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# DIET DISPENSARY



DIET DISPENSARY, MONTREAL  
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Canadian  
pamphlets

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A SHORT HISTORY  
OF THE  
DIET DISPENSARY

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1879-1906

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## INTRODUCTORY



AT the earnest request of many friends, this account of the Diet Dispensary, its encouragements and discouragements, its aim and the results obtained, has been prepared.


Apparently the work has reached a crucial point in its existence, and having lately attained the dignity of a suite of rooms, it seems a particularly suitable time to take a backward look and see what the growth has been as well as to give a faint forecast of what is hoped for in the future.

OCTOBER, 1895.



## The Diet Dispensary



EARLY in the spring of 1879, it was suggested, at a meeting of the Young Women's Christian Association, that a Diet Kitchen, similar to charities bearing that name carried on in several cities of the United States, should be started in Montreal. The question was carefully weighed and held long in abeyance. It seemed a great undertaking, for the Association was young, and every new branch meant additional expenditure. Finally, however, the more venturesome spirit prevailed. A Com-

mittee, before known as the Hospital Committee, was authorized to make enquiries in regard to the work elsewhere, and, if they saw fit, to start a place where the poor, who had sickness in their homes, could obtain, on the presentation of an order from a physician, food, properly prepared from good material, suitable to the cases in question.

With a capital of some \$18, these ladies bravely began a work which has grown into the present Diet Dispensary.

After much consultation, a circular was printed and sent to nearly every physician in the city, stating the aim of the object and asking co-operation. So many and such kind responses were received in answer, that further steps were taken with renewed ardour. At this time the Association occupied a house in Mansfield Street, and a small portion of the basement was set apart for the Dispensary work. With the capital on hand, a small gas-stove was obtained, a few—very few—dishes, and one or two pots and pans. Some friends, already interested in the project, gave the remaining absolute necessities, and the Diet Dispensary was a

reality. Money was indeed scarce, and, like many young housekeepers, the Committee dared not indulge themselves with paid help. Every pint of beef-tea, each glass of jelly, had to be made by the ladies themselves, while the demand was fluctuating and small at best. With the heat of summer, nearly all the Committee left the city, some patients complained of inattention, the limited space set aside for the Committee's use cramped both them and the inmates of the house, and the days of the Diet Kitchen seemed numbered. Just then, when the little store of money was well-nigh exhausted, and no more seemed forthcoming, a good friend suggested a solution of one of the difficulties, namely, the lack of space. The Committee were largely ladies of the American Church. In the basement of this building were two unused rooms, (one of which had an entrance from outside), and practically unlimited cellar-room—why not ask for permission to use these premises? The idea was eagerly caught at, and a request was forwarded, which met with so cordial a response from the church Trustees that in the following January the ladies



found themselves in the quarters which were so generously granted to them, rent free, for nearly fourteen years. Money, too, was received, in amounts sufficient to meet daily needs, and, on the whole, the outlook was more cheerful.

Will any of the old members of the Committee forget the five dollars (surely providential) sent that first Christmas Eve, when but a few cents were left, or the enthusiasm over the first *twenty* dollars received. On the other hand, are they not likely to remember the weary hours spent in cooking, or in dispensing—or worst of all—the afternoon when no applicants appeared?

Although the ladies made a house to house canvass of the doctors, leaving a card which explained the object of the work, it was seldom remembered that first year, and orders were such a rarity that the idea of closing the door permanently was mooted, though to the credit of the Committee be it stated, it was frowned upon.

All this time a large number of ladies were engaged in the work. The original Committee did the cooking, at which they spelled one another two mornings of each week, with the aid of a charwoman for the heaviest of the work.

In addition to this, every afternoon from two till four, the services of six other workers were required, each one attending to the dispensing for one day in the week, when every applicant who presented a note from physician, clergyman or city missionary, was supplied with the desired food. The ladies also did some visiting and met many pitiful cases. Even in the very early days they were assured that lives had been saved by the Diet Dispensary, and such knowledge amply repaid all toil and anxiety.

When the first of April arrived, the report showed some three hundred applicants which was considered quite an encouraging beginning.

