

The room is a dingy, stuffy, little hole, seemingly too cheaply mean and baldly prosaic for anything but the commonplace. It was certainly not a fitting stage-setting for tragedy. Nor did the people make a humanly harmonizing background. They were there to hear what might be the most awful of all sentences, but they could not realize the situation. Indeed the thing was an impossibility. A woman behind me said she "hoped they would be acquitted as she couldn't bear to hear them sentenced." People were complaining of the draughts. Some one near me was munching peanuts. When women were found seats by the court officers, they smiled their thanks not otherwise than they would have done in a street car. Yet there were men very near to death within reach of their parasols. The counsel for the crown was delivering his terrible indictment, and when he would succeed in piecing out the damning wof of logic with merciless astuteness, men here and there would chuckle at what they saw only as uncommon "smartness." They would have been impressed quite as much, if not more, by the aspirate idiocies and theatrical gesticulation of a lawyer before the footlights. One could not put one's self in a position to feel with the accused. It was unreal, a garish drama. Truly the jury were affected, but the current of intense feeling running between the judges and those to be judged was almost completely insulated. This has not the ring of probability, but truth is stranger than fiction. On the faces of those not directly concerned there was no "chill dread," no "breathless suspense"—not at that time; even later there was not much.

The prisoners' box was the centre to which wandering eyes kept ever returning. Their drawn, sleepless faces were the colour of unbrowned pastry. Their eyes had that dull rigidity which comes from constant looking in one direction in horrible unwinking fascination. It is a tenet of psychology that the body tends to follow the attention if the latter be fixed on one point; at times these men would attempt to sit up erectly against the back of the box, but, getting their heads in a line with some object on the wall, one could see them gradually lean forward toward the counsel and jury.

The judge was finishing his charge. Whether it was in the man or the subject, there was something in the words and the delivery which was wonderfully impressive. It was an unbroken monotone, rising and falling without the insincerity of oratory, sweeping powerfully into the mind and soul. It was a kind of gravely solemn, deeply resonant chant, such as might have been read from the infallible scrolls by a hoary-haired prophet of the Chosen People. Accusation and palliation flowed forth together—though it was certainly favourable to an acquittal. It seemed to be the essence of British law, ponderous and awful with imperturbable calm. The jury sat rigidly upright, looking into vacancy with that peculiar absence of expression, which seems an emotional atavistic recurrence to the Aryan; it comes only when caused by intensity of feeling. They had wept when the counsel for the defence had appealed to them. There was none of that now, though they were much more deeply moved. The prisoners stiffened themselves in their places, pulling themselves together. Their hands twitched with nervousness. The sudden sharp chirping of some sparrows at an upper window, broke on the still sombreness of the room with painful acuteness, and drew a spasmodic glance from one of them; but his gaze went back to the stern judge above him as if drawn by a magnet.

When the jury rose to leave the court the tenseness of feeling was relieved and there was a sudden elastic rebound. Chatting broke out on all sides and the court-room watchdogs of the Javert breed bayed at the unchained minds with petty sternness. The prisoners were detained in the box for a few moments, while the counsel for the Crown rose with legal relentlessness to make motion for their arrest on other charges. They were at that moment expecting the death penalty, but it was prudent to foresee their acquittal. English justice must have seemed to them like a merciless bird of prey, which would relax one claw only to grip the harder with the other. They were led away to await the return of the jury. With them all thought of death seemed to leave the room. People were excited; little jokes became jests which called forth immoderate laughter; the senses again awoke to the bad atmosphere of the place, the must and dust, and the recent meat and drink of one's neighbours. Almost no one was serious. The wife of one of the prisoners smiled at an acquaintance; human nature is frequently a palpable falsehood. The whole scene was like that seen in

the grand stand at the starting of a horse race. The moment was come, but as yet there was no cause for hope or fear.

A bustling and inflowing of officials announced the agreement of the jury. The court rose to receive the judge. The jury filed in stolidly. The prisoners leaned forward. The shuffling of feet and the whispering died down to a stillness which brought into sudden loudness the ticking of the clock. The clerk gabbled the legal interrogation at the twelve arbiters. The foreman rose, straightened his shoulders under the dignity of office, and gave out an abrupt "Not Guilty." Then there was a sudden clapping and murmur, stifled by cries for order. The faces of the two given new life relaxed into ludicrous, uncontrollable delight. The judge was still a stern sphinx-like machine of justice. The prisoners were formally acquitted. The big detective walked up to them with a genial grin and took them again in charge. We went out to the fresh air, and heard the newsboys selling special editions with much outcry.

A. E. McFARLANE.

MONTREALS MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

Some interest is beginning to be taken in the municipal elections which take place the first of next February. Our council, by the law passed in 1893, is elected every two years. Previous to that date aldermen were elected for three years and a third of the council retired every year. This was not satisfactory to the people since it lent itself readily to the perpetuation of ring rule; and the Legislature was urged to fix the term of the council for one year and have an annual election. This the Legislature would not do, but fixed upon the two years term as a compromise, at the same time reducing the representation of each ward from three to two. The Mayor's term, which had previously been for one year only, was made synchronous with that of the council. The present Council is the first under these regulations, and in two months time all its members will have to face their constituents at the same time, and if the people are dissatisfied with them, as they certainly should be in a majority of cases, they will have a chance to make a change.

The successor to Mayor Villeneuve should be English-speaking, and a Protestant at that, by virtue of what is known as "the compact" of 1885. This has no force, however, except as its reasonableness appeals to the electors; and as, with one exception, it has never been loyally obeyed by all parties to it there is no certainty that it will this time command enough support to put a member of the minority in the Mayor's chair. The understanding was that the office should be held alternately by English and French, two years at a time being given to each nationality. In 1887 when Sir John Abbott was chosen by the English he was opposed by Mr. Rainville, but was elected. To him, after his two years term, succeeded Mr. Grenier, who, however, after serving two years declined to retire. The French, however, again showed their loyalty to the understanding and Mr. Grenier was beaten by James McShane by something like five thousand majority. But that weakness which comes to men in office of regarding themselves as indispensable to the public overtook Mr. McShane and at the close of his two years service he had himself put in nomination again. He was opposed by Senator Desjardins, and, it is the best proof of Mr. McShane's extraordinary popularity with the masses, that though his candidacy was in defiance of this understanding and being such was opposed by every news paper in the city he was beaten by about only one hundred and fifty votes. Mr. Desjardins not offering for re-election. Mr. Villeneuve became the French candidate in the following year and was opposed by Mr. McShane who was again barely defeated. In both cases Mr. McShane owed his defeat to the large majorities rolled up against him in the English wards. The English, indeed, resented his candidacy much more than did the French, for they felt that if the compact were once broken by the election of an English-speaking Mayor, out of his turn, they would be certain to pay dearly for it in the near future by being entirely excluded from participation in this honor.

Both French and English have, therefore, shown their wish to have this unwritten law obeyed, and if the English Protestants put forward a man personally acceptable to the better-class of the French he will probably be elected though he is certain to be opposed by some representative of the "grab-all" French-Canadian element.