

LOUIS HÉBERT.

By M. CHARLTON,

Librarian of McGill Medical Library, Montreal, Canada.

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Every student of Canadian history knows that from the first [158] days of the colonization of New France, an important rôle as colonists was played by members of the medical profession. If they were not remarkable for any great professional brilliancy, they were generally men of sterling character and courage. Louis Hébert, apothecary, surgeon, and agriculturist, is regarded, next to Champlain, as the "Father of New France." When Champlain induced his old friend of Port Royal to venture once more to become a colonist of New France, he knew he had accomplished a greater work in building up his colony than had been done since its foundation. For Louis Hébert had proved his worth at Port Royal, not only as a surgeon, but as a keen and ardent agriculturist.

When Champlain returned to France in 1617, his mind filled with the wondrous future he was planning for Quebec, he knew it was of vital import to obtain as colonists men of the best type, not jail-birds, as Roberval had had to contend with, nor mere adventurers, who came for the love of adventure or gain, and went away again, but men who would cultivate the land. And so the thought of his friend came to him—Louis Hébert, who had cultivated such beautiful gardens at Port Royal, until that settlement was destroyed by Samuel Argall, when Hébert returned to France.

Louis Hébert had received a good education, for his father was a man of repute, being apothecary to Catherine de Médicis. Louis followed his father's business and had a shop on the banks of the Seine, where he was well patronized. But in the

* Presented by Dr. Henry M. Hurd at the meeting of The Johns Hopkins Historical Society, March 9, 1914.

[158] summer of 1606, he suddenly announced to his friends and relations that he was sailing with Poutrincourt and fifty other colonists for the New World, of which there had lately been so much talk. Among others who sailed in the ship was a Parisian lawyer, historian, and poet named Lescarbot, the friend and lawyer of Poutrincourt. It is to Lescarbot we are indebted for the vivid portrayal of how the first winter in the new settlement at Port Royal was passed. "For my part," writes Lescarbot, "I can say that I never worked so hard in

[159] my life. I took pleasure in laying out and cultivating my gardens, in making alleys, building summer houses, growing wheat, rye, barley, oats, beans, peas, and garden plants, and in watering them, for I was most anxious to find out, by personal experience, the quality of the soil."

With Lescarbot worked Hébert and the days were not long enough for these two enthusiastic agriculturists; they must needs work by moonlight, digging and planting. Lescarbot and Hébert returned to Paris in the autumn of 1607, but Hébert, after a short stay, came back to Port Royal accompanied by Biencourt, Poutrincourt's son. He assisted Biencourt in managing and taking care of those colonists who had remained, and when Biencourt was absent, acted as his lieutenant until the place was destroyed in 1613, by the English. Hébert then returned to Paris as he thought, for good, and once more opened his shop on the banks of the Seine.

When Champlain arrived in France in 1617, he visited Hébert, and so beguiled him with his marvellous accounts of the country about Quebec that Hébert again sold his possessions and with his family started for Honfleur, where he arrived on March 14. Champlain had induced a new fur trading company to promise to support Hébert and his family for two years; and afterwards to make him an allowance of two hundred crowns for three years.

On arriving at Honfleur, Hébert found, to his chagrin and dismay, that all the promises which the company had held out to him were false. In vain did Hébert appeal for fair treatment. The company refused to keep their promises; they offered him one hundred crowns instead of two hundred, and, moreover, required his bond for free medical attendance at all

times to the settlers and to the clerks belonging to their com- [159]
pany. Hébert was at their mercy, but rather than return to
Paris, for he had disposed of all his effects, he embarked with
his family for the New World.

