

# CANADA'S FIRST APOTHECARY

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THROUGH a narrow gap in the North Mountain range, the tides of Fundy squeeze their way to form the singularly beautiful expanse of water known to us as Annapolis Basin. There is a measure of poetry in this name, but none in that which designates the portal—Digby Gut. One may now pass through this portal any day, in great comfort, to enjoy the varied delights of the countryside which bounds the Basin. No such comfort attended the first white men who ventured through the Gut. Wearied by long and strenuous weeks in the small, buffeted craft in which they had dared the treachery of wind and wave, Demonts and his curiously assorted company effected that historic passage early in the summer of 1604. There were rogues and ne'er-do-wells in the party, men who had known of nothing but deprivation and hardship, and there were gentlemen of culture and refinement whose very names are a heritage of which Canadians will ever boast. Some may have been more appreciative than others of the glory that greeted them when Fundy's turbulence had been left behind, and they floated on the placid waters of the Basin, rimmed by densely wooded hills broken by alluring gorges into which the tides could still find a way. But there was unanimity in approval of the peaceful beauty that had become theirs, and of the promise of comfort and plenty so generously unfolded. What more fitting than that such a place should be called Port Royal?

Many wished to go no farther, but Demonts's commission was to explore as much as possible of the New World, and he insisted upon pressing on. And so it came about that the winter was passed at St. Croix, where defence against the dreaded native would seemingly be easy, but where a much more formidable and unexpected foe was to be encountered. That was three centuries before the importance or even the existence of vitamins had been suspected, and nearly half of the party, victims of scurvy, were buried at St. Croix before the snows disappeared.

Port Royal was often thought of during that miserable winter, and in 1605 those who had survived returned thither to establish the second permanent European settlement in the western hemisphere. The site selected for the colony was thought to be

safe against enemy attack, but between the date of founding and 1750 it experienced twenty-four military encounters of greater or less magnitude, while on two occasions during the American war for independence it was again the scene of hostilities. In such an historic setting, known since 1710 as Annapolis Royal, early in August of this year, the Nova Scotia Pharmaceutical Society erected a tablet to the memory of Louis Hébert, who joined the Port Royal colony in 1606, and was the first apothecary to come to Canada.

On this side of the Atlantic we are accustomed to a rather narrow interpretation of the term "apothecary", and to regard it as almost synonymous with "pharmacist." The earliest apothecaries doubtless limited themselves to the compounding and sale of drugs, but as time passed they gradually extended their activities to include prescribing and other medical treatment. Apothecaries and apothecary-surgeons were by no means uncommon in both England and France long before the time of Hébert. A Guild of Apothecaries was formed in France in the thirteenth century, the Masters of which were entitled, in the following century, to wear long gowns with wide sleeves and velvet facings. While many of those who assumed the title were thorough-going rogues, there were others who were of excellent character, some were good chemists, and not a few of the regular clergy took pride in being known as apothecaries. Of Hébert's standing in the Guild we are not informed, but he was engaged, in succession to his father, in the business of apothecary in his native Paris before coming to Port Royal. In the little colony he took place with those who comprised the famous *Ordre de Bon Temps*. For a short time he was entrusted with the administration of the affairs of the colony. And L'Escarbot wrote: "Our apothecary, Master Louis Hébert, a man who, besides his experience in his art, taketh great delight in the tilling of the ground." His enthusiasm in this last particular, and the stimulus he gave to others to emulate him, gained for him the right to be known as Canada's first agriculturist.

It would appear that the apothecaries, even those contemporary with Hébert, were not universally popular. They charged high prices, and mankind has ever been fond of indulgence in medicine. Our forefathers submitted to nauseous drugs with as much complacency as to discomfort in general, and perhaps derived from them even more satisfaction than we of to-day. Possibly their habits engendered a greater sense of need for such artificial aids than we experience. Apparently they resorted to them with more diligence and enthusiasm than we do, and while their choice was more re-

stricted, they made generous use of the mighty mixtures that were available. The stimulus given to exploration by the discoveries of Columbus resulted in the introduction and exploitation of a large number of new remedies which were welcomed with much acclaim by those whose drug-appetites had become somewhat jaded, and this proved of no small advantage to the drug-dealers. There is a subtle attractiveness in anything of oriental origin, and drugs from the East had a singular lure for many a year before trade in them could be carried on easily. In the sixteenth century Holland controlled the carrying trade between the north and the south of Europe, while the Portuguese held the secret of the sea route to India. After the Dutch learned that secret, there was fierce fighting for the control of the drug trade. Even the clove was responsible for much bloodshed, and Motley tells us that "the world's destiny seemed to have become almost dependent upon the growth of a particular gillyflower." The English struggled to gain a foothold in the drug marts, but for long had to be content with the occasional capture of a drug-laden Dutch or Portuguese ship. In time they effected a treaty with the Dutch which enabled them to set up an establishment at Amboyna, where, in 1623, despite the treaty, the establishment was attacked and destroyed, and several British were killed. So the apothecaries were able to suggest reasons for their high prices, but we can fancy, nevertheless, that good Queen Bess was startled when presented with Hugo Margon's bill, for one quarter, amounting to £83.7s.8d.—the equivalent in purchasing power of at least \$2,500.00 in our money. Included in this bill were such items as "a confection made like a *manus Christi*, with bezoar stone and unicorn's horn, eleven shillings;" "a conserve of barberries, with preserved damascene plums, and other things for Mr. Raleigh, six shillings"; "a royal sweetmeat with incised rhubarb, sixteen pence."

