Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, November 19, with transcript

TOO MUCH FREE MEDICINE A Committee of Doctors Criticises the Hospital Service. Charity Said to Be Abused—Many Who Are Able to Pay Treated Without Charge.

Drs. Llewellyn Eliot, Charles G. Stone, F. B. Bishop, Rosier Middleton and Elmer Sothoron, comprising a committee created by the Medical Association of the District to inquire into the methods pursued by the various hospitals of the city, has reported at great length upon the subject, and the consensus of their findings is that the local dispensaries and hospitals are abusing public charity. The association, in appointing the committee, declared that it did not intend to be antagonistic to any of the excellent medical institutions, but desired to protect its members from imposition. The association received the report November 16, and after eliminating many radical features, authorized its publication. The voluminous document recites the manner in which the committee proceeded with the inquiries, and then declares that “there is great abuse of medical charity in all the hospitals and dispensaries.” The committee further declares that this abuse is especially great in the central dispensary, meaning the Emergency Hospital, and asserts that the majority of applicants here and elsewhere are able to pay for medical treatment. The course followed by the police in removing sick and injured people taken from the streets to hospitals instead of to their homes is condemned, and the recommendation is made that non-residents be charged a small fee for treatment in hospitals, or be excluded from them.

The Emergency Hospital is particularly criticised by the committee, which asserts that it cannot be denied that it has long since ceased to be an institution of charity.

“In past years,” says the report, “as well as at the present time, this last institution (the Emergency is referred to) has operated to the greatest injustice to both the community

and the profession. Injustice to the community by educating them that they are entitled to the services of the gentlemen attached, free of charge, at the same time it assists in pauperizing the recipients of those services for which they could and should pay; injustice to the profession by taking from their hands cases of sick and injured persons who rightfully belong to them, that the number of admissions to the hospital may be increased, in order to influence the appropriation committee of Congress. Cases have been brought from Maryland and from Virginia for treatment—laparotomy, fractures, stab wounds, gunshot wounds, dislocations and others—and if published accounts are of any value in this matter, they have never been rejected; the records of the hospital will show this. Only recently a man was brought from Maryland; a railroad employe, past villages where competent physicians, members of the Baltimore and Ohio relief service, resided, and of which service this man was also a member, any of whom would have willingly undertaken the care of the case. This man was entitled to the services of the company's surgeon, and as his injuries were of a serious character, he should have been sent to Providence Hospital, where the railroad company pays the expenses of treatment, but under the rules of the police department, as laid down by the Emergency Hospital, this man was not taken where he rightfully belonged, but was brought to its wards. Here was a flagrant injustice to many physicians along the line of the route. Here is another, J. W. Rice, who resides at Balley's Cross Roads,. Va., while digging a well, Saturday, was struck by a falling tub of dirt weighing thirty pounds. Rice was seriously injured internally, and was brought to the Emergency Hospital for treatment. These men died of their injuries. It is useless to multiply cases of abuse. It is useless to multiply cases of abuse. In the opinion of your committee, the emergency department of any hospital should be operated upon the same lines of charity that would govern individual charity. That a man is sick or wounded does not constitute any moral, legal or financial right in his claim to the charity of a community; it does not entitle him to treatment without charge unless such a right is established in the first instance; neither does it tend to make him retain his self-respect, his independence of spirit nor his standing in the community for him to receive for nothing such services as those for which he can pay.”

THE RECENT ELECTION. Approximate Pluralities in the Different States.

The announcement of the result in Wyoming permits a statement to be made or the exact number of votes the presidential candidates will have in the electoral college. The South Dakota republicans are reported to have conceded the election of the democratic electors.

The following table gives the electoral votes of the candidates and their approximate pluralities:

For McKinley.

Electoral Vote. Plurality. California 9 6,000 Connecticut 6 53,839 Delaware 3 2,600 Illinois 24 144,131 Indiana 15 22,179 Iowa 13 72,000 Kentucky 12 346 Maine 6 47,000 Maryland 8 30,827 Massachusetts 15 168,716 Michigan 14 55,000 Minnesota 9 48,812 New Hampshire 4 35,000 New Jersey 10 87,856 New York 36 272,427 North Dakota 3 5,000 Ohio 23 53,733 Oregon 4 2,500 Pennsylvania 32 304,000 Rhode Island 4 23,750 Vermont 4 41,000 West Virginia 6 12,000 Wisconsin 12 100,000 Total 272 1,588,716

For Bryan.

