
Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

STATE HOUSE, BOSTON Jan. 8, 1878.

To His Excellency the Governor and the Honorable Council.

THE Joint Special Committee who were directed by an order of the Legislature to inquire into and report upon the management and discipline of the State Workhouse at Bridgewater, which order reads as follows:—

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, May 11, 1877.

Ordered, That a committee of three on the part of the House, with such as the Senate may join, be appointed to inquire into the discipline and management of the State Workhouse at Bridgewater, with authority to sit after the Legislature has been prorogued, and to report their facts and conclusions to the Governor and Council.”

Beg leave to submit the following Report:—

HISTORY OF THE INVESTIGATION.

The Committee held their first meeting on the twenty-fourth day of May, and after organizing, discussed the best method of pursuing the investigation with which they were charged. No specific charges were made against the institution at the time the order was adopted by the Legislature; and the only course that seemed open to the Committee was to make a general investigation into the conduct of the institution, with a view of ascertaining, if possible, if any abuses existed in the management or discipline of the workhouse, which needed to be exposed, that they might be corrected in the future. This information could be obtained in the main from only two classes of persons: first, the officers and those officially connected with the institution; and secondly, from

the former or present inmates. After giving the subject most careful consideration, the Committee decided, in the first instance, to call before them any of the present inmates who desired to make any statement in regard to the institution. To this the inspectors and superintendent demurred, on the ground that it would be subversive of discipline and order; but the Committee, while aware that such must be the case to a certain extent, felt that such an argument should have been addressed to the body which ordered the investigation, and that a full hearing of all sides of the case could be had in no other way. Some thirty male and forty female inmates signified their desire to be heard; and their testimony occupied the attention of the Committee during eleven days, the hearings being had at the workhouse. In all cases, where any complaint was made of an officer of the institution, the officer was at once called, and allowed to state, in the presence of the complainant, his version of the matter.

The Committee then gave public notice, by advertisement, of a hearing to all parties interested, at the State House, and during eleven sittings heard any one who had any information to communicate for or against the management of the institution. At these meetings at the State House, the officers of the workhouse were represented by Edward L. Pierce, Esq., as counsel. Dr. Lewis G. Lowe, the representative from Bridgewater, upon whose motion the investigation was ordered by the Legislature, appeared before the Committee; and at his request a number of witnesses were summoned, including one David P. Monroe, a letter from whom Dr. Lowe had previously handed to the Committee. The Committee also summoned all witnesses whose names were suggested by the counsel for the officers of the workhouse.

In order to make comparisons which might aid them, and to gain information which might be useful in forming a correct judgment in the premises, the Committee visited the state farm near Providence, Rhode Island, and a number of the charitable and correctional institutions in this State; and they desire to express their thanks to those officially connected therewith for much valuable information, as well as for the uniform courtesy and kindness with which they were received.

Almost at the outset of the investigation the Committee

lost, by death, the services of one of their number, Captain Charles W. Davis, of Templeton. His loss was keenly felt by the Committee, not only because his social qualities and kindly disposition had endeared him to each of his fellow-members, but because they missed his keen insight into character, his quick perception, that sifted truth from falsehood, and his ready sympathy, that was always alive to the needs of the unfortunate; and they regret for the public and for themselves that he had not lived to have aided with his experience and counsel in the preparation of their Report.

THE WORKHOUSE.

The main buildings connected with the Bridgewater Workhouse were erected under the authority of a statute of 1852, as one of the three great almshouses established by the State, the others being at Tewksbury and Monson. Levi L. Goodspeed was appointed superintendent of the Bridgewater Almshouse November 17, 1853, and the house was opened for the reception of inmates May 1, 1854. Mr. Goodspeed held the office of superintendent until January 1, 1871, when he resigned, and Nahum Leonard, Jr., was appointed in his stead, and still holds that position. In 1866, the Legislature by statute established a state workhouse at Bridgewater, and set apart so much of the almshouse for that purpose as might be found necessary; the object sought to be attained by the change being a separation of the criminal from the deserving poor. On May 1, 1872, the whole of the buildings were appropriated to the workhouse, and the Bridgewater Almshouse was discontinued.

BUILDINGS.