Then there was widespread suspicion that strict honesty did not characterize all apothecaries, and that substitution of inferior for expensive drugs was not infrequent. The arduous young were too often disappointed by the ineffectiveness of love philters for which they were charged large sums. Sensitive folk complained of concoctions which surpassed the witches' brew of Macbeth's time in disgustingness. And some shops were apparently but poorly camouflaged brothels. Such things accounted for the unpopularity of the apothecaries with the laity. The regular physicians did not love them either. As long as the sale of drugs had been in the hands of the grocers, the physicians were content, and for a long time the apothecaries merely carried on a branch of the grocer's

business. There was contentment, too, during a period in which the apothecary was the physician's adjutant, a period when Chaucer could write concerning his "Doctour":

Ful redy hadde he hise apothecaries  
 To sende him drogges and his letuaries,  
 For ech of hem made oother for to wynn.

But when the apothecaries ventured into competition with the physicians, friction began. The physicians generally had been satisfied with modest fees, and the contrast between their relative impecuniosity and the opulence of their less well trained rivals became increasingly perturbing. After protesting without avail, they tried what stipulation would do. Thus William Bulleyn (obit. 1576) laid down twenty-one rules, of which a few are quoted:

#### THE APOTICARYE

1. Must fyrst serve God, forsee the end, be clenly, pity the poor.
2. Must not be suborned for money to hurt mankynde.
13. That he neither buy nor sel rotten drogges.
15. That he put not in quid pro quo without advysement.
17. That he meddle only in his own vocation.
19. That he do remember his office is only to be ye physician's cooke.

Stipulation also proved unavailing, and the "cookes" continued to flourish abundantly and to flaunt their success. In Germany, insult was added to injury when apothecary shops came to be imposing structures with façades ornamented by stone figures of great physicians of the past. Wealth, of course, brought influence, and, in the year that Hébert came to Canada, James I granted a charter of incorporation to the apothecaries of London. While this was not seriously opposed by the physicians, it proved to be a factor in developing a wrangle which eventuated, some eighty years afterwards, in the establishment by physicians of free dispensaries for the sick poor—thus originating a system which has developed to an extent quite beyond the expectation of its originators.

All this digression may be put to account as offering an explanation for Hébert's decision to leave his business in Paris for an adventure in the New World. He was accompanied by the apothecary-surgeon Daniel Hay, who is generally spoken of as Canada's pioneer physician—although the writer has contended that there is evidence that a medical man of some sort was attached



to the party that spent the winter of 1604-5 at St. Croix. The medical needs of so small a colony of hardy men could not have been great, and it may be assumed that one medical man would have sufficed at all times except when a party was detached to exploration. It is recorded that Hébert dressed the hand of Pontgrave's son, injured by the discharge of a misdirected gun in a conflict with Indians, and that five years later he attended the Sagamo Membertou in his last illness, but he could not have had an active professional life at Port Royal, and we cannot believe that his migration was in the hope of enlarging his business. That he was a man of parts and refinement is indicated by his acceptance to close fellowship with Poutrincourt, Pontgrave, L'Escarbot, Champlain, and the other choice spirits of the colony, by the influence he wielded and the trust shown in him. We may therefore feel that he belonged to the better class of the apothecaries, but that he had other and greater interests.

When the colony, "its fair distances and the largeness of it, the mountains and hills that environ it" (as lovingly described by L'Escarbot), had to be abandoned in 1607, Hébert returned to France, but he came back to aid its re-establishment in 1610. Three years afterwards Port Royal fell to Argall's expedition, and Hébert once more returned to Paris where he resumed business as an apothecary, to be later (1617) persuaded by Champlain to accompany him to Quebec. With him came his wife and three children, of whom his daughter, Anne, became the first bride to be led to the altar in Canada. At Quebec he busied himself at gardening, urged others to similar activity, entered heartily into the social life of the community, and because of such things was distinguished as the Patriarch of New France. After ten years of untiring industry in his new home, he met with injuries which resulted fatally. His widow and children continued the cultivation of the garden, and we read that in the stressful winter which preceded the capitulation of Quebec to Kirke, in 1629, the garden was ransacked of every root and seed that could afford nourishment. On surrendering to Kirke, according to Dionne, Champlain asked the English commander to "protect the chapel of Quebec, the convents, and the houses of the widow of Louis Hébert and of her son-in-law Guillaume Couillard." To this Kirke agreed readily, and invited Madame Hébert and her family to remain at Quebec to enjoy the fruits of their industry under British allegiance. A few other families also remained, and it was in the Hébert home that the first Mass was heard after Quebec was restored to the French by the treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye.

The city of Quebec has possessed a memorial to Hébert for several years. It is fitting that at last an appropriate tablet should be erected at the scene of his first activities on Canadian soil. And it is especially fitting that the tablet should be erected by members of the craft with which Hébert was associated, and that a large number of them, assembled from all parts of Canada, should make a pilgrimage to the site of the ancient colony to participate in the dedication ceremonies.