

CANADA

Medical and Surgical Journal.

MONTREAL, FEBRUARY, 1879.

CORONER'S INQUESTS.

We insert, by request, a letter from Dr. O'Leary, addressed to the Editor of *The Montreal Herald*, which will be found to be a running commentary on the inquest held on the body of the late Richard Patton, suspected to have died by poison, or of having committed suicide by swallowing an over-dose of morphine. We do not think that it has been proved positively and without doubt, that the deceased actually did die of morphia poisoning, but then it was not to be expected that the mere examination of the stomach and its contents would satisfactorily prove this point.

The whole affair from beginning to end appears to have been bungled.

An inquiry touching the death of an individual, to be of any service in the administration of the law, ought to be conducted on such principles as to leave no loop-hole or assailable point where a doubt can be entertained. The law always leans to the side of mercy in criminal cases, and the prisoner is entitled to the benefit of any doubt which may arise. This is a well-known axiom, and since it is so, why should not the Government guard against any such possibility by the employment of skilled evidence where such is attainable. In the method of conducting inquests as at present followed, it does appear to be a mere matter of form, a disagreeable form which has to be gone through, but which means nothing, and practically amounts to nothing. The country is saddled with expense in conducting a meaningless inquiry, which in the end serves to fill our evening