

HOUSE...No. 40.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

SECRETARY'S OFFICE, BOSTON; Feb. 21, 1844.

To the Speaker of the House of Representatives :

SIR,—I have the honor to submit to you the following statements, to be laid before the House, in reply to its order of the 15th inst., requesting the Secretary of the Commonwealth “to inquire into and report as to the most economical, convenient, and effectual mode of distributing to the several towns, the blanks and documents which are sent out from his office.”

The terms of the order include only blanks and documents distributed from this office; but I have thought that it might be convenient to the House to consider, at the same time, the best method of transmission of books and papers both to and by the Secretary.

1. No bound books are now sent out from this office, except Metcalf's Reports, of which one or two volumes are furnished annually. These it has been the practice to deliver to the order of the persons entitled by law to receive them.

2. The following documents are commonly transmitted through members of the General Court; such as remain on hand at the close of a session are forwarded by mail; viz. :

To Towns.

Abstract of Returns of Registration,

Do. do. of Overseers of the Poor.

To Towns and Sheriffs.

Abstract of Returns of Jails and Houses of Correction.

3. The Laws and Resolves of each session are sent to members of the Legislature and to towns, by mail, at the expense of the Commonwealth.

4. The following documents are sent by mail, at the charge of the party to whom they are addressed, viz. :

To Banks and Insurance Offices.

Abstracts of Bank Returns,

Do. of Insurance do.

To Banks.

Requisitions on Banks.

To Institutions for Savings.

Requisitions on those Institutions.

To Insurance Offices.

Blanks for Insurance Returns.

5. The following are distributed through the Sheriffs, viz. :

To Clergymen.

Proclamations for Fast and Thanksgiving.

To Selectmen.

Precepts for Elections of Members of Congress.

To Overseers of the Poor.

Blank Returns of the Poor, and of Pauper Accounts.

To Sheriffs.

Blank Returns of Jails and Houses of Correction.

To Town Clerks.

Blank Returns of Registrations.

To School Committees.

Blank Returns for School Committees,
School Registers,
Abstracts of School Returns.

Of Returns required by law to be made to this office, those from Banks, Insurance Offices, Institutions for Savings, School Committees, Town Clerks, and Overseers of the Poor, are received by mail or by private hand. Those of Elections of the various State Officers, of Representatives to Congress and of Electors of President, are made by the town clerks directly to the Secretary's office, or to the Sheriffs, who are then required to deliver them to the Secretary.

I have made inquiry into the cost of transmitting the above-mentioned books and papers through the post office, and by the regular expresses. Either of these methods would cost much more than that hitherto in use. The expresses could convey parcels at a cheap rate to the large towns, but not to towns lying off the great roads. On a full consideration of the whole subject, I see only one thing to improve in the present system. By the act of 1843, chapter 75, section 3, the sheriffs are denied compensation "for any services rendered by them in the distribution of proclamations, precepts, or other documents." This prohibition has been felt to be a hardship, and, by the construction put by some of the sheriffs upon the law, it covers only a portion of the papers which they are required to circulate. When such papers do not require immediate transmission, the sheriff can commonly convey them to their destination, through his deputies, without cost; but in cases where, as in the recent instance of the issuing of precepts for the election of a member of Congress in the third district, no time is to be lost, he can only fulfil his duty by incurring some expense. Some of the parcels required by law to be freely distributed are bulky; in addition to those heretofore circulated, the order of the Le-

gislature of the 12th of the present month directs the annual distribution by the Secretary of more than three thousand copies of the Report of the Board of Education to that number of school districts and committees.

A provision for allowing to sheriffs a remuneration for reasonable expenses actually incurred would, I think, accomplish all that is to be desired. The parcels sent from this office to the sheriffs would be transmitted to each, at small cost, through the public conveyances.

Very respectfully, I have

the honor to be your

obedient servant,

JOHN G. PALFREY, *Secretary.*