

COMMUNICATIONS

HOSPITAL SITES.

II.

To the Editor of the Gazette:

SIR,—In a previous communication something was said as to the advantages of the site of the Royal Victoria Hospital. Let us now turn to the old site, as it may be supposed to appear to the ordinary citizen.

The venerable and justly loved and respected General Hospital, has, beyond the remembrance of the present generation of men, been an institution of which our city has good reason to be proud, and which has conferred inestimable benefits not only on our own citizens but also upon strangers. It has been emphatically the English Hospital, managed on the principles which commend themselves to the practical good sense and sagacity of the English-speaking portion of our people, attracting to itself the best medical talent of Canada, and cared for and supported by the elite of our citizens, while it has extended its benefits to patients of every origin and creed. It has also been an essential helper to the great medical school which has given Montreal celebrity as a centre of professional education, as well as to the rivals which have recently endeavored to share its laurels. It has now the prestige of great reputation and enduring usefulness. Its present governors revere it as an object of solicitude to good men who have passed away, and generations of our citizens have looked to it as their resource in accident or sickness.

Such an institution necessarily commends itself to the good will of all men, and it has accordingly from time to time received many generous gifts, and few of our more wealthy citizens depart this life without remembering it in their wills, while there is no charity to which they are more willing to contribute. Any attempt to weaken or injure it would be sure to meet with public reprobation.

The site of the General hospital was selected at a time when the city of Montreal was almost limited to the ridge occupied by St. James and Notre Dame streets, when Craig street was in great part a swamp where a botanist might still collect marsh plants, and where possibly an early sportsman might chance to have a shot at snipe. Dorchester street was then nearly as far afield as the mountain park is now; and if the records of the time were carefully searched, it would no doubt be found that there were conservative people then who deprecated a location so distant from the heart of the city, and contrasted it with that of the older hospitals then near the river side. Medical doctors then considered the central part of St. James street sufficiently remote from their patients, and probably regarded a drive to Dorchester street as something of the nature of a country visit. Since that time all the large populations occupying the western and upper parts of the city have grown up, and the General hospital is nearer to the river than to the rear of the city, while the part of the town surrounding it is becoming more and more occupied with shops, warehouses and factories, and it is being more and more enveloped in the increasing smoke of a manufacturing town.

The nuns in the meantime have wisely removed their great hospital to the upper part of the city, where it has ample space for extension and for surrounding grounds, and where the existence of the park on its western side, that of the prevailing wind, ensures to it for all time the inestimable blessing of fresh air for its patients. In these ways it possesses inducements which commend themselves to the people, and which tend to counterbalance the great advantages in other respects offered by the General hospital. The latter also falls short of the accommodation necessary to meet the present demand. It is said that many patients have to be refused admission, and that the space both for patients and attendants is altogether inadequate. Donations and bequests in aid of extension, it is true, have been received, and plans for improved buildings have been prepared but the more prudent and

it possesses inducements which commend themselves to the people, and which tend to counterbalance the great advantages in other respects offered by the General hospital. The latter also falls short of the accommodation necessary to meet the present demand. It is said that many patients have to be refused admission, and that the space both for patients and attendants is altogether inadequate. Donations and bequests in aid of extension, it is true, have been received, and plans for improved buildings have been prepared, but the more prudent and sagacious of governors unquestionably are impressed with the feeling that it would be improvident to expend large sums of money on a site at present insufficient for the requirements of a good modern hospital, and which must yearly become, with the extension of the city and the occupation of its central part for business purposes, more and more unsuitable. The governors of the hospital should, in the public interest, regard not the present merely but the future, must note the upward and westward extension of trade, population and of our churches and public institutions. They should also bear in mind that within not many years the churches and public institutions, which are now moving up to western Dorchester and St. Catherine streets, will be as much "down town" as they were in St. James and Craig streets, and that the time is coming when the Mountain park will be in the middle of the city. They should be prepared not to tie themselves to a piece of ground, however hallowed by old association, but should be ready to act with the same wise forethought which animated the original founders of the hospital, at a time when the present extension of Montreal would have been regarded as an impossibility.

In the circumstances, the foundation of the Royal Victoria hospital on a site further removed from the lower and less salubrious portion of the city should be regarded by those interested in the General hospital as a welcome deliverance from a great and increasing difficulty; and if any arrangement can be secured whereby the two hospitals can work together and be mutually helpful, a great advantage to the public will be secured. Besides this, economy is an important object. So long as our French-Canadian fellow-citizens prefer the ecclesiastically managed hospitals, which are now being so severely repressed by their brethren beyond the sea, it is evident that the support and management of properly equipped general hospitals must devolve on the comparatively small English element, and this should not be burdened with a duplication of work and expense. It follows that amalgamation of some kind must commend itself to all prudent men, animated by a sincere regard for the public welfare; and the question really is how this may best be effected. To this end some concession may be required in matters non-essential, while securing the permanence of a thoroughly efficient managing board representing all interests, and the retention of all that is desirable in the capabilities of both sites and of the buildings erected upon them.

Fortunately, while there is some natural hesitation and indisposition to any precipitate action on the part of the governors of the General hospital, the majority of them are disposed fairly to weigh in the public interest any proposals laid before them; and the board of the Victoria hospital, on its part, has made advances and offered large

concessions in aid of union. This, it is understood, is with the full concurrence of the generous founders of the new hospital, who by the purchase of enlarged space on the mountain side at a great additional cost, have shown themselves disposed to consult in every way, even the prejudices of some of the citizens, while at the same time advancing much beyond our old ideas of the requirements of a great and growing city, of whose extension and prosperity in the future they have, from their own successful work in this direction, some reason to feel confident. When the agitation for improvement of the parish schools of Scotland was in progress some years ago, an attempt was made to raise a popular cry to the effect that this was derogatory to the memory of Knox, the great founder of these schools. The reply was: "If Knox had been of your mind, there would have been neither reformation nor parish schools." Let us not allow unreasonable prepossessions with reference to the past to stand in the way of enlightened provision for the future. This, however, raises the question, how best the rival sites may be combined and used for the public benefit; and this may afford material for another communication.

ONLOOKER.

July 20, 1889.

THE OKA QUESTION.