

**REPORT TO THE U. S. SANITARY
COMMISSION. ON A SYSTEM FOR THE
ECONOMICAL RELIEF OF
DISABLED SOLDIERS, AND ON CERTAIN
PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO OUR
PRESENT PENSION LAWS**

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Report to the U. S. Sanitary Commission. On a System for the Economical Relief of Disabled Soldiers, and on Certain Proposed Amendments to Our Present Pension Laws by John Ordranax

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JOHN ORDRONAUX

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OF
DISABLED SOLDIERS,

AND ON CERTAIN PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO OUR PRESENT

PENSION LAWS,

BY

JOHN ORDRONAUX, M. D.,

Prof. of Med. Jur., Columbia College, N. Y., and Associate Member U. S. S. C.

*"Confret exsangue quo se post bella senectus?
Quas aetas erit emeritis? qua rura dabuntur?
Quo noster veterans aret, quo moenia foveat?"*

Lucan. 1, 343.

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1904.

REV. HENRY W. BELLOWS, D. D.,

President U. S. Sanitary Commission.

DEAR SIR—I have the honor to submit the following Report as the result of the investigations undertaken by me, in compliance with the Resolution heretofore adopted by the Executive Committee.

As none know better than themselves the difficulties surrounding this subject, which has so long occupied their attention, so none can better comprehend the delays incidental to a cautious development of those conclusions, to arrive at which has required the wisest counsel, the calmest study, and the most critical sifting of opinions kindly and co-operatively tendered me, by earnest thinkers throughout our country.

I have the honor to be, with great respect,

Very truly yours,

JOHN ORDRONAX,

New York, April 6, 1864.

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INTRODUCTORY.

The disbanding of a large army, and the return to civil life of thousands of men who have lost the momentum of previous industrial enterprise, and must begin anew the task of settling themselves into spheres of employment, is an event well calculated to awaken the most serious attention of political economists.

A state of war, is always a state of industrial disruption, proportioned to the population from whom an army is recruited. This is more particularly observed, when, from a small peace establishment, an army is suddenly raised to enormous proportions, and a stimulus beyond that afforded by any of the industrial arts is given to persons to join it. Where bounties and wages are offered whose aggregate amount exceeds the annual earnings of ordinary day-laborers, it follows that trade cannot enter into competition with such rivals, and must in consequence suffer the loss of most of that labor which, heretofore, was content to accept its ordinary market remuneration. A population which is large or superfluous—which is gaining on bread and consuming faster than it produces—can spare with advantage a portion of its number. Instead of suffering, the industry of the country will gain thereby; and in proportion as social plethora is relieved, will eleemosynary burthens diminish. But when, in order to

preserve a foothold in distant parts, large bodies must be detached as corps of observation and occupation, while the mobile force in the field is daily requiring fresh levies to maintain its numerical effective at a maximum standard—when a nation is thus required to supply this double draft upon its population, the necessary withdrawal of so many laborers from the various channels of industry, can but produce a shock to the social fabric, and interrupt the previous relations of capital to labor. In a state of peace, and with ordinary prosperity, these relations are disposed to be mutually compensative; the fluctuations, whenever occurring, being generally favorable to labor, on the well-founded experience that material prosperity is always measured by the demand for labor, and that, consequently, the greater the variety of channels through which employment can be obtained, the larger will be the dispersion of wages and comforts throughout a nation.

But interruptions of trade, when merely temporary in character, do not necessarily entail permanent loss upon the productive industry of a country. The activity of the human mind and the spur of necessity soon drive men into new spheres of occupation; and that which formerly was considered an integral art, unsusceptible of sub-division, is suddenly seen to give birth to many collateral and subsidiary branches, precisely as, in the human frame, nature provides against accidents to the great channels of circulation, by furnishing it with collateral and compensatory currents.

