

THE PERSONALITY OF OUR NEWSPAPERS

*A Popular Interest Series, With
a Varied National Turn*

Number One:

The Montreal Star

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OF all business enterprises the production of a successful newspaper is the most perplexing and most psychological problem in the world—even more so than publishing books or governing a country by democracy. Granted adequate capital and good business management, almost any business that caters to a real public need will spell that doubtful word known as success. Not so the newspaper. In this particular kind of business there are factors above capital, business efficiency and public need. In this sphere of production people do not always buy what they need, no matter how much money may be spent in a businesslike way in producing it.

You can see this exemplified in almost any city where newspapers are published. Buy the newspapers of the average city and look them over with a business eye. You will find one loaded up with advertisements, often to such an extent as to make the news appear a secondary affair. That paradoxically enough, is mute evidence of its success as a "news" paper. You will find another filled with interesting news matter while short on advertising, compared with its rival. That, paradoxically again, is evidence of more or less non-success as a "news" paper.

Here is another paradox. Both these newspapers may be performing a highly important function in the life of a community. Just as a well-organized Opposition is absolutely essential to the success of democratic government, so papers in opposition to each other are absolutely necessary to the healthy growth of public opinion. An unsuccessful newspaper, looked at from a strict dividend-earning point of view, is not necessarily a superfluous newspaper. How is it, then, that two newspapers, each important in the life of a community, may be so unequal from a business point of view? How is it that while one will support its owners in luxury, the other will have to be supported by its owners or their friends, or by both?

If you study the history of any successful newspaper—and by "successful" I mean the newspaper which, as a business proposition, gives an adequate return on the capital invested, quite apart from any form of subsidy—you will find that it has gained the outstanding position it occupies as the result of having at the back of it a man of outstanding personality. That man may be familiar personally to everybody in his community, or he may be comparatively unknown, even by name. But the paper will be instinct with his personality.

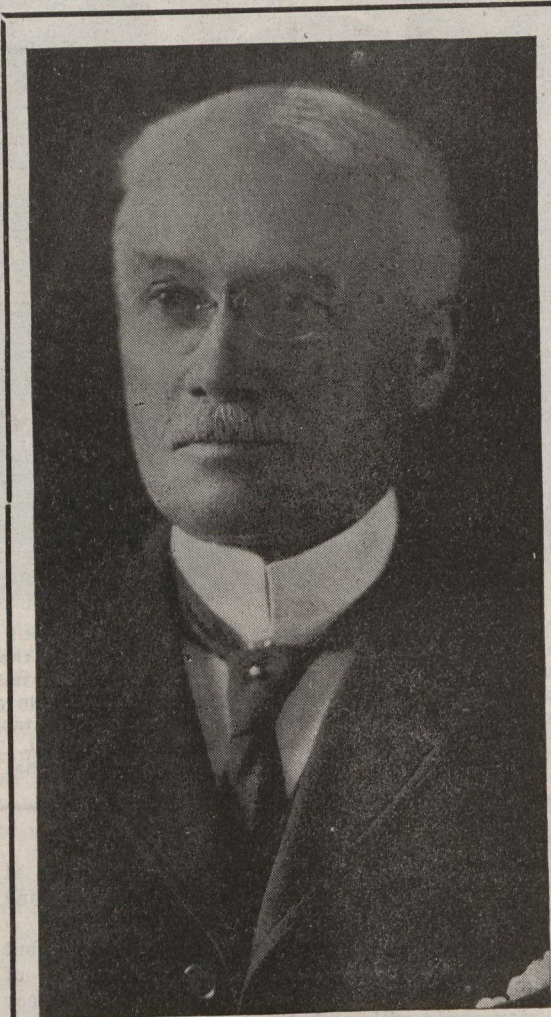
AMONG the comparatively few newspapers in Canada which are highly successful propositions a prominent place is occupied by the Montreal Star. And the Montreal Star is instinct with the personality of Sir Hugh Graham, who, from the day when he founded it, over thirty years ago, down to the present time, has been its guiding force.

Sir Hugh Graham is a most elusive personality. He does no personal advertising—never has. He hates to see his name in print, or to figure in public life. He seldom comes into the public view, except in the attacks of his opponents. He has few intimates, and to the vast majority even of the people of his own home city, let alone of Canada, he is but a name. Yet it is his personality alone which has built up the Montreal Star into one of the big papers of the continent and of the British Empire.

The Montreal Star has never been the organ of a party. It is often supposed to be a Conservative paper. There are those, for instance, who claim that it was primarily responsible for sending the present government into power. But not even those most appreciative of the services it rendered to the Conservative cause on that occasion would claim it as a Conservative paper, because while supporting the government one day, it may be in frank opposition to it the next. Thus, while it waged a tremendous campaign to put the present party into power, it came out in direct opposition to Premier Borden's first official act in power, namely the selection of his Cabinet. It declared that this bore evidence of "sinister influences."

The man behind the Star thus asserted himself in open opposition to the leader of his choice in the very moment of the triumph of the cause for which he had fought.

