

HOUSE....No. 138.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, March 25, 1856.

The Committee on Public Charitable Institutions, to whom was referred the Order directing them "to inquire into the expediency of suspending all proceedings commenced under the Act passed May 21, 1855, for establishing a Hospital for Insane in Western Massachusetts," have considered the same, and

REPORT:

The subject referred, by the above-named Order, to your Committee, is of great moment. It pertains to one of the leading public charities of the State. Involving so essential an interest, and touching upon what is generally considered to be, and what really is, of such vital concern to the community, namely,—a proper provision for the insane of the Commonwealth,—the Committee have given much time and care to the consideration of what was committed to them. Their conclusions have not been hastily arrived at, nor are they reared upon slight grounds.

The whole subject before your Committee resolved itself into a single question:—

Is a third hospital for the accommodation of the insane of our State demanded?

To settle this question, it is only necessary to ascertain how many patients the two hospitals now in operation can receive, and how large a number they actually have.

By the last Report of the Superintendent of the Worcester Hospital, we find that in December, 1855, there were 336 patients in the hospital. In a previous year, there were in that institution 532. It is the opinion of the Superintendent, that, with their present arrangements, they can fully meet the wants of 450 patients, being 114 more than they now have. And when the new building, which is now in process of erection, is completed, other rooms can be fitted up at a trifling expense, so as to serve a still larger number.

It is the judgment of the Superintendent of the Hospital at Worcester, that there should be therein at least 450 patients, before the State incurs the cost of providing another asylum of this nature.

The Lunatic Hospital at Taunton is such in capacity as to accommodate 400 patients. The last report from that institution reveals to us that there are but 262 now in the asylum. It contains thirty-six rooms, which have not yet been occupied. And the Superintendent assures us that the number of patients is daily decreasing; and that unless more patients are received, it will be necessary to raise the price of board. The hospital cannot be carried on with the present number of inmates, at the present rates of board.

The city of Boston, finding that she has sufficient accommodations for all her insane, has determined to remove to her own asylum all those of her insane who are now in the State hospitals. When this is done, we see that the State will have still more room for her lunatics.

Besides, there are in our public hospitals private patients from other States, so that if our State finds herself pressed at any time for the want of conveniences for her insane, she can remedy the difficulty by dismissing from her asylums those patients who have come from other States.

Another thing which it is important to consider, is the fact that insanity is on the decline. This statement is in accordance with the testimony of the Superintendents of various

lunatic hospitals, and of others. The causes of this decline are various, but need not here be specified.

There appears to your Committee to be no legitimate way by which to supply the projected hospital with patients, except by taking them from the two hospitals now provided, and these already have a much smaller number than they are prepared to take.

The Committee would call the attention of the legislature to the *expense* of erecting this new hospital. By the Act of last year the sum of two hundred thousand dollars was appropriated to build a hospital large enough to convene two hundred and fifty patients. That sum has been found to be inadequate, for the commissioners have asked for an additional sum of fifty thousand dollars; so that, taking the estimates of the commissioners, this hospital will cost at least two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. And since, when it is finished, it is to accommodate but two hundred and fifty patients, it will be seen that the simple interest upon the amount expended will be sixty dollars per annum for each patient, over and above the absolute expense of supporting them.

Now, although this enterprise is not to be regarded chiefly in the light of dollars and cents, still, your Committee submit whether this is not a consideration of much consequence, in connection with the facts which have now been stated, and in view of the present exhausted state of the treasury.

While it should be the policy of our Commonwealth to be liberal in her charities, it should also be her policy to avoid extravagance.

In this connection, your Committee would disclose one other fact. To defray the expenses of erecting this new hospital, the Act of 1855 empowered the treasurer to issue scrip or certificates of debt, in the name and behalf of the Commonwealth, to an amount not exceeding one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, which may be expressed in the currency of Great Britain, and shall be paid to the holder thereof, in London. Now, not a dollar of this scrip has yet been sold. It all lies as so much worthless paper. And there are still unsold seventy thousand dollars of the scrip authorized to be issued to meet the expenses of establishing the State Lunatic Asylum at Taunton.

Whence is the money to be derived to cover these immense outlays?

From the foregoing facts and considerations, it is the unanimous conviction of your Committee, that a new State lunatic hospital is not required, and that all proceedings commenced under and by virtue of the Act passed May 21, 1855, for the erection of a State Lunatic Hospital in Western Massachusetts, ought to be discontinued.

For the Committee,

D. M. REED.