

external examination of the body receives five dollars, making an autopsy he receives ten dollars. There are further fixed charges for the constable who summons the jury and the witnesses, for chemical analyses, for hire of room to be used for the inquest, and for guarding the the body.

This, put as succinctly as possible, is the present coroner's law for the Province of Quebec.

Several objections have been brought against this method of investigating suspicious deaths; and despite the fact that the law as now administered is much amended, and differs in many respects from the law of a few years back, the objections still retain their force. Your Committee would point out what it considers to be the most serious disadvantages of the present mode of procedure.

1. *The Cost.*—Taking the returns for Montreal alone, as shown by Dr. Wyatt Johnston, the cost per inquest—that is to say, per case—is decidedly greater than in London, New York or Massachusetts. The rate would seem to be \$22.00 in Montreal, \$15.00 in London, \$16.90 Boston, \$12.80 in Massachusetts generally, \$10.00 in New York; and this notwithstanding the fact that autopsies, the most expensive individual item in the investigation of suspicious deaths, from three to four times as frequent in the other cities as they are in Montreal. Here, in Montreal, it costs more to maintain a dead body in the care of the coroner than it does to maintain an ordinary live individual with healthy appetite at a first-class hotel for the same period. Some of the items permitted by law in the coroner's accounts ought to be lessened or removed altogether, others ought to pass into general police accounts. But the fact remains that the system is as expensive as its results are unsatisfactory, and that the chief source of expense is the legal investigation of cases which do not call for legal investigation at all, owing to the fact of death not having been due to violence. The exclusion of cases not calling for inquest by means of a preliminary medical examination seems to be the most rational means of reducing the expenses.

2. *Payment by Fees.*—Your Committee is of opinion that, as a matter of principle, the payment of the coroner according to the number of inquests held by him is most unsatisfactory, and is inimical to the proper carrying out of enquiries into the cause of death.

Your Committee find that of the cases of death calling for a coroner's investigation occurring in the various large towns, from 50 per cent. to 75 per cent. can upon preliminary investigation be found to be due to natural causes. That is to say, the more careful the preliminary investigation made by the coroner, and the more conscientious and expert he shows himself in the performance of his duties, the fewer the

inquests he finds it necessary to hold, and the less his income if he be paid so much per inquest. While if it so happens that his enquiries lead him to suspect the frequent occurrence of any one form of crime at any period, as, for example, child murder, and so to hold an increased number of inquests upon certain classes of cases, immediately he lays himself open to the charge of seeking to increase his income. This ought not to be. In the cities, at least, the coroners ought to receive fixed salaries.

3. *The Jury.*—Under the present system, the jury in Montreal, with rare exceptions, certainly cannot be said to be a capable and representative assembly of citizens. Men engaged actively in any form of business prefer to employ any subterfuge rather than sit for what may be many hours in a morbid atmosphere, for no return whatsoever save discomfort and loss of time. The consequence is that too often the jury is composed of a heterogeneous collection of incapables, gathered from the highways and bye-ways and bar-rooms of the neighborhood. The verdict of such incapables is, time after time, at variance with the evidence presented.

4. *Viewing the Body.*—The custom of viewing the body is as old as the coroner system. It arose at a time when violent deaths were as many as doctors were few, and when population was everywhere so sparse that the jury had an important part to play in determining by external examination that death was due to violence, and, again, in identifying the corpse. Now-a-days, in a large town, it is highly probable that not one of the jury will have known the deceased, and the determination of the cause of death may more safely be left to medical men. In any case, it is easy to obtain identification by means other than the irruption of a strange, unseemly rabble into the house of mourning. The general feeling throughout the community is that this intrusion into the circle of bereaved relatives in the very depth of their trouble, permitted by the present law, ought to be prevented, and your Committee urges strongly that it is as unnecessary as it is unbecoming. It has been superseded in many States by a system of sworn affidavit of the fact of death and the identity of the body, and this course should be followed here.

5. *Suicide.*—The existing law does not demand inquest in cases of *felo de se*. This your Committee, on the whole, is inclined to consider a disadvantage. The general opinion of the community is strongly opposed to suicide, and were it to be recognized that this mode of death necessarily involved a public investigation, there is little doubt that the unpleasant publicity of the subsequent proceedings would act as a deterrent in not a few cases. As a matter of fact, suicide is on the increase in those States where this deterrent does not exist or has of late years been removed.

6. *Medical Evidence.*—A study of the ver-