

ONE HUNDRED CASES IN THE CORONER'S
COURT OF MONTREAL, 1893.

BY WYATT JOHNSTON M.D., MONTREAL.

(Concluded.)

IV.—DEATH FROM NATURAL CAUSES (20 CASES).

Under natural causes I have included those cases only where a known natural cause could be fairly considered as proved. Those cases where indefinite verdicts of "natural causes" were rendered, have been classed as deaths from unknown causes.

Our great source of inaccuracy in coroner work is the readiness with which probable (and even, improbable) medical explanations of the death are made the basis of verdicts. The phrase "I don't know" is not perhaps as frequently made use of in medical evidence as it might be.

The family physician is placed in a very delicate position when summoned as a witness. He is often examined in the presence of the persons who are his patients, before a jury some of whom may be his patients and he may have already made some informal statement as to the cause of death. He may too, through his attendance on the deceased be in possession of secrets which he hesitates to reveal, 'sine gravi causa,' to a prying and inquisitive jury. Among his patients, the family physician is very properly regarded as an oracle. Personally, when almost all of us infinitely prefer that our medical attendant shall not inflict upon us his doubts and difficulties in our own cases. On the other hand, in legal matters, the oracular functions of the physician remain in abeyance, and it becomes simply a question of what is or is not proved by facts.

An expert is placed in a rather more favorable position than an ordinary medical witness as there are no extraneous reasons why he must appear to know more than the facts clearly establish, and he may without loss of dignity adopt the agnostic as opposed to the oracular stand-point in giving medical evidence. As the information acquired by the expert is not obtained in confidence from a patient, he is more free to divulge it if necessary, and the employment of experts in