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Neurological stamp

Jean Nicot 1530–1600

When he was French ambassador to Lisbon Jean Nicot was intrigued by local reports of the efficacy of tobacco for the cure of some serious diseases. On his return from Portugal he introduced the tobacco plant into France (hence the name nicotine). It was used to cure headaches, treat syphilis, and the smoke was thought to alleviate asthma. The green leaves were advised for neck pain.

It is said that tobacco cured the queen of her headaches and that those in positions of influence experimented with the plant and promoted the therapeutic aspects associated with it. Tobacco became a fixed part of European medical practice. It was prescribed for a multitude of ailments and diseases including paralysis, rabies, tetanus, epilepsy, nervous disorders and hysteria.

There was a popular suspicion at the time that doctors opposed the smoking of tobacco because it was diminishing the need for their services. In later years there was a general attack upon the use of tobacco. Horace Greeley, an American journalist and politician defined the cigar as “a fire at one end and a fool at the other.”

The 400th anniversary of the introduction of tobacco into France was marked by a stamp issued in 1961 (Stanley Gibbons no 1517, Scott no 989).

L F HAAS