

Winthrop (R. C.)

MR. WINTHROP'S REMARKS

AT THE

OPENING OF THE BUREAU OF CHARITY.

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BOSTON PROVIDENT ASSOCIATION.

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MAY 19, 1869.



ADDRESS

AT THE OPENING OF THE

NEW ROOMS OF THE PROVIDENT ASSOCIATION

IN THE BUREAU OF CHARITY.

BY HON. ROBERT C. WINTHROP,

PRESIDENT.



WE hold our annual meeting to-night, my friends, for the first time in this new Temple of Charity; and our Association is the first, I believe, which has enjoyed the privilege of using the hall in which we are assembled for the purposes of an anniversary. It is eminently appropriate that it should be so. It was from the managers of this Association, nearly twelve years ago, that the original memorial to the City Council proceeded, which has led at last to the erection of this edifice. As one of those managers then and now, and as one who may be permitted to remember and to acknowledge the authorship of that memorial, I cannot but feel the greatest satisfaction at the accomplishment of our design.

We owe our first acknowledgments to the City Council, who sanctioned our plans and made such liberal appropriations for their completion. We owe our acknowledgments, next, to the Overseers of the Poor, under whose auspices the building was undertaken and finished. We owe our acknowledgments, also, to many of our fellow-citizens, who liberally contributed to the private subscription required by the City Council before the work was entered upon; and

especially to one, whose anonymous offer of \$5,000 at the outset gave such encouragement to our enterprise.

Nor can we forget on this occasion the deep interest taken in the plan by the late excellent Dr. James Jackson, who had suggested something of a kindred character many years before, and who expressed to me, not long before he was overcome with the infirmities of age, his earnest hope that he might live to see the work accomplished.

We have here a substantial and commodious structure ; in a situation as central and as accessible as could reasonably have been desired for such a purpose ; with an admirable arrangement of apartments, and with all the conveniences necessary to their occupation. Already the principal charitable agencies of our city are in full possession of these apartments, in perfect correspondence and sympathy with each other ; pursuing the different departments of their common labor side by side, and gladly aiding each other by mutual contributions of information and advice. The Overseers of the Poor, whose cares and counsels I was permitted to share for three years under their new organization, and to whose zeal and fidelity I can bear personal and cordial testimony ; the Society for Industrial Aid and the Prevention of Pauperism ; and our own Provident Association, — the three organizations whose spheres of action are widest, and whose operations were designed to be coextensive with the limits of our city, — are here in the principal stories. A branch of the Boston Dispensary is in the basement, with the office of the City Physician adjoining it. We should all have eagerly welcomed our friends of the Howard Benevolent and the Young Men's Benevolent Associations, had they found it consistent with their more limited objects to accept the apartments offered to them. But we can hardly regret that rooms have been left for more than one association of benevolent ladies, and for more than one agency of the funds for the relief of the soldiers of the late war. The ladies, indeed, were foremost in taking possession of the rooms allotted

to them ; and their presence here gave the earliest pledge and the earliest assurance of success to the experiment of thus concentrating the leading charitable organizations of a whole city beneath a single roof.

In immediate connection with these agencies stands the new building for what is known by the name of the Temporary Home, with every accommodation for supplying temporary food for the hungry, and temporary shelter for the houseless ; where any destitute and not absolutely unworthy persons may find a breakfast, or a dinner, or a night's lodging, until they can look about them for employment or permanent relief. And I know of nothing which is calculated to afford more real satisfaction to a benevolent heart, than to know that there is now in our city, easily accessible at all hours of the day or night, and of every day and night of the year, an ample and commodious edifice, where any one, young or old, of either sex, who is really in distress for food or shelter, and who is not ashamed or afraid to apply for them, may find admission and succor. I do not forget that the Rev. Dr. Wells, of St. Stephens, and Dr. Andrew Bigelow, and our venerable friend, Father Cleveland, and other good men, have done something, have done much, in this way heretofore, and that this very Institution has been in operation, as an experiment and on a small scale, for several years past. But I think we shall all lie down on our own pillows with more comfort, when some wintry storm is howling about our windows, now that we are assured that if any poor person, man or woman, boy or girl, by any accident or any rashness, has wandered away too far from home or friends, and is exposed to the rigor of the elements or to perils a thousand-fold worse, — a safe and comfortable refuge will always be open, and always within reach.

Let the Institution be thoroughly known, and let it be carefully and rigidly guarded against abuse, — as I am convinced it will be, under the direction of the Overseers of the Poor, and with the aid of an honest and vigilant police, — and the

results will be as abundant in satisfaction to the community generally, as they cannot fail to be in comfort and safety to the poor.

