Royal Victoria: The Inside Story

SIR HENRY GRAY'S GROSS BETRAYAL.

Two weeks ago this paper asked, in a brief editorial, for a clean-cut expression of truth from those most intimately concerned in the forced resignation of Sir Henry Gray as Surgeon-in-Chief at the Royal Victoria Hospital and as a member of the staff in the Faculty of Medicine at McGill. No attempt having been made in the meantime by those interested to acquaint the public with the facts of this extraordinary incident, it has devolved upon me to investigate the causes of what may be termed the Gray case and make public the results of my inquiries.

I may say, first, that I am astounded and disgusted at the sorry spectacle which certain leading medical men of this community have made of themselves, and say that, unless steps are taken at once to right offence against this eminent guest-surgeon of Canada's, that both McGill University's Faculty of Medicine and the Royal Victoria Hospital are bound to appear ridiculous in the eyes of the medical world. It is primarily because of my belief that injustice has been done to Sir Henry Gray by these two institutions and by certain prominent local medical men, that this article appears.

It is also my opinion that both the university and the hospital can only stand foursquare before the world by rectification of the wrong they have done, and that, if these institutions permit themselves and their destinies to be guided by those who have made it their personal and almost public business to ruin Gray's reputation—then the star of either or both must decline.

Had Sir Henry Gray been a mere local celebrity, it might have been possible to discredit him and sack him, as McGill and "The Vic" have done, but, Gray's fame does not happen to be local to Montreal.

After thorough investigation of causes and effects there is no choice but to cite Dr. Charles Martin, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at McGill University for conduct unbecoming a gentleman of his learned profession, and to criticise Sir Arthur Currie, Principal of the University, for permitting himself to be used as a tool by those who sought Gray's head on a charger.

Let us now consider the case.

THE CENTRAL FIGURE.
Who is Sir Henry Grey?

Until three weeks ago he was the Surgeon-in-Chief at the Royal Victoria Hospital and an honorary member of the staff of the faculty of Medicine at McGill. The former post he assumed on invitation by the Board of Governors after the retirement of Dr. Armstrong, coming to Canada from the Old Country to take charge, it having been the opinion of those most concerned in the selection of a successor to Dr. Armstrong that there was not a local doctor, member of the staff, of big enough calibre for the post. He joined the teaching staff in an honorary capacity after Dean Martin had rushed Dr. Archibald into the role of Professor of Surgery, when it was heard that he was to take charge at the hospital. Until then the two positions of Surgeon-in-Chief of The Royal Victoria Hospital and Professor of Surgery at McGill University had been regarded as practically one and the same. Thus, Sir Henry Gray, on arrival in Montreal, found himself in charge at the Royal Victoria, but subordinate to his own hospital juniors at the university. This impossible position was permitted to exist and encouraged by Dr. Martin, the Dean at McGill, who should have realised that the situation he was creating could lead only to dissension.

Continuing the reply to the question, "Who is Sir Henry Gray?" Prior to coming to Montreal he was recognized as one of the great surgical authorities of the day. He had been chief consultant in surgery with the Armies in France until 1918 when he was recalled to the War Office for even more important work. Gray's fame and standing are world wide and are by far too great to be permanently affected by the parish pump politics of the two local institutions which so cursorily disposed of his services.

Why did Sir Henry Gray come to Montreal?

He came to Montreal at the request and invitation of the Governors of the Royal Victoria Hospital to assume charge as Surgeon-in-Chief, because, to repeat, it was felt that there was no local surgeon on the hospital staff big enough to assume the task from which Dr. Armstrong was then retiring.

Then What Happened?

