[Circular letter, submitting proposals for the establishment in Boston of a "hospital for the reception of lunatics and other sick persons," and inviting contributions.

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Mass. Gen. Hosp. Circular letter to benevolent citizens of Boston, stating the need and importance of a hosp. for the reception of lunatics and other sick persons in the town of Boston.

BOSTON, AUGUST 20, 1810.

SIR,

IT has appeared very desirable to a number of respectable gentlemen, that a hospital for the reception of lunatics and other sick persons should be established in this town. By the appointment of a number of these gentlemen, we are directed to adopt such methods, as shall appear best calculated to promote such an establishment. We therefore beg leave to submit for your consideration proposals for the institution of a hospital, and to state to you some of the reasons in favour of such an establishment.

IT is unnecessary to urge the propriety and even obligation of succouring the poor in sickness. The wealthy inhabitants of the town of Boston have always evinced that they consider themselves as "treasurers of God's bounty"; and in Christian countries, in countries where Christianity is practised, it must always be considered the first of duties to visit and to heal the sick. When in distress every man becomes our neighbour, not only if he be of the household of faith, but even though his misfortunes have been induced by transgressing the rules both of reason and religion. It is unnecessary to urge the truth and importance of these sentiments to those, who are already in the habit of cherishing them; to those, who indulge in the true luxury of wealth, the pleasures of charity. The questions, which first suggest themselves on this subject, are whether the relief afforded by hospitals is better than can be given in any other way; and whether there are in fact so many poor among us, as to require an establishment of this sort.

THE relief to be afforded to the poor, in a country so rich as ours, should perhaps be measured only by their necessities. We have then to inquire into the situation of the poor in sickness, and to learn what are their wants. In this inquiry we shall be led to answer both the questions above stated.

THERE are some, who are able to acquire a competence in health and to provide so far against any ordinary sickness, as that they shall not then be deprived of a comfortable habitation, nor of food for themselves and their families; while they are not able to defray the expenses of medicine and medical assistance. Persons of this description never suffer among us. The Dispensary gives relief to hundreds every year; and the individuals who practice medicine gratuitously attend many more of this description. But there are many others among the poor, who have, if we may so express it, the form of the necessaries of life, without the substance. A man may have a lodging, but it is deficient in all those advantages, which are requisite to the sick. It is a garret, or a cellar, without light and due ventilation, or open to the storms of an inclement winter. In this miserable habitation he may obtain liberty to remain during an illness; but, if honest, he is harassed with the idea of his accumulating rent, which must be paid out of his future labours. In this wretched situation the sick man is destitute of all those common conveniences, without which most of us would consider it impossible to live, even in health. Wholesome food and sufficient fuel are wanting; and his own sufferings are aggravated by the cries of hungry children. Above all, he suffers from the want of that first requisite in sickness, a kind and skilful nurse.

BUT it may be said that instances are rare among us, where a man, who labours with even moderate industry, when in health, endures such privations in sickness as are here described. They are not however rare among those, who are not industrious; and who, nevertheless, when labouring under sickness, must be considered as having claims to assistance. In cases of long protracted disease, instances of such a description do occur amongst those of the most industrious class. Such instances are still less rare among those women, who are either widowed, or worse than widowed. It happens too frequently that

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modest and worthy women are united to men, who are profligate and intemperate, by whom they are left to endure disease and poverty under the most aggravated forms. Among the children of such families also instances are not rare of real suffering in sickness. To all such as have been described, a hospital would supply every thing which is needful, if not all they could wish. In a well regulated hospital they would find a comfortable lodging in a duly attempered atmosphere ; would receive the food best suited to their various conditions ; and would be attended by kind and discreet nurses, under the directions of a physician. In such a situation the poor man's chance for relief would be equal perhaps to that of the most affluent, when affected with the same disease.

