

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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DOCUMENTS

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THE LEGISLATURE

OF THE

STATE OF MAINE,

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1859.

THIRTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE.

HOUSE.]

[No. 11.

R E P O R T .

Your Committee who have had under consideration the petition of E. W. Jackson and others, asking that the Legislature would consider the claims of the idiotic children of this State, for beneficiary aid, have had the same under consideration, and would ask leave to

R E P O R T :

We are fully aware that the subject matter of this petition is one that has but recently formed a topic for private or public consideration, and only those who have had an opportunity or a disposition to make it a matter of investigation, can have any conception of its magnitude or importance. The present limited knowledge and consequent lukewarmness on the subject is too apparent, and requires at once the information, eloquence, and warm philanthropy of some English or French enthusiast, or the earnest and devout love for the unfortunate, which has aroused to action the philanthropic energy of Massachusetts. If, however, the State of Maine is more moderate in its aspirations to lead, our people are no less earnest when the light of truth points the true pathway for honest effort to do good. That the time has fully come, for an expression of our intention, to do something for the idiotic, is the unanimous opinion of the Committee, and we only regret that we have not the time or opportunity to present the subject in all its details, in order that the whole matter be properly understood; but before introducing a resolve we ask leave to submit a few remarks. Your Committee have had to rely upon the experience and investigation of others, and for this

purpose we have examined several documents and reports, and we are particularly indebted to the large, practical, and voluminous report of a special commission, appointed by an act of the Massachusetts Legislature, of the year 1846, to inquire "into the condition of the idiots of that commonwealth, to ascertain the number, and whether anything could be done in their behalf." The conclusions and practical information obtained from this commission was the result of a careful and personal investigation among several hundred of the unfortunate idiotic children of Massachusetts. At this time, —ten years ago—public attention in this country had not been aroused upon the subject, and there were no ready means for information, other than had grown out of personal and private effort to educate and elevate this class of persons. The early task was difficult, uncertain and repulsive; but, there are noble and generous men in New England, whose steady aim to do good is restricted by no lack of zeal or interest, when humanity calls upon them to act. Can idiotic children be educated? It would seem unnecessary for any commissioner of Maine to take the initiatory steps that were so essential at an earlier period to solve the question, and thus faithfully complied with by Dr. S. G. Howe, the Massachusetts State Commissioner. No man in the philanthropic world stands higher than Dr. Howe of Boston—and to him, are we indebted, for instituting an inquiry, which resulted in bringing the matter before the public eye of Massachusetts, with such convincing arguments and cogent reasons, that it moved at once the philanthropic heart of that commonwealth, and established beyond peradventure the practicability and moral necessity of educating and elevating the idiotic children of our sister State. We do not propose to go into details, and while we might strengthen our position by statistics, information, and the remarkable success derived from the French and English schools for the idiotic, or might use the favorable conclusions which the operation of the Pennsylvania, Ohio, and New York State Institutions furnish: we choose, for want of time, to take Massachusetts as our stand point, for our earlier connections and present associations point to that State as nearly akin to us, and worthy to instruct us in every moral enterprise. We see no good reasons for any special investigation to prove that there exists in our State a numerous body of idiots, representing the most abject specimens of brutish depravity

and misery. There may be a few that are well cared for, and on this account more intelligent and pleasing in their appearance; but it is a faint light compared with the general gloom of the picture. These imperfections of the human race exist in every phase of society, and their ratio of numbers bear an intimate relation to the population of a State or country. Taking Massachusetts as a basis, we have probably upwards of 600 persons of all ages in our own State who would properly come under the class of idiots. Many of them occupying a position painful and repulsive to contemplate. This is not the intention of nature, but it is the result of the violation of some natural laws.

We have reason to hope that the spirit of true philosophy and physiology may, at some future day, disclose the true causes which bring this calamity upon the human family, and point to the remedy: *even now*, this fact cannot be controverted: "that nature outraged in the person of the parents, exacts the penalty from the persons of their children."