Alabama 11 30,000 Arkansas 8 50,000 Colorado 4 75,000 Florida 4 9,000 Georgia 13 25,000 Idaho 3 10,000 Kansas 10 8,000 Kentucky 1 Louisiana 8 35,000 Mississippi 9 35,000 Missouri 17 50,000 Montana 3 15,000 Nebraska 8 6,000 Nevada 3 5,000 North Carolina 11 17,000 South Carolina 9 35,000 South Dakota 4 400 Tennessee 12 20,000 Texas 15 45,000 Utah 3 15,000 Virginia 12 15,000 Washington 4 5,000 Wyoming 3 400 Total 175 505,800

the line of the route. Here is another, J. W. Rice, who resides at Balley's Cross Roads, Va., while digging a well, Saturday was struck by a falling tub of dirt weighing thirty pounds. Rice was seriously injured internally, and was brought to the Emergency Hospital for treatment. These men died of their injuries. It is useless to multiply cases of abuse. In the opinion of your committee, the emergency department of any hospital should be operated upon the same lines of charity that would govern individual charity. That a man is sick or wounded does not constitute any moral, legal or financial right in his claim to the charity of a community; it does not entitle such a right is established in the first instance; neither

does it tend to make him retain his self-respect, his independence of spirit nor his standing in the community for him to receive for nothing such services as those for which he can pay."

Discussed in Later Years.

Continuing, the committee declares that "during late years the question of hospital and dispensary abuse has been discussed very extensively; so far with more or less relief in other cities. The remedy is only to be found in harmonious conferences of physicians attached to the institutions of charity. Without harmonious action on the part of the medical and lay directory of an institution, friction occurs and opposition to mutual benefits is developed. The first lesson to be learned is that the system of admission is radically wrong. This is apparent to any one who looks at figures. The present uncontrolled system of free admission does a great injustice to the profession and demoralizes the patients. The hospital managers are not free agents, neither are the medical men; they both have received the trusts from their predecessors, without question as to the abuses which they were continuing. The lay members cannot enforce economy and institute checks based upon business principles, since the staff would object to such an assumption of authority; the medical members cannot institute reform in admissions, as the lay members would think such reforms were based upon improper motives, but there is no question that by mutual concessions and harmonious conferences every abuse with which they may be charged can be corrected. Antagonisms would vanish, the profession would regain its respect and pauperism be checked. The eleemosynary medical institution works a grievous hardship upon the young physician, since it compels him to render service gratuitously upon their board or wait idly to gain such experience as he needs. If the eleemosynary institutions are abolished, the management will be free to remedy the abuse."

The statistics of the various patients given hospital and dispensary treatment in the local institutions during the year ending June 30, 1895, are given, showing that a total of 58,180

were treated, including 15,150 by the physicians of the poor, and the committee declares that at least 90 per cent of these were free cases. The committee concludes that there is great abuse of medical charity; that the majority of applicants at dispensaries and hospitals are able to pay a physician a fee, to be regulated by the amount of wages received, and that the working man is able to pay his physician.

The Recommendations.

The recommendations made by the committee are as follows:

First—That every institution require written evidence, in the form of a certificate, from every applicant for free treatment at every institution, supported in part or in whole by the government.

Second—That there be a central distribution bureau, where all applicants for free medical aid be required to apply, present their evidence, and receive the certificate necessary to their admission to any charitable medical institution, such certificates to continue in force for thirty days.

Third—That this bureau be in charge of a salaried medical officer, whose record of applicants shall be open for public inspection under certain restrictions.

Fourth—That cases of sick and injured persons found upon the streets, in the stations, or elsewhere, which, upon investigation, are proper subjects for treatment, be carried to their homes, and if they have no suitable homes, to the nearest hospital.

Fifth—That cases brought from the states be refused treatment in the public wards of a hospital, and that such cases be compelled to pay for services or be excluded from the charity of the city.

Sixth—That the physicians to the poor be paid larger salaries, that their number be increased, and that they be required to attend more closely to their duties.

Seventh—That, in future, the members of the medical staff of hospitals and dispensaries be elected for a term of not more than four years, and be ineligible for an immediate re-election.

Eight—That the Medical Association of the District of Columbia oppose the further appropriation, either from Congress or the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, to any or all institutions which are found to abuse medical charity.

Ninth—That the reputable members of the profession be allowed to attend patients in all of the hospitals of the city.

South Carolina 9 17,000 South Dakota 4 400 Tennessee 12 20,000 Texas 15 45,000 Utah 3 15,000 Virginia 12 15,000 Washington 4 5,000 Wyoming 3 400 Total 175 505,800