

## NOTES ON CORONERS.

Charles Turner Bravo was a young barrister, of strong constitution and sound health, who had recently been married to a widow possessed of a handsome income. One day after dinner he was taken suddenly and violently ill, and showed all the symptoms of metallic poisoning. To the physicians who were called he resolutely denied having taken such a poison, though Mrs. Cox, a companion of his wife, afterwards told them that he had confessed to her that he had taken it, and implored her not to tell his wife. In the course of the next day he died. Chemical analysis of the vomited food and of the contents of the intestines conclusively proved it to be a case of poisoning by tartar emetic. At his last meal Mr. Bravo had partaken of all the food in common with his wife and Mrs. Cox. The only thing which he alone had used was a bottle of Burgundy.

The resolute denial of the deceased *in extremis* to his physicians that he had taken poison, although informed in the most solemn terms by Sir William Gull that the consequences of his denial might be to throw suspicion on some one else, and the apparent absence of motive for an act of self destruction, occasioned doubt as to his having committed suicide. The coroner, however, adopted from the first the theory of suicide, heard only a portion of the testimony. No examination was suggested of the wine remaining in the bottle, nor was it accounted for; no inquiry was made as to where the tartar emetic was procured; the wife of the deceased was not examined; and the coroner positively declined to examine one of the physicians who had been in attendance, and who offered to testify.

The necessary result of this perfunctory proceeding was a verdict that the deceased died from the effects of antimonial poison, but how or by whom the poison was administered there was no evidence to show. In other words, the only fact found by the verdict was that which the medical inquiry satisfactorily established, that the death had resulted from poison; and the only purpose for which an inquest is ever justifiable,—to ascertain whether a crime had been committed or not, was left wholly out of sight.

Certain suspicious circumstances in the case and the position taken by the medi-

cal gentlemen in attendance on the deceased caused the whole matter to become notorious; and such was the public indignation aroused by this palpable farce and miscarriage of justice, that the attention of the government was drawn to the case. The Attorney-General moved the Court of Queen's Bench to quash the inquisition, and have a special commission appointed to hold another inquest. The Solicitors of the Treasury were set at work upon the case, and after many weeks of a most searching and careful investigation, during which all manner of collateral inquiry was indulged in, attended on both sides by eminent counsel, the second verdict was returned to the effect that Mr. Bravo did not commit suicide; that he did not die by misadventure; that he was wilfully murdered by having tartar emetic administered to him, but that there was not sufficient evidence to fix the guilt upon any person or persons. If a crime was here committed, the failure of the coroner to inquire into facts clearly connected with the death—such as examining the contents of the bottle from which Mr. Bravo alone had partaken at his last meal—probably defeated the ends of justice; if it was not a case of crime, but of suicide or accident, the hurried and slipshod manner in which the first inquiry was conducted aroused a painful suspicion, and occasioned a long and expensive, and, as it proved, fruitless investigation. In either view of the matter, proper care and a decent regard for the important interests involved would have insured the utmost care at the first hearing, and obviated the needless and scandalous second inquest.

Sir Charles Lyell, the eminent geologist, died after a lingering illness, resulting mainly from his advanced age. Some time previous to his death he had stumbled on the staircase, and fallen in such a manner as to inflict some injury, which probably, in his already weak state, hastened his decease. He had been attended by eminent physicians, who regularly certified the cause of his death. The body, encased in a leaden coffin and an oaken box surrounding it, was lying in his house ready for interment. At this moment Coroner Hardwicke, stimulated by an over-zealous officiousness, ob-