Hence we find idiocy the offspring of licentiousness, intemperance, and debauchery. And these are fruitful causes, but not the only causes. It will not be denied that we have a class of unfortunate idiots, and probably our State has but little idea of their number, their wants, and consequently, our individual responsibility. A person has but to look into his own neighborhood to understand their condition and treatment; for it is but the universal picture that would present itself, should he visit the home of the idiot, wherever he may live. Very few have any care or mental training, but are allowed to follow the dark and cheerless pilgrimage of life, subject to the taunts and ridicule of the world, and too frequently their animal existence is hardly ever decent, comfortable, or cared for; but fortunately death comes sooner to throw its mantle over such a repulsive scene of wretchedness. Our own personal observation must clearly substantiate the fact, which, if more practical evidence was wanting, would be the foundation-stone for doing something for the elevation of the idiot. The fact which we wish to disclose, is the striking difference of result, upon idiots of the same mental manifestations, brought out by the various trainings to which they are subjected. We wish to say, that family influence and instruction make a deep impression upon the idiotic mind. This truth comes under our

own individual inspection. Look upon an idiot, the son or daughter of intelligent, industrious parents, of cleanly habits; visit another, the offspring of lazy, careless and shiftless parents, both of the same mental capacity—the one under the former influences, becomes a person of quiet and clever disposition, perhaps even of common intelligence; the other becomes the object of filth and gluttony, and finally yielding to vicious and gross habits, sinks into driveling and destructive idiocy. Give both the advantage of systematic mental and physical training, such as our idiotic schools give, and one would be surprised at the result. It is universally conceded, that idiocy is not a primary disease, but a defective development of the mental faculties, presenting a variety of cases of mental excess and deficiency, when compared with each other. This complication furnishes a variety of success, when idiots are brought under proper rules for discipline and education. Some few are totally unable to learn; others can simply be taught cleanliness and the rules of order, and may do a little physical labor; others can do any labor, and may become methodical, and able to read and write; others may become self-supporting, and pass off for men of ordinary intelligence: but totally neglected, they find that level which has heretofore generally been their sad common lot. What can the State of Maine do for this class of her fellow-citizens? We return again to the action of the State of Massachusetts. Massachusetts appointed commissioners in the year 1847, "to inquire into the condition of the idiots of that Commonwealth, to ascertain their number, and whether anything could be done in their behalf." The work was thoroughly and well done; the field of operation was among a people in every respect similar to our own; diligent and careful inquiry was instituted in the various towns of that Commonwealth, and the true state and condition of a large number of the idiotic of the State were made known to the commissioners, by a laborious and personal examination. The substance of the report is embodied in a paper of over one hundred pages, and from personal observation is based the conclusion of the commissioner, after a studious inquiry and interview among nearly six hundred Massachusetts idiots. The Massachusetts commissioner and the Legislature of that State were fully satisfied, ten years ago, without the practical knowledge that we now have, that a large portion of the idiotic

children of that State were susceptible of improvement; and they gave the subject an honest, correct and practical consideration, and stretched forth the helping hand. Is it not obvious that the feeblest of God's creation are more deserving of help, and have more claims for our consideration, than those that are better able to help themselves? Is it the part of the good Samaritan to pass by all that are totally unable to help themselves? Is it not right, and holy even, to gather the ninety-ninth sheep into the fold of humanity?

There are scattered through the State of Maine probably four hundred idiotic children, who are following the same pathway that has been trod by their predecessors, with but one talent, and that buried in a napkin. It is not educated here; there is no elevation; it lives and dies in chaotic darkness, with no hope to point to a brighter future. When the mental education of the idiot is neglected, their person ill-treated, their appetites and passions restrained by no human moderation, they become disgusting, stupid, and degraded, presenting a sad spectacle of human wretchedness, and finally "go darkling to the grave like the beasts that perish." And this is no fault of theirs—under proper and systematic training, their mental and physical powers quickened and called into action, they may become neat in person, quiet in their deportment, and industrious in their habits, and perhaps self-supporting, and some become persons of common intelligence; new light now breaks in upon the soul, and faith points to a better existence beyond the grave. Facts sufficiently verify this conclusion. So desirable a change in the condition of our idiotic children is in our own keeping, and does it become us, as christians, as patriots, as philanthropists, to deny the responsibility? Idiocy is one of the agents that depresses society. The weight of this incubus is felt upon society in all its relations, and this creates a public burden. Private individuals suffer intensely. How many homes are made sad and dreary by the continual presence of the idiot. Neighborhoods suffer, and we all remotely suffer; thus our feelings should be enlisted and our sympathies excited for the unfortunate idiot. Our town treasuries suffer, for a large number of idiots, of necessity, become town charges. This is a fit and fruitful subject of legislation, for it is to relieve this burden, that we ask for legislation.

