

VERMONT INSANE ASYLUM.

A SHOCKING CONDITION OF AFFAIRS--RESULT OF THE INVESTIGATION OF A LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE.

The Vermont legislative committee to inquire into the management of the asylum for the insane at Brattleboro have made a report. They begin by expressing surprise at the discovery that the asylum really belongs, not to the State, but to a private corporation. The interest of the State in the property, now valued at half a million dollars, is simply that if it ceases to be an insane asylum the State has a lien upon it for security for the \$23,000 heretofore invested. The property is owned by a private corporation, the trustees of which are Asa Keyes, N. B. Williston, Frederick Holbrook and Daniel Kellogg. The committee say:

At the time of our first visit, we found the number of patients at the asylum to be 485--a number, as the committee believe, and as the officers of the institution admit in their testimony, far too large for the capacity of the buildings comfortably to provide. About seventy-five of the patients were, at the time of our visit, confined in underground apartments, which were damp, unwholesome, and entirely unfit for occupation by human beings. The sleeping apartments in this underground portion were small, ill-ventilated, warmed and lighted. The sleeping apartments of the males were altogether too small, while some of those in the female ward were only nine feet in depth by four in width and eight in height, opening into a narrow hall, and ventilated only by eight two-inch augur holes bored through the door. About midway of the length of one of these lower wards, and at the end of another ward and at the side are sinks which receive the urine and slops from the wards above, and at all seasons of the year must impart unwholesome odors. On the occasion of our visit, although disinfectants had been freely used, your committee found the odors extremely unpleasant. We believe the confinement of any person, sane or insane, in these underground apartments, to be cruel, and that officers and employes of the institution should be prohibited, under heavy penalties, from hereafter placing any insane person in these apartments.

The whole asylum was at the time of their first visit, inadequately warmed and ventilated; we also notice at this and subsequent visits, the almost entire absence of anything to relieve the harshness of restraint; very few pictures broke the hard outlines of the hall walls; while at Northampton and Concord we found the walls embellished with pictures, not costly, but pleasant to the eye and sense, and which we believe must tend to draw these unfortunates from contemplation of themselves, and from a means toward their cure. At Northampton we also found a large yard decorated with shrubs, and yet securely enclosed, where the more dangerous class of patients might exercise. At Brattleboro we found nothing of this kind, except some small yards, enclosed with high and close board fences, without tree, shrub or even grass, to relieve their untidiness.

We find that punishments are sometimes inflicted at the Vermont asylum, and that the punishment known as bathing has been inflicted upon patients by the attendants by the order of the superintendent, in the manner following: The patient for some offence, or supposed offence, is taken to the bath-room, his hands tied, laid upon his back in the bath-tub and the faucet turned, allowing a stream of cold water to run upon the head and face while the body is immersed in tepid water, and is so kept until relieved by the attendant. While satisfied that restraints are necessary to prevent the delirious from injuring themselves and others, we cannot find language strong enough to express our indignation that punishment of any kind as such should be resorted to or be in any manner inflicted upon these unfortunate and irresponsible beings.

We are satisfied persons have been admitted to said asylum who were not insane, who were admitted on the certificate of a single physician; hence the necessity of some law guarding and protecting the rights of sane persons. The statute of 1855 provides that a medical examiner should be appointed by the Court of Chancery of Windham county, whose certificate of the insanity of any person proposed for admission should be conclusive proof of the fact. Under this statute the court appointed Dr. Stockwell, Sr., the superintendent of the asylum, medical examiner, and continued him in that office during the remainder of his superintendency. This appointment, as might be naturally expected, opened the door for fraud and chicanery upon the part of some of the officers of the institution.

The committee find no fault with the food served. They commend the management of the asylum under the new superintendent, and very extensive improvements are now in progress.