

## THE STATUS OF NURSING AMONG THE FRENCH CANADIANS IN THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC, CANADA.\*

The history of the nursing profession in our country goes back to the year 1639, when the land was under French domination. During this period the ladies of the court of Louis XIII were greatly interested in social work. Thanks to the publication of the "Relations" of the Jesuits they knew of the pressing needs of the colony which was still in its infancy. The Duchess of Aiguillon, niece of Cardinal Richelieu, whose zeal equalled her piety, resolved to furnish the necessary funds to build, in the city of Quebec, a hospital destined for the colonists and the Indians.

Three nursing sisters of Dieppe, of the order of the Chanoinesse of St. Augustine, were chosen for this heroic enterprise. In company with the first group of Ursuline nuns (among whom was Mother Marie of the Incarnation, called the Therese of New France) they arrived at Quebec on the 1st August, after a terrible three months' voyage. Just then an epidemic of small-pox broke out among the Hurons. The nursing sisters, who were given temporary lodging by the Jesuits, set to work immediately and in less than three months our heroines had given care to more than two hundred of these unfortunates, whose filth was equalled only by their misery.

A life of incredible suffering and privation began for the group of noble women and lasted for them and their successors for more than a century. Their unconquerable courage and their great charity were above all praise; extreme poverty, the cruelty of the Iroquois, fire, war, nothing could make them give up their work, nothing could conquer their devotion to duty.

For more than three hundred years the nursing sisters of the Precious Blood in Quebec have lavished their charity and ability on thousands of the sick in their district, where they are regarded with gratitude and veneration.

They have had many trials in the course of these three centuries. To-day they have numerous flourishing hospitals, where the sisters give themselves to their work without stint, following in the footsteps of their holy predecessors, the first heroines of French Canada.

Some years after the arrival of the nursing nuns in Quebec, in 1642, Ville-Marie, now Montreal, was founded 180 miles from Quebec. The distance of the borough of Hochelaga (the Indian name for Montreal) from that of Stadacona (the Indian name for Quebec) necessitated the establishment of a new hospital, that of the Hotel-Dieu of Montreal. The sublime devotion, the heroic sacrifices of Quebec were repeated at Ville-Marie.

To the great Jeanne Mance (the collaborator of Maison-neuve) whose ability and qualities we know, was entrusted the direction of the new hospital. It has well been said that Jeanne Mance is the first woman who appears in the history of Ville-Marie (Montreal). With her noble heart, her sound judgment, her enterprising spirit, her firm will, and her heroic virtues, she is the fine type on which her followers are modelled. She had the nursing sisters of le Flèche associated with her to help and continue her work.

The history of these ancient institutions is the history of Montreal, of its heroic origin, of its stirring struggles, of its astonishing progress.

Since that remote period the number of our Institutions has increased considerably. We have to-day in the Province of Quebec fourteen hospitals whose schools of nursing are approved by the Association of Registered Nurses of the Province of Quebec, without counting a good number of others, especially in the district of Quebec,

which have not yet judged it opportune to have their schools approved and their graduates registered.

The Association of Registered Nurses of the Province of Quebec dates from 1920, when it was legally approved and granted a Charter by the legislature. In 1925 the Association was authorised to make membership conditional upon the passing of an examination. This examination is held twice a year under the direction of the Committee of Management of the Association for the graduates of all the approved schools. The law provides for an exception in the case of the graduates of the schools affiliated to any of the French Canadian Universities of the Province, for whom the Board of Examiners is composed of members of the University and of members of the Association.

It being our intention to give here only a general idea of the status of nursing in the Province of Quebec, we shall limit our review to the principal schools of nursing among the French Canadians.

The first was founded at the Hospital Notre-Dame in the month of October, 1899. The hospital itself was established by the initiative of Dr. P. Lachapelle, the Reverend Father Rousselot, P.S., and the Mother Superior General of the Gray Nuns, Mother Deschamps. "We see here united in a common undertaking to establish a national and catholic enterprise, the University, the order of Saint Sulpice and the Gray Nuns. It is on this triple foundation that the Institution rests with us and has its reason for existence—and it should realise in a form of charity unknown up to this period an intimate religious and secular collaboration." The school of nursing was founded with the object of charitable work and for clinical teaching; in its development it had necessarily to extend its benevolent action to young women wishing to learn the art of nursing.

This school, as well as the Hospital of Notre Dame itself, is under the direction of the Gray Nuns. These worthy daughters of the venerable Mother d'Youville lead a quiet existence, but none the less they have a remarkable spirit of progress and their devotion to duty is so familiar to us that it passes almost unnoticed.

The second French-Canadian school of nursing in Montreal was founded at the Hotel-Dieu Hospital in 1901 and received its legal recognition in 1920. Its affiliation to the Association and to the University of Montreal gave it the final official approval.

In 1907 the third school of nursing was opened, that of the hospital of Saint Justine. "It was"—so says the chronicle—"on a November day, when the leaves were falling from the branches like wounded birds, that some ladies met together in an old house. They had \$87.11 in money, a box for a table and four chairs, with which to lay the foundations of the Saint Justine Hospital for Children. These early workers had a heavy task to accomplish. To undertake the organisation of a hospital for children at this period was to fight against fixed prejudices. It was considered that children ought to be cared for in their families, or, if necessary, in the existing hospitals with the adults. Yet, because it was necessary to fight against these prejudices and because there were little ones who wept for help, a week later a bed, a ton of coal, a sick child and a nurse entered the old house simultaneously. The Saint Justine Hospital was founded."

To these women, directed by Madam L. de G. Beaubien, the population of Montreal owes a debt of gratitude it can never discharge.

The medical department of the Saint Justine Hospital, under the direction of Dr. Raoul Masson, was organised in January, 1908, and the dispensary was opened in March of the same year. Already many mothers were coming to the consultations with their children in their arms.

\* By courtesy of the Editor of the I.C.N., the official organ of the International Council of Nurses.

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