The mere announcement that Gray was to take charge at the Royal Victoria provided all that was necessary as a red rag to the surgical bulls at the "Vic." There is a clique at the Royal Victoria which is very jealous of its own rights and privileges, a clique which has always aimed to control the hospital from the surgical point of view. Almost any doctor will tell you so. To these men the appointments of an outside was a calamity; that the appointed outside should be a man of such eminence in his profession, was calamity and catastrophe combined. The plotters wasted no time. Even before Gray's arrival, canards were being spread in an effort to shatter his reputation in advance. Dr. Archibald was at once rushed into the Surgical post at McGill, one which should, in courtesy, have been offered to Sir Henry on his arrival. By every available manner of means, mainly unethical, everything was done to make his lot impossible. Instead of meeting Gray's offers of cooperation, Sir Henry was greeted with secret and public rebuffs and by underhanded propaganda engaged in for no other reason than to ruin his reputation as a surgeon. This was the way in which Montreal surgeons of high local rank greeted their distinguished colleague from beyond the sea.

Rumours were quietly set going on his arrival calculated to ruin his prestige.

It was said that "Gray was sent home from France," a statement tantamount to labelling him a failure and a washout, as any soldier will tell you. That rumour had its root in falsehood and those who aired it did so without any reference to sources where authentic information was available. Had they investigated their rumour, prior to releasing it, they would have found that Gray was recalled to England from France to work side by side with Robert Jones, the man who is recognized as the greatest orthopedic surgeon of his or any other day. Had the anti-Gray propagandists been honest men, let alone men of ethical standards they would have asked, for instance, Director-General of Medical Services Goodwin, in London, for a statement as to Gray's capabilities before they set out, as parish politicians to tear his reputation to tatters. Such statements are laughable. The unfortunate thing about them is that people in their ignorance of facts are only too prone to absorb gossip even more readily than they can assimilate gospel.

"WITHOUT GLOVES"

Professional ill-wishers—ill-wishers in their desire to discredit Gray because they believed, little men, that his presence amongst them threatened their own prestige—declared that his operating room was a menace to the lives of his patients in that he operated "without gloves." It was whispered that Gray was so careless in the operating theatre that his patients ran grave chances of infection at his hands. That figment of the imagination finds its best refutation in Gray's professional reputation over the last twenty-five years, during which times he has ascended to the summit of his craft—without gloves. No man could become the Empire's chief surgical consultant in the field during the war, as Gray did, no man could be knighted by his King for his services to surgery, as Gray was, unless his merits were above the criticisms of a clique of jealous men who are just ordinary, every day surgeons of high standing in Montreal, but of no great account elsewhere. Yet with what haste was rumour spread when Gray had a series of unsuccessful operations in a week at the Royal Victoria! I have not heard that all the patients operated upon by the local men at the "Vic" have lived to tell the tale. But I have heard rumours of operating room laxity at the same institution in those days which were quite on a par with anything that was whispered about Gray.

The general public is always led to believe that doctors, as a class, are jealous of professional ethics and honour. In that belief I concur. But jealousy of the man may sometimes run away with individual honour, and there is no question that this happened in the case of Gray. It is publicly stated by doctors that a certain eminent member of the profession locally went so far in his mad jealousy as to visit the friends of a young lady who was to go under Gray's knife, and urge them not to permit the young lady to be operated on by Sir Henry. "He is a dangerous man," this medical man is said to have declared. And the operation was performed by somebody else.

I do not think that there is necessity to recite other falsehoods or unwarranted fabrications that were spread in the effort to discredit the Surgeon-in-chief. The statements which I have made in the paragraphs above are sufficient to establish the fact that I know my ground and that my investigations have been thorough. So we will turn from rumour towards the more active forms of attack levelled at Sir Henry Gray by those who wanted him out of the way—where they now have him, they imagine.

THE STAR CHAMBER

Star Chamber intrigues have formed a great part of the inner life of the two institutions in the past months, though it was through the university that the heaviest direct blows were struck at Gray, it being there that his enemies had their strongest attack positions. "Dissension" was the keynote of the campaign at McGill, and dissension was worked up to a high pitch until Sir Arthur Currie, the Principal, was manoeuvered into a position where he was made to believe that the only way to bring harmony into the Faculty of Medicine was to get rid of Gray.

Perhaps by the time Currie acted, things may have reached that pass. One thing is sure, and that is that Dean Martin of Medicine did not make any real effort to maintain peace in his family or to help the cause of Sir Henry Gray. Had Martin been actuated only by the desire to help McGill and the School of Medicine, there are many things that he might have done which he left undone, making it absolutely apparent to the most ignorant lay observer just where the Martin sympathies have been.