There are other persons also, who are of great importance in society, to whom the relief afforded by a hospital is exceedingly appropriate. Such are generally those of good and industrious habits, who are affected with sickness, just as they are entering into active life, and who have not had time to provide for this calamity. Cases of this sort are frequently occurring. Disease is often produced by the very anxiety and exertions, which belong to this period of life ; and the best are the most liable to suffer. Of such a description, cases are often seen among journeymen mechanics, and among servants.

Journeymen mechanics commonly live in small boarding houses, where they have accommodations which are sufficient, but nothing more than sufficient, in health.—When sick, they are necessarily placed in small, confined apartments, or in rooms crowded with their fellow-workmen. They are sheltered from the weather, and have food of some sort, and these must in many cases be the extent of their accommodations. Persons of this description would do well to enter a hospital, even if they had to pay the expense of their own maintenance. In most cases they would suffer less, and recover sooner by so doing. When, as sometimes happens, they have not the means of payment, they become objects of charity ; and the welfare of such persons should be considered among the strong motives in favour of establishing a hospital.

Servants generally undergo great inconveniences at least, when afflicted with sickness ; and oftentimes much more than inconveniences. With so much difficulty is the care of them attended in private families, that many gentlemen would pay the board of their servants at a hospital, in preference to having them sick in their own houses. In some cases however, neither the master nor servant can afford the expense of proper care in sickness. Not uncommonly a young girl is taken sick in a large family, where she is the only servant. She lodges in the most remote corner of the house, in a room without a fire-place. The mistress is sufficiently occupied with the unusual labours, which are thrown on her, at a time, perhaps, when she is least fitted to perform them. Under such circumstances how can the servant receive those attentions, which are due to the sick. Of what use is it that the physician leaves a prescription to be put up at the Dispensary. He goes the next day, and finds that there has not been time, even to procure the remedies, which he had ordered ; meanwhile the period, in which they would have been useful, has passed by, and the incipient disease of yesterday has now become confirmed.

Persons of these descriptions would not be disposed to resort to a hospital on every trivial occasion. But, when afflicted with serious indisposition, they would find in such an Institution an alleviation of their sufferings, which it must gladden the heart of the most frigid to contemplate.

There is one class of sufferers, who peculiarly claim all that benevolence can bestow, and for whom a hospital is most especially required. The virtuous and industrious are liable to become objects of public charity, in consequence of diseases of the mind. When those, who are unfortunate in this respect, are left without proper care, a calamity which might have been transient, is prolonged through life. The number of such persons, who are rendered unable to provide for themselves, is probably greater than the public imagine ; and of these a large proportion claim the assistance of the affluent.

The expense, which is attached to the care of the insane in private families, is extremely great; and such as to ruin a whole family, that is possessed of a competence under ordinary circumstances, when called upon to support one of its members in this situation. Even those, who can pay the necessary expenses, would perhaps find an Institution, such as is proposed, the best situation, in which they could place their unfortunate friends. It is worthy of the opulent men of this town, and consistent with their general character, to provide an asylum for the insane from every part of the commonwealth. But if funds are raised for the purpose proposed, it is probable that the Legislature will grant some assistance, with a view to such an extension of its benefits.

Of another class, whose necessities would be removed by the establishment of a hospital, are women, who are unable to provide for their own welfare and safety, in one of nature's most trying hours. Houses for lying-in women have been found extremely useful in the large cities of Europe; and although abuses may have arisen in consequence, these are such as are more easily prevented in a small, than in a large town.

There are many others, who would find great relief in a hospital, and many times have life preserved, when otherwise it would be lost. Such especially are the subjects of accidental wounds and fractures, among the poorer classes of our citizens; and the subjects of extraordinary diseases in any part of the commonwealth, who may require the long and careful attention of either the physician or surgeon.

It is possible that we may be asked, whether the almshouse does not answer the purposes, for which a hospital is proposed. That it *does not* is very certain. The town is so much indebted to the liberality of those gentlemen, who, without compensation, superintend the care of the poor, that we ought not to make this reply without an explanation. The truth is that the almshouse could not serve the purpose of a hospital, without such an entire change in the arrangements of it, as the overseers do not feel themselves authorized to make; and such as the town could not be easily induced to direct, or to support.