The buildings at Bridgewater intended only for the housing of paupers are entirely unfit for the safe-keeping of such an incongruous mass of persons as are here congregated, and humanity and expediency both call for such a change as will separate the old and feeble from the young and vigorous. The present buildings can never be so altered as to make a model institution; but some change should be made at the earliest possible moment which will allow of a proper classification of the inmates, and will in some degree lessen the liability to fire, which now is most imminent. A small steam-

pump, and some dozen fire-extinguishers, are all the means that can be depended upon for putting out a fire; and should a conflagration occur among these large wooden buildings, three and four stories high, and filled with many decrepit and feeble inmates, loss of life would be inevitable, and our people would cry out against the inhumanity that exposed so many human lives to such daily peril.

In many respects this institution differs from any other in the State. Here we find collected together all classes of criminals. Those broken down in health from intemperance and abuses and the vigorous graduates of the state prison or house of correction. Incurrible boys from the cells of Westborough are sent here to sleep in the same dormitories and be subject to the same discipline as the aged tramps whose vitality is well-nigh exhausted. With the removal of the female inmates to the woman's prison at Sherborn, one wing of the building should be fitted up with cells similar to those in the various houses of correction, where the more dangerous inmates should eat and sleep, and the dormitories left for those from whom no trouble is apprehended. When this is done, the discipline of the institution may be much improved, and the temptation to abuse of authority very much diminished; the unfortunates whose crime consists wholly in an inability to control their appetites, and the vagrants who are only criminally lazy and shiftless, can then be separated from those the record of whose lives is a catalogue of crimes.

Another advantage of having some of the inmates sleep in dormitories and some in cells is found in the opportunity offered to reward good conduct on the part of an inmate by permission to exchange the cell for the dormitory, a privilege which is generally eagerly sought after, although in a few instances, in institutions where both methods prevail, inmates have preferred the seclusion of the cell to the freedom of the dormitory.

An air of neatness and cleanliness pervades all the buildings, indicating a watchful care on the part of the management in this regard, for which they deserve commendation.

BATHING.

The means provided for bathing the male inmates at the workhouse are a disgrace to the institution and to the State.

Common decency would seem to require that they should be provided with separate tubs in which to perform their ablutions; but we find here a large tank in which some twenty full-grown inmates are required to bathe at the same time, and the result, so far as cleanliness is concerned, can well be imagined. The inmates have not, all of them, lost all sense of the proprieties of life; and such self-respect as they bring with them should be fostered, and care should be taken that nothing is done that shall tend to destroy it. The Committee believe that at no other institution in the State are full-grown inmates subjected to such indignity. Formerly the female inmates were bathed in a similar manner, but since the appointment of the present superintendent separate tubs have been provided for their use. A like provision should at once be made for the male inmates.

CELLS.

In the basement of one of the buildings are located some half-dozen cells, in which the male inmates are confined, either for punishment or safe keeping. These cells, in the opinion of the Committee, are not proper places of confinement for any considerable length of time. Cells in which a prisoner is to be confined, sometimes for thirty or forty days, should not be built mostly under ground, particularly as no necessity exists for such a location. If one wing of the building is provided with cells, as previously suggested, these cells, and an objectionable cell in the "meat cellar," may be dispensed with. While the present cells are used it might be well for the physician, when making his daily round, to visit the inmates confined therein.

RECORDS.

In this connection the Committee desire also to say that it seems to them important that a careful record should be kept of the punishments, giving the date of commitment to the cell, the nature of the offence, and the date of release, and that the entries should be made each day, and not left to be made up at the end of a week or month. The quantity of food given each prisoner confined in the cells should also be made a matter of record, as this institution differs from others in having no cells which can legally be called solitary, and

the provision of law which requires a prisoner to be released from such a cell at the end of ten days does not here apply. It may, therefore, become important in case any question arises as to whether a prisoner has suffered in bodily health by his confinement, covering sometimes a period of thirty or forty days,—and such questions have arisen,—to be able to positively state what quantity of food has been furnished to him.

The Committee have no doubt that the superintendent would very willingly cause such a record to be kept, if directed so to do by the board of inspectors.

FOOD.

Some complaints were made that the food was not of proper quality, and that the bread was not always sweet; but, so far as the Committee were able to ascertain, the food furnished is as good as to quality, and as sufficient in quantity, as that furnished at other public institutions, and no more cause for complaint exists than might occasionally be found in any family or institution where food is provided.

RULES.

Some of the inmates complained that they were ignorant of the rules and regulations laid down for their conduct while in the institution; and the Committee think that the officers should be careful that a sufficient number of printed copies of these rules are kept posted in each room, so that no inmate can make such a plea in extenuation of his misconduct. They would also suggest that, as the rules for the government of this institution remain as approved by the Governor and Council in 1866, when the workhouse was established, it would be well for the board of inspectors, or a committee of the Council, to examine them carefully with a view of making such changes as eleven years' experience in their practical working may point out as necessary or desirable.

