

## **Report of N. D. Stebbins, M.D., on registration.**

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STEBBINS (N.D)

Report of \_\_\_\_\_ on  
Registration.

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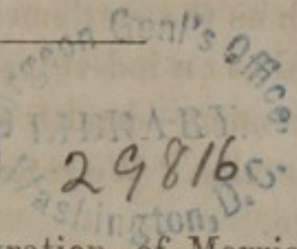




1858

B. V.

REPORT OF N. D. STEBBINS, M. D., ON REGISTRATION.



Mr. President and Gentlemen

Your committee on registration of Marriages, Births and Deaths, have deemed it unnecessary to go into all the particulars connected with the subject, for the purpose of making out a full report—there being one perhaps not as complete as might be, which was laid before the medical profession at the meeting of the American Medical Association in the city of Detroit in 1856, and has since been published in their transactions. It was expected before the present time that another report on registration would have been laid before us, which was read at the last meeting of the American [Scientific Association. Their transactions not being published—if so, not furnished to its members—we have failed to have their aid and influence.

There are now in operation laws for the registration of births, marriages and deaths, in the States of Virginia, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, Kentucky, Vermont and South Carolina. Favorable bills have been offered by other States for a similar purpose, and we would call your attention to one offered by our State Legislature at its last session. Laws for a similar purpose are now in successful operation in many of our cities. It is to be hoped that Michigan may be the pioneer State in the West in adopting a complete law on registration. Already a law exists for the registration of

marriages. It will be found by examination of the county records that this law is very imperfectly observed ; and for all practical purposes in political economy, it entirely fails, there being no annual report of the same. ¶The advantages derived by the adoption of laws for the registration of births, marriages and deaths to the State of Michigan, may be seen, in addition to those common in other States, such as the settlement of hereditary claims—paupers—the claims on individuals or governments—interests of political economy—health and life—well being of the body politic generally. We refer to the increase of immigration to our State.

Our northern counties, which offer every inducement for enterprise and agriculture, are yet quite sparsely settled. Emigration passes by Michigan for a supposed more fertile and healthy portion of country westward. We believe that if the ratio of the number of deaths which occur in this State was compared with that of our eastern States who make annual reports, there would be found a large ratio in our favor, and especially in those parts of the State now comparatively unsettled.

The greatest obstacle to the adoption of laws in the different States for this purpose, judging from their reports, has been the want of information among all classes. Its importance is seen and felt only comparatively among a limited number. The medical profession are deeply interested in the statistics which may be found in the tables of death and its various causes—the natural result of a faithful registration. No less should community at large be interested by these statistics. We may learn by such statistics the ratio of deaths which occur in different counties, towns and wards of a city, becoming in this way better acquainted with the various causes of whatever differences may exist—they will be the more readily obviated or removed.

The medical profession, who are best acquainted with

these facts, ought to be as they have been, foremost in urging the passage of a law for this purpose.

The legal profession, who make up the greater portion of our active politicians, are with more difficulty led to act with the same energy as in other matters of no more importance. At the same time they have interests in this matter; and we are happy to say, many among them appreciate them, and are willing to co-operate in the passage of a law for registration. Their interests, professionally, will be found in suits of law involving the right of heirs to property in hereditary claims in estates, &c.

The duties of the physician, in furnishing statistics, ought to extend beyond the statement of the number of births and deaths in various causes, which may occur in his observation or practice. Tables of all the different diseases which are met in practice should be kept, their character noted, and final result. It has been said that "The loss of available power in society is not measured by the mortality alone, but by the amount of sickness in addition to this"—a fact which every practicing physician must have seen, when sickness has prevailed to a large extent, and comparatively very few deaths. We have an example which may be found in the address delivered by the President of the New York State Medical Society, at their last meeting of 1858; and we are happy to cite you to the report of one of our own number—that of Dr. Beach—published in the transactions of the State Medical Society for 1858. It is to be hoped many more of our number will volunteer to give similar reports, so that a better comparison of the state of health may be known in the different portions of our State, although statistics of this character we may not be able at present to have published in a general State registration; still, their publication in our transactions would prove of great value to the profession and to the public at large, in many ways obvi-

ous to those who give the subject the attention which its importance demands.

