

THE ROMANCE OF MEDICINE IN NEW FRANCE

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THE story of the settlement of Canada in the early days is full of entrancing interest. About it clings the glamour that always attends heroic enterprise, militant faith, and the picturesque setting of the past,—a romance that has inspired poets, artists, and historians. Jacques Cartier, De Monts, Champlain, Maisonneuve, Dollard, La Salle, Iberville, and Frontenac, are names familiar to every school child. It is not of these, however, that I intend to tell. Peace hath its victories no less renowned than war and discovery. The quiet work of the medical men and nurses of these early days, the establishment of hospitals in the young colony, if less widely known, are not less interesting, and have proved to be no less enduring.

The voyages of John and Sebastian Cabot had directed attention anew to the *terra nova et incognita* in the west. Henceforth, eager eyes were turned, in increasing measure, towards America. The Spaniards explored the south; the English, the centre. France could do no less than match them in the north. The lure of discovery and adventure, the call of the wild, and—perhaps as much as all—the glitter of prospective gold, beckoned to all peoples and to all ranks. Nobleman and gentleman, priest and nun, the medical man, the sailor, and the simple peasant, answered the call.

The great bugbear of these early explorers was scurvy, as contemporary accounts abundantly testify. Cartier lost a large proportion of his crew during his first winter at Quebec, and would have lost more had it not been for a friendly Indian, who told him of a specific in the form of the bark and juice of the spruce. The remedy was prepared as follows:

To take the bark and leaves of the sayd tree, and boile them together, then to drink of the sayd decoction every other day, and to put the dregs of it upon his legges that is sicke: moreover they told us that the vertue of that tree was to heale any other disease.

The remedy must have proved efficacious, for we are told that

if all the physicians of Montpellier and Lovaine had been there with all the drugs of Alexandria, they would not have done so much in one yere as that tree did in six daies, for it did so prevaile that as many as used it by the grace of God recovered their healthe.

The secret must have been lost, however. For we find, seventy years later, the expeditions of Champlain and DeMonts suffering in the same way, and without recourse.

There is internal evidence to show that surgeons accompanied these early explorers, but unfortunately we are not always told their names, much as we would like to know them. The latter part of Champlain's narrative is more explicit, and in connection with the outbreak of scurvy which occurred at Port Royal (Annapolis) in the winter of 1605-1606, he states:

Our surgeon, named Deschamps, of Honfleur, a man skilled in his profession, opened several of the bodies to see if he could have better success discovering the cause of the disease than had the surgeons of the preceding year . . . and was no more able to find a remedy for curing than were the others.

We do not know, then, who was the first medical practitioner in Canada, but Deschamps evidently was the pioneer in Nova Scotia.

Several medical men were associated with the infant colony at Port Royal. Daniel Hay and Louis Hébert arrived there from France on July 27th, 1606, the latter of whom was destined to play a distinguished part, somewhat later, at Quebec. Of Daniel Hay we know little, save that he was a man of courage and determination, and did not stay long in Canada. Hébert is spoken of by L'Escarbot, the historian of the time, as "a man who, in addition to his skill in his art, takes great pleasure in cultivating the soil." Of him we shall hear again. A third medical man, "Our surgeon, Master Stephen", accompanied Champlain about the same time. In 1607 both Hébert and Hay went home to France, and the next year Champlain applied himself to his great task, the founding of Quebec. On this occasion he had with him a surgeon called Bonnerme. This man came quickly into "bad eminence", as he was one of six persons accused of conspiring to take Champlain's life and deliver the settlement into the hands of the Spaniards at Tadoussac. For the credit of the profession, it is comforting to be able to say that Bonnerme was able to prove his innocence.

And now we return to Hébert, who—next to Champlain—may be justly termed "The Father of New France." He was a man of good education, an apothecary of Paris, who seems to have been seized with the *Wanderlust*, for he made several trips to

Canada, returning home in 1613, as he thought for good. Champlain also returned to France in 1617, full of wonderful dreams for the future welfare of his foundation at Quebec. He wished to obtain settlers of the best type, and so he bethought himself of his trusty friend Louis Hébert, who had proved himself so capable a surgeon, and had cultivated such beautiful gardens at Port Royal.

He so beguiled his friend with his beautiful visions that Hébert sold his possessions and again started for the New World. Arrived at Quebec, he built a substantial stone house on the upper level, in the vicinity of Couillard and Famille Streets, and before long had established there a model farm. Indeed, he is more noted for being the first farmer in Canada than for his medical attainments. He speedily became a prominent figure in the little community, and became in succession seigneur of Sault-au-Matelot and of St. Joseph, with the title of *Sieur d'Espinay*. This most valuable man, so helpful, and so well beloved, died from the effects of a fall, and was buried in the cemetery of the Recollet Fathers at the foot of the cross. His statue, in the costume of a *habitant*, stands beside the city hall of Quebec to-day, and his descendants are still to be found in Canada.