FARMING OPERATIONS.

The out-of-doors operations, including the conduct of the farm, were criticised by one of the former officers of the institution; but, upon the whole evidence submitted, it appeared to the Committee that nothing was shown calling for censure

or for unfavorable criticism. The land bears evidence of careful culture, and the crops will compare favorably with any upon the neighboring farms.

OFFICERS.

The Committee entered upon the investigation with the hope that nothing would be found, either in the discipline or management of the workhouse, deserving of censure; and the criticisms so far made by them are mainly due to a state of things beyond the control of the officers of the institution, or are comparatively trivial in their nature. They now have to deal with the conduct of the officers towards the inmates; and this they found by far the most difficult part of their work, because the evidence regarding some of the under-officers was so contradictory in its character that it is almost impossible to decide what to give credence to, and what to reject. This being the case, the Committee deemed it best to confine themselves almost entirely to the testimony of the officers, believing that by so doing the object of the investigation could be as well attained, and all question as to the reliability of the testimony upon which they base their conclusions, be avoided.

Inspectors.

The inspectors having the oversight of this institution are careful, judicious, and humane men, well fitted for their positions, and conscientious in the discharge of their duties; and, under the present system of supervision, it would not be probable, hardly possible, that any of the acts of the under-officers, which are commented on hereafter, should have come to their knowledge. The Committee believe that the inspectors would condemn such conduct as severely as any one, and that both they and the superintendent will guard as carefully as possible against its recurrence in the future.

Superintendent.

The Committee are pleased to be able to state, that after a thorough and searching investigation into the discipline and management of the workhouse, they are of opinion that the present superintendent, Captain Nahum Leonard, Jr., is a competent and reliable officer, and one well qualified to man-

age such an institution. A number of credible witnesses, whose means of making a comparison were most excellent, testified that since Captain Leonard took charge of the workhouse there had been a marked improvement both as to management and discipline. His capacity for usefulness would be greatly increased if he could have for an assistant superintendent a person having the proper qualifications for the office, as set forth later in this Report. The Committee feel compelled to criticise sharply the acts of some of the under-officers, but there was no evidence that these acts were ever brought to the knowledge of the superintendent, all the testimony tending to prove that such acts were committed in direct violation of his express orders.

Matron.

For the matron, Mrs. Leonard, there were no words but those of praise, both from inmates and officials; and an examination of the female inmates developed no abuses existing in that part of the institution. The forty female witnesses, who gave their names to the Committee, as desiring to be heard, stated, almost without exception, that they did so under a misapprehension. Mrs. Durant and Miss Loring, of the Prison Commission, who make frequent visits to the workhouse, testified that under the kind and judicious management of Mrs. Leonard, all the female inmates had been well treated, and an interest taken in their future welfare, quite exceptional in the history of public institutions. The Committee believe that the judgment formed by these ladies renders Mrs. Leonard no more than her due, and that the State is fortunate in being able to secure the services of a matron so well qualified, in every respect, to discharge the difficult and delicate duties which devolve upon her.

Assistant Superintendent.

The office of assistant superintendent at this institution is an important one. Upon that officer devolves all the responsibilities of management whenever the outside duties of the superintendent call him away from the workhouse; and upon him the superintendent must often rely for information as to the manner in which the under-officers discharge their duties. A person to make an efficient assistant superintendent

should be a humane man, and one who believes that a kind word is not lost, even if spoken to the rather unattractive inmates that are found at Bridgewater. His position should be ranked so far above the other officers that he would feel it his duty to acquaint himself with their doings, and aid the superintendent in enforcing a strict compliance with the rules laid down for their government. He should be a man of executive ability and a good disciplinarian, understanding that the first principles of good discipline require a strict obedience of orders on the part of under-officers. It is impossible for the superintendent of so large an institution to personally inform himself of every thing that happens about the buildings; his assistant should be eyes and ears for him, competent to advise in reference to the management of officers and inmates, and as to the general conduct of the workhouse. The institution and the superintendent stand greatly in need of the services of such an officer. The present incumbent does not, in the opinion of the Committee, meet the requirements of his position.

Subordinate Officers.

It is universally conceded by those conversant with the matter, that it is easier for the superintendent of a public institution of this kind to manage the inmates than it is to control his subordinates. The position of an under-official has nothing attractive about it. It is a confining and disagreeable duty, and in the case of Bridgewater almost isolates the officer from any society except that of his brother officers. The daily contact for years—in one case for twenty-three years—with such a class of inmates as are found at Bridgewater, has a tendency to inspire officers of certain dispositions with a contempt for those under their charge, which manifests itself in unnecessarily rough and harsh usage of the prisoners.

