

McGILL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Montreal General Hospital.
Exposure no.1.

The Supressed Report.

QT

M76e

QT

.M7C6e



ACC. NO. 67839 DATE 1930

MONTREAL GENERAL HOSPITAL.

Exposure No. 1.

THE SUPPRESSED REPORT

AND

THE LADY SUPERINTENDENT.

At the Quarterly Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Montreal General Hospital, held in August, 1877, a statement was laid before them, being the Report of the Sub-Committee on Expenditure. At the following Quarterly Meeting a pamphlet was distributed to the Governors, bearing the title, "A Letter Addressed to the President," by Mr. Andrew Robertson (the self-elected Committee of *one*), and as we are fast approaching another Quarterly Meeting, the writer presents—not exclusively to the above Board, but to the public generally—matter in connection with the Montreal General Hospital strange but true.

To write the history of the internal working of the Institution during the past two years would not be a pleasant task, nor is it a matter of congratulation to discover in this Canada of ours an epoch of administrative abuse and official despotism of which it is to be hoped, in the interests of common fair play and truthfulness, is yet limited in its operations, and confined even in "that system" to a limited degree. It was thought the blight had fallen only on the Montreal Institution, owing to the importation of *one*, and one only (as regards Montreal, this is undoubtedly true), but as it will be seen hereafter the evil has appeared in the London Institutions, even the guardian, St. Thomas, is flapping his wings uneasily in the hope of wafting away the plague that exists

under his very nose. In Montreal the chances of re-converting the General Hospital to the purposes for which it was formed, viz: An Institution that was incorporated especially for the relief of the sick poor, and for the better prevention of infectious and other diseases amongst the destitute, thereby decreasing the mortality of a populous and growing city, lending a helping hand to the poor citizen, and protecting the more fortunate and wealthy from epidemics, for which purpose subscriptions were given from time to time. The chances of re-conversion are not very great at present, the combination is too strong; but the rotten part of the system that it supports must be exposed, and by frequent exposure its fate will be eventually sealed. The public may regard with indifference for a time; but when once thoroughly aroused, it is not difficult to foretell the fate of the Pecksniffian administration so lately re-instated in the Montreal General Hospital.

It will be fresh in the memory of most that at the last annual meeting of the Governors of the Montreal General Hospital, it was proposed that a sub-committee be formed, for the purpose of reporting, in their opinion, the best means of keeping the revenue and expenditure on a more equal footing than then existed. A committee was appointed consisting of the following gentlemen:—C. J. Brydges, T. M. Bryson, Chas. Alexander, and John Plimsoll, Esquires. The committee sat repeatedly, their investigations being lengthy, entailing considerable labor, and sacrifice of valuable time; their report was published and adopted at the quarterly meeting of Governors, held in August last; afterwards the report was suppressed and became a thing of the past; its failure was owing partly because the committee were misled as to the terms of Miss Machin's engagement, being under the impression that she was engaged for two years, the actual terms of the engagement were not known, *and are not known now to the Committee*, and partly because in that part of the report relating to the dismissal of Miss Machin, perhaps better known of late as "Lady Superintendent," they glossed it over by paying a high compliment to her ability, and alleging that her services were no longer required, as the formation of a training school had been abandoned, &c., &c. The writer believes that the committee in adopting the above course were actuated by generous impulses, making her dismissal apparently due to the training school scheme, and not to what was well known to themselves and the house at large, her ignorant and imperious conduct to the officers and employees of the Institution, her direct opposition to the Committee, her malicious persecution, as invariably displayed towards those employees who had sufficient self-respect to resist the tyrannical conduct of a woman whose cruel and unholty reign was white-washed over by the abominably used word discipline; this may appear very strong language to use in connection with the idol of that portion of the Medical Board who took such wonderful interest in the Institution, and that they did not