As the little colony grew, sickness—especially small-pox—became more prevalent, and it became evident that hospital accommodation was essential. Through the efforts of Father Paul le Jeune, who accompanied Champlain on his return to Quebec after the treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye, the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, niece of the great Cardinal Richelieu, became interested in the project. A grant of land was obtained from the Company of Merchants on the upper level in Quebec, and the Cardinal and Duchesse subscribed the necessary funds. Thus in 1639 was established the Hôtel Dieu, which still exists, and is the oldest hospital in North America save one, that founded by Cortez in the city of Mexico in 1524. To the Hospitalières of Dieppe was entrusted the supervision of the new hospital. They sent out three nuns, whose names are worthy of remembrance, *Mère de St. Ignace*, the Mother Superior, a woman of remarkable talents and courage, and her assistants *Mère de St. Bernard*, and *Mère de Saint Bonaventure*. The early history of this, our premier Canadian hospital, reads like a romance, but cannot be further dealt with here. The second hospital to be established in New France was the Hôtel Dieu of Montreal, or, as it was originally called, *Ville-Marie*. Even more than in the case of Quebec was the planting of a colony at *Ville-Marie* something of a crusade. Its story reads like a fairy tale.

In the little town of La Flèche in Sarthe-sur-Loire dwelt a civil servant called Jerome Royer de la Dauversière. A simple tax-collector, "God called him to greater things." In a vision he was directed to found an Order to care for the sick. Throwing himself heart and soul into the work, he established, in 1636, a community in honour of Our Lord and St. Joseph, located in a miserable dwelling, little better than a hovel, where three servant maids attended to the patients. In this very humble way the imposing and costly hospitals of Montreal took their origin. The story goes that the first assistance which the founder received in his noble project was a gift of two deniers from a child, and one from a poor woman. Pious faith has identified the former with the Christ-Child himself, and the latter with the Virgin Mary. De la Dauversière also had dreams of starting a hospital in New France and of using the nuns of his new Order in its service.

To further his plans, and full of zeal, he went to Paris in 1639, where he met the abbé Jean Jacques Olier, the founder of the now rich and powerful Society of St. Sulpice, who also had his eyes turned towards the west. Without previously knowing each other, or being acquainted with each other's plans, being led by the same vision from Heaven, the two men met, and joined forces in a common undertaking. In 1641 they formed a company, called "La Société de Nôtre Dame de Montréal", acquired possession of the island of Montreal, and secured from the King the valuable services of de Maisonneuve as Governor. Paul Chomedey, Sieur de Maisonneuve, had been a soldier from his youth up, but was a godly man withal, one also endowed with vision and enthusiasm, tempered with a sound common sense,—an inspiring leader for such a dangerous and exacting enterprise.

The third outstanding figure in this little drama was Mlle. Jeanne Mance, who was born about 1606 at Nogent-le-Roi, a village of Haute-Marne. She had long dreamed of going to Canada, but it was not until about 1640 that she was free to indulge her wish. She set out for Paris. Her biographer tells us how "Many imagined that Jeanne, who lacked none of those external advantages which could make a person sought after in the world, would yield to the temptation of going to be admired in Paris." Her soul was far nobler than this, however, and when she arrived at the great city she was introduced to a rich and philanthropic widow, Mme. de Bullion, who confided to her her intention of founding a hospital in New France, and asked her to take charge of it. Soon after, Mlle. Mance set out for La Rochelle, to take ship for Canada.

The little company under de Maisonneuve, which was to found the new settlement, was about to start, but de la Dauversière had not as yet found a suitable person to take charge of the hospital which the Société de Notre Dame intended to build on the island. The nuns of La Flèche could not spare any of their number, and time was pressing. Again Heaven interposed. Without previous acquaintance, de la Dauversière met Mlle. Mance in La Rochelle, went up to her, greeted her by name, and was so impressed by her gentle dignity and the sympathy with which she heard of his plans, that he offered her the position of Directress of the new Hôtel Dieu. Jeanne accepted, and decided to join the party of de Maisonneuve. After a tempestuous voyage, the ship in which she was reached Quebec on Aug. 3rd, 1641. De Maisonneuve was not so lucky. He was compelled several times to put back to France. This was unfortunate, as he lost several of his crew, including his surgeon. On reaching Tadoussac, M. de Courpon, admiral over the fleet of the Company of New France, generously permitted his own medical man to join the expedition. The man who had the honour of joining in this noble enterprise, and who had the distinction of being the first surgeon at Montreal, was called Louis Goudeau. De Maisonneuve reached Quebec seventeen days after the other ships of his party.