In England, the Registrar General is required to make quarterly returns. By this means the community are early made acquainted with any epidemic which may be making its way in the country. The city of London makes weekly returns. Their proximity to the continent, and being in the track by which the cholera has generally made its way, there is the more reason for frequent reports than in our own country. While we believe that yearly reports would be all that is necessary for the interests of the State, still we think that our larger cities, and especially those bordering on our great thoroughfares, will find it to their interest to have reports made quarterly, if not oftener.

The statistics which have been made, and published in England and on the continent, show that since the registration of births, deaths, &c., that its effects have been to operate on society by an increase of longevity, and lessen the mortality of its population. For an example, we give an extract from their reports, which may be found in the reports published by the State of Kentucky, in 1854, as follows:

In Sweden, for instance, between 1756 and 1763, the annual mortality was, for males, one in 33.25; for females, one in 35.75; whereas, in the year 1800, it had diminished to one in 34.75 for males, and one in 37.50 for females. From mortuary tables, preserved with considerable accuracy at Geneva, it appears that at the time of the Reformation, one-half of the children born, died within the sixth year; in the seventeenth century, not until the twelfth year; in the eighteenth century, not until the twenty-seventh year; consequently, in the space of about three centuries, the probability that a child born in Geneva would arrive at maturity, has increased five-fold.

In London, in the year 1606, the annual deaths were 1 in 14.5, or 7 per cent. of the population; and in plague

years, during that century, it reached 25 in 100, or every fourth man, woman and child. In 1838, it was only 1 in 35.5.

Between the years 1730 and 1750, 74 of every one hundred children born in London died before they were six years old ; but in more recent times only 31 and a fraction out of every 100 die under the same age ; that is to say, the deaths of children in London were then more than twice as numerous as they are now. About a century ago, the mortality of the children received into the London Hospitals was of astonishing amount. Though the fact seems scarcely credible, we believe there is no good reason to doubt that of 2,800 annually received, 2,690, or *twenty-three in twenty-four* died before a year old. It was at length seen that this mortality was the effect of overcrowding, impure air, and imperfect aliment ; and after an act of Parliament had been procured to compel the officers to send the infants to nurse in the country, only 450 out of 2,800 died the first year. It has been ascertained that during the last century, about a third has been added to the average expectation of life ; that is to say, an individual now has as good a chance of living forty years as he had a hundred years ago of living thirty. To what can such a fact be owing but to the diminution of the causes of disease in the improved condition of [the people—(the result of registration.)] A curious investigation has been made in London to ascertain the effect of density of population on health. In a large district where the population is so dense that there are only thirty-five square yards to each person, the annual mortality is 3,428 ; in another district of the same population, where each individual has an allowance of one hundred and nineteen square yards, the mortality sinks to 2,786 ; in a third where there are one hundred and eighty square yards to each person, the mortality is only 2,289, or under two-thirds of what it is in the closest of the three districts. It was also found that



in the three districts, the mortality from typhus fever was respectively as we go from the roomiest to the closest, 131, 181 and 349. Precisely similar results have been discovered in Paris. M. Villermé has there ascertained that deaths among the poor at some arondissements are just double what they are in the rich. Taking the whole of the above facts into account, we must see that not only do deaths and longevity depend expressly on laws, the operation of which we can understand, but man has it in his power to modify, to a great extent, the circumstances in which he lives, with a view to the protection of his organic well-being and preservation.

Your committee would recommend that a committee be now appointed by the members of this Society, to report before its adjournment a resolution and petition in favor of a law for the registration of births, marriages and deaths, to be enacted by our Legislature, at its present session, and signed by all its members. Petitions have been forwarded to persons in every part of the State, for the purpose of soliciting names of individuals, and it is expected they will be forwarded to some of the members of the Legislature. Accompanying this will be found the report of the committee on State Affairs, in favor of registration, at its last session; also a part of the report of the committee on registration of the A. M. Association for 1856.

