

SENATE....No. 148.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

IN SENATE, March 30, 1861.

The Committee to whom was committed the Order, requesting an examination into the "condition" and "management" of the State Reform School for Boys, at Westborough, have attended to that duty, and submit the following

REPORT:

Your Committee visited the Institution on the 2d of February, and examined it as thoroughly as a brief visit of several hours would admit.

The superintendent, Mr. Allen, had just been appointed, and had not taken the management of affairs into his own hands; while the trustees, also new, had hardly become acquainted with the wants of the Institution, or had opportunity to initiate any policy of their own.

The destruction of a portion of the building by fire, in 1859 so narrowed its limits, that the boys are too much crowded together for their health or moral benefit.

With the exception of a new wing, erected last year for a chapel and dormitory, the interior of the building wore a gloomy and forbidding appearance. The rooms allotted to the boys, besides having grated windows and barred doors, were poorly ventilated and unclean.

The school-rooms were cheerless apartments, having blackened walls, dirty floors, and defaced desks, presenting an appearance not well calculated to inspire the "young idea" with ambition, or a desire to learn.

Their play-yard is extremely small, surrounded entirely by high buildings, which shut out the sunlight and air, yet affording their only place for out-door recreation.

The boys were pale, emaciated, sickly—the result of close confinement, and a lack of wholesome exercise—a kind of treatment unsuited to the development of muscle, health, or moral virtues.

A large number of boys were farmed out at ten cents per day (six hours) at the business of chair bottoming. They were compelled to accomplish a certain amount of labor in a given time or suffer chastisement. The younger boys were engaged six hours per day in the effeminate employment of knitting.

Two hours in the morning and two in the evening were set apart for school exercises. Since our visit, however, the hours of labor have been diminished, and those for school increased.

Many of the boys were locked into narrow cells during the night like criminals in our penitentiaries.

The only redeeming feature, is the establishment of family schools out of the main building, after the plan of the Industrial School for Girls, at Lancaster. One of these was in successful operation when your Committee visited the institution. Another has gone into operation since. They contain thirty boys each.

In these family schools the boys are subject to no such prison discipline as they find in the large establishment. They eat and drink at the same table with the superintendent, being allowed much the same privileges that a prudent father furnishes his own children.

Relieved from bolted doors and grated windows, intrusted with the responsibilities which involve integrity of character, they seldom violate the confidence reposed in them. This fact alone is a strong argument against the reformatory system practiced in the large building.

Such was the "*condition*" of the State Reform School when visited by your Committee. Of its "*management*" under its present officers we are unable to speak; but from the high character of the superintendent, as a teacher and disci-

plinarian, and the apparent interest which the new Board of Trustees manifest in the welfare of the school, we have great hope that a radical change will be brought about in the government of the institution.

From the brief examination given to this subject, your Committee are unanimous in arriving at the following conclusions :—

That the attempt to reform vicious boys, by herding them together by hundreds in one institution, has signally failed.

That the Westborough Reform School has been more of a prison for the punishment of crime, than a school for moral and mental improvement.

That a system of rigid coercion has been pursued, instead of kind and humane treatment so essential to secure confidence, subdue untutored passions, and develop the tender sensibilities of youth into permanent character.

That there has been too much work, too much in-door confinement, and too little play for young and growing boys.

That female teachers should be employed as far as practicable, instead of males.

That the family system, already initiated, is the only correct way of reforming this class of boys.

That it is not wise policy for the State to expend more money in erecting other buildings on the premises, till it can be conclusively shown that this experiment is a success.

Finally, that the idea of abandoning the large establishment at Westborough altogether, and substituting Family Reform Schools in such counties as may need or desire them, to be supported by the counties, is worthy of more than a passing consideration.

LANSING J. COLE,
G. M. FISK,

Of the Senate,

S. C. WRIGHTINGTON,
DAVID NICHOLS,
GEORGE CHOATE,
BENJ. F. OTIS,
COLUMBUS TYLER,

Of the House,

Committee on Public Charitable Institutions.

