

### A NOBLE VENTURE

Francis J. O'Keefe, '46

One of the first duties of society is to maintain the health of its people by the application of at least the ordinary means of medicine. It is a duty before God, and to our fellow man. Yet, despite the rapid advance in the various fields of medicine, we find even at this late date a far from satisfactory and universal distribution of those media by which the problem of health can be solved. There are many causes which have retarded the initiation of hospitalization and other health programs, and we as a people should feel guilt at not having grasped those benefits that were within our reach. As with many of the other problems in our democracy, we sidestepped the issue and found solace in a multitude of alibis. Such a condition served but to weaken our disposition to attack problems and to find practicable solutions for them.

Now, however, there is a very definite trend towards a fuller realization of the duties attendant upon democracy. In general people are becoming more conscious of their several needs and aware of proper means to attain them. It is well that such a condition is apparent in the Maritime Provinces, where some of our clear thinking social leaders have introduced and set in motion an efficient plan for hospital care.

It was no mean task to survey the hospitalization needs of the three provinces and make available a plan sufficient for those needs. Great praise is due to all those worthy pioneers in this work as also to those who at present so capably administer the plan in action.

In the year 1941, a committee on group hospitalization, appointed by the Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island Hospital Association, delivered its first report to the Hospital Convention. Rev. John R. MacDonald, Antigonish, then the chairman of the committee, urged immediate action for hospital care. He stated that the present hospital system of fee for service was inadequate due to the inability of many to pay; that provision for the payment of costs by groups was beyond the experimental stage and had proved its value; and finally, that due to



the lack of economic security of the people there was a tendency away from the democratic way of solving the problem of sickness.

In addition to this the committee laid down a set of principles as the basis for action. These were as follows: Community hospitals built, maintained, and operated by the people are essential institutions in a democracy. Arrangements for hospital costs through family and individual groups is the democratic way of making hospital services easily available to all the people who are gainfully employed. The function of democratic government is to aid the people in executing their democratically organized plans for hospital service. State centralization of health services would be one phase of totalitarianism. But state supervision of and assistance to the people's organizations are in harmony with the tenets of democracy. In fact the stronger the people's organizations are kept, and the further we keep away from centralization of control by the state, the more do we uphold the ideals for the defence of which Canada has staked her resources of men and money. And, finally, there are, of course, certain phases of national and provincial health service which cannot be efficiently handled by local organizations, and these come within the proper scope of government control.

Such was the report that received the unanimous approval of that convention. It was the chief stimulus that incited immediate and concerted action in the way of providing more and better hospital service for the people. Further, it gave added courage to those who would venture forth on such a mighty mission.

A short time after this the Maritime Hospital Association, Inc., was formed and placed under the direction of a board of trustees representing all sections of the three provinces. Dr. Joseph A. MacMillan, Charlottetown, is chairman of this active group of voluntary workers. A perusal of the list of his co-workers should place even the most doubting of minds at ease, and call forth the effort of every individual and group to further the success of this venture.

The plan is a co-operative one and based on community effort. It is a property of the community supporting the



hospitals that serve the subscribers, and where feasible it will be directed by a local committee, one of which is now functioning at Chatham, New Brunswick.

In order that the plan for hospital care may be successful it is of necessity a group plan. In making it such, a solid foundation is secured and a minimum of risk is the welcome result. Only by such a policy could the abnormally low fees paid by subscribers become a reality. Again, the masses of the people are more easily and quickly brought to reap the benefits of the plan.

Enrolment is open to anyone who is employed where there are five or more on the staff, including management, and such special groups as professional associations and similar organized groups whose members do not serve under a common employer. In this way the plan is available to practically every person.

The cost of becoming a member is well within the reach of every income, while the family plan of one dollar a month covers the family whether it be small or large. This is really a very welcome feature that should attract every family in the land. In return for those payments members are eligible for twenty-one days of free hospital care and other such medical services as the hospital is equipped to offer patients.

At present all the Maritime hospitals are members of the plan, and every subscriber, when taken ill, has a choice of any hospital. This also gives adequate protection for a member anywhere in the Maritimes whether he be at home or away from home at the time of any illness or accident. On leaving a hospital one is handed a bill marked "Paid," and is not haunted by the ghost of a hospital debt which perhaps otherwise he would be unable to pay.

Such, in general, has been the commencement of a plan that has the approval of all right thinking people. It comes as a bright ray of hope to the many who hitherto were unable to benefit by hospital care owing to the absence of organization and various other causes. Now the way is clear to a better era in hospital care.