

A Prairie Hospital

A Venture and a Plea
By ELIZABETH WALMESLEY

The writer of the following article hopes that some account of an attempt now being made out on the Albertan prairie to establish a tiny cottage hospital, will not be irrelevant to the interests of the readers of The Guide. The hospital is designed largely for maternity work, but also with a view to dealing with all accidents of common occurrence on the farm due to the use of modern agricultural machinery, etc.

Hotels, stores and blacksmith shops are all necessary in the young western town, but it may be doubted if any institution is likely to be of more benefit to an isolated or widely scattered community, or a more useful advertisement, than a workable little hospital.

However small a town may be in itself—and Islay only boasts of about 120 inhabitants—out west here it is presumably the local point for a vast extent of country all more or less settled up. For a town like that to possess a hospital (a cottage hospital of about eight beds), is by no means to imply that sickness is prevalent, or that the place is unhealthy, but rather that the needs of its women folks are adequately recognized and the hazards of its men provided for. It should be as unnecessary, in a Western farmers' journal, to describe what the dawn or close of life may mean all alone in the prairie shack as it was superfluous for the secretary of the Islay Hospital board to describe these things when begging for the Islay Hospital funds in Edmonton.

A Prairie Need

Pioneers, whether men or women, know. To enlarge upon the risks of childbirth, when there is not a woman within a score of miles to do a "hands turn" for another, is perhaps to make a plaint where the brave hearted prairie wives and mothers themselves would not dream of doing so; and to chronicle such things as a man getting his foot half severed by his own cutter bar on the mower, having the seat of his disc break and letting him down on the knives, being asphyxiated at the bottom of his well, gored by a bull or struck by the sun, is to put on record some aspersion of the life which all who are fit to lead it vote the finest in the world. One is very far, indeed, from wishing to do that. But the fact remains that a little hospital as near at hand as the nearest hamlet is the solution of these difficulties and emergencies. Such a hospital, however, should be a benefit, as distinct from a charity, to the entire district whose subscribers support it and by no manner of means a money-making concern. This is the goal we have set before us in Islay, and as we venture to think there is something unique in the scheme—at least as it would be worked out here on the prairie, we are trespassing on space in the columns of The Grain Growers' Guide to invite the criticism or approval or, perhaps, the assistance of its readers.

There is no reason why every one of these little Western towns, strung like beads along the lines of the great transcontinental railways, should not each possess a cottage hospital of its own. Little vessels do not take the wind out of each others' sails, but altogether they form quite an adequate fleet. Serious cases necessitating the attention of more than one nurse, or requiring elaborate surgical treatment, could be conveyed to larger centres, of course, just as at present everything beyond somebody's rule-of-thumb remedy is shipped off a hundred miles up or down the line.

Islay's Enterprise

It was in consequence of a good many sensible reflections such as these, that Islay, a little hamlet on the C. N. R., 30 miles west of the Saskatchewan border, determined this summer to see if it could not build a cottage or hospital, a very modest little affair, designed to meet the needs of an enormous district to be sure, but small enough still not to collapse when through the advance of settlement and progress the area from which it derived its support at first should have shrunk to one-third of its present size. Its neighbors, larger towns both, were at first inclined to laugh or to sneer, but Islay kept its own counsel and within two months of the fateful resolution of the

Board of Trade which elected a hospital board and presented it with a free site for the future hospital, the enterprise of the little place was not only on the high road to financial justification, but had received the most sincere and encouraging approval of the first men in the council of Alberta. His honor, the lieutenant-governor, and Premier Sifton, both expressed themselves in the kindest way in regard to it, wished it all success and contributed generously to its funds.

Raising Funds

In the first place everyone was unanimous as to the need of a hospital, from the bachelors who would like to see some pretty nurses on the hill, to the baby who had lately developed adenoids, and everyone was confident as to the possibility of getting one, by a long pull and a strong pull and a big pull all together (especially after threshing), from the poor man who whipped out his ten dollars to the rich one who haggled over a quarter. Money might not be so plentiful at the moment the board was formed as it ought to be after threshing, but collections were made at pic-nics, "hospital" was preached from up-turned tubs, "tag day" was instituted on Sports Day, and the Edmonton business men's special train was actually held up in the station, so that within a very short time the treasurer was able to report half a thousand dollars in the treasury.

The second half was raised within ten days when the board sent its secretary to Edmonton, to run up and down the streets, in and out of offices, and round and round the hotel rotundas, with her collecting box. It seemed, indeed, that such a cause had only needed to be voiced to meet with the most generous response: An emissary from the prairie had very little begging to do in the prairie capital once her errand was known. She can never exaggerate the kindness with which she was received everywhere, nor the moral support it was to her—an unknown beggar for a distant cause—to elicit so many expressions of approval and god-speed from official and responsible men who would watch this venture with far-seeing eyes. From the city doctors and the U. F. A. she might have reaped a still more golden harvest but for circumstances over which she had no control recalling her to Islay.

Much, however, had been done, and the board felt itself in a position to actually begin its work, as soon as the land should be conveyed and the plans ready to hand.

The Problem of Maintenance

It only remains to elaborate a plan of maintenance. The Islay hospital will receive from the government a grant of 35 cents a day per patient, and it will be the object of various fund-raising social diversions, but it is of the first importance that it should enjoy a guaranteed income of about three thousand dollars independent of any other source. The writer of the present article went up to Stewart on the borders of Alaska this summer to find out how they run the logging, mining and railroad camp hospitals in British Columbia, and she found it was done most efficiently on a system of ten dollar subscriptions per annum, which entitled the subscriber to free treatment at the hospital for any length of time during the current year or subscription. Thus, if a hospital requires \$3,000 a year, it is necessary to get 300 men to subscribe ten dollars each. Non-subscribers pay for treatment either at their own convenience or at ordinary hospital rates. If this plan could be adopted on the prairie we should have at Islay a hospital supported, with the least inconvenience to themselves, by the farmers round about, and every subscriber would be entitled to free treatment for himself and wife and children. Married men might possibly be asked for a slightly larger subscription than those in the state of single blessedness. Islay hospital would represent no financial millstone round the town's neck and no one would be required to do everything, since everyone would do something.

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