care if every nurse in the Hospital left, so long as the skilled supervision (heaven save the mark) remained, the adopted model of Messrs. Redpath and Robertson, and the future saint of the Church of Ecclesiastical Milliners, but the facts contained therein are such that can be proved beyond the possibility of a doubt, by testimony and evidence, unquestionable and overwhelming. As this question will afterwards be treated separately, enough has been said here to shew the rock on which the sub-committee stumbled, instead of taking the hint, or as our friends over the line say, "being let down easy," the Lady Superintendent took advantage of the varnished clause, and with the assistance of a number of the Medical Board, and the self-elected committee of *one*, remains in the Institution; the usefulness of which has been seriously curtailed, in order to keep an unscrupulous woman in possession of \$640 per year, with a bonus of nothing to do. When it is taken into consideration that a portion of the hospital revenue comes from the hard-earned 50 cents of the laboring classes, it is indeed a matter of alarm and shame that the infectious ward should have been closed in order to save the salary of an officer, for whose services there is no more need of in the Montreal General Hospital than there is of a Refrigerator Agent at the North Pole. Yes it is indeed a shame that such policy should have been worked to keep in office an individual whose household management never rose above the level of walking about without any definite purpose, whose business capacity was absorbed in an extensive English correspondence with sympathetic females and others, whose administrative ability culminated in the fact of hiring servants and discharging them,* and whose disposition was of that vindictive nature that she resorted to means alike unholy and contemptible to injure the characters and destroy the chances of employment of those she discharged.

It will naturally be asked, how could such conduct be allowed in the Montreal General Hospital, under the nose of the Committee? It requires very little reflection to refresh the memory that abuses and tyrannical conduct in Institutions have invariably existed for lengthened periods, until some crime more glaring or prominent than others, roused the indignation of a patient public. When Charles Dickens startled England, by exposing the Fleet, and Dotheboys Hall; when Charles Reade opened the curtain and shewed the hideous spectre of tyrannical officialism, men looked aghast and asked themselves if such things existed in their midst. In the Montreal General Hospital attempts were made to bring acts of injustice before the committee, generally by letter addressed to the President or Chairman; most of these were dismissed on the ground that it was inexpedient to interfere with house matters; others were referred to the Lady Super-

*It seems incredible, but an inspection of the Hospital books will shew that Miss Machin discharged 170 servants or thereabouts (inside two years.)

intendent for her report thereon; the result can be easily imagined; injustice was heaped upon injustice; the writers were either discharged or subjected to a series of annoyances that was tantamount to forcing them to resign.

But it may be further asked, what does all this amount to? What proof can be given that there has existed in the Montreal General Hospital, and does exist, a systematic course of tyranny, practised by the Lady Superintendent, towards the nurses and employees of the above public charity? And what proof can be adduced with regard to the administrative and business incapacity of this woman?

It is sufficient to state here that the number of servants discharged give ample proof of the allegations made. As the system that was introduced into the Montreal General Hospital some two years back will form the subject of a more extended document than this one, and as the machinery will be held up for public inspection, it will, perhaps, answer the ends of justice better than embodying it here.

With regard to the administrative ability of the *highest salaried official* in the Montreal General Hospital, it can easily be seen that even in her special department, (*viz.*: nursing), and the one upon which the Medical Board declared she was the mainstay, the life, the Alpha and the Omega, she has been a complete failure. 50 per cent of the London nurses that were brought over have left her detestable rule, one by one; and the scheme that was originated of encouraging a system of good nursing, and popularizing it in this country, has received a blow, the effects of which are already felt in a department that might, with a little Christianity and fair play, have been made the medium of much usefulness, instead of an organization of espionage, petty tale-telling, eaves-dropping and tyranny.

When Miss Machin received an intimation of her dismissal, her first step was thoroughly in keeping with her general character. The London nurses—that is, all that were left of them,—were summoned into her room, where she first extorted a promise from them that they would not divulge what she was about to communicate. Then came the false statement that “the Committee are dissatisfied with us,” and asking them to resign when she went away; then the medical men were button-holed. Drs. Campbell and Howard were implored to take up cudgels on behalf of “our dear sister.” The Medical Board held a meeting; resolutions were drawn up by the Secretary and others containing eulogistic adjectives as numerous as the titles affixed to the umbrella bearing chiefs on the gold coast; scouts were put out; Mr. Andrew Robertson constituted himself a committee of *one*, and what between Mr. Robertson and Miss Machin, at Elm Bank, and Mr. Redpaths, and Miss Machin and Mr. Robertson, in the hospital, a pamphlet was produced entitled “A letter addressed to the President,” and a few days after a number of slips were printed in connection with the pamphlet, in which were some laughable details relative to the distribution of nurses, and the duties of assist-