Under-officers at such an institution have, in any event, a difficult task before them. They must be cool, calm, and able to control their temper under abusive language; they should so conduct themselves that the inmates will respect them; they should be firm in enforcing the rules, and quick to punish any infraction of them; but they should always remember that the punishment should also be according

to the rules, and that a departure on their part should subject them to a severer censure than could be accorded to a prisoner. To strike or kick a prisoner, however lightly, and even if done simply as a show of authority, lowers the officer in the estimation of the inmate, and cannot but be subversive of that proper discipline which it should be the aim of the officers to preserve. A prisoner who breaks the rules should be promptly punished, but the punishment should be such as is laid down by the same rules, and not such as any individual officer may see fit to mete out. That the officers are sometimes aggravated almost beyond endurance the Committee believe, but such officers have mistaken their vocation if they cannot control their temper under any and all circumstances. When an officer is attacked he must defend himself to the utmost, and use all the force necessary for such purpose, and no one would blame him if the prisoner should be severely handled; but when the prisoner has surrendered, all violence should cease, and he should be handed over to the proper authority for punishment.

The comparative freedom of the inmates at Bridgewater, their assembling together in one of the buildings both before and after meals, and sometimes during the day, and the practice of working them upon the farm in gangs of twenty or more, renders it much more difficult to preserve good order and discipline among them than is experienced in the different prisons and houses of correction where the inmates are either at work or in their cells. The Committee believe that if their suggestion of providing a sufficient number of cells in which to keep at all times when not at work a certain portion of the inmates were carried out, a much more perfect discipline could be maintained, and that herein lies the remedy for most of the evils complained of at Bridgewater.

The Committee have made these suggestions because it seemed to them that some of the under-officers at the Bridgewater Workhouse failed to understand their position with regard to the inmates, and that, while they were generally guilty of no great abuse of authority, they undertook in some cases to punish what they considered a misdemeanor on the part of an inmate, by committing what, on their part, was a greater misdemeanor. From the admissions of some of the under-officers, it appears that they have undertaken to punish

an infraction of the rules, or a disobedience of orders, by rough usage of the prisoner, as by kicking or striking him; that in some instances they have, according to their own version of the affair, struck inmates for fun, or have "fooled" with them by pulling their hair or by throwing pillow-slips over their heads. It seems hardly necessary for the Committee to say that, while the different acts may not have been of great severity, no penal institution can be successfully carried on under a system which permits such occurrences. For an officer to kick an inmate, lowers and degrades the officer, not only in the eyes of the inmate, but, insensibly perhaps, in his own estimation. If corporal punishment is necessary to maintain the discipline of the institution, then it should be administered according to fixed rules laid down for the guidance of officers. Nothing can be more subversive of all discipline than "fooling" or playing with prisoners. No officer can do so without lowering himself to the level of the prisoner, and the moment that is done all respect for such an officer is at an end.

Take the case of officer Wentworth. He admits that he kicked an inmate named John Bray, because he did not return quickly when sent on an errand; and when he first appeared before the Committee, claimed that there was no impropriety in his so doing. He also admitted kicking James Ferris, and locking an old man named McGovern in a water-closet in the "shanty."

Officer Reynolds admitted throwing a pillow-case around the neck of a boy named Ganer, and claimed that he was only "fooling" with him, although the boy swore that he choked him; also to having struck James Ferris, more in fun than to hurt him; and officer Ripley testified that Reynolds struck an inmate while in the "shanty," to make him howl for his amusement. The admissions of these officers may fairly be taken as an indication of their habitual conduct towards those under their charge; and the Committee believe that officers who understand so little how to conduct themselves towards prisoners in a penal institution are not suitable persons to be placed in authority.

The Committee cannot agree with the counsel for the officers, that the kicks and cuffs were too trivial for consideration. They were given in defiance of the rules of the work-

house, by officers whose duty it was to see that such rules were enforced; and while no great harm may have been done to the inmates, the influence of such disobedience of orders could not be otherwise than pernicious. It also seems to the Committee that a constant repetition of kicks and cuffs, however little harm or pain may be inflicted thereby, would do more to force upon the inmates the conviction that they are regarded as beyond the reach of good influences, and as little else than utterly worthless vagabonds, than a much severer beating given at long intervals. It is the little annoyances of life, daily repeated, that sour the disposition and harden the sensibility; not the great troubles, which, while they chasten, ennoble and elevate us by calling into exercise our fortitude and resignation.