The almshouse receives all those, who do not take care of themselves, and who are destitute of property, whether they be old and infirm, and unable to provide means of subsistence; or are too vicious and debauched to employ themselves in honest labour; or are prevented from so employing themselves by occasional sickness. This Institution then is made to comprehend what is more properly meant by an almshouse, a bridewell or house of correction, and a hospital. Now the economy and mode of government cannot possibly be adapted at once to all these various purposes. It must necessarily happen that in many instances the worst members of the community, the debauched and profligate, obtain admission into this house. Hence it has become in some measure disreputable to live in it, and not unfrequently those, who are the most deserving objects of charity, cannot be induced to enter it. To some of them death appears less terrible, than a residence in the almshouse.

It is true, that the sick in that house are allowed some greater privileges and advantages, than are extended to those in health. Yet the general arrangements and regulations are, necessarily, so different from those required in a hospital, that the sick, far from having the advantages afforded by the medical art, have not the fair chance for recovery, which nature alone would give them. Most especially they suffer for the want of good nurses. In these officers must be placed trust and confidence of the highest nature. Their duties are laborious and painful. In the almshouse they are selected from among the more healthy inhabitants—but unfortunately those, who are best qualified, will always prefer more profitable and less laborious occupations elsewhere. It must then be obvious that the persons employed as nurses cannot be such, as will conscientiously perform the duties of this office.

In addition to what has already been stated, there are a number of collateral advantages, that would attend the establishment of a hospital in this place. These are the facilities for acquiring knowledge, which it would give to the students in the medical school established in this town. The means of me-

dical education in New-England are at present very limited, and totally inadequate to so important a purpose. Students of medicine cannot qualify themselves properly for their profession, without incurring heavy expenses, such as very few of them are able to defray. The only medical school of eminence in this country is that at Philadelphia, nearly four hundred miles distant from Boston; and the expense of attending that is so great, that students from this quarter rarely remain at it longer than one year. Even this advantage is enjoyed by very few, compared with the whole number. Those who are educated in New-England have so few opportunities of attending to the practice of physic, that they find it impossible to learn some of the most important elements of the science of medicine, until after they have undertaken for themselves the care of the health and lives of their fellow citizens. This care they undertake with very little knowledge except that acquired from books;—a source whence it is highly useful and indispensable that they should obtain knowledge; but one, from which alone, they never can obtain all that is necessary to qualify them for their professional duties. With such deficiences in medical education, it is needless to show to what evils the community is exposed.

To remedy evils so important and so extensive, it is necessary to have a medical school in New-England. All the materials necessary to form this school exist among us. Wealth abundantly sufficient can be devoted to the purpose without any individual's feeling the smallest privation of any, even of the luxuries of life. Every one is liable to suffer from the want of such a school; every one may derive directly or indirectly the greatest benefits from its establishment.

A HOSPITAL is an institution absolutely essential to a medical school, and one which would afford relief and comfort to thousands of the sick and miserable. On what other objects can the superfluities of the rich be so well bestowed?

THE amount required for the institution proposed may, at first sight, appear large. But it will cease to appear so, when we consider that it is to afford relief, not only to those who may require assistance during the present year, or present age; but that it is to erect a most honourable monument of the munificence of the present times, which will ensure to its founders the blessings of thousands, in ages to come; and when we add that this amount may be raised at once, if a few opulent men will contribute only their superfluous income for one year. Compared with the benefits, which such an establishment would afford, of what value is the pleasure of accumulating riches in those stores, which are already groaning under their weight?

HOSPITALS and infirmaries are found in all the Christian cities of the old world; and our large cities in the middle states have Institutions of this sort, which do great honour to the liberality and benevolence of their founders. We flatter ourselves that in this respect, as in all others, Boston may ere long assert her claim to equal praise.

We are, sir,
Very respectfully,
Your obedient servants,
JAMES JACKSON,
JOHN C. WARREN.

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