The close of a war must, therefore, find many arts almost suspended, and capital turned into, comparatively speaking, only a few channels. While fortunes have rolled in upon those to whose doors these channels more immediately led, inactivity of business—suspension of enterprise—and losses from un-

employed capital, have necessarily fallen upon the larger portion of the mercantile community. Society may then be considered as deprived of that cohesive force which springs from the mutual inter-dependence of varied occupations. The larger capitalists absorbing the few remaining arts, the small dealers have been driven from the field of competition, and compelled to remain inactive, until new and multifarious enterprises, born of renewed confidence, again authorize the employment of moderate capital. In this state of things, the disbanding of a large army, and the return of so many unemployed persons to the ranks of civil life, all anxious for occupation, all needing support, must, for a while, at least, greatly convulse the channels of trade. The first necessary consequence of a glut of labor is a fall in its value, which, if not immediately accompanied by a corresponding decline in the price of provisions, produces destitution among that large class of artizans who ever live from hand to mouth, and depend upon their daily earnings for their daily bread. Ere the currents of trade once more resume their wonted flow, and the old order of things becomes re-established, our eleemosynary institutions and private charities will be drawn down to their lowest ebb, in order to meet the crying wants of this ever needy class. To create new institutions of this kind, for the purpose of answering a temporary call, because overwhelming, would only tend to increase pauperism by increasing its respectability, and shielding it behind the sanctions of legislative recognition.* Therefore, to check, and to diminish unnecessary pauperism, we must, as much as possible, deny it a legal status. We must treat it as an exception,

* It is generally found that the number of paupers is always in accordance with the extent of charitable institutions, the springs of self-reliance being weakened by the adventitious aids of gratuitous support.—(*Carey, Polit. Econ.*, part 2, p. 211.)

and not as the rule of life, which, once adopted, can be followed to the end. And while it is both necessary and humane to have pauper-houses, they should, like hospitals, contain no fixed population, but discharge as soon as relieved every one who is able to earn his own living. As a general rule, human pride repudiates the condition of a beneficiary for life, and all look forward to that golden future, teeming with promised acquisitions, in which each shall be independent and self-supporting. It is the duty of governments, therefore, by wise legislation, to foster such sentiments; it is the duty of society at large, by the persistent influences of voice and example, to constitute itself the missionary of this idea. For, when this shall be done, and men everywhere be taught the essential dignity of independence, society will have erected the strongest barriers, not only against destitution and misery, but also against idleness, profligacy and crime. Pauperism and crime are ever in close relationship to each other; and so often in the direct line of cause and effect, that a prevention of the former largely operates as an extinguisher of the latter. The "dangerous class" in any community is almost exclusively recruited from among the unemployed poor.

Now, with us, the time can not be far distant when our best efforts in this behalf will be needed, and all our energies be called upon to grapple with some such many-sided problem as this. *What is to be done, not only with the disbanded, but particularly with the invalid and disabled soldiers created by the war?* For if it be wise and expedient to consider, in the manner in which we have been pointing out, the effects upon the labor-market of disbanding a large army, and the material consequences resulting from the sudden influx of hosts of laborers into a field where little demand exists for their services, or where the supply, from its suddenness and magnitude,

will immediately out-run the demand, and continue to do so for a long while to come; if it be a wise fore-casting on the part of political economists to consider and prepare for the advent of this large class into the social hive, how much wiser and more humane is it not, to consider the peculiar position of those among that class, who, by the accidents and vicissitudes of war, have paid the tribute of patriotism on battle-fields—have lost limbs and health, and thus rendered it certain that they must fall behind their fellows in the competitive race for bread, self-support and honest independence. It is for these maimed and mutilated martyrs of the war that our tenderest sympathies should be kindled. It is in their behalf that public opinion, anticipating legislation, should interest itself in some plan of permanent and ennobling relief, and our best efforts be directed towards keeping them from falling by the way-side, sad—wary—unsuccessful—and neglected—or drifting into large pauper retreats, where the edge of ambition is dulled, and the heart crushed into apathy by the consciousness of dependence and helplessness. Whatever may be said of poverty as a moral discipline or a stimulus to effort, it is very certain that its effects in the aggregate, and upon masses of individuals, are pernicious and demoralizing. Adversity may soften the hearts of a few, but upon most its effects are directly opposite. Whether this arises from envy or comparison with the more fortunate around, it cannot be disputed that poverty, recognizing itself as incurable, destroys ambition, self-respect, and virtue, and sinks its victim into a condition, born partly of temperament, and partly of education and surrounding circumstances, but always degrading to his self-respect. The strong become desperate, and disturbers of social order—the weak fall into secret vice, and low, dishonest practices, or sink at once into dull apathy and indifference to their position.