For three years the work was carried on in a similar way. Discouragements were faced bravely, and at the end of this time the Committee found themselves with a decided increase of work, no debts, and a balance of \$66 to their credit. The plan of doing everything themselves—which had never worked very well—became more impracticable as the orders grew more numerous, so a bold step was taken—a helper was secured who was to give her entire time and do all, namely:—cooking, cleaning

and dispensing, while the ladies would supervise. This would cause increased expenditure but it was deemed wise to run the risk, if risk it was, and after some trouble a young woman was found who filled the position satisfactorily. She, however, soon desired to seek her fortune in the adjoining republic, and again a successor was found who remained throughout the winter, but with the spring she sought change of occupation, and this action of hers brought the faithful worker who has until the past summer served the Dispensary, linking her name with the work, and giving to it most valuable assistance by her kind-heartedness and discretion, as well as by her untiring efforts in its behalf. It was with sincere regret that the ladies felt obliged to accede to the request that she might retire on account of the state of her health, and she carries with her the good wishes of one and all about the establishment.

For another three years there was little change to record. The manager added to the variety of delicacies prepared and occasionally paid visits to the very sick patients, while the increase of orders was most marked. The Com-

mittee continued the management and in the main, remained the same.

With the increased growth it seemed necessary to have more than one officer, and first a treasurer, and later a secretary were chosen from among the ranks, thus dividing the labour and lightening the task of each.

After another three years the fact became apparent that a visiting nurse was a necessity. Although money needed for the work had always been forthcoming, there had never been any superfluity, and the additional sum needed for this purpose seemed stupendous. The question was seriously weighed before being finally decided. The feeling that it was a necessity prevailed, and it is well to say here that there never has been a time since, when the treasurer has not been able to meet this expense. With the nurse began that new branch of the work—the supply of bedding and clothing, which has been so highly appreciated by many of the applicants at the Dispensary, and the still more valuable visiting of the sick, which has become so important a feature of the work.

From that date (December, 1885) till 1889 the

records show no startling events, only a steady increase in work and in the interest shown by outsiders and workers alike. From time to time special efforts were made to raise money, always so successfully that anxiety over financial difficulties was of short duration. Indeed this has been one of the marked features of the work. The Committee have never made a house to house canvass of the city, and further than occasional notes, no personal appeals have ever been made in its behalf; still there has always been a sufficient sum on hand to meet the expenses of the hour, and the Committee have faith to believe that as long as the work is a necessity in Montreal, such will be the case.

As the work became greater, it was deemed best to engage another assistant, who at first was secured to help both nurse and manager, but who gradually assumed the position of second nurse.

At about this time, by the advice of several friends of the work, and for purely financial reasons, the Committee asked and obtained permission to sever its connection with the parent branch, the Young Women's Christian Associa-

tion. It is almost needless to add that the kindest of feelings were expressed on both sides, and that the relations between both societies has ever continued as binding as in the early days. The yearly report of the Diet Dispensary was read with the Association reports at their annual meeting until 1894, when owing to the number of branches which that institution now sustains, and the consequent lengthened meetings, the Dispensary report was withdrawn.

The latest step taken by the Dispensary, has been a removal from the quarters, so long and so generously given them by the Trustees of the American Church; rooms which have seen the work grow from infancy to such an extent as to be cramped in the accommodations which helped it through nearly fourteen years of existence. To celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of its life, a new home was found, and to suit the applicants, who are very largely of the poorest class, rooms were secured on St. Antoine Street. This move was made after very serious consideration, and consultation with the board of gentlemen, who for some years past have been the advisors of the Committee in any important mat-

ters. The locality chosen seemed a good one, as the work aims to reach the poor, and their convenience had to be first considered. During the sixteen months that the Committee have occupied these rooms, the greater number of free applicants has convinced them of the wisdom of the step taken, and after a few months, a plan whereby the rich as well as the poor, might be suitably served, was thought out, and put in practice. Mr. Tremble kindly offered to place in his drug store, goods to be sold, and since November last, fresh supplies have been sent to him daily, where they are kept on ice, and may be obtained by any person desirous of purchasing them. This plan has worked admirably; the situation of the store (corner of St. Catherine and Mountain streets) is convenient for those who live uptown, and the kindness invariably shown by all with whom the workers have come in contact, cannot be too highly spoken of.

In looking back over these past years, the Committee feel that they have great cause for thankfulness and they earnestly hope that as large a measure of success will be granted to

them in the future as has been in the past. Through all the years of weary work, they have been a united band, all having one and the same object in view, and there have been remarkably few changes, among the workers. Two years ago the first heavy blow fell upon them, when, without warning, the beloved secretary, who had given her whole souled service to the work for ten years, was taken from their midst. A member of the Committee from its very early days, her hearty enthusiasm and earnest manner, never failed to rouse the most lagging spirit, and secured for her the warm friendship and deep admiration of all who were associated with her, while her pen was ever ready, and her feet were never too weary, to serve the cause she loved. May her memory be a constant example to those who come after her, so that being dead, she may yet speak to us!

