

CORONER'S INQUEST.

An inquest was held yesterday at 11 a.m. at the Bird-in-Hand Hotel before Mr. Tarleton, coroner, and a jury of seven, Mr. J. Smith being foreman, touching the cause of death of Henry Griffiths, master of the schooner Rubicon, who was found in the Constitution Dock on the morning of Monday, the 24th instant.

The jury having viewed the body, the following evidence was taken :—

David Fermaner deposed that he was a friend of deceased and his family, and came round with deceased in the Rubicon. The vessel was moored in the Constitution Dock. Deceased and witness lived on board the vessel. Witness remembered Thursday afternoon last, the 20th inst. Deceased asked witness to look after some bark that was being placed on board the vessel, as he had business to attend to ashore. He was then perfectly sober. Witness accordingly remained on board the vessel, and deceased returned to the vessel at 3 o'clock. He said he had just sent a draft to his father, and he asked witness to look after the vessel a little longer as he had more business to attend to. Witness did not observe any signs of liquor about the deceased at that time. Witness next saw him at 10 minutes past 5. They had some conversation, and deceased appeared to be a little excited. He afterwards went away, and

witness did not see him again alive. Witness went ashore on that night about 6 o'clock, and returned about 9 30. When he got on board he was surprised to find that deceased was not there. Witness went to bed as usual, and heard no noise during the night of any one coming on board. Next day he gave information to the police of deceased being missing, and was for several days engaged with Constable Armstrong in hunting about the town for him. As deceased had not turned up on Monday, and having a suspicion that he might have fallen into the dock, and got under the vessel, witness determined to move her. After the vessel had been moved, witness looked into the deep water where she had been lying, but could not see anything of deceased. About an hour afterwards witness, in looking into the water close to the side of the dock, saw the body of the deceased in a sitting position, between the side of the dock and the place where the vessel had been. If the deceased had been standing at the time his head must have been out of the water. The body was just underneath where the gangway of the vessel was before she was moved. His back was against the side of the dock. There was no gangway plank in use, and anyone going on board had to step off the edge of the wharf on to the rail of the vessel. Witness got a boathook and lifted the body up with it. He afterwards had the body conveyed to the dead-house. Deceased had been a man of intemperate habits, but had been

pretty steady lately. Deceased was 51 years of age, and was a native of Launceston. In the opinion of witness as a seafaring man, the Dock was very unsafe, and was not properly supplied with appliances for saving life. There were no life lines by which people could assist themselves out of the Dock, and unless help was available to people falling into the Dock they must be drowned, no matter how well they could swim, as there was nothing but a wall to climb up. He was also of opinion that all vessels should be compelled, as in other ports, to have a gangway plank.

John Griffiths, son of deceased, deposed that he was nine years of age, and came round from the Mersey in the Rubicon. He remembered Mr. Fermaner going ashore about 6 o'clock on Thursday evening last. Witness stopped on board, and remembered his father coming on board about 8:30. Witness was in the cabin, and his father told him to go to bed, and said that he had to watch the vessel. Deceased was quite sober at that time. Witness then went to bed, and did not see any more of his father. He heard him walking along the deck after he left the cabin. Witness did not hear any noise in the night.

William Holdsworth Macfarlane, M.B., deposed that he was house surgeon at the General Hospital. The body of deceased was taken to the hospital on Monday last. He had made a *post mortem* examination of the body, and had found some bruises and abrasions on the forehead and eyelids from which blood had flowed. There was also a small

bruise on the back of the right hand. Both fists were clenched. There was a quantity of mucus on the beard of deceased, and his clothes were saturated with water. Without making a thorough examination witness was of opinion that the appearance of the body was not inconsistent with death from drowning. He believed that the death of deceased had been caused by drowning. The bruise on the forehead was such as might have been caused by a man striking his head against the iron railing of the vessel. There was no fracture underneath the bruise. The blow might have stunned deceased for a few minutes.

This was all the evidence taken, and the Coroner in summing up, stated that the police had made an effort to trace the movements of deceased on the night of Thursday, but without effect. The death appeared to be the result of one of those sad accidents which do occasionally take place, viz., by the deceased falling between the vessel and the side of the dock in attempting to get on board. There was no absolute evidence upon this point, but the whole facts of the case were not inconsistent with the supposition. The remarks of Mr. Fermaner were highly deserving of notice. It was certainly an unfortunate fact that a great number of people had been drowned in the Constitution Dock, and he hoped now that attention had been called to the subject, the authorities would take some steps to prevent a sacrifice of life for the future. Speaking of the absence of gangway planks, he said that it was only recently that he had experienced con-

siderable difficulty in getting on board a vessel in the dock.

The jury returned a verdict of death from drowning, caused by deceased accidentally falling into the Constitution Dock on the night of the 20th instant.
