

a careful inquiry, by the Coroner, into the outside circumstances might be necessary.

On this account, if a joint inquiry were made, either the Coroner or Medical Examiner would, in many cases, have very little work; and, therefore, a reduced fee paid in all cases would be fair to both. One Coroner could easily take charge of a district requiring several Medical Examiners; and, in the country, where the outside circumstances are readily ascertained, the medical examiner might take entire charge of the preliminary investigation, only notifying the Coroner when the case proved really suspicious. In the country, we have, already, medical men now acting as Coroners who could be appointed Medical Examiners.

It is very important that the Medical Examiner should *make inquiry* into medical matters, in addition to examining the body, and should aid the Coroner in making any medical enquiries. In any case, the first thing to be established is whether death is due to violence or not, before the legal question of responsibility can be considered at all.

Juries should only be summoned when their assistance is really necessary. It seems safer to call them in all cases of homicide and, possibly, of suicide, but their real usefulness would lie in considering cases supposed to be due to negligence, especially railway and industrial accidents. The verdicts given in such cases, though they never result in a conviction for homicide, no doubt indirectly tend to ensure public safety.

In many parts of the United States inquests are held privately, but this plan would scarcely be tolerated here. Publicity, by juries, is a protection to a Coroner, as the blame for any mistake, of course, rests with the jury.

DEATH FROM NATURAL CAUSES.

Respecting the large number of natural deaths reported as suspicious, it may be

said that the proportion they form in Montreal cases, viz., 42 p.c., is not unusually high;—the number in New York being 68 p.c., in Philadelphia 72 p.c., in Liverpool 72.3 p.c., in Charleston 77 p.c., and in Chicago 47 p.c. In Boston they form 36.6 p.c.

The best means of excluding these cases from Coroners' Courts is by establishing some good system of registration of deaths, and enforcing a preliminary medical investigation by the Local Boards of Health into deaths not properly certified, before reporting them to the Coroner. I am glad to learn that there is a prospect of the charter of the city of Montreal being amended in this respect during the present session.

CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, I have only to state that, in my opinion, what is needed to improve the Coroner's Court of the Province of Quebec is the introduction of a law similar to that now existing in Connecticut, providing for coroners with legal knowledge and official medical examiners, with definite instructions as to the duties of both.

I would, therefore, respectfully suggest:—

1. The appointment, in each district, of official medical examiners, to determine whether death is due to violence or not; and of magistrates or lawyers, as coroners, to decide whether such violence is criminal and calls for inquest before a jury.

2. A preliminary inquiry and examination of the body in all cases reported; made jointly by the medical examiner and coroner in cities, and by the medical examiner alone in rural districts;—the facts obtained to be recorded in writing.

3. Autopsies to be ordered when the cause of death is unknown and the circumstances of the death suspicious. Juries to be summoned when evidence is obtained pointing to criminal violence.

4. Salaries to be substituted for fees in the case of large cities.

If desired to do so, I am prepared to frame an Act which will provide for this