In closing this brief account of the Diet Dispensary the writer would like to give more prominence to the work accomplished by the nurses,—work of a nature which cannot be paid for, and which comes only from a willing heart. Of the weariness and discomfort, borne so cheerfully



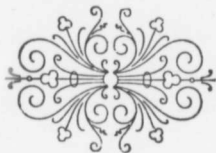
by them nobody, save themselves, has any idea, but surely the grateful thanks which are continually coming back to them, must be some reward for their lives of self-sacrifice.

Some idea of the growth of the Diet Dispensary may be formed by a comparison of figures. The number of applicants during the first year was some three hundred; last year they were nearly eight thousand. The first treasurer's report gives the total receipts as \$150.54, and a balance from this on hand of \$13.66. The statement closed March 15th, 1895, shows that \$2,303.58 had been handled, and the balance was \$115.10, a somewhat startling increase.

That the work is far from perfect, the Committee only too keenly realize, but they are constantly striving to improve, and they earnestly desire the co-operation of all who have any interest in their efforts to aid the sick who are powerless to help themselves. A new year has lately begun, the workers still endeavor to fill their obligations to the sick and distressed, but with each year they feel more keenly the need of more sympathy and help from many;—from each and all who know what sickness and

suffering mean,—and they most earnestly solicit that help and that sympathy, without which they cannot hope to succeed in their undertaking.

Montreal, October 1st, 1895.



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## APPENDIX



5. It is now ten years since the foregoing pages were published. The edition has been exhausted, and the Committee of the Diet Dispensary deem it advisable to have a further one issued, adding a record of the work during the intervening time.

The small suite of rooms in St. Antoine Street, secured in the spring of 1895, was occupied for four years, by which time it was outgrown, and a house on Osborne Street, containing more rooms, was leased. With the increasing work, another helper was a necessity, and the Dispensary then secured the services of a most efficient worker, who still assists the matron in her duties. The position in Osborne Street was sufficiently central to dispense to applicants from the upper part of the city, so it was felt quite unnecessary to tax Mr. Tremble's kindness further, and from

the date of the removal (1899) all has been done under the one roof.

That the Dispensary was reaching those in need of its aid, was evinced by the increase in the number of its orders, and the necessity of obtaining another nurse in 1899.

In 1901 another move was made, two doors west, to a similar house, in somewhat better repair, in which the Dispensary remained for four years. While here a telephone was given, and arrangements were made to deliver supplies ordered through it, so that since then, by the payment of a small additional sum, jellies, etc., have been sent to all parts of the city by special messenger.

In 1904 it was thought wise to obtain the services of a paid collector. The result has been most satisfactory, and has settled the harrassing question of how to obtain sufficient funds to support such an institution.

About this same time a long-cherished scheme was put into operation, and a branch was started in the eastern portion of the city. To this branch was transferred the nurse who visited

in that district; a matron was found to prepare and dispense the supplies, and the little offshoot was watched with much anxiety by the main committee.

As in the early days of the Dispensary, so in the first months of the new one, there were many discouragements and small results to show for much labour and thought, but friends were firm in their assurances that it did good, and, notwithstanding obstacles, it has survived and grown. Now, after nearly three years of existence, the work seems firmly established with a fair future, and suggestions of still further branches may even yet become realities.

The work is now well known, and requests for supplies to be sent away from Montreal, and for information concerning the establishment of similar dispensaries in other cities are not infrequent.

For some years the Committee had hoped for a place of their own, and as the work entered its twenty-fifth year, the Secretary made mention of this desire in her report. To the joy of all Dispensary workers, a promise of \$1,000 as

a nucleus of a building fund, came in answer. With such a substantial beginning the Committee grew enthusiastic, so that in a few months they were the proud and grateful possessors of a sufficient sum to buy a house (79 Mansfield Street) which pleased them, alter it to suit the needs of the work, and furnish it throughout. Some rooms, not immediately required for the Dispensary, were let, thereby adding to the revenue, and in October, 1905, the place was formally opened.

The present home is bright, commodious, and a constant pleasure to its workers. Those long connected with the institution cannot fail to feel the contrast between its humble beginning and its present fair proportions,—a truly wonderful growth. They can only earnestly hope that they may succeed in the future, as in the past, and, by means of their prosperity, be still further enabled to help their suffering fellow-beings, thereby continuing to merit the confidence of their friends and the public.