Indeed, my friends, all that is wanted, if any thing be wanted, to make this Charity Bureau, with the Temporary Home annexed to it, a complete success, is to have its character and its locality fully known to the rich and to the poor, and to have a generous support and confidence accorded to it by all. It might well be worth while to have placards at some of the corners of the streets, and on some of the lamp-posts, so as to be illuminated at night, "Bureau of Charity and Temporary Home, corner of Chardon and Hawkins Streets," so that every wayfarer might read it readily. And no householder of our city should be without cards of reference to the establishment, always at hand for delivery to those who call. Let it be everywhere understood that here, under a common roof, are to be found the agencies for relieving all who are really in want, — whether the want be of employment, of food, of fuel, of clothing, or of lodging; and let all applicants for charity be directed to this building.

We do not propose that any one should drive the beggar away from his own door, if he comes there, or pass him by in the street, if he appeals for succor. We would not have the old text disregarded, even though it be apocryphal, — "Never turn thy face from any poor man; and then the face of the Lord shall not be turned away from thee." But let us all agree that, instead of throwing away our small sums, or our large sums, on every one or any one who presents an appearance of poverty, to be squandered in drink or vicious indulgence, and to encourage pauperism, beggary, and imposture, we will simply and kindly say to each and all as they approach us, "Go to the Bureau of Charity in Chardon Street, and, in one or other of the offices there, you will be relieved, if you require and deserve it." And then let the small sums or the large sums, which might have been given upon mere impulse or importunity, be sent to our treasuries here.

Why, my friends, if one-half of the money which has gone heedlessly into the pockets of street-beggars and vagrants, whether with papers or without papers, during the last twenty years, could have been collected into the coffers of the Associations now gathered under this roof, in proportion to their respective expenditures, I hazard little in saying that we should have required but few other contributions. We must put a final stop to street-begging. We must ferret out and expose all imposture. We must make a broad line between the honest and deserving poor, and the profligate professional beggars, who strive to get the means of living in idleness and vice by imposing on the sympathies of the benevolent. This is the design of the building we inaugurate to-night; and may we not well call upon our whole community, upon the rich and the poor, upon all who require help, and upon all who are able and willing to do something for the relief of their less favored neighbors, to unite in assuring success to this first systematic attempt to organize, concentrate, and economize the charities of our city? With the blessing of God, and the cordial co-operation of our fellow-citizens, Boston may have, as the recent Annual Report of the Overseers of the Poor has predicted, "a more perfect system of public charity than any other large city in the world." Let us invoke that blessing, and that co-operation, and let us look confidently to the result.

In regard to our own particular Association, my friends, I need say little on this occasion. Organized in 1851, it has now been in active operation for eighteen years. The amount expended for charities in 1853 was but little over \$6,000. The amount expended for charities in 1867-8 was nearly \$16,000. The reports of the Executive Committee and of the Treasurer, which will presently be submitted to you, will inform you as to the operations and expenditures of the year just ended. Meantime, however, let me say distinctly, that we need larger contributions than we have ever yet been able to procure, in order to accomplish all the good of which our or-

ganization is capable ; and let me add that I think we have a right to demand them. We need, and ought to have, a greater number of annual subscribers in small sums and in large sums. Not a few of our largest original contributors have passed away ; and others must come forward to fill their places, if our labors are to continue successful.

I do not believe that Boston would willingly allow such an Association as this, with its organization so carefully arranged, and with all the experience it has acquired, to fail for want of means. Nor do I think it can fairly be expected of our managers to turn beggars themselves, and to solicit from house to house the amount which is necessary for the relief of the poor. Our treasury at this moment is, indeed, almost exhausted ; but I cannot doubt that this very building will be the means of awakening a fresh interest in our operations ; that all who are not indifferent to the condition of the poor will take pains to inform themselves of what we have done and of what we are doing ; that they will not only visit our office and satisfy themselves as to our system of registration, examination, and relief, but will voluntarily inquire, from time to time, into the condition of our resources, and not wait for solicitation before contributing liberally to our funds. If the amount allowed by our visitors to a poor woman or a poor family, sometimes seems small, let it always be remembered that we give to the full extent of the means placed at our disposal. Indeed, it has frequently happened, in the course of the fifteen years during which I have presided over the Association, that our expenditures have greatly exceeded our receipts, and that we have been compelled to begin a new year with the discouraging work of providing for a large arrearage.

This ought not so to be ; and I cannot conclude without an earnest appeal to our whole community, to see to it that the treasury of this Association is seasonably replenished.

BOSTON, May 19, 1869.

