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BOSTON.

REPORT

OF

COMMITTEE ON CITY HOSPITAL

IN RELATION TO DEATH OF BESSIE
BARGEBUHR.

IN COMMON COUNCIL, June 12, 1879.

Ordered, That the Joint Standing Committee on the City Hospital be instructed to investigate the facts relating to the admission of Bessie Bargebuhr into the City Hospital, her treatment, and her death there June 4, 1879, and report the same to the City Council.

Sent up for concurrence.

W. H. WHITMORE,
President.

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN, June 16, 1879.

Concurred.

HUGH O'BRIEN,
Chairman.

Approved June 17, 1879.

FREDERICK O. PRINCE,
Mayor.

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IN COMMON COUNCIL, Oct. 9, 1879.

The Committee on City Hospital who were instructed to investigate the facts relating to the admission of Bessie Bargebuhr into the City Hospital, her treatment and death there, having attended to that duty, beg leave to submit the following

REPORT.

The committee heard the statements of Mr. Bargebuhr, Dr. J. Foster Bush, the physician who attended Mrs. Bargebuhr prior to her admission to the City Hospital, the physicians and nurse who attended her during her stay there, and have received a written statement from Dr. Cowles, who was Superintendent at the time she was admitted, but who is now absent in Europe.

It appears that Mrs. Bargebuhr had been under Dr. Bush's care for about a month previous to her admission to the hospital; she was suffering from abscess of the breast, and a mental trouble, which manifested itself in a suicidal form. She had made three attempts upon her life, and it was necessary to watch her to prevent her from escaping from the house and committing suicide. Dr. Bush advised that she be sent to Danvers; but her husband and friends were unwilling to do so, and wished to have her treated at the City Hospital. Accordingly she was taken there by her husband on the 24th of May, accompanied by a note from Dr. Bush to the effect that she had a trouble with her breast, and cerebral symptoms. This note was given to Mr. Bargebuhr, with the distinct understanding that Dr. Cowles should be told the whole history of the case. When she arrived at the hospital, Dr. Platt, who was acting as admitting physician in the temporary absence of Dr. Cowles, was sent for, and, on asking the nature of the applicant's illness, was informed by her husband that it was abscess of the breast; and he was not told the history of the case. There being nothing to indicate that she was not a proper subject for treatment at the hospital, she was admitted. She was placed in a private room, and although in a state of great nervous excitement, — a condition incident to the disease of the breast from which she was suffering, — it does not appear that anything in her conduct up to the time of her death indicated that she was insane, nor was anything said to her attendants which would lead them to suspect that such was the case. The local disease improved under treatment, but the nervous excitement increased to such an extent, that, as a measure of precaution,

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the attending physician caused the windows of her room to be fastened down; a measure which in such cases would usually be deemed unnecessary, and therefore indicated more than ordinary care.

On the 4th of June, Mr. Bargebuhr visited his wife, and, as is customary in the case of private patients, the nurse retired from the room. When she returned she found the room vacant. At the conclusion of his interview, Mr. Bargebuhr had left his wife without notifying any one, although he knew that the nurse was in another room within call, and Mrs. Bargebuhr, taking advantage of the opportunity, went into an adjoining room and threw herself from the window to the ground. Death shortly ensued.

Such are the facts as they appear to the committee. It is proper, however, to state that Mr. Bargebuhr claims to have told several of the hospital physicians of his wife's attempts at suicide, and especially Dr. Cowles, whom he met in a horse-car when returning from the hospital after leaving his wife there. This statement is emphatically denied by each and all of the persons mentioned, and is unsupported by any corroborative testimony. It is a fact, not denied by Mr. Bargebuhr, that he did not give the admitting physician a history of his wife's case, in accordance with his understanding with Dr. Bush; and this, in connection with the other circumstances attending his action in the matter, leads the committee to believe that, to say the least, he is mistaken, and that he did not say anything which would arouse suspicion as to his wife's sanity. It also seems highly improbable that a physician of Dr. Cowles' experience would allow a case of suicidal insanity to remain in the hospital after it had been brought to his attention.

In conclusion the committee desire to say that nothing was brought forward in the course of the investigation to indicate negligence or unskilfulness on the part of any persons connected with the City Hospital, and the responsibility (if any there be) for Mrs. Bargebuhr's death does not rest upon those who attended her during her stay there.

LUCIUS SLADE,
CHARLES H. B. BRECK,
GEORGE H. LOVERING,
GEORGE T. PERKINS,
HOWARD CLAPP,

Committee.