The subjoined figures show the receipts for the year 1905, and the work accomplished.

Amount received, \$4,127.89; expenditure, \$3,754.29; number of orders filled, 13,354; visits paid by nurses, 5,943.



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MISS BIGELOW,      MISS GREENSHIELDS,  
MISS D. A. REA.

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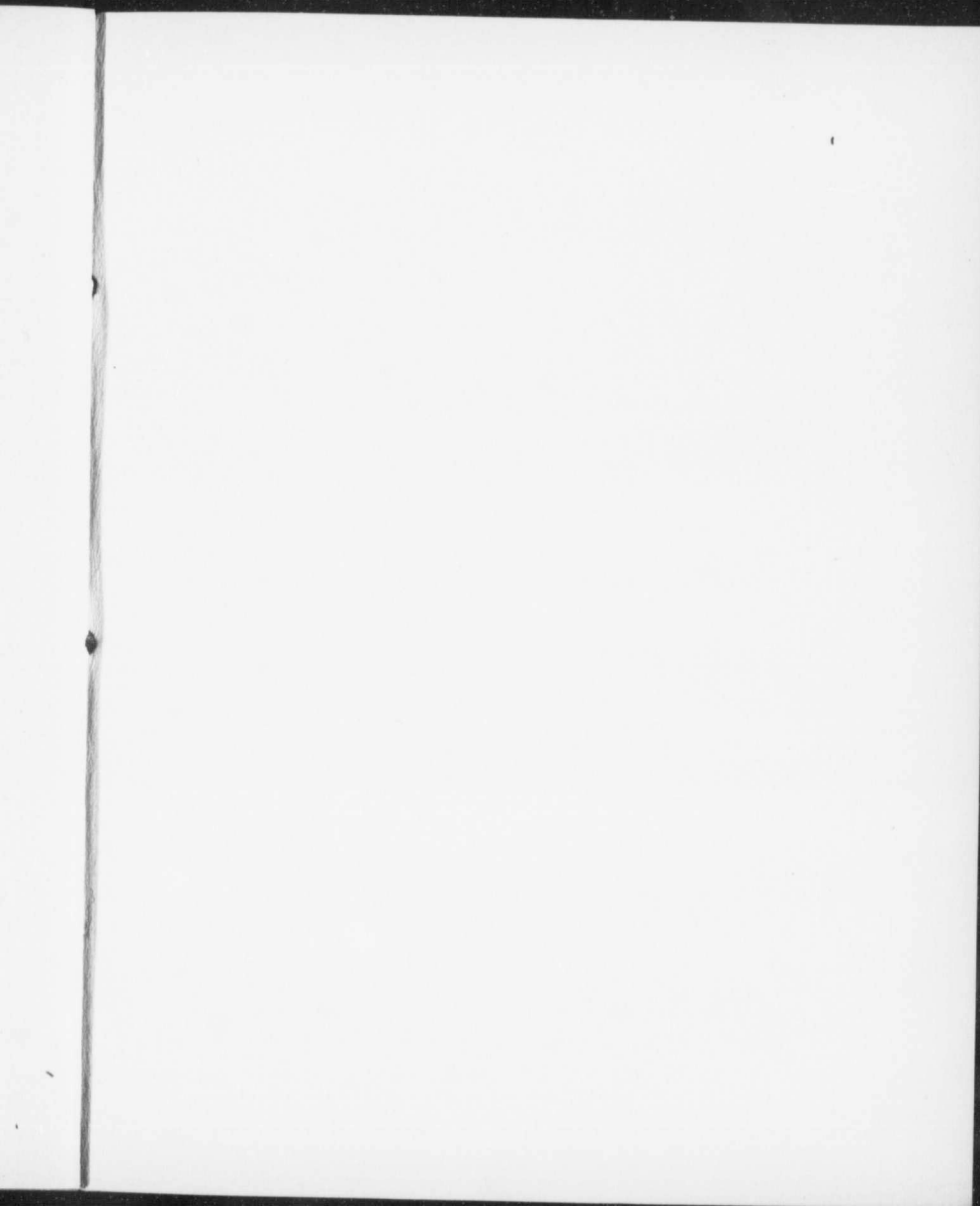
**Legal Adviser.**

FRANCIS McLENNAN, ESQ.

79 Mansfield Street,  
Montreal, March 15th, 1906.









**79 Mansfield Street**

