

# THE LANCET

## HOLDING INQUESTS.

The rareness of the event, holding an inquest in the Province of Manitoba, justifies special mention. We, with many others, devoutly hope that it heralds a different line of action on the part of the authorities than has hitherto prevailed. The inquest alluded to was held on the body of a young Englishman who was fatally asphyxiated by coal gas while asleep in the room of a city hotel. This was the second case in the same house fatally ending from a like cause within a few weeks, so that the authorities could not well pass it over. That the jury considered blame attached to others, their verdict shows. Numbers of people have met with violent deaths in this city and province in the last twenty-five years, but, in consequence of the apparent cause of death being evident, no inquiry was deemed necessary. A scaffolding may fall and unfortunate mechanics hurled to their death. It does not require a Solomon to conclude that they were killed by the giving away of the planks on which they trusted their lives. But, was no one culpable for the careless fixing of this scaffolding? A man wanders from a bar-room and is found frozen to death without a cent in his pocket. Another is found laying on the road shot dead, with a gun lying near him, one barrel discharged; others have met with violent deaths under railway trains. The causes of death are all in evidence, but it is only by the coroner's inquest that it is elicited whether blame attached to any person or persons for the death. We are supposed to be governed by English law. But an infant cannot be buried in the United Kingdom, who dies an unnatural death, without the indispensable inquest. No law officer has the power to burke this inquiry, and the score of economy, which

dictates it here, is, we believe, deserving of the very strongest condemnation. If English law prevails, it is against the law, and it robs the public of one of the greatest safeguards against crime and culpable negligence. A coroner's inquest has numberless times unearthed strange and unthought of facts, that have routed the previous theories of the causes of death, though apparently they were plain. It is not sufficient to satisfy any one man, or even a number of men, on a cursory inquiry as to the cause of the loss of that which is easily taken, but which no mortal can give. The cause and the minutest details surrounding the violent death should be thoroughly investigated, and this investigation is due to the public, and no paltry cloak of economy, or self-sufficient judgment, should be allowed to thwart a legal process enacted for the welfare and protection of citizens at large. We have repeatedly called attention in these columns to the culpable neglect of holding an inquest in all cases of unnatural death. Serious injury to the public is perpetrated in every instance where, on a perfunctory inquiry, the dead are placed out of sight. It is simply an encouragement to crime. We trust that the profession will seriously consider the subject, and refuse to take the position of coroner saddled with the restriction that an inquest held, unless sanctioned by the legal department of the government, will be at the coroner's expense. An honored position mentioned in the Charter of Athelstan to Beverly Ann, 925, and according to Sir Thomas Smith, who wrote in 1853, deriving the name from crowner or coromator, because the subject of every death by violence is accounted to touch the Crown, has fallen into disuse, we may almost add contempt, under the action of the Local Legislature of Manitoba. Let the law be carried out as intended, and a paltry, dangerous and fatal economy departed from.