Because of the strength of his personality, absolute independence of judgment has always been so marked with Sir Hugh Graham, and through him of the Montreal Star, as to be almost a fetish. Never, even in the early days of desperate struggles for



Sir Hugh Graham, proprietor and founder of the Montreal Star; one of the first men in Canada to realize the news value of the Imperial idea.

way bound, or have his own hands tied, by any of the many forms of direct or indirect subsidy. The temptation must have been great, for those who knew him in those days say he often did not know from one day to another where the money was coming from to buy the paper to run off the next issue.

When the Montreal Star was first started the feeling between Protestants and Catholics in Montreal was, I understand, very strained. Sir Hugh Graham recognized that if an English-speaking paper in the city of Montreal was to be a real success, it must have the support of both Catholics and Protestants, for in this way it would gain readers among all the well-to-do French families, as well as secure the solid support of the Irish, a very important part of the community.

SO he set out to provide a newspaper on broad lines that would appeal to every class in the community, and that would especially appeal to the sympathies of a section whose support an esteemed contemporary had alienated, namely, the Irish Catholics. Thus among the earliest standing rules in the Montreal Star office was that the Star must never go to press without an item of news from Ireland in it. That rule holds good to the present day. No matter what issue of the Star you take up, in that issue you will find an item of news from Ireland—often a purely local news item. This is one of a weekly batch that comes in from the Star's Irish correspondent. A development of this catering to the Irish support is to be seen in the fact that Sir Hugh Graham has secured the Canadian rights of T. P. O'Connor's weekly cabled letter, and publishes

this every Saturday. Thus the Star has become an absolute necessity of every Irishman within its sphere of influence, whether he agrees with the paper's attitude and opinions on local or federal politics or not.

The same policy which has won and kept the support of the Irish has won and kept the support of possibly 95 per cent. of the English-speaking population in the city and district of Montreal, a very large proportion of the well-to-do French-Canadians, and a big list of out-of-town subscribers.

Just as Sir Hugh Graham sensed the binding value of news straight from Ould Ireland for such readers, so he sensed the value of Scotch news for Scotch, and Paris news for the French. For many years the Star has published a weekly letter from Scotland, written in the Scotch version of the English language, full of dialect and expressions such as would warm the cockles of a heart of stone—if it were Scotch. The Star's correspondent has often written pleading to be allowed to use English, but no! Sir Hugh comes from Scotch ancestry himself and he knows the value of real Scotch warm with the news and the speech of the bonnie hills o' hame. The Star's weekly letter from Paris is written by a lady, who combines the qualities of "faneur" with an intimate knowledge of Canadian requirements.

IT is true, by getting right under the skin of its readers, no matter to what nation they may belong, that the Star has rallied both willing and unwilling to its support. People can agree with the Star, or they can disagree with it, but most of them have got to have it. Sir Hugh has made it a household necessity. The business man has been made to have it because he does not feel he is au fait with what's doing in the financial world unless he has seen what the Star has got on its financial page. The man interested in sports has been educated to regard the sport's page as an authority. The average reader wants the Star because it has a wonderful telegraphic service, and is bound to have the latest phase of whatever is important in the world's doings. The matron insists on having the Star because she wants to read the department store's advertisements. Servant girls and office boys want the Star because that is the paper which has specialized on short "wanted" advertisements. To parents an important recommendation has been that the Star is kept out-and-out British and free from vulgarity or Yankee slang.

Sir Hugh was one of the first men in Canada to realize the news value of the Imperial idea. When he set up a branch office in London and went to the heavy expense of having his own London correspondent cable over special news every day to bind Great Britain and Canada in more intimate bonds of mutual interest, he struck a very sympathetic cord in the hearts of all who were proud of their British ancestry. I believe the Star was the first paper in Canada to have an independent cable service of its own, and thus to offset the effect of British news colored for consumption in the United States. That alone gave the Star a wonderful hold on the people, and greatly enlarged its prestige throughout Canada.

SIR HUGH'S interest in Imperialism did not stop at appreciation of its news value. He is an out-and-out Imperialist himself, and has argued Imperialism in season and out of season in the Montreal Star. He was, for instance, generally supposed to be the author of the "emergency" proposals put forward by Sir Robert Borden. Whether he was or not I don't know, but the campaign carried on by the Star both before and after those proposals were launched was successful in making most people believe that instead of the Star echoing Sir Robert Borden, Sir Robert Borden was echoing the Star.

Sir Hugh has always trod warily in the realms of prophecy, realizing, no doubt, with Shakespeare, that prophecy is the most superfluous form of folly. But he prophesied the war with Germany, and in a long, violent, and almost heart-rending campaign for a naval contribution, his paper pictured Armageddon, as it loved to call it, with such a wealth of horrific detail that on one occasion it even had the Hon. G. P. Graham set forth as likely to appear with "blanched lips and quaking limbs" if only he knew why the Star was so sure about what was coming.

Of Sir Hugh Graham's absolute sincerity in this promotion of the idea of the need for Imperial unity of action in the face of a common danger there can not be the slightest doubt. He has long been one of the most advanced Imperialists in the Empire. This phase of his personality has been strongly reflected