Their passage was a stormy one, and when they reached
Newfoundland, the ship encountered a great field of ice-bergs.
At one time, it seemed as if all on board must perish. Father
Joseph, one of the passengers, knelt upon the deck and prayed
for Divine assistance, and we are told in the "Relations of the
Jesuits" that Madame Hébert took Marie Rollet, her youngest
child, and held her up through the hatchway, so that she might
receive the father's blessing. It was on this long and stormy
voyage of thirteen weeks and a day that the courtship of Anne,
the eldest daughter of Hébert, commenced. Among the pas-
sengers was one Etienne Jonquesé, a sturdy son of Normandy.
He wooed Anne so successfully that the two were married in the
autumn by Father le Caron. This was the first marriage in
Canada according to Church rites, but Anne had a short
wedded life, for she died in 1619 and was followed by her hus-
band within a few weeks.*

The passengers were first landed at Tadousac June 14, and
after returning thanks for their safe arrival, they went on to
Quebec.

Quebec consisted at this time of a few roughly-built huts,
clustered close to the water's edge; they were inhabited by
clerks, interpreters, and others employed by the company.

Louis Hébert chose for the site of his future home, land on
the height above—later called Mountain Hill, part of which
was between the present streets of Famille and Couillard.
He lost no time in building his home, a substantial stone
house, thirty-eight feet in length by nineteen in width, the
best house for many years to come in Quebec, and the first
dwelling in what was afterwards the Upper Town, for as yet
Champlain had not built his fort on the cliff. Not far from

*Thus we have mention of the first marriage in New France,
and in connection with that it is interesting to notice the first
marriage in New England took place the 12th of May, 1617,
two months and a half earlier, between Edward Winslow and
Susannah White.

[159] the house ran a stream of pure water, and this had decided Hébert in his choice of a site. For ten years Hébert toiled like any hardy peasant upon his farm. He sowed Indian corn and vegetable seeds, planted apple trees and his beloved grape vines. All his spare time, when not attending to the sick, was devoted to his agricultural pursuits. Every year he cleared more ground and tried fresh experiments in farming; every year his farm grew more and more productive. He was able, almost from the first, to support his family on what he raised, and this in spite of the fact that the company forced him to sell them his grain at a price fixed by themselves, one of the many acts of injustice rendered him by the company. This farm was the show farm of Quebec—the model farm, so to speak, of the day. From this time agriculture began to find its place in New France, and in these golden days of Canada's greatness, she may well be proud of her first farmer.

It is claimed that the first seignory mentioned in the records was that of Sault-au-Matelot near Quebec, which was ceded to Louis Hébert by the duc de Montmorency in 1623 and that this was added to three years later by the duc de Ventadour of the fief of d'Epinay on the St. Charles River. A controversy has arisen, however, as to whether Hébert may be rightly called the first seigneur in New France.

The life of this clever, original Frenchman was crowded with interest, from the day he first left Paris and settled at Port Royal to his final home at Quebec. Through innumerable hardships and difficulties he had struggled on with unflinching courage and hope. He had accomplished wonders during his ten years' residence at Quebec. In January, 1627, a great sorrow came upon his friends. Hébert fell on the ice when he was crossing a river and died shortly afterwards from the effects of the fall. They buried him amidst great grief in the cemetery of the Recollet Fathers at the foot of the cross. Only three days before his accident, Hébert had visited the Fathers and as though he had had a premonition of his death, he had requested that when that event took place, he should be buried in that spot.

It is supposed that the first time a notary's services were

required in New France was in the drawing up of Hébert's [159] will.

Among the settlers who had remained at the advice of Champlain, when Kirke captured Quebec, were the Hébert and [160] Couillard families, as well as a surgeon, Adrien Duchesne and his wife, who came to Quebec in 1618. Duchesne was the second medical man to settle there.

When Champlain returned to Quebec after the treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye, he was accompanied by Fathers Paul le Jeune and Anne de la Nouë. They went immediately to Madame Hébert's house, the only one spared in that scene of desolation. Here Madame Hébert lived with her second daughter, Guillemette and her son-in-law, Guillaume Couillard. Couillard had come to Quebec in 1613 as a carpenter. But he had soon become, under Louis Hébert's teaching, an active farmer. In 1628, instead of tilling the ground by hand, oxen were used, and so well had Couillard managed Hébert's farm that it was spoken of as the one fertile spot at Quebec when Champlain returned.

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