

EDITORIAL COMMENTS.

From the Canadian Medical Journal.

The subject of ventilation of public buildings has long engaged the attention of sanitarians; and of the various methods proposed, all present some objectionable point, so that perfection has not, so far crowned the efforts of those who have devoted their energies in this direction.

Dr. Henry Howard of St. Johns, the worthy superintendent of the Provincial Lunatic Asylum, of the Province of Quebec, has been forced to enter the lists in sheer self-defence. A more wretched building does not exist on this Continent, possessing the name of a lunatic asylum, than the institution over which he is forced to preside. The building was a few years ago used as a court-house, although we believe it was not originally built for that purpose. At the time of the Trent difficulty, when the Imperial Government in their wisdom sent an additional military force to this country, the old barrack at St. Johns, which had been selected by the Canadian Government as a temporary lunatic asylum, was re-occupied for military purposes by the Imperial authorities. Dr. Howard was forced to relinquish that site, and the present building which he occupies was temporarily given for his use, in lieu of the more extensive and commodious buildings known as the St. Johns barracks. We have repeatedly entered a strong protest against the present system, as more expensive than would be the erection of a new building; expensive in every respect, as it is utterly impossible to adapt such a building for the purposes of a lunatic asylum, besides which the constant outlay on a old building, the alterations necessary, the patching and repairing, in the long run costs more than a new establishment. But what should weigh more in the counsels of those whose business it is to provide such establishments is the fact that there is no chance of benefit being derived by the unfortunates confined there. As to the scientific treatment of the insane under such circumstances, it is out of the question. There is, therefore, every reason on the score of economy, if on no other grounds, for a change in the present system. The sooner the Government of Quebec adopt the idea of change in this respect, the better for the country at large, and the sooner will be removed the stigma of possessing a building in which afflicted human beings are housed which is hardly suitable for animals of the porcine species.

We say that Dr. Howard in sheer self-defence was forced to seek some efficient means of improving the air of his Asylum. From personal inspection we can bear testimony to the success of his efforts. When some five years since we visited his Asylum, we were simply horrified with the condition of things. Improvement certainly has followed on his exertions, and we have reason to know that these experiments have been attended with considerable outlay. We presume that the expense of these various trials or experiments has been borne by himself, as we all know that in Government enterprises great care is adopted to prevent unnecessary outlay, every farthing has to be satisfactorily accounted for, and the expenditure of large sums of money for mere experimental pur-