

## NUMBER OF INQUESTS HELD.

The number of deaths investigated in the Montreal district by the Coroner has been at the rate of 1.3 per annum per 1,000 population, and the number of inquests at the rate of 1.0. These numbers, judging by the experience of cities elsewhere, do not appear to be excessive, the number in all parts of the world ranging between 1 and 3 per 1,000. New York investigates 3.0; Philadelphia 2.7; London 2.0; Pittsburg 2.0; Buffalo 2.0; Baltimore 2.4; Washington 2.5; Birmingham 2.4; Liverpool 3.0; Charlestown 4.0; Newark 2.3; Chicago 1.5; Cleveland 1.3; Wilmington 1.3; St. Louis 2.4; Boston 1.2; New Haven 1.1; and Milwaukee 1.5; while, of a number of the other cities, of which I have reliable returns, there is not one where less than one death is investigated yearly for every thousand inhabitants.

While this, no doubt, shows that about this proportion of deaths may be expected to occur annually in a large city, under circumstances calling for an investigation of some sort, it does not necessarily follow that inquests should be held and a jury summoned in all these cases. It seems customary, in most places, to make a preliminary enquiry, in order to see whether the death is really due to violence. According to the thoroughness with which this enquiry is made, the number of deaths calling for an inquest is reduced to three-fourths, one-half, or even one-fourth of the total number reported for investigation.

The Quebec statute of 1892 necessitates a preliminary enquiry by the Coroner before deciding to hold an inquest; and, if a careful and satisfactory enquiry could be enforced, there would be no grounds for holding inquests in more than one-fourth of the total number of deaths reported as suspicious in Montreal; in other words, less than 100 inquests would be held in each year. The Quebec statute differs materially from that of England, which

compels Coroners to hold public inquests in all cases of deaths not due to natural causes, and in all deaths in prison from any cause whatever. In Ontario, where the statute is the same as Quebec, no inquests are held in cases of accident from negligence of the deceased or cases of suicide.

It seems better in the interest of society that inquests should be held in cases of suicide, in order to check its frequency; as, in countries where this is not done, suicide is decidedly more frequent; but the present Quebec statute leaves it doubtful whether inquests must be held on suicides or not.

The idea of the Quebec statute of 1892 seems excellent in principle, as the State can have no interest in investigating deaths not due to violence. The only defect is that, without a medical examination or inquiry, it is impossible, in most cases, to determine whether death is due to violence or not; and a knowledge of the cause of death is, in most instances, the first step necessary.

## PRELIMINARY MEDICAL EXAMINATION.

In the United States this fact is taken advantage of, and the preliminary examination is always made by a medical man. Most of the American and Canadian coroners are, on this account, physicians; and when such is not the case, are provided with medical officers who make the preliminary enquiry. The result being, that inquests are only held upon violent deaths.

## AUTOPSIES.

The best results are obtained when an autopsy is permissible at the preliminary inquiry. In Massachusetts, in spite of the fact that nearly \$40 is paid for each autopsy, the average cost of investigating suspicious deaths is \$12.80, or \$10 less than in Montreal; and, in New York, the average cost of each death investigated is only \$10; including all the expenses of conducting the Coroner's Court.