

THE MAPLE TREE.



ANADIANS must feel interest in the maple tree. Its emblematic leaf arouses the pride and the aspirations of the Canadian patriot's heart, and the Canadian — if any such there be—

whose lethargic nature is not awakened by such patriotic sentiments, is interested in the maple at least inasmuch as it is the source of a very delectable food product. We are indebted for much of what we are to say in the present paper to the historian, Benjamin Sulte, who on this subject, wrote an extremely interesting article, characterized by deep and patient research. The article we refer to appeared in the issue dated June 4th, 1892, of *Le Monde Illustré*, a French journal of Montreal.

China and India, it seems, were the countries in which sugar was first known. Later on it found its way into Arabia, Syria, and Egypt. To Alexander the Great is awarded the honour of having introduced it into Greece, whence it passed on westwards to Sicily and Rome. About the year 1420, Portugal procured some samples of sugar, and from that country some of it was obtained by the inhabitants of the Canary Islands. These islands and Madeira made known to all Europe the existence of sugar. It was not, however, commonly used by the Europeans until a couple of centuries later. In 1506 the Spaniards brought sugar-cane from Saint Domingo Island, where it grew without being cultivated. We see, then, that sugar-cane grows in many countries, and was widely known before the discovery of America. The fruitful maple tree, on the other hand, is to be found chiefly in America, and belongs especially to Canada.

Mr. Benjamin Sulte, despite his lengthy researches, finds it impossible to ascertain the exact time at which the maple sugar industry originated. No mention at all is made of maple sugar in the "Relations des Jesuites," which are the chief historical

records of the country from 1632 to 1673. In 1663 M. Pierre Boucher wrote a little book entitled "Histoire Naturelle de la Nouvelle-France." Speaking of the maple he says in substance: "There is a species of tree called the maple, which grows quite large and high; its wood is very beautiful. However, we use it only to burn or to make tool handles, a purpose for which it is well suited on account of its being extremely soft and strong. When these maples are notched in the spring there flows from the notch a quantity of water which is sweeter and more agreeable to drink than water mixed with sugar." M. Pierre Boucher's object in writing his work was to make known to his readers Canada's natural resources. And since he makes no mention of the manufacture of maple sugar or maple syrup, we are justified in concluding that the maple sugar industry originated subsequent to the year 1663. Mr. Sulte assures us that no further mention is made of the maple tree in Canada's historical documents until the year 1683, when the Baron de La Hontan wrote as follows: "The maple resembles the wild cherry tree in height and thickness; there is, however, this difference between them: the bark of the former is brown and its wood is reddish. The Canadian maples are not at all like those of Europe. The former contain a peculiar kind of sap which is more pleasant to the taste than any lemonade or cherry water, and which is the healthiest drink in the world. To get this liquid, an incision about two inches in depth and ten or twelve inches in length is made, slanting into the wood. At the base of this incision the sap flows into a sort of spout, which empties into a trough at the end of which a vessel is placed for receiving the liquid. Each tree can yield only five or six bottles of sap per day, and each Canadian *habitant* can collect twenty barrels of it morning and evening, if he wishes to tap all the trees on his farm. The incision made does the tree no harm. Out of this sap is made sugar and syrup which is indeed precious, inasmuch as it is the best of all remedies for strengthening the lungs. Few people