The new colonists decided to spend the winter in Quebec, though they soon found that they were looked upon askance by the authorities there. On May 6th, 1642, they set out again, and on the 17th arrived at a place not far from the Indian village of Hochelaga, which had been selected years before by Champlain as a suitable location for a colony. The event was celebrated by a mass. The words of the officiating priest, Father Vimont, which have fortunately been preserved to us by the abbé Dollier de Casson, were singularly prophetic on this occasion. He said:

That which you see, gentlemen, is only a grain of mustard seed, but it is cast by hands so pious and so animated by faith and religion, that it must be that God has great designs for it, since He makes use of such instruments for His work. I doubt not but that this little grain may produce a great tree, that it will make wonderful progress some day, that it will multiply itself, and stretch out on every side.

After a fort and chapel had been erected, work was begun on the hospital. Their generous benefactress started the institution with a gift of about sixty thousand écus, followed by others amounting to sixty-two thousand livres. The poor were to be treated free of charge. On Oct. 8th, 1644, the Hôtel Dieu of

Montreal was ready for work. It was modest enough, to be sure, being constructed of rough beams, the crevices filled in with mud, and the roof of slabs. It measured sixty feet by twenty-four. There were two rooms for the sick, one for Mlle. Mance, one for the servants, and a kitchen. A chapel, ten feet square, was built of stone adjoining it. The institution was endowed, in addition to the money, with five cattle and twenty sheep, at that time the only domestic animals in the country. It was not until the following year that the furnishings and medical stores arrived from France.

Hardly was the structure completed, when it was filled with sick and wounded. The vicissitudes of the hospital were, from henceforth, many and various. Iroquois Indians made continual incursions upon the little settlement. Soon an additional room had to be provided at the hospital, and two more servants added to the establishment. The buildings also were surrounded by a stockade.

By 1650, things had become serious in the little colony. Constantly depleted in numbers by the merciless attacks of the Indians, disheartened by internal dissension, some lost hope, and it appeared as if the venture might have to be abandoned. Mlle. Mance, therefore, returned to France, and succeeded in obtaining reinforcements of men and money. The hospital was in an exposed place, and so frequently attacked that de Maisonneuve pierced the walls for musketry, and fortified it with two cannon and some swivels. Eventually its occupants had to be withdrawn to the main fort, and the building was utilized as an outpost defence. One incident will serve to show the kind of danger to which the poor people were subjected. One day a colonist and his wife were pursued by the Indians in the direction of the hospital compound, and the woman, falling behind, was captured. Her husband turned back to save her, or share her fate. Three of their friends, who were hastening to their assistance, were unexpectedly attacked by forty Iroquois, who were lying in ambush. The men immediately ran for the main entrance of the hospital, where Mlle. Mance was waiting to open the door for them. So close was it that, as she closed the door behind the last one, his cap was shot off. One man, who had taken refuge in a tree, by kicking his assailants, succeeded in this somewhat prosaic fashion in saving his life, though at the cost of a partial scalping.

Again things became acute, and the colony was in danger of extinction. Again their eyes looked towards France. This time, de Maisonneuve himself undertook the journey, the hospital endowment furnishing the money. Mme. de Bullion came to the

rescue, and the Governor returned with more than one hundred men. It was now possible to enlarge the hospital, and an additional building was constructed, together with a chapel, fifty feet long, provided with a belfry and two bells.

Little is known about the events of the next few years. In 1657 Mlle. Mance fell on the ice, breaking her right forearm, and dislocating the wrist. The arm became useless, and caused her so much pain that at times it required four strong men to hold her. In speaking about her case, she said, "I suffered much, I was obliged to carry my arm in a sling. Since the time of the fracture I have not been able to use the hand in any way, so that I was obliged to be dressed like a child." In consequence of this accident, it was thought desirable to bring over some of the Sisters of St. Joseph of La Flèche, and Jeanne a second time returned to France. She was accompanied by Sister Bourgeois, who hoped to bring back to Canada some young girls who should devote themselves to the education of children. The project succeeded, and thus was established the third sisterhood in Canada, the Congregation of Nôtre Dame. While in Paris, Mlle. Mance was examined by many skilful surgeons, and her case was pronounced incurable. Nevertheless, we are told that the arm was miraculously healed by being touched with the casket containing the heart of M. Olier. Mme de Bullion was so rejoiced at the recovery of the sufferer that she presented the sum of twenty-two thousand livres as an endowment for the Sisters of La Flèche. The money was handed over to de la Dauversière, who was to send three Sisters of St. Joseph and one working Sister to serve the poor gratuitously in the Hôtel Dieu of Ville-Marie.

