

Montreal Council on the Rampage

The Montreal city council was in its most characteristic vein recently, when the question of the recent Health Survey came up for discussion on a lengthy motion of Alderman Dr. Poulin, expressing a view deprecatory of the findings of the Survey. In the result, an amendment of Alderman des Roches, chairman of the city executive committee, referring the Survey for study to a commission of aldermen was carried; but not before several members of the council had gone on the rampage, just in the old sweet way. Among a section of the aldermen, indignation, real or simulated, waxed fast and furious at the Survey, which one of the medical members of the council (Alderman Dr. Quintal) characterized in set terms as unfair to the city, while he also described its publication and distribution as unjust. The indignation, it will be noted, was "on tap" not for the state of affairs, in many respects a very shocking state, that the Health Survey uncovered, but for the action of those who, in the public interest, have disseminated among the public the information that it contained.

As our readers are aware, we are of the opinion that those who made themselves responsible for the

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very prolonged and expensive undertaking of the Health Survey, absolutely without cost to the city of Montreal, are deserving of high praise for their public spirit. They obtained the services of experts of the highest standing and efficiency, to be found on this continent, to conduct it, and, in support of the project, they got together perhaps the most influential committee that has ever been constituted in Montreal to deal with a matter of urgent and vital public importance. And now, forsooth, because the Survey has disclosed certain facts, in connection with the state of public health in Montreal, of a kind naturally disconcerting to those whose main policy on this all-important matter can all too often be summed up in the mystic words, "Hush, hush!" the experts and their findings are to be held up to public derision and the motives of those who made themselves responsible for the Survey are to be impugned.

Some of the facts that the Survey brought out were of a very disturbing kind, as we have previously had occasion to point out. For example, the death rate in Montreal is far higher than that prevailing in any of the twelve larger cities with which a comparison is instituted; the infant mortality rate is also far higher than that prevailing in any of the same twelve cities; and the death rate, among children two years old and younger, from diarrhoea and enteritis, is far higher in Montreal than in any city of the twelve. At the same time, the money expended by the city of Montreal, for purposes of public health, is immensely less in amount in proportion to population, than that expended by any of the twelve large cities with which comparison is made. Of course, the connection between cause and effect is inescapable even by the poorest kind of aldermanic intelligence. The obvious remedy is: Spend more money on public health. In fact, that is what the Survey has specifically recommended. It is what informed opinion on public health matters in Montreal, both medical and otherwise, knows to be an absolute necessity. But it is what a certain section of the council — that council which, alas! has so often proved itself profuse where it should be vigilantly economical, and cheese-paring where expenditures are greatly and gravely needed — doesn't want. Hence the indignation and vituperation.

However, while the Health Survey did not create the deplorable conditions existent, in certain directions in the domain of public health in Montreal, it has, very effectually and very properly, turned the searchlight of public attention on them. The matter will not "down" now, in spite of all the vaporings and blusterings of "rampageous" aldermen. The commission to which the Survey has been referred for study will be closely watched at its work. In any case, it is the almost unanimous view of authoritative opinion, cognisant of the lamentable condition to which we have referred, that the Survey is at once scientific and logically convincing and that its recommendations will have to be carried out, practically in their entirety, if the city of Montreal is to gain, in the realm of public health, any substantial measure of the prestige that rightly accrues to it in so many other spheres.

It was rather amazing, by the way, that Alderman des Roches, the chairman of the city executive, should have taken occasion to assert that, in the matter of the typhoid epidemic of two years ago, "everyone did his duty," specifically mentioning the council and executive. As far as Dr. Boucher, the director of the Montreal Health Department is concerned, we have said before today that we regarded him, as having done his best, in the face of great difficulties, at that time, but the course taken by the council and executive seemed to us then, as it still seems, to have been deplorable, and we are surprised at the boldness that would claim credit for it.