and as the wounds healed nothing more was thought of it.