ants. Some of the performances in connection with these proceedings were quite in bearing with the character of the woman who told Nurse Randall "that she had not a friend in the hospital."* The London nurses were wheeled into line in the vexed presence of the Treasurer; questions were put and answers extracted, the value of which can be easily estimated from the fact that one nurse, who had refused to sign the coercion document, headed with Sister Blower's signature, was not allowed an opportunity of answering the questions put in the presence of the author of "a letter addressed to the President." It is, indeed, anything but pleasant to the writer, and cannot be edifying to the reader, to go over a recapitulation of petty acts, to wade through the history of persecution, and gaze on the mal-administration that has marked the official career of the individual dubbed with the extraordinary title of "*Lady Superintendent*;" but although it is an unpleasant duty, it is nevertheless imperative that the subscribers and public of Montreal should know the character of one who has been written up in public as the most important addition that has ever been made to the Montreal General Hospital, who has been described by the author of "*Daniel's Band*" as "*our dear sister*," and who seems to come up to such a wonderful standard of excellence in the eyes of the President and Treasurer that they considered the closing up of one wing of the hospital, and the spreading of diphtheria in an already terror-stricken city, a mere trifle, in order that Miss Machin might continue to draw a salary which, curiously enough, was so mysteriously interwoven with other figures in the Annual Report, that a majority of the public were under the impression that her extraordinary services were given gratuitously.

In drawing this pamphlet to a close the writer is not compelled to do so for want of matter on this subject, as case upon case, and act upon act, could be brought forward until these few pages would grow into a volume. Other matters will be hereafter treated, the nature of which it is not wise to allude to here, as measures would be immediately taken to remove as much of the evidence as possible. If what has been brought to light in this communication is a matter of surprise, that which will follow will be as astounding as any revelation in Montreal. The writer is well aware that every means will be resorted to in order to crush and stifle the voice of one who undertook to expose injustice and persecution, which the chief perpetrator hoped had passed into oblivion; but neither threat or demonstration will deter the writer from dealing with this evil, resting in the firm belief that truth and justice will prevail, and that persecution and hypocrisy will receive their own reward.

*The case of nurse Randall is alluded to here; her treatment at the hands of Miss Machin will long be remembered. When Miss Randall left the hospital she carried with her the best wishes of every officer and employee in the Institution, except Miss Machin, and of course Sister Blower.

It is worth a little to attempt to save our Montreal General Hospital from a system that has reduced St. Thomas' Hospital, England, to bankruptcy, and a state of inefficiency more in keeping with an Italian Lazar House than the purposes for which that once noble Institution was founded. Brompton and King's, both London hospitals, are suffering from the same cause. In Montreal the signs of approaching decay are too well marked to admit of any doubt; the shutting up of two wards, the closing of the Diphtheria ward, the total failure to place nursing on a proper footing, and the establishment of a system that has handed over to the tender mercy of a designing woman the management of the Institution, and rendered the once respected and important positions of Hospital Doctors subservient in many matters of vital importance to our "dear sister from St. Thomas."

The language used in reference to Miss Machin and her conduct may appear harsh to those who have had very little opportunity of judging, and whose estimate of her character and fitness is based on a formal acquaintance or an occasional interview with one who,

"Skilled by a touch to deepen scandals tints
With all the kind mendacity of hints,
While mingling truth with falsehood, sneers with smiles,
A thread of candour with a web of wiles."

But to those who are cognizant of the wrongs perpetrated it will be a matter of surprise that such an amount of leniency has been shewn to one who never lost an opportunity of libelling the characters of the officers, employees and others who refused to sanction or countenance the Jesuitical system introduced into the Montreal General Hospital by Maria M. Machin.

The reasons for making this an anonymous publication are quite justifiable, on the ground that the writer will, doubtless, have to reply to the anonymous matter of the ritualistic division, who, backed by the satellites of the Holy Cross, will never lose an opportunity of strengthening the position of one whose devotion to the Church of Tooth and McConochie may make the field of operation for the further extension of Puseyism in the Montreal General Hospital a far easier task by the introduction of the thin end of the wedge by Miss Machin. It is further justifiable for being anonymous; were it otherwise, every possible annoyance would be pushed upon those whom the writer does not wish to mix in this matter. It is this fact more than any other that has deterred the author from appending a signature that would add double force to the subject in hand.

