

THE COURSE OF A CAREER

Victor Speer

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AFTER Murray had been with the Canada Southern Railroad for about a year, the Canadian Government began to inquire if he was restricted exclusively to railroad detective work. His line of work had brought him under the constant and direct notice of the Department of Justice.

He received requests from the Department of Justice to aid them, first in matters in his territory as head of the Canada Southern's Detective Department, and finally to take up a baffling case for the Crown and work it out. In the fall of 1874 Murray received this telegram:

"JOHN W. MURRAY. Come to Toronto. O. MOWAT."

The signer was Sir Oliver Mowat, at that time Attorney-General and head of the Department of Justice. Murray turned the telegram over to the railroad people. They told Murray to go to Toronto and see what was wanted, as they desired to keep on good terms with the Government. Thus Murray, as chief of detectives of the Canada Southern, went to Toronto in 1874 to see Attorney-General Mowat. The Attorney-General asked Murray to become connected with the department. Murray declined, saying he had come, in response to a telegram, to aid the Government in any particular matter it had in hand.

"The matter was stated by the Attorney-General and his deputy, J. G. Scott," says Murray. "For a number of years counterfeiters had been at work in Owen Sound and vicinity. Some of them had dealt in counterfeit money for a long time, and had grown very wealthy and had influential connections. In fact, their relationships made it a doubly difficult matter. The Government was annoyed greatly by their actions, and the conditions finally had become such as to make it necessary to break up the gang, regardless of their influential connections. Once more I was thankful for my early training in the counterfeiting line. I went direct to the vicinity stated by the Attorney-General, and it was not long before I was in the confidence of the men who were handling the queer. The families of some were among the most respectable in that part of the country. I went ahead and obeyed my instructions. The members of the gang were arrested and convicted, and sent to the penitentiary.

"One of the gang had disappeared. He forged bonds and mortgages on various farmers, including a \$1,500 mortgage on a farmer named Laycock, in the township of St. Vincent, County of Grey. He sold the forged paper in Toronto to Blakely & Alexander and fled the country, leaving no trace of his whereabouts. His name was John C. Bond, of Owen Sound.

"I returned to St. Thomas, after breaking up the gang and putting a stop to the counterfeiting, and resumed my duties with the Canada Southern. At intervals I received communications from the Department of Justice relative to securing my services permanently. Sir Oliver Mowat was Attorney-General then, and J.G. Scott, now Master of Titles, was Deputy Attorney-General. In the spring of 1875 came a formal tender of appointment as Detective of the Department of Justice. I conferred with my friends in St. Thomas. They advised me to accept. Mr. Finney, however, urged me to remain with him; and later, when he went west and built the Wisconsin Central, he endeavoured to get me to go with him.

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"In April 1875 I was appointed by the Canadian Government. When I received the notice of appointment, I wrote at once saying it would be impossible for me to get away for at least three months. They replied that this was satisfactory. I finished the work I had then in hand, and in July 1875 I reported for duty in Toronto as Detective for the Provincial Government. I was the only regular officer, and I succeeded a man named Smith. My territory was all the Province of Ontario, and also I was to follow criminals to any place and run them down. I took charge of the detective work in the Department of Justice, of which the Attorney-General was the head."

Murray was thirty-five years old at this time. He found himself in charge of the detective work in a field extending practically from Montreal on the east to Rat Portage on the west; from the United States on the south to the wastes of snow and ice above Georgian Bay on the north. Its total area was 101,733 square miles, and its division was into eighty-four counties. It was girdled by the Ottawa River, the Upper St. Lawrence and Lakes Ontario, Erie, Huron, and Superior. From south-east to north-west it stretched 750 miles, and from north-east to south-west it was 500 miles.

In this field to which he was called, Murray found that the Department of Justice, otherwise the Attorney-General's Department, had charge of all the criminal business of the Province. For the expense of the administration of criminal justice there is an appropriation made by the Legislature, or Parliament, every year. A certain proportion of this appropriation is charged up to the various counties for work done therein. Each county has a County Crown Attorney, equivalent to a District Attorney in the United States. The County Crown Attorney is under the direction of, and is paid by, the Department of Justice. The counties have their local constables appointed by the County Judge of each county, but any criminal matter of importance is reported immediately to the Department of Justice. If the Department deems the case of sufficient importance, Murray takes it up either in person or supervises the investigation, the constables and others being subordinate to him in the matter.

"It is an excellent system, and the splendid record of the Department of Justice for many years indicates how efficient it is and how well it works," says Murray.

Murray thus entered upon the full course of his career over twenty-eight years ago. He brought to his work a rich experience and rare training. His dangerous and exacting duties during the Civil War were followed by busy years with the United States in special service and hard years, filled with all sorts of experiences, on the police force at Erie. He learned all the details of the lower forms of police work and gradually broadened his field of activity until he was graduated from the detective work at Erie to the duties of head of the Canada Southern Railroad's detective department. He had learned what it meant to come in contact with desperate criminals. He had improved the opportunities to study the ways of the keenest crooks. He had schooled himself in the details of information of every class of crime. The severity with which his skill and knowledge and ability were tested in the years to follow is shown again and again in the tales of the crimes whose mysteries he solved and whose perpetrators he ran to earth.

His new field included cities, towns, and villages, thickly populated places, and vast stretches of country unsettled and wild. In the flock of this new shepherd were the keen city thieves, the riff-raff of towns, the roughs of the country, and the outlaws of the wilds. The people of the province varied as much as did its physical geography. There were strong French settlements, strong German settlements, strong English settlements, strong Irish settlements. Each had its distinguishing characteristics. They were clannish in their ways. Entire counties were known as German counties, or French counties, or English counties. Scattered among the honest, peaceful folk were desperate and lawless men. In addition to those who had sought the country from the old world as a haven wherein to hide, or who had grown up to disregard the law in the liberty which the land afforded, were those who fled from the United States and buried themselves in out-of-the-way places. There were endless opportunities for the perpetration of all kinds of crime. In the outlying villages or sparsely settled country, ruffians were able to outrage law and order, and escape to other remote parts of the Province.

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Burglaries, murders, assaults, forgeries, counterfeitings, all classes of crime and all classes of criminals were known to the Province at that time, as they have been known to it since. But the criminals soon were to learn the grip of a new master. They were to feel the iron hand of a man who feared none of them; they were to hear the tread of footsteps in pursuit, that never ceased until the pursued was dead or behind prison walls, and realise that the old order of things had passed away, that a new figure had risen among them and ruled in absolute sway.

Murray in 1875 was a broad-shouldered, powerful giant, sandy haired, sandy moustached, blue-eyed. His voice, then, as now, was remarkable for its wide range, and particularly for its power to change from gentle, tender tones to ones so deep, so rough, so harsh, that at times the guilty, on hearing it in thunderous accusation, have burst into tears and confessed. In all the years that have passed since he began his work in Canada, Murray has changed little in appearance. Age has dealt kindly with him. The broad shoulders and powerful frame are giving their meed of deference to the fateful years that have gone, but the blue eyes look out upon the world, as of old, bright and unafraid.