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Canadian Coroners.

Mayor Church of Toronto and the County Council of St. John, N.B., would do away with the office of coroner because of its apparent uselessness in bringing guilty parties to justice. Though there is much cause for complaint in the way many coroners carry out their duties, the position itself is one of the most responsible in preventing miscarriages of justice. The duty of a coroner is to investigate every case of sudden death or that of any person who dies under suspicious or peculiar circumstances, and to ensure non-interference he is given wide—practically absolute—powers in his search for the truth; he is the constant guardian of the community's moral code, and because of the independence of his position the coroner is a check on the police in regard to suspicious cases of death. Every sudden death and every body found must be reported to him immediately, so that he may investigate the cause, and in the case of most coroners, the investigation is sharp and direct, without frills and legal interference. All this, of course, is on the supposition that the coroner carries out his duties honestly and without fear. When he is lazy or indifferent, instead of being a protector, he is a menace to society and the sooner he is got rid of the better, but to do away with the office would simply be placing society in the hands of a system of irresponsibility, because, failing the coroner, there is no direct responsibility on any person to

start an investigation that may bring to light the cause of any death that had been caused by murder, manslaughter or criminal neglect.

Mayor Church's principal complaint was that too many deaths caused by reckless automobile driving had been allowed to pass as "accidental death." This is true, not only in and around Toronto, but in many other districts. But this is not always the fault of the coroner himself, but the coroner's jury, who seem to be very scared, unless there is direct evidence, to take the responsibility of bringing in a case of, say, manslaughter against a reckless driver, and it is surprising how the passengers of a death car will perjure themselves to protect the driver against the consequences of his reckless driving. What is wanted in this country is a closer police surveillance over drivers of automobiles. Any death car, whose driver had no license, should be confiscated, and the driver heavily fined, whether he, or she, escapes from the coroner's jury or not, or where the driver has a license it should be confiscated, unless it be proved that the victim was at fault.

In the Old Country the coroner, who gives the whole of his time to the work, while independent of all local influences, is responsible to the Secretary of State for Home Affairs, who closely investigates any complaints made, either for the way in which the coroner carries out his duties or his charges to the jury. This has a deterrent effect on carelessness or incapacity. In Canada the coroner is responsible to the Attorney-General of the Province in which he is located, and we do not see why the same close check is not kept on our coroners by that officer.