The following article from the London *Lancet* is placed before the Montreal public without any comment here; if it is the means of calling attention to the state of affairs in an Institution that might be made a credit to Montreal, and a protection to the city against the diseases that exist here—a

terror to rich and poor alike—it will have answered a double purpose:—

LONDON, *Saturday, November 17, 1877.*

The decision of the Governors to maintain the original form of management of St. Thomas's Hospital, modified only so far as would relieve the Treasurer of certain details of internal management, as these have been traditionally and erroneously understood in this charity, casts a serious responsibility upon the medical and surgical staff. It may be admitted that the present discreditable state of the hospital, both financially and administratively, is not a necessary result of the system of management under which it has been so long maintained; but a system which has given no security in the past, and which, even as modified, can give no security in the future, against, on the one hand, the crippling of a superb income, and, on the other hand, the deterioration of a magnificent building, medico-sanitarily, below the standard of the older hospitals, the evils of which it was specially constructed to avoid, must be rotten at the core. A new Treasurer, appointed after the ancient rule, may possibly reinstate the financial position of the hospital; but we have no hope that, even when aided by a house committee and a resident non-medical superintendent, he will be able to give to the internal administration of the hospital, especially in its medico-sanitary aspects, that development which the position of the Charity claims, which the reputation of the great School of Medicine attached to it demands, and which, above all, the patients received into the wards and the public, to which they can alone look in so anomalous a contingency, have a right to expect. In fact, the proposition that the resident superintendent should not be a medical man, shows a fundamental misconception of the essential internal requirements of the hospital. We believe that there is now no doubt whatever that the surgical patients brought into the wards of St. Thomas's Hospital are exposed there to aggravated risks to life wholly dependent upon the faulty internal administration of the hospital medico-sanitarily. It is a ghastly satire upon this noble and costly building that its wards, in the construction of which science is understood to have exhausted itself in making them such as would give the patients received into them the greatest chances of recovery that man could compass, should, by grave errors of administration, have been made as mischievous to the suffering inmates as the wards of some of our older hospitals built before science touched such matters. So incredible does it seem to many that this deplorable result should have such an origin, or a source of evil admitting of being so easily remedied be permitted to exist in St. Thomas's Hospital that it is not uncommon now for the experience of this new building to be adduced as fatal to the pavilion plan of hospital construction. We counsel persons who think after this fashion to visit the hospital, and putting aside the less obvious but not less serious questions touching the classi-

fication of cases and other more recondite surgical or medical matters, to study it from the point of view of that "fastidious and universal cleanliness" which, as its late distinguished surgeon, John Simon, has said, makes the healthiest hospital as it makes the healthiest house, and that pre-eminent regard to ventilation which constitutes the one possible safeguard to fouling of the air within hospital wards by exhalations from the bodies of the sick. He will find no universal cleanliness, and will probably be astonished if he comes upon traces of fastidious cleanliness; he will find ventilation a name for haphazard opening and closing of windows, if, indeed, he does not chance to find a ward practically sealed against the outer air and stinking (the word is used advisedly) with the effluvia of the patients in it; he will find the clinical assistants living under conditions befitting a purlieu of St. Giles's, and accustomed to surroundings, wholly destructive of scrupulous and refined regard to those conditions of cleanliness which make the safety of a ward and prevent the surgeon being more mischievous to his patient than the injury from which that patient may suffer; he will find also a conspicuous absence of any common skilled intelligence regulating the several wards and parts of the building, and co-ordinating the administrative agencies for the one purpose of the hospital, the welfare of the sick. Hitherto, under the traditional administration of the hospital, the medical and surgical staff have been practically helpless against the evils to which we have referred, and their repeated protests have been unheeded. They had hoped, during the discussions following upon the death of the late Treasurer that it would have been practicable to effect a reform of the hospital administration without departure from the ordinary rules of hospital procedure. This hope must now, the modifications proposed notwithstanding, be held to be at an end. We cannot for a moment believe that the medical and surgical staff will lend themselves to a continuance of the medico-sanitary mal-administration which so closely affects the welfare of their patients, and which touches them so nearly in reputation. Moreover, the public and the profession have now a claim to learn from them fully, the actual state and requirements of the hospital in respect to its medico-sanitary administration. As yet the facts which have become known in this relation, while abundantly sufficient to justify our observations, do not show the whole extent of the existing evil. It is incumbent upon the medical and surgical staff to prepare and make public an exhaustive report on the subject.

4116340



