

MEN and BOOKS

MILESTONES IN CANADIAN MEDICINE*

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Three and a half centuries ago the first European colonists arrived at Acadia under Champlain and encountered their first formidable obstacle to settlement—scurvy. Two apothecaries, Daniel Hay and Louis Hebert the first men with any medical skill to practise in Canada accompanied this small group of immigrants. During the first winter many succumbed to scurvy and others were incapacitated so that the projected colony seemed doomed to failure. The preventive method of drinking spruce tea which Jacques Cartier had learned from the Indians over half a century before was unknown to these practitioners and so no relief was found for the stricken people.

Hebert returned to France to qualify as a surgeon and to find what cure might be available for scurvy. In 1608 he arrived at Quebec where a new and larger settlement was planned.

It is interesting to recall that Canada was invaded by home seekers from the four points of the compass. The French came from the East by way of the St. Lawrence and were menaced by scurvy. The United Empire Loyalists left the New England colonies after 1776 to occupy parts of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario and had already learned how to avoid this disease. The Selkirk settlers arrived by way of Hudson Bay from 1811 to 1815, and soon adopted the eating habits of the company officials and so escaped this affection. There is no mention of scurvy among the early residents of Victoria where Dr. John S. Helmcken became the first doctor about 1850.

Aside from scurvy and the accidents and common ailments incident to a healthy outdoor life in New France the chief concern of the medical men and governors was to prevent the entrance of epidemic disease frequent in the country from which the ever increasing flow of immigrants came, and to curb its spread once it had gained a foothold in the new country. A striking contrast is noticed in the medical histories of the Spanish invaders of the West Indies and Mexico on the one hand and that of the French on the other. Whereas the Spaniards contracted from the natives yellow fever, malaria, and probably syphilis, the new conquerors of Canada imported and disseminated among the Indians smallpox, typhus and cholera. Undoubtedly smallpox

* Read at the Seventy-eighth Annual Meeting of the Canadian Medical Association, Section of Historical Medicine, Winnipeg, June 27, 1947.

was the first and greatest scourge. It wiped out whole tribes of Indians and was so widespread that in time epidemics reached the far western plains with devastating results.

The medicine man and the doctor were alike unable to reduce its virulence and powerless to stem its relentless infiltration among settlers and Indians. Inoculation against smallpox was introduced at Quebec in 1765. In 1802 vaccination was used for the first time in Canada at Liverpool, Nova Scotia. The Indians accepted it and gradually smallpox was brought under control. Another milestone was reached.

With the growth of Quebec a hospital became a necessity so in 1639 the Hôtel Dieu, was erected the second hospital in North America, Cortes having built one in Mexico in 1525. The Hôtel Dieu, Montreal, 1644, was the second such edifice in Canada. The Toronto General was constructed in 1820. It was not until 1872 that the first hospital in the west was built in Winnipeg. The public and doctors did not take kindly to these institutions for a long time. Even in 1889, there were only 0.91 beds per 1,000 of population in Canada. In 1946 this had increased to over 6 beds per 1,000.

Another milestone was passed when in 1750 Bigot introduced regulations for the examination of intending medical practitioners. His reasons are better given in his own words:

“From information we have received, it appears many unknown individuals coming from Europe and elsewhere have engaged in surgery as much in the cities as in the country districts, without any permission; that these strangers whose ability is unknown treat the sick with little care and without giving them relief; distribute worthless remedies which give unsatisfactory results, not having all the experience necessary, and leading as a final result to abuses which are prejudicial to the well-being of the subjects of the King; and to prevent the evil which the obstinacy of many through inexperience may cause we have decided to make the following regulation.”

In 1758 a Medical Act was passed by the British Government regulating the practice of medicine and surgery in French Canada. A licence would be granted only after an examination by some person designated by the Governor or Commander-in-chief. Fines were imposed for offenders who failed to take the examination or violated the provisions of the Act. It was not until 1795 that a similar Act was put into force in Upper Canada. Manitoba had its first licensing act in 1871, New Brunswick in 1881, British Columbia in 1886, and the North West Territories in 1888. The Dominion Medical Council did not come into being until 1911.

The medical histories of all the Provinces follow much the same pattern. First came the pioneer medical men with the early settlers. As the population grew epidemic disease required some form of regulation to prevent its

spread. Then hospitals were required. About this stage of development of the country unskilled practitioners and quacks had to be weeded out and so examining and licensing boards were set up. Following this medical societies and journals came into being. When greater growth of population took place medical schools to train suitable practitioners were organized. Lastly, research was established in these institutions. The history of medicine of Canada has followed this pattern. We have seen the first doctors arrive, quarantine introduced, hospitals built and regulations for medical practice set up.

