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Correspondence

THE PENSIONER FORCE AND THE INQUIRER.

To the Editor of the Perth Gazette & W. A. Times.

SIR,-Though much has been said and written of late, relative to the condition and future prospects of the Enrolled Pensioners in this Colony, yet after all nothing really practical or beneficial has resulted therefrom. Men with more than the usual amount of disinterestedness than is to be

met with in the world, have from time to time pointed out, through the medium of the public journals, the pitiable condition of these men as a body, yet a semi-official rejoinder, or a specious explanation by some interested "red-tape official," or the publication of some elaborate statistical tables have, unfortunately, in almost every instance, been sufficient to silence the writer, to stifle inquiry, and what is more to be regretted, to satisfy the public.

On my part, however, I can say without the slightest egotism, that I have not, as the saying is, "rushed into print hurriedly" and without having first ascertained that the statements I put forth were not only substantially correct, but were in fact incontrovertible. Such, being the case, I do hope, that the result of bringing this question again to the notice of the public, will be, what I solely desired from the commencement, to wit: the social improvement of a class of men who have every claim on our sympathy and regard.

With these few remarks by way of introduction, I will now proceed to further consider the present condition and future prospects of the Enrolled Pensioners in Western Australia, with a view to the public fully comprehending a question, which is, to us, there can be no doubt, one of the first importance.

And in doing so, I think I need not dwell again on the extraordinary assertion that Pensioners have on their arrival in this colony a prospect of seven years' employment. That assertion I have proven to be a fallacy - to be a pure invention either of the Editor of the *Inquirer* or of his official correspondent.

It also appears to me unnecessary to comment on the fact, that the Pensioners who are on the Day Force are in a position to live both well and comfortably. No one will be found hard-headed enough to question that; indeed, almost everyone is unanimous on that point.

I now come to consider the state of those Pensioners who are on the Night Force -

men to whom is entrusted the protection of our lives and property - men, who before today have shed their blood in defence of their Queen and country, and now after all their noble deeds, when they should be in a position as it were to "Sit by their fire and talk the night away; Weep o'er their wounds, or, tales of sorrow done, Shoulder their crutch and show how fields were won."

What in truth is their position? I blush Sir to record it! I feel shocked to think that the Pensioners who have arrived in the colony from Feb., 1863 :

Merchantman, (convict ship) Feb., 1863...50
Clyde, May," ...50

Lord Dalhousie, Dec.," ...30 ?130

See Col. Brace's Return dated 15th March, 1864.

Since the arrival of the last named vessel have arrived: -

Clara, April, 1864 ...30,

Merchantman, Sept., " ...30

Total, 190

The Day Force consists of 167 men, hence in less than two years the Force will be renewed by new arrivals - so much then for the prospect of seven years' constant employment - condition of our veterans is so lamentable as it, undoubtedly is; and though it may pain some, yet a love of truth and justice impel me to state facts, which will prove but too plainly, that their condition is only one of beggary -- that they are nothing less than military pampers !

And now for my proofs : and though they are wholly unnecessary for those who are resident in Perth or Fremantle, yet they may be useful to those in the mother country who have the good and welfare of the old soldier really at heart : -

A is a man with a wife and four children, living - will you believe it ? - in a Hut !

B is a man with a wife and five children, who live, sleep, &c., in a room 12 feet square.

C is a man with a wife and three children - living in a room about 10 feet square.

D is a man with a wife and three children, who live in a hut or house; - the order of the architecture however is quite aboriginal.

E is a man with a wife and six children who live together in one small room.

F is a man with a wife and three children, who have two rooms.

But more than sufficient - I will not enumerate, as I could, the condition of many other Pensioners with whom I am well acquainted, and though my story of woe reminds one of the far-famed House that "Jack Built," yet who can gainsay my assertions? Who can question the demoralizing effect of huddling so many human beings, even of one family, in such miserable houses as I have described? Echo answers - who?

And here I would wish to add one other remark, and that is - that these men have not about them even the common comforts and conveniences of a civilized life; but why be surprised at that? How could they procure them on 14s. per week?

And if such is the condition of those who are the recipients of the before named pittance, what must be the condition of those Pensioners who have to depend on their own energy to procure a living for themselves and their families? As might be expected (and I have made every inquiry), as a general rule - the most deplorable that can be possibly conceived; and the number who are thus thrown on their own hook, ready to catch at anything that can support life or prolong a miserable existence, is no less than 112!

Now, Sir, the question of the Enrolled Pensioners being, as a body, in a state of misery, does not, I imagine, require any

further corroboration. It is a fact undeniable; hence we can understand - what was so difficult to the *Inquirer* - why it is that so many have recently left our shores, and why so many others purpose doing likewise. It is a truism to say, that like causes produce like results, and you need not be told, that the old soldier is not so obtuse, as not to perceive, that what has befallen so many of his comrades, may one day, perhaps, befall him, and so, while he is in a position, he adopts the wise alternative of going elsewhere, rather than run the risk of adding to the ranks of the "miserables."

I can assure you, Sir, that Pensioners do not leave this colony because they imagine it to be the very worst spot of creation, nor to satisfy a desire which it is supposed they entertain of rambling here, there, and everywhere. The truth is, they have seen enough of the world, and have experienced more than enough of its cares, and would now rejoice to find in Western Australia, the Elysium of which they had dreamed - a land where they might end their days in peace.

And why I ask could it not be made so? Is it not in the power of the gallant Colonel to do much to render his men both comfortable and happy? Why I ask does not the Government do all they can in settling the old soldiers on grants of land in the neighbourhood of towns, or in the country districts? There is certainly no scarcity of good land; for we have it in abundance; and the more one reflects upon the matter, the more reason he has to complain of the supineness and do-nothing policy of Governor Hampton and of the gallant Colonel. In fact they are so passive at the present crisis of affairs, that one is led to believe that they are either in a state of somnambulism or are governing according to the tenets of the 'know nothings.'

If the gallant Colonel and His Excellency were not labouring under some strange hallucination, surely they would at once perceive, what is apparent to every one who does not wear official spectacles, that unless the old soldier is put in a position to earn a living for himself and his family, he must inevitably sink into a state of

pauperism. There is no use denying the fact that the Pensioners can never hope to compete in the labour market, with those who have never endured hardship or privation, and whose previous condition have inured them in some degree to manual labour. Such being the case, it is obvious that it is the bounden and imperative duty of those in power, to carry out the scheme I have suggested, of placing the old soldier in a position of maintaining himself, and those dependant on him, by their own labour and industry.

But while I do urge this particularly on the gallant Colonel I do say in all sincerity - do not place men on SAND - do not give them pieces of ground utterly undeserving of being tilled by man's hand, and then ask them to reap off a Sahara what can only be expected from fertile plains.

Surely the social improvement of the Pensioner is infinitely more deserving of the anxious care and solicitude of the gallant Colonel and Governor