

BOARD OF ASSISTANTS.

JULY 18, 1831.

The Report of the Committee on Charity and the Almshouse, in relation to the Medical Department of the Almshouse, having been read, was laid on the table and ordered to be printed.

B. CRANE, CLERK.

THE Committee upon the Almshouse and Charity, beg leave to offer the following Report upon the present state of the Medical Department of the Almshouse, and to suggest a plan for its improvement.

The number of patients in the institution of all classes, varies from 500 to 550, and from the last return they consisted of 150 medical, 129 surgical, 108 insane, 122 ophthalmic, and 10 other diseases. The number of obstetrical cases last year was 54. There is a Resident Physician who receives a salary of \$1500 per annum, besides his board. He is assisted by four young men, who are required by law to have pursued the study of medicine two years.

It will be acknowledged that a charge so extensive, must require great activity and corresponding knowledge to fulfil its duties. The phases of these varied diseases demand an intellectual combination of extraordinary dexterity and power, to apply its force to their management with safety to the patient and reputation to the institution. In all Hospitals of Europe and America, the care of so great number is unprecedented, and a division of diseases is deemed necessary to fulfil the objects contemplated by the projectors of such charities. The number of patients in the New-York Hospital rarely exceed two hundred at one time in the house. There are four Consulting Physicians and Surgeons, eight Attending Physicians and Surgeons, a Resident Physician and Surgeon,

who have each two Assistants. It must be observed that only two classes of diseases are treated, Surgical and Medical Obstetrics; Insanes and the diseases of children are excluded. The government is taken from Hospitals in Europe, and experience has proved it complete and effectual. Any comparison instituted between that house and the Bellevue establishment, must be decidedly in favour of the former, especially in the efficient aid extended to the sick and in the medical police. The medical police of the Alms-house, indeed if any can be said to exist, is so defective, that no rules have been adopted for its government, even to prevent the introduction of contagious diseases. All charities of this kind have rules which exert a salutary operation upon the administration of its concerns. The duties of physicians and surgeons are defined; the apothecaries department regulated, with an aspect to the economical distribution of medicines and the instruction of medical students, especially forms a prominent feature which distinguishes these infirmaries.

It ceases to be a question if older institutions have adopted such necessary precautions to prevent abuses; that a wholesome restraint should be enforced to preserve to the public the great benefits which might be secured by proper application of time and money. But can this be effected by the present arrangement? It cannot. For if the experience of competent judges has proved that such number of physicians are necessary to the care of two classes of diseases, the vigilance, skill and experience of one cannot be sufficient to the management of upwards of three hundred patients with other diseases. Neglect will grow out of such defects, and a supervision will avail little which demands such expanded observation to embrace so many important objects. What vigilance, skill or experience cannot effect, must be left to the incompetency and ignorance of young men to discharge. The Committee would bring forward the strong example of the children afflicted by Ophthalmia, as illustrative of this position. Here a disease of a contagious nature has existed for three years, and may we not infer that many other diseases have been protracted from the same cause? If the powers of a mind directed with all the vigour which concentration upon any given object induces, had been applied to the investigation of this disease, can it be supposed that its existence now would have been a matter of record, or had the police been effective, could it have been introduced? To the first inquiry, such a presumption is entirely at variance with the constitution of the human mind; and to the second, the experi-

ence which has accumulated from all similar institutions, is opposed. The solution of this question, is to be found in the entire unfitness of any individual capacity to embrace so many distinct objects and give them that inspection they merit.

But there is another view which presses upon the Committee. It is the creation of a monopoly which deprives the Medical profession in this city, of rights which they should enjoy in common with their fellow citizens. Here is an institution which embraces every range of disease, many of which are not found in the ordinary walks of its calling, and to which it cannot have access under ordinary circumstances. The nature and character of epidemics the extended circle of diseases effecting children besides insanity, the most exciting class which falls under the cognizance of physicians.

By the present construction of the Almshouse no opportunity is offered of studying these most interesting complaints. Should all these materials of instruction be enclosed in the experience of one physician, who may never disseminate through the city or state, the fruits of knowledge, which is so important to the health of our fellow citizens? Should not other centres of radiation be established to extend benefits in which the safety and health of thousands are involved? Monopolies derived from the ingenuity which is applied to useful objects; in the construction of machinery, in the discovery of powers which may result to public good, may find some apology in the rewards which are held out to the enterprise and skill of projectors: but restrictions upon the vigor of intellect, upon the expansion of genius, upon the aspirant hopes and exertions of honest ambition and free competition, have never found advocates in the corrupted and narrow policy of the most despotic governments. Whatever assaults may have been committed against private rights, public interest and invasions upon individual liberty, the republic of letters has always been free; and amid the ruin of states and the extinction of nations, the costly monuments of the arts, the recording pages of literature and philosophy have remained as the best guides to indicate the refined condition of their political existence. Paris and London point to their medical schools with just pride; they have not grown up in the shade of private influence and private objects; but under the fostering care of governments, who have always felt the true value and acknowledged the influence which the cultivation of science reflects upon the condition of society. Shall then this temple of Medicine be closed

to the youth of our city? Shall its treasures crumble under the corroding enactments of the Common Council, or shall its portals invite our youth to enter and receive the instruction which it can dispense to those who are anxious to fulfil the arduous duties of a most responsible profession?

But it is unnecessary to appeal to the liberal policy of Europe, when our sister cities of Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore furnish such ample provision for the instruction of their youth. The distinguished reputation which their schools reflect upon their munificence, offers a sad contrast to the contracted policy which governs our institution. While their lavish expenditure places medical education upon a level with older states, ours removes it to those dark ages when empyricism and mystery regulated the wants of a nation, by the rules which governed the selfishness of interested individuals. The age we live in, is characterized by the invigorating principle of competition which excites the evolution of faculty and free exercise of capacity; which recognizes no other standard than that derived from merit; acknowledges no other principle than that which springs from intellectual endowment, and the cultivation of those powers which are exclusively the property of our race. Can then an appeal be necessary to maintain the Medical Student in the exercise of those privileges which are granted in every quarter of the globe; or shall the chilling indifference of our authorities drive him to other places to obtain the means of education which their liberality excites; or shall he be here permitted to enjoy the bounties and opportunities concentrated so happily to supply all his wants.

The Committee cannot apprehend any result which would conflict with such apparent interests so identified with the character, prosperity and reputation of our city. They therefore propose that a sufficient number of Physicians and Surgeons be appointed to discharge more effectually, the duties of the Medical department without further increase of expense to the city; that they be enjoined to extend to Medical Students, the advantages which are derived from the Institution, and they would suggest that a system of Medical Police be prepared, and other rules for its government, which shall protect the Almshouse from the difficulties which have hitherto embarrassed it.

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