On arriving at La Rochelle, to take ship for Canada, Mlle. Mance was joined by the three nuns, whose names we are glad to honour, Judith Moreau de Brésoles, Catherine Massé, and Marie Maillé. The bird of misfortune seems to have perched upon their ship. At the last moment there was a dispute about the passage money. They were scarcely away from France when an epidemic broke out, and eight or ten persons died. When at last they reached Quebec, many of the company were more dead than alive. To make things worse, the authorities there were making great efforts to gain control of the hospital at Ville-Marie, but, after many difficulties, Jeanne Mance and her associates triumphed. Soon, however, they were called upon to bear a new blow. In 1660 news came from France that the good Dauversière had died, and it was found that he had misappropriated the twenty-two thousand livres of hospital money entrusted to him, in order to repay certain shortages in his accounts! The hospital community was now

reduced to extreme poverty, and the Sisters were reduced to selling their spare clothes in order to get the coarsest of food. They suffered greatly from cold, and one of the duties of the night watcher was to throw out the snow that blew in through the crevices of their poorly constructed building. Their trials were indeed great. The Indians frequently laid ambushes to seize the Sisters as they went in the night to the care of their patients, fortunately always without success. To add to it all, in 1663 there occurred a severe earthquake, which lasted five minutes, terrifying the community. The patients had to be carried out of the buildings and laid on the snow. No great harm was done, however, but, on the contrary they experienced a great increase in piety.

Of the succeeding years we know comparatively little. The little band had always to meet the active hostility of Quebec. Mlle. Mance suffered from many severe illnesses, grew old, and died as she had lived, on June 18th, 1673. She wished her body to lie in the chapel of the hospital, and her heart to be embalmed and placed in the parish church. As the construction of the church building was long delayed, her remains were placed in the chapel and were destroyed in the fire which consumed that structure in 1695. All that now remains of Jeanne Mance is the fragrant memory of a noble life spent ungrudgingly in the service of others, and an inspiration that has been vital through two centuries and a half. The present representative of the Hôtel Dieu is a large and splendid building situated on Pine Avenue.

We have the names of more than twenty medical men who were at Montreal during the first forty years of its existence. Probably most of them were birds of passage, as it is hardly likely that such a small settlement could support so many. Two or three of these may be specially mentioned. Dr. Pécote de Balestre came in 1659. He is remembered chiefly for a partnership which he formed with the famous Dollard for cultivating the land. He was also the first medical man at Montreal to sign "physician" instead of "surgeon" after his name. Another, Pierre Piron, surgeon, added to his income by making boards with a long saw. Jean Michel accompanied La Salle on his voyage on the Mississippi from 1678 to 1683.

At Quebec we have Jean Madry, who was this city's first mayor: Michel Sarrazin, the discoverer of the pitcher plant, named in his honour "*Sarracenia purpurea*": and Dr. Gauthier, a distinguished botanist, who first found the wintergreen which bears his name—"Gaultheria Procumbens". François Gendron, who arrived in 1642, did not settle in a town, but went directly to the country

of the Hurons, where he learned much of plant lore and the medical practice of the aborigines. On his return to France, he enjoyed great reputation, and was called in to attend Anne of Austria, mother of Louis XVI.

Other early hospitals, besides those mentioned, were: the Hôpital Général of Quebec, founded in 1693 by de St. Valier, the successor of Bishop Laval, housed in the convent of the Recollet Fathers, which is said to be the only building in Quebec that exists in anything like its original state: a small hospital at Port Royal, having "huit lits très mauvais", established about 1703: and the King's Hospital at Louisbourg of 1724. As in the case of the infant colonies of New England, the settlers in New France were, from time to time, sorely afflicted with pestilence. Dysentery, typhus, and, of course, scurvy and small-pox, were rife. Probably also plague was imported on three occasions. Serious epidemics occurred at Quebec in 1708, 1709, 1711, 1718, 1740, 1746, 1750, 1757 and 1758. Truly a heavy load of woe!

Many of the medical men of this early period in our history are somewhat shadowy figures. We should, indeed, like to know more of their qualifications and achievements. This, at least, can be said. Paris at this time was supreme in surgery, and the French-trained men would be as good as the best. When translated to New France they proved themselves to be brave, resourceful, and devoted men. All hail to them!