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W. Gray album 1883

M.S. 8

In the hand of W.O.

Resurrectionist

ANATOMICAL REMINISCENCES

1875 - 1883

-----cOo-----

By,

F. J. Shepherd,

Former Demonstrator of Anatomy,
McGill University, Montreal.

UNIVERSITY OF MONTREAL

1875-1876

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Dr. J. Chabert

Faculty of Arts, Montreal
McGill University, Montreal

When I was a Medical Student at McGill University, in 1869-73, nearly every subject for dissection was obtained illegally, by the old method of "body-snatching". Although there was an Anatomy Act on the Statutes of the Province of Quebec, and an Inspector of Anatomy, yet as no penalty was attached to the law it was never carried out. The only institution which fulfilled the law was the Montreal General Hospital which religiously handed over to McGill all unclaimed dead. After the body had been received at the College the Demonstrator of Anatomy went to the Inspector of Anatomy and tendered him a fee of ten dollars and was given a permit to dissect the body. The Inspector at that time was the City Clerk and he took no interest in his anatomical duties. I have occasionally seen as a student cases which were undoubtedly coronor's cases on the dissecting tables; one man I remember had a bullet wound through his forehead - we never asked where he came from and would not have been told had we inquired.

On my return from Europe in the autumn of 1875 to assume the duties of Demonstrator of Anatomy I found immediately that to provide subjects for the dissecting room I had to accept those obtained from "Resurrectionists". The body snatchers were usually medical students, chiefly French, who by the proceeds of their nefarious occupation paid their fees. The usual price for a subject was from thirty to fifty dollars, paid in cash, and for this purpose the Demonstrator was provided with funds. - Of course he gave no detailed account of this expenditure.

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For some years I obtained subjects from the Cote des Neiges Catholic Cemetery to the west of the Montreal Mountain. Two Irish students made a compact with the guardian of the cemetery and aided and abetted by him obtained many subjects (so I learned afterwards). The dead poor, not being able to pay expenses of the vault, were buried in winter in very shallow graves in a certain corner of the cemetery, and those freshly made graves were marked by the guardian and the students went up at night, disinterred the bodies, buried usually the previous morning, removed all clothing, ^{wrapped} ~~muffled~~ them ^{brought for the purpose} in blankets and toboganned them down Cote des Neiges Hill. Many weird tales are told of accidents and the bodies rolling off the tobogan ^g and people who saw the accident thinking a death had occurred. They usually arrived at the College in the very early morning hours and the janitor took in the bodies and gave a receipt on which they collected their money the next day. The receipt was always presented by some one who had nothing to do with the snatching.

^{Sometimes} ~~Occasionally~~ these bodies were missed by relatives and the dissecting rooms of the City were searched and if the body was identified it was pre-empted by the detectives. Occasionally they prosecuted me for receiving the body. Now as there is no property in a dead body and no clothes were taken, the only count on which they could summon me was, "Offence against decency" and I was usually fined \$50. The judge, a Mr. Coursol, recognised the necessity of obtaining material for dissection, always fined me and nothing more was said. I ^{seldom} ~~of course never~~ knew who brought the bodies and the janitor, strange to say, was never summoned as it was

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supposed to be all done by medical students for the love of anatomy and in the interests of their profession, and it was ~~of course~~ thought that they had the entrée to the dead house. ~~of course~~ ^{naturally} there were other sources of supply ^{such as} country cemeteries at a distance, and ~~occasionally~~ ^{Sometimes} I received a subject (frozen of course) ~~in~~ from the railway in a Saratoga trunk. Occasionally if there had been soft weather the smell from the trunk attracted attention and excited suspicion so the box was often opened and the body found. ^{needle tray} ~~of course~~ it was never claimed and no one knew who sent it. I remember on one occasion a student finding his uncle on the table, he was a Frenchman and said to me, "What for you got mine uncle here?" I said I did not know it was his uncle, had I known I should never have received him and said if he paid the expenses of removal he could have him. He thought awhile and said, "spose my uncle come, spose he stay", and he did stay and was properly dissected. On another occasion a man found his grandmother on the table; he explained to me that as far as he was concerned he did not care but he thought the family might object and so took charge of his ancestress and forwarded her to her proper resting place.

