

ment, as well as in those states which are now under the medical examiners system, of separating as far as possible the medical and legal side of the investigation, and entrusting these to physicians and lawyers respectively. Your committee is just as firmly convinced that all legal questions should be left wholly to lawyers, as that all medical ones should be entrusted to medical men.

ABOLITION OF THE OFFICE OF CORONER.

Your committee finds that in those states where this has been done, the previous difficulties seem to have been promptly and permanently removed, and it does not appear to have been necessary in any instance to revive the office. The office of coroner was created in England while that country was in a lawless state, and when police regulations and courts of justice were almost non-existent. Since the development of the judicial and police system, the coroner's office has gradually come to fill the important function of fifth wheel to the car of justice. It has been retained through that conservative spirit which retains the cumbrous system of pounds, shillings and pence for the national currency. Many of the United States are still in that primitive and lawless condition, which makes the office of coroner a useful one. In the more highly civilized states the old coroner system is rapidly disappearing, and it is practically obsolete in five, viz.: Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey and New Hampshire.

As to whether the office of coroner should be abolished in our own province, we have no hesitation in stating, as medical men, that, from a medical point of view, the office is simply an absurdity, which constantly interferes with the proper employment of medical science for judicial ends, and that it could be abolished to-morrow with marked benefit to the medical side of criminal cases.

The fact that the appointment of competent medical experts as consultants to the coroner's court of Montreal during the last year has neither prevented nor

greatly diminished the number of those palpably absurd and unsatisfactory verdicts, which have made this court a public laughing-stock in past years, shows that something must be radically wrong with the system, which must be remedied, even if this necessitates abolishing the office.

On the other hand, we do not feel, as medical men, competent to decide as to the possible effects which would be produced by this change from a judicial point of view. If the office of coroner were abolished, the legal duties would have to be provided for in some way, the details of which can only be decided by persons thoroughly conversant with the workings of our criminal law. Furthermore, the abolition of the office of coroner does not appear to your committee to be absolutely necessary in order to secure the necessary medical reforms. All that is really necessary is to do away with the medical functions and responsibilities of the coroner and to make the office a purely judicial one, only dealing with those cases where there are definite grounds to suspect death from violence or negligence and these grounds are either strengthened or not removed by the examination of a medical expert.

A COMPROMISE IDEA.

We would therefore recommend :

1. That salaried medical examiners be appointed to investigate all deaths occurring under circumstances calling for medico-legal investigation under any act, and that these officers be given authority to make such medical examination of the body as may be necessary to determine whether death was due to violence or not ;

2. That in every case the medical examiners report the result of their examination to the coroner or other judicial officer charged with investigating the legal side of such cases, who, in case of violent death, shall make such investigations and take such measures as are necessary for the proper administration of the law.