And still further, we would call your attention to the interesting and able report published in the transactions of the American Medical Association for 1858, by Edward Jarvis, M. D., in which will be found that the law on registration is better observed since its adoption in 1842, and is growing more and more in popular favor;" to which is appended their system of statistical nosology, and that adopted in the census department of the United States army, and the same as recommended and adopted in Great Britain, Ireland and Germany.

N. D. STEBBINS.

REPORT OF N. D. STEBBINS, M. D., ON REGISTRATION.

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The committee appointed to report on the registration of births, marriages and deaths, by the American Medical Association, at its meeting in the city of Detroit, 1856, recommend as follows:

1. The Secretary, or some other officer of State, shall prepare and circulate to the towns, cities or counties, as the case may be, blank forms, for returns, based upon the system and nosological arrangement adopted in the preparation of the mortality statistics of the last census of the United States. (It has been suggested that mumps be added to the list of diseases.)

2. The birth of every child shall be recorded by the parent or owner of the child, stating distinctly the time of its birth, the name and nativity of both its parents, and whether it be the first, second, or any other number, by the same parents.

3. Every marriage shall be recorded by the person who solemnizes the marriage contract, stating the names and nativity of both parties.

4. Every death shall be recorded by the person having charge of the premises on which the death shall have occurred, and the record shall distinctly set forth the cause of the death, according to the certificate of the physician having had charge of the patient, or according to the best of his information which can be obtained, together with the name, nativity, age, sex, color, and occupation of the

deceased; and these several records shall be given to the clerk of the town, city or county, as the case may be, and he shall make a return of them, according to the blank forms which he shall have received, to the Secretary or other officer of State, who shall annually publish the same.

[ No. 19. ]

REPORT of the Committee on State Affairs in favor of a law for the Registration of Marriages, Births and Deaths, in the State of Michigan.

The committee on State Affairs, to whom was referred the various petitions which have been presented, praying for the passage of an act requiring a Registry of Marriages, Births and Deaths within this State, have had that subject under consideration, and beg leave to submit the following report :

A law for the registration of Marriages has now a place upon our statute books. But so imperfect is this law in some of its features that it has been almost wholly neglected or disregarded, by those entrusted with the duty of carrying out its provisions, though subject to a heavy penalty for such neglect. So little attention has been paid to it that the records in the Clerk's office of the county of Wayne—the most populous county in the State—show, as we are informed, that only 419 marriages were recorded in that office for the year 1856.

In some cases the distance of the parties from the coun-

ty seat may account for a neglect to comply with the law ; in others, disinclination on the part of the clergymen solemnizing the marriage, to demand the legal fee required to be paid for recording the marriage, under the registration act. But whatever the causes, they are alike injurious in their results. There should be required a better reason than either of these, or any other which is believed to exist, for disregarding a law so eminently calculated to guard the interests of community by rendering perpetual the evidence of the marriage and family relation. It is to be presumed that similar neglect prevails in other portions of the State. It is to remedy the defects of the law so as hereafter to compel a more general compliance with it, and to couple with it a provision also requiring a careful and faithful registry of all the births and marriages in the State, that the action of the Legislature is now required.

The beneficial result of a uniform and general system of registration of marriages, births and deaths has been fully realized by many years of experience in several States of the Union. The law has been as strictly and uniformly enforced in such States as any other statute. Wherever it has been longest in operation and most generally enforced, there its advantages are most obvious, and its requirements most popular.

A very natural and laudable desire exists, even amongst the citizens of our republican country to know something of their ancestry, and not alone from a feeling of mere curiosity, but often as a matter affecting their material and pecuniary, as well as their moral interests and affections. Questions, too, in this ever-changing age, are constantly arising in communities and families, as to the age of individuals, upon the solution of which, may depend many important interests and rights, political, social and pecuniary, all of which can be easily solved through the information to be procured from an efficient registry. Township officers would also be materially assisted in determining vex-

atious questions as to the settlement and support of paupers, and would be better enabled to avoid expensive litigation growing out of that subject. The equitable descent and distribution of the estates of intestates would be more certainly secured, and the prompt and more certain identification of individuals, when from similarity of names or other causes, it would otherwise be difficult, would be another important benefit. The progress of population for purposes of political economy, developing the operations of certain fixed laws relative to the subject, could be ascertained and defined at stated periods by the proposed measure.