Now one finds the founding of the first medical society. This was the Medical Society of Quebec. The first meeting was held in Quebec City in 1826. The membership seems to have been about equally divided between French and English practitioners. At the first regular meeting twelve papers were presented, six in French and six in English. In this year also the first medical journal in Canada appeared. This was published quarterly in both French and English. With increased facilities to discuss medical problems both verbally and in the medical press a stimulus was given the early physicians to investigate and report on matters of local and general interest and another milestone in Canadian medicine was reached.

The *Montreal Medical Gazette* was established in Montreal in 1845, the first entirely English publication in this country. Many journals followed in Montreal, the Maritimes and in Upper Canada. It was not until 1911 that the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, formed by the union of the *Montreal Medical Journal* and the *Maritime Medical News*, came into existence.

Just after Confederation in 1867 the Canadian Medical Association was founded. Its early years were precarious. Eight years after its birth it came close to losing its identity and was saved only by the adverse vote of the judicial council of the American Medical Association. At that time it had less than 500 members and these were from the Eastern Provinces. There was no member from west of Lake Huron. Canadian medicine was striving to find its place as an independent unit on the continent when in 1875 a resolution was adopted at the annual meeting at Niagara which threatened its existence.

This resolution called for a union with the American Medical Association. The latter body at its next meeting was of the unanimous opinion “that a union of the two Associations into one is desirable”. The judicial council of the American Association by its action in vetoing the matter saved the Canadian Association from absorption. Surely this was a milestone safely passed.

Canada was expanding. The Canadian Pacific Railway soon stretched to the far Pacific. Branches grew off the main line north and south. Rival railways opened up new territory and immigration was encouraged. The medical needs of the people called for more physicians. Montreal was fast outstripping Quebec in population, as a shipping port and in financial importance. Here in 1824 the staff of the Montreal General Hospital created the Montreal Medical Institution, the precursor of the Medical Faculty of McGill. In the same year at St. Thomas, Ontario, Dr. John Rolph commenced a course of lectures on Medicine. In 1830 Dr. Rolph opened a private medical school in Toronto which later became "The Toronto School of Medicine". In 1854 by arrangement with the Board of Victoria College the Toronto School became the Medical Department of that University. In 1850 the Upper Canada School of Medicine, newly formed, offered their services to Trinity College and so two medical schools carried on in Toronto until 1903 when the University of Toronto took over the Medical Faculty of Trinity.

Victoria University built at Cobourg in 1836 was in a curious position as regards medicine. As has been noted it took over the Toronto School of Medicine and granted degrees. From 1867 until 1890 it granted degrees to students of L'Ecole de Médecine et de Chirurgie de Montreal which had been established in 1843, but did not have degree granting privileges.

In 1847 there was in existence the "Incorporated School of Medicine of the City of Quebec". Queen's University established a Medical Faculty in 1854. Dalhousie offered a partial course in medicine in 1867 and was giving a complete medical education by 1872. The London Medical School was founded in 1881, Manitoba Medical School in 1883 and the Medical Faculty of the University of Alberta in 1913. The University of British Columbia and that of Saskatchewan are preparing to give complete medical instruction at the present time.

When the older medical schools were firmly established laboratories became better equipped and money became available for research work. Many valuable contributions were made by all the medical schools, but the greatest was the discovery of insulin and its development by Sir Frederick Banting and his associates, Professor McLeod, C. H. Best and Dr. J. B. Collip, in 1922. Canada too has given leaders in Medicine to other countries. Chief of these was Sir William Osler, first Professor of Medicine at Johns Hopkins and later Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford. Dr. Arthur Ellis, now Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford, was the second Canadian to occupy this post.

Many others attained high place in teaching and research work, particularly in the United States. Canadian Medicine was now, unfortunately for itself, exporting its talent.

With the outbreak of the first great war many Canadian physicians joined the Imperial forces or proceeded overseas as medical officers in the Canadian Army Medical Corps either attached to combatant units or with hospitals or Field Ambulances. During the second world war a greater number played their part both overseas and in many research laboratories at home.

With nine medical schools, graduating men equipped to deal with the type of work they are called on to perform, Canada has today taken a high place in world medicine. Looking back over the past, one can point with pride to the milestones which have marked its progress and be proud of the heritage which our forefathers in Canadian medicine have bequeathed to it, and look forward to a future of ever-expanding usefulness in the prevention and care of disease in the rapidly growing population of the Dominion.

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