It is among the injunctions of the Mahomedan religion "to treat

with kindness all those upon whom the light of nature has forgotten to shine ;” and the followers of that faith are said to be conspicuous in doing generous deeds ; and even in countries where pure christianity sheds none of its softer light or kindred influences, there also humanity finds friends, whose open heart and earnest aspirations point a steady way for noble deeds. To France are we especially indebted for some noble manifestations of self-devotion and sacrifices for the good of humanity—her idiotic schools are models for any country. Hospitals and beneficiary institutions are but the offspring and guide-board of enlightened civilization—the more numerous, the higher the scale of true national greatness. A free and independent government, like our own, has a high and noble destiny. Its history, its hopes, its glory rest upon the education of the *whole* people. While it refuses an education even to the humblest talent, its glory is not consummated and there is no fruition until it furnishes means of education even to its most menial subject. An intelligent American, who had visited several of the idiotic schools of France, thus writes :—“ I have watched with eager interest the progress which many young idiots have made in Paris, under the direction of Mons. Voiser and Vallet, and have seen with no less satisfaction and astonishment nearly one hundred fellow beings, who but a short time since, were shut out from communion with mankind, who were objects of loathing and disgust, many of whom rejected every article of clothing ; others of whom, unable to stand erect, crouched themselves in corners, and gave signs of life only in hideous howls ; others of whom, the faculty of speech had never been developed, and many whose voracious and indiscriminate appetite and gluttony satisfied itself with whatever it could lay hands on, with the garbage thrown to swine.

These unfortunate beings, the neglected of humanity, I have seen properly clad, standing erect, walking, speaking and eating in an orderly manner, at a common table, quietly as farmers and carpenters gaining by their own labor the means of subsistence. Storing their awakened intelligence by reading one to another, exercising among themselves, the generous feelings of nature, and singing, in unison, songs of thanksgiving.”

It is a miracle, you will exclaim, and so it is a miracle of intelligence, of patience and of love. When I expressed to the teacher of

the school at Bicetre, Mr. Vallet, my gratitude and my surprise at the results of his efforts, his reply was as profound as it was beautiful and modest, "Patience and the desire to do good is all that is necessary." Such was the character of the information, that came across the waters to the Massachusetts commission from various authentic sources, that it inspired all the friends of humanity with full confidence in the ultimate success of the enterprise. Massachusetts, in the year 1848, strengthened individual effort with State aid. The effort at that time was considered somewhat experimental. But for three successive years, the State paid from its treasury \$2,500 for the education of a portion of her indigent idiotic children. The success was so marked, and the result so favorable, that after the expiration of three years, the Legislature increased its appropriation from \$2,500 to \$5,000; and in addition to this, in the year 1855, it appropriated \$25,000 dollars for the purchase of suitable land, and the erection of a proper building, which has since been erected and furnished; and now affords a suitable home and school for those idiotic children, who wish to be educated. The State of New York stimulated by the effort of Massachusetts, and from a personal knowledge of the operation and success of the Massachusetts school, at once erected at an expense of \$75,000, an institution for the idiotic of that State. Pennsylvania has erected a most beautiful edifice at a cost of \$80,000, and sends forth the most favorable reports in regard to the success of that institution. Ohio has a State institution, which is also liberally endowed. Connecticut has an experimental school. Rhode Island and New Jersey make their annual appropriations, and other States are moving in this great moral enterprise. It is too late a day to spend time or words in endeavoring to show the necessity and the duty of public and private beneficence. That sentiment no longer slumbers in the American bosom, but it is manifest in our disposition to aid all objects of Humanity.

This is but the reflection from the moral and intellectual standard of any people; and the higher we raise the moral and intellectual standard of the people, with equal pace do we increase the circle of our beneficence. Meeting houses for religious worship, seamen's chapels, common schools, poor houses, hospitals, insane and lunatic hospitals, institutions for the deaf and dumb, institutions for the blind, asy-

lums, have each severally presented their claims, and help has been cheerfully allowed and heartily given.

Whenever or wherever on the great stream of life, we see the image of God personated, however helpless and unfortunate the individual, however self-sustaining his struggles, there is presented an abiding evidence of a greater work for humanity. The abstract question of our duty in all beneficiary objects needs no farther comment, and we will now give an abstract from the 11th annual report of the Massachusetts school which breathes the general spirit and information of several others. We claim, then, "that the experiment of teaching and training idiots has been carefully and patiently made, and has proved successful, and that this institution has done all that its real friends promised.

True, it has not changed the nature of any born idiot and given him common sense, and no honest and wise persons have pretended that this could be done. But this experiment has done much good in various ways.

It has shown that idiots form no exception to the law that every form of organized life is capable of being changed for better or worse by surrounding influences.