Some curious things have happened about subjects. On one occasion I received from the Montreal General Hospital in proper legal form the body of a man who had died friendless, - an Englishman. He was received on a Friday evening. It turned out the man had been a Mason and the Masons getting wind of it made enquiries and it was found that this neer-do-well was the Honourable -----son of Lord -----and had been a prominent Mason. The Masons called on me Saturday afternoon

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and after having explained the circumstances of the case asked me to kindly deliver up the body and that they would pay all expenses. I gave a written order to the janitor (the celebrated Tom Cook, a character of much note amongst medical students) to deliver up the body, and they went away much pleased. A fine coffin was sent to the College with a silver plate on the lid giving the name and titles of the occupant and Cook was to place the body in the coffin. Next day, Sunday, there was a Masonic funeral at Christ's Church Cathedral, ^{was attended by} which all the prominent Masons attended in full regalia. Well, on the Monday following I went up in the morning to the dissecting room and the first subject I saw was this man who was supposed to have been buried the day before. I called up Cook and asked him what he meant by this and he told me that he could not bear to let so good a subject leave the College so had substituted a rotten old subject which had been some weeks in the deadhouse, a Frenchman and a Catholic. I thought it better to say nothing and the Honourable-----was duly and properly dissected and the French Catholic had the advantage of being buried twice, once as a catholic and again as a Protestant with Masonic ceremonies.

There was a shrewd old steward at the Montreal General Hospital who was very successful (for a consideration) in getting the bodies of people who had died in hospital on loan from their relatives on condition that we would bury the remains. This he always did and handed over a certificate of burial, without any cost to them. I wont say as to the quantity of the remains buried ~~of the individuals~~ but something was kept and buried.

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At one time the scandal of the "body snatching" enterprize became so great that public opinion was aroused. It is the custom in Eastern Canada in country places in winter, on account of the frozen state of the ground, to place their dead in vaults or dead houses in place of burying them, and in the spring when the ground thawed out they interred them in the ordinary way. Well, at one time, the students in search of subjects broke open ~~one of~~ these vaults and removed all the bodies from them without disturbing the coffins, leaving the clothes behind. I have seen the French students bring in as many as ten or twelve bodies at one time obtained in this way. Of course when the relatives came in the spring to bury their dead there were no bodies and an outcry was justifiably enough raised, but it was too late to trace the subjects they had long since disappeared and the only remedy was to guard the dead more carefully in the future.

At one time the dead house in a nunnery in an adjacent village was robbed of its dead and this happened to be a school where many ~~American~~ young ladies came from the States to be educated. There had been an epidemic of typhoid fever and many nuns and scholars had died and were awaiting ^{in the dead house} removal or burial in the Spring. One night thieves broke in and stole all these bodies. Unfortunately for the robbers the young American girls were awaiting removal to their homes and when the relatives came they found the coffins empty and then of course there was a great outcry. The bodies were never brought either to McGill or the French school, for the robbers, alarmed at the tremendous indignation which the robbery had aroused, hid the bodies in convenient snowdrifts, of which there were many that winter, and when there was danger of the search

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coming too near they moved them to other places. I was told that for some time they were buried in a large snowdrift near the medical school and in the College grounds. The bodies were not recovered until a large reward was offered. The perpetrators of the theft were so clever that they not only got the reward but were never found out. This affair so scandalized the community and the Catholic hierarchy that the Archbishops approached the Anatomical department and asked them what kind of law they wanted in order to obtain subjects legally. We replied that a law with a penalty attached was necessary and also that the body must be claimed by relatives and not friends. So they went to the Provincial Legislature and requested the Government to pass such a law, which they promptly did; they were opposed only by a few English Members. This law put an end to "body snatching" and provided an ample supply of subjects for the dissecting rooms. The Law runs ^{Somewhat} thus: "All persons dying in Institutions (such as hospitals, jails, lunatic asylums) receiving aid from the Provincial Government, if not claimed by a relation nearer than the third degree in 24 hours, must be handed over to the Inspector of Anatomy for distribution in proper order to the medical schools." The penalty was of course the withdrawal of the aid furnished by the Provincial Government if the Law was not carried out. It has proved most satisfactory and ~~all~~ the subjects are obtained chiefly from the large lunatic asylums and without difficulty. The Clause in the Act which requires the claiming of the body by relatives, not further removed than first cousins, and this relationship to be sworn to before a magistrate is a most important addition for any friend or society could claim them heretofore.

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