

professional man, there is a very large number of cases, and these often the most important from a medico-legal aspect, where a correct determination can only be reached by a well-qualified medical man, and where it is all important that a correct answer be gained at the outset, not only for the benefit of the relations of the deceased (that they be sheltered from the least breath of unnecessary suspicion), but also for the benefit of the provincial exchequer, that the province be not saddled with the cost of an inquest leading to no result. When more than 50 per cent. of all deaths which coroners are called upon to investigate are found to be from natural causes, it is evident that the majority of deaths now investigated require no legal investigation whatever, while, on the other hand, as indicated above, all such deaths demand an initial investigation by a medical man.

CRIMINAL CASES.

Under the existing law, when his jury brings in a verdict of murder or manslaughter, or of being accessory to murder before the fact, against any person or persons, the coroner must issue a warrant against such person or persons, and send him or them before a magistrate or justice, if this has not already been done. He must at the same time transmit the depositions taken before him in the matter. To all intents and purposes, the trial before the magistrate proceeds as though no previous enquiry had been held. The coroner's depositions are not employed as evidence. In fact, the magistrate treats the case as though he were proceeding under an ordinary warrant. If the magistrate confirms the charge, the case is sent up to the grand jury, and here again all the witnesses are once more summoned and the evidence is repeated, and the grand jury finding a true bill, the case goes before the petit jury, and again the evidence is repeated.

It appears to your committee that this proceeding is singularly cumbrous, and that, besides harassing the witnesses, it allows an unduly large number of loopholes of escape for those guilty, upon some legal technicality or faulty observ-

ance of legal procedure. Your committee, considering that the problem of how this procedure may be simplified is a purely legal one, does not offer any suggestions on the matter.

Taking all these disadvantages into consideration, and being especially impressed by the fact that the earliest stages in the investigation of suspicious death must of necessity be of a medical nature, and by the further fact that where the legal proceedings of the coroner lead to a definite charge against an individual or individuals, those legal proceedings are practically passed over unnoticed by the higher courts, your committee have come to the conclusion that a drastic change in the mode of investigation of suspicious deaths is advisable in this province.

THE CORONER'S PERSONALITY.

There are two questions which naturally suggest themselves prominently in connection with questions of coroners' reform. The first is, Should the coroner be a physician or a lawyer? and the second, Should the office of coroner be abolished?

With regard to the qualifications necessary for coroners, your committee does not think it necessary to dwell upon the relative advantages of having medical or legal coroners, although this is a subject of dispute which has now been fruitlessly discussed for more than a century, and will in all likelihood continue to be so as long as the coroner system lasts.

In London a settlement of the question has been attempted by selecting as far as possible coroners who have obtained both legal and medical qualifications. This plan of expecting the coroner to be a jack-of-all-trades has not much to recommend it; and the fact that in London, in addition to the doubly qualified coroner, there are the deputy coroners, who are obliged by law to be barristers, and all the medical expert work is done by outside men, shows that matters are not in any way simplified even by having the coroners who are at once both lawyers and physicians.

The only rational plan, and one whose advantages appear never to have been questioned, is that adopted on the conti-

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