Another thing that must be said is that Sir Arthur Currie, in his manner of disposing of Gray's services at McGill, did not take a course that will gain for the McGill Principal any great reputation as a diplomat. In fact he is obviously a tool, wittingly or unwittingly.

The anti-Gray clique struck from its strongest vantage point, McGill. Currie was made to feel that harmony was impossible if Gray remained—and you will note that I take the charitable view of Sir Arthur's action, placing him in the role of instrument rather than casting him as co-inspirator. But neither view is particularly flattering to the former Canadian Corps Commander. I believe that it took much time, much pressure and much persuasion to bring Currie to the point where he wrote the letter asking Gray to "turn in his equipment." But the dissension point was stressed so strongly that the Principal finally acted—and Sir Henry Gray was discharged from the teaching staff at McGill. After that the heads of the Royal Victoria, again seeing the "dissension" bogey, felt that no course was open to them other than to instruct Sir Henry that his days as Surgeon-in-Chief at the Royal Victoria were over. In that, too, I take the charitable view, though, in my capacity as observer, I must say that I think that the second dismissal followed too quickly on the heels of the first not to have been pre-arranged.

The next strip of action in this colorful incident is known to the public and consists of the publication on the front page of the Montreal Gazette of the facts immediately surrounding Sir Henry's double-dismissal, accompanied by a letter sent by Sir Arthur Currie to Sir Henry Gray, and the latter's reply. Currie's letter was feeble and cringing, while Gray's bore earmarks of having been written by a man stunned by a body blow.

The subsequent issues of daily newspapers of the same date made reference to the "incident"—and that ended the matter in so far as the taking of the public into the confidence of those concerned goes.

Nothing further appeared in the daily press.

Why?

Because the "story" was "killed" to use a newspaper phrase. It was "killed" by request. The anti Gray crowd wanted no further publicity for their sally into the realms of intrigue and stealth, and proprietors of the leading English-speaking newspapers in Montreal promptly clamped the lid down on "The Gray Case."

Why have the daily newspapers of Montreal persistently refrained from publishing signed letters taken to their editors by members of the medical profession who desired to express their views and rally to Gray's support?

Why were City Editors instructed to "kill" any news item bearing on the matter?

I gave the answer to these two questions before I asked them.

The whole matter is a public scandal and a public disgrace, and it can have no other effect than to drag two of this community's finest institutions in the muck. When the coterie of amateur archplotters set out to discredit Gray and rid themselves of him—to become sun instead of shadow themselves—they overlooked something very important namely that, though they may control the Royal Victoria Hospital and McGill University and can bring pressure to bear on the Montreal press to squelch unpleasant stories, they do not control anything very much outside the confines of this locality and that, in attacking Gray, they have sought as their target a man who, because of his eminent position in his profession, can muster the strongest forces in the world of surgery at his back, and that his former colleagues across the sea—as well as surgeons of eminent position in the United States—are not likely to let the matter drop at the point to which the local muddlers have brought it.

I can see no other solution in view than the complete exoneration of Sir Henry Gray by medical men of world repute, and that—unless action is immediately taken here, on the ground to adjust matters satisfactorily and repudiate Gray's enemies—can only lead to discredit for McGill and the hospital which Sir Henry served. If the university and the hospital insist on standing their present ground and Gray is exonerated by his colleagues elsewhere, the result will not serve to enhance the reputation of McGill nor will "The Vic" appear in good light. Therefore, I say, let those who have the good of these two great institutions at heart, not to mention the good of the medical profession locally, come forward and fling aside the curtains of deceit and treachery which are being permitted to hide the facts behind.—(Leslie M. Roberts in Roberts Weekly).

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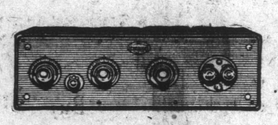

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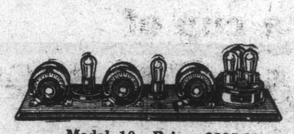

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