

HOUSE.....

.....No. 60.

REPORT AND BILL

PROVIDING FOR A

RETURN BY OVERSEERS OF THE POOR.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, March 30, 1837.

Ordered, That a Joint Committee be appointed to report a more *simple, concise* and *useful* form of Return, than the one which is now made, from the Overseers of the Poor in the several towns in this State, agreeable to a recommendation of the Secretary of this Commonwealth, in his late Abstract of the Returns of Poor: and Messrs. CUSHMAN, of *Bernardston*,
RUTHVEN, of *Boston*, and
TUCKER, of *Roxbury*,
are appointed on the part of the House.

Sent up for concurrence.

L. S. CUSHING, *Clerk*.

IN SENATE, March 31, 1837.

Concurred: and Messrs. TURNER and ADAMS are joined.

CHA'S. CALHOUN, *Clerk*.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, April 5, 1837.

The Joint Special Committee, to whom was referred an Order of the 30th of March, requiring them to "report a more simple, concise and useful form of Return for Overseers of the Poor," have had that subject under consideration, and respectfully ask leave to

REPORT:

Previous to the year 1833, your Committee are informed, no return was annually made by overseers of the poor. In March of that year, an order passed the House of Representatives, (but never received the concurrence of the Senate,) requiring "the Secretary of the Commonwealth to send annually to the Overseers of the Poor of the several towns, a blank form of return; which form shall be by them filled up, according to the truth of existing circumstances within their several precincts on the last Monday of December of each year." That return being very intricate and difficult to make out,—requiring much time and labor to complete it,—and having no penalty attached to a non-performance of it, of course, in many cases, was neglected.

There are 305 towns in this Commonwealth. In the

year 1834 only 202 towns made any return. In 1835, 212 towns were returned. In 1836, 206 towns; and this year, 1837, 204 towns only were returned.

It will at once be perceived, that a return so much neglected,—about one third of all the towns paying no attention to it,—must be extremely defective, and, in fact, little better than none at all. It afforded no sure data, from which correct inferences could be drawn. In addition to this, the *labor* of making that return is a serious impediment. In small towns it must take much time; and in the city of Boston, days and even weeks are necessary to comply with all the minute and useless provisions of it. Your Committee, therefore, are fully satisfied that the present form of return is defective and inoperative.

The question then arises, is any annual return of the state of pauperism in the several towns desirable? Your Committee are clearly of the opinion, that a *plain* and *concise* return, embracing the number of paupers in all the towns, foreign and native; the manner and expense of their support, and a few other important facts, is very necessary, and would prove highly useful. And further, that *every* town in the State should be made to feel the necessity of complying with the law. Such a return would show the annual influx of foreign paupers, and the amount paid for their aid and support. It would show, what has never yet been accurately known, the total amount expended by all the towns for the support of paupers:—an amount which would, undoubtedly, surprise all. And it would show the comparative expense of supporting paupers in different parts of the State.

For one other, among many reasons, your Committee deem an accurate and full return from overseers of the

poor, exceedingly desirable. It is well known, that a large number of our most intelligent people are anxious that some change should be made—that some more economical, and, at the same time, beneficial method should be adopted for supporting our paupers. The amount paid for supporting paupers in Massachusetts is about double, in proportion to population, to what it is in the state of New York, and in some other states in the Union; and, in the opinion of many, it is *double* what it would be here under a county poor house system.

Now there is no way to show so effectually the evils of our system, as by a full and accurate statement of the most important facts in relation to our paupers and pauper expenditures. Our people require only to be brought under the necessity of giving their serious attention to the question “of the wisest methods of providing for the poor,” and to have the data presented to them, in order to be able to decide correctly upon the best means of rendering such support.

Hence a return of the state of pauperism in the Commonwealth is so desirable. And hence, also, the necessity that every town should be under a penal obligation to make such return.

Impressed, therefore, with the absolute necessity of a new form of return for overseers of the poor, and the importance of the subject, your Committee unanimously recommend the passage of the accompanying Bill.

Respectfully submitted by order of the Committee.

HENRY W. CUSHMAN.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

In the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty.
Seven.

AN ACT

Providing for a Return by Overseers of the Poor.

BE *it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives, in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows :*

1 SEC. 1. The overseers of the poor of the several
2 towns in this Commonwealth, and the directors of the
3 house of industry in the city of Boston, shall, on or
4 before the second Wednesday of January, of each
5 year, make out and return to the Secretary of this
6 Commonwealth, a statement of the paupers in said
7 town, as they are on the last Monday of December
8 preceding,—which return shall contain true and cor-
9 rect answers to the following inquiries, viz :

10 What number of persons have been relieved or sup-
11 ported as paupers during the year in your town ?

12 Of these how many have a legal settlement in your
13 town, or elsewhere in this Commonwealth ?

- 14 How many state paupers does your town support?
15 How many of those are foreigners?
16 How many of the foreigners are from England and
17 Ireland?
18 Have you an alms-house?
19 What number of acres of land is attached to your
20 alms-house?
21 What is the estimated value of your alms-house
22 establishment?
23 What number of persons have been relieved in your
24 alms-house during the year?
25 What is the average number supported in alms-
26 house?
27 What is the average weekly cost of supporting each
28 pauper in alms-house?
29 What number of persons in your alms-house who
30 are unable to perform any kind or amount of labor?
31 What is the estimated value of all the labor per-
32 formed by paupers in your alms-house?
33 How many persons do you aid and support *out of*
34 alms-house?
35 What is the average weekly cost of supporting pau-
36 pers *out of* alms-house?
37 How many does your town support or relieve who
38 are insane?
39 How many do you relieve or support who are idiots?
40 What proportion of your paupers, in your opinion,
41 have been made dependent by intemperance in them-
42 selves, or those who ought to have been their sup-
43 porters?
44 What number of your foreign paupers have come
45 into this Commonwealth within one year?
46 What is the total nett amount of supporting or re-

47 lieving paupers in your town for one year, including
48 interest on your alms-house establishment?

49 What amount does your town receive from the
50 treasury of this Commonwealth towards the support
51 of state paupers?

52 And the Secretary of this Commonwealth shall, in
53 the month of November annually, furnish the over-
54 seers of the poor of each town with a blank form of
55 return, which shall contain in substance the foregoing
56 interrogatories.

1 SEC. 2. The Secretary of this Commonwealth
2 shall, as soon after the second Wednesday of January
3 of each year as practicable, make out an abstract of
4 the returns of the overseers of the poor, together with
5 such explanatory remarks as he shall deem proper,
6 and cause the usual number to be printed for the use
7 of the Legislature.

1 SEC. 3. If the overseers of the poor of any town
2 in this Commonwealth, or the directors of the house
3 of industry in the city of Boston, shall refuse or neg-
4 lect to make the return as aforesaid, they shall forfeit
5 a sum not exceeding one hundred dollars, to be recov-
6 ered by indictment, in any court of competent juris-
7 diction.