The Committee believe that some of the other officers did not always conduct themselves towards the prisoners in a manner which would best advance the discipline of the workhouse, and they would suggest to the superintendent a more careful scrutiny of the official doings of his subordinates, and a more direct and frequent method of communication between himself and the inmates. The Committee do not believe that the before-mentioned acts of the under-officers were approved by or came to the knowledge of the superintendent. They are aware, as before stated, what a difficult task the officers have before them; that the temptation to enforce the rules by violence, as by far the shorter method, is sometimes most difficult to resist. But if the conduct of the officers is such as to inspire respect; if the inmates are made to understand that any departure from the rules, or disobedience of orders, will be promptly and severely punished by confinement and short rations; if the officers maintain towards them a dignified bearing, and never descend to "fooling" or playing, to personal altercation, or to the use of the hand or foot as a means of discipline, then the occasions for the exercise of authority will, in the opinion of the Committee, be very much diminished.

Perhaps in many instances it might be better for the inmate to receive corporal punishment than to be locked up in a basement on short rations; and there may be cases among the incorrigible boys sent hither from Westborough where such punishment would be the best means of discipline, but until

these methods of punishment are authorized by the proper authority they should not be permitted upon any pretext whatever. The Committee do not lose sight of the fact that nowhere in the State is there a penal institution where the means for maintaining proper discipline are so defective. We cannot expect at the hands of the officers at Bridgewater the perfect discipline possible in the jail and house of correction. It seems to the Committee, however, that, poor as are the facilities, no necessity exists for a resort to kicks and cuffs to enforce order, and that personal violence should be used only where it may be necessary for an officer to defend himself from attack, or to prevent the escape of a prisoner.

In the opinion of the Committee it is not conducive to good discipline to place in authority in such an institution a person who has been formerly an inmate. They believe that most officers in charge of such institutions will agree that an officer so appointed cannot command the respect of the inmates, and that they will be much more restive and inclined to resist any exercise of authority on his part than they would be under the commands of an officer whom they regarded as coming from a different class of society.

No allusion has been made to an assault by officer Pasho upon John Sullivan, because Sullivan had left the institution and the State before the first visit of the Committee to Bridgewater, and because the officer was promptly discharged. The case of an assault made by officer Hall upon George Rumrill had been brought to the attention of the inspectors, and they continued Hall in the service of the institution, with the understanding that if he committed a similar offence his service would be at an end.

There was a mass of testimony upon which the Committee have not commented. Some of the adverse testimony of the inmates was corroborated by the officers, a larger part was contradicted; some that was uncorroborated was undoubtedly true; a larger part was evidently overdrawn and exaggerated. Such being the case, the Committee felt that their purpose would be best answered if they confined themselves to the facts admitted by the officers, and about which there could be no dispute, being confident that if the suggestions heretofore made in this Report are heeded, all cause of complaint of the management at Bridgewater will be removed.

The Committee would state again, and would emphasize their belief, that provision should be made to supply one wing of the building with cells; and they would call the especial attention of the Governor and Council to the present unjust and unsatisfactory way in which the prisoners are provided for, with the hope that they will make some recommendation on the subject to the incoming Legislature. Separate the hardened criminal and incorrigible scamp from the harmless vagrant and unfortunate drunkard, and most of the difficulties now complained of at Bridgewater will disappear.

The Committee regret that they found any cause of complaint regarding the management of the Bridgewater Workhouse, while they are pleased to be able to say that no such serious abuses existed as were alleged on the part of some of the complainants. Massachusetts spends large sums annually for the support of her public institutions, and it is with pleasure that her citizens believe that they are in the main well managed and properly officered.

The Committee have endeavored to conduct their investigation in a manner which should best accomplish the end for which they sought, and would enable them to discharge the difficult duty imposed upon them most efficiently and satisfactorily; but such a public investigation must necessarily work great injury to the discipline of an institution, whatever may be the verdict of the investigating committee; and while the Committee believe that Dr. Lowe, who offered the order for the present investigation, was actuated only by the best of motives, they would suggest that in the future a more private investigation be first had into any charges against the management of a public institution, to ascertain if such a public overhauling be necessary or expedient.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

SAMUEL S. GINNODO,
M. J. FLATLEY,
Of the Senate.

SAMUEL R. HEYWOOD,
CHAS. S. OSGOOD,
Of the House.