It has rescued some children of merely feeble minds from the imbecility into which they had fallen, either through abuse, or neglect, or unwise treatment; children who were considered as idiots, and who would have sunk into hopeless idiocy but for the help of this school.

It has given speech to some who were dumb, and who, if left without special aid, would have remained dumb.

It has greatly improved the condition of more than four-fifths of its pupils, as their friends will testify.

They have been put into a higher state of health and vigor.

They have been trained to the command and use of muscle and limb.

They feed themselves, dress themselves, and conduct with decorum.

Their gluttonous and unseemly habits have been broken up.

They have been trained to temperance, cleanliness, and order, until the habits have become as second nature. Their powers of self-control have been increased, and they strive to make themselves

less unsightly and disagreeable to others. Many have been trained to habits of industry, so that they may at least be less burdensome to their friends. Their mental faculties and moral sentiments have been developed by lessons and exercises suitable to their feeble condition, and they have been raised in the scale of humanity.

Finally, a conviction has been produced in many minds that idiotic children, if they are considered only as belonging to the great class of the insane, should have special care and training; and this conviction is so well founded, that henceforth some establishment for their special benefit will be considered necessary here so long as New England maintains her present high standard of public morality and Christian beneficence."

In conclusion, it would seem unnecessary to advance farther reasons for showing the practicability of doing something for the unfortunate idiot. Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio in almost successive years, started experimental schools, and upon the result was based their continuance. The capacity of idiotic children for great improvement, and almost universal exaltation of the mental over their animal powers, has been thoroughly demonstrated. Their institutions are noble monuments of public charity, and the education of the idiot has become the settled policy of these States. These unfortunate human beings, the former occupants of barnsheds and garrets, have at last come from their filthy lurking places, and they do no injustice to the wants of the insane, the deaf and dumb, and the blind, but with even hand they knock at the door of an intelligent philanthropy. True, the cry comes from Egyptian darkness, from the abodes of misery, the home of torn garments and weak minds, but it only renders the picture more impressive; and shall Maine alone of the New England States render a deaf ear to the feeblest of her natural sons? Let us all remember as legislators, that it is a dark and sad page in human history, when true philanthropy is disregarded. Charity should quickly follow in the rear of knowledge, and with the knowledge that we have, how can we refuse admittance to the poor despised idiot within the circle of our charity? Civilization, wealth, and intelligence, implies duty and obligation. New England represents the former; it can never deny the latter. While we are all reminded that the most successful results in personal or State aspirations for position, fame

and wealth, that the thorough accomplishment of every ambitious scheme finds one common level at the brink of the grave, let us not forget, that we have the most positive assurance, that in the cause of humanity our works "still live," and that Divine blessings do follow us; and now, with Massachusetts, let us carry into practical operation the eminently christian maxim, "That no one in human likeness shall be beyond our fostering care."

What do these resolutions propose? simply, the taking of the sum of \$1,500 from the treasury, for the education of a few of our indigent idiotic children. The sum is comparatively small and insignificant when compared to their number and wants; still, it will accomplish good, "as far as it goes," and the second resolve opens an avenue for a larger appropriation, should the circumstances of the case demand it. It places upon our State record an acknowledgment of the claim of the idiot, and an unwillingness on our part to shut them entirely from human consideration. Let our vote on this question be carefully weighed, and let us not be so far behind the unanimous legislative voice of Massachusetts, as to indicate that we are much inferior to our sister State in doing deeds of humanity, benevolence, and christian charity.

With these remarks we submit the matter to your consideration, trusting that this Legislature will not only consider it their duty, but a privilege, to do continually for the indigent idiotic and feeble-minded of our State.

FREDERICK ROBIE, *Chairman.*

STATE OF MAINE.

RESOLVE in favor of the training and teaching indigent idiotic children.

RESOLVED, That there be paid out of the treasury of
2 this State a sum not exceeding fifteen hundred dollars,
3 for the purpose of training and teaching such indigent
4 idiotic children of the State of Maine, as may be con-
5 sidered proper subjects for education by the Governor
6 and Council; *provided*, a suitable arrangement can be
7 made at any New England Institution established for
8 the education and training of such children.

RESOLVED, That the Governor and Council be direct-
2 ed through themselves or some suitable commission,
3 to make the condition and numbers of the idiots of
4 our State a matter of investigation, and to report at
5 the next Legislature the expediency of forming a
6 State institution of our own.

STATE OF MAINE.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, Feb. 24, 1859.

On motion of Mr. ROBIE of Gorham, laid on the table and 350 copies of same ordered to be printed for the use of the Legislature.

GEO. W. WILCOX, *Clerk.*