Considerations equally cogent, would seem to require a similar registration of births and deaths. Statistics of mortality, showing the extent and causes of deaths in different localities, have been demonstrated by the experience of those States and countries where such a law exists, as of the first importance in many respects. In determining whether death in certain cases, results from natural causes or otherwise, whether by disease or violence, murder or accident, it has been frequently found of the greatest moment in the trial of important causes in the courts.

For ascertaining the relative number of deaths occurring in the various sections of the State, and their causes, and by comparing the numbers in certain given localities, eliciting inquiry as to any disparity that may exist, whether it is caused by stagnant water, or a violation of any of the other laws of health, thus suggesting the remedy to be applied for removing disease, an act for registering deaths, would be found of great value. Much information would also be elicited as to the influence of occupation upon health, in regard to hereditary taint, such as consumption, scrofula, &c., and would show the urgent necessity of endeavoring to remove such cause when within the reach of medical science; and it would do much, too, to awaken the public to the necessity of preventing the introduction of

pestilential disease, a premonition of which may be afforded by the record of increased deaths from maladies usually accompanying fatal epidemics. Of the facilities it would afford for the collection of information as to the usual and physical causes of mortality with a view to the use of the necessary means for their eradication or amelioration, we need not speak. This consideration of the subject will suggest itself to the mind of every intelligent man.

Statistics of registration in various European, as well as in those States in which the experiment has been tested, show that both in different localities and different occupations, the difference has been very great in the destruction of human life. They have thus been led to adopt measures for an equalization, so far as the improvement of the sanitary condition of the country can produce that result ; and already with the happiest effect by the prolongation of life in a very perceptible degree. A similar system in this State can be made to answer a similar useful purpose, and with an amount of labor and expense quite insignificant, compared with the benefits which would be derived by our citizens in the general improvement of their health and prosperity.

One of the most eminent philanthropists of the age has said that numerous and momentous as are the questions which present themselves for solution at the present day, and urgently as many of them demand our consideration, not one of them can fairly be brought into competition with the great question of sanitary reform. Look at it simply as a question of humanity, and it will not suffer by a comparison with the highest efforts of the philanthropist; regard it as a great act of justice, and it must be acknowledged that here, too, it presents peculiar claims to consideration. Measure it by the rule of man's economy, and it will be found without a rival. View it in its moral relations and re-actions, and we know not if the great question of education will not sink before it. An eminent English

statesman has also declared it to be a subject of infinite importance to the security of property—important to ascertain the sanitary state and condition of individuals and communities under various circumstances—important to enable the country to acquire a general knowledge of the state of population.

There are many almost equally weighty reasons that might be urged in favor of a registration of births, as well as marriages and deaths. Not the least of these is the facility it would afford in collecting statistics of population, in ascertaining the relative number of births to deaths, and of males to females. To the political economist these are inquiries of much interest, as they are of great importance to society, not, it is true, in a pecuniary point of view, but as contributing largely to the fund of human knowledge upon a question that closely concerns its interests in other respects. But this discussion of the subject is so intimately interwoven with the other two, and forms so necessary a part of a system that we will not dwell further upon its advantages.

The publication of the statistics which would be collected by a well matured and rigidly enforced registry law, would serve as an annual lesson on the laws of human life in their operation upon ourselves, a kind of practical physiology taught in all our towns and at every fire side, far more instructive and impressive than any derived from books, teaching the principles and laws of life developed by our natural constitution, as actually existing under surrounding influences, and pointing to the means for their improvement and modification.

Your committee therefore submit herewith a bill embodying and intended to carry out these views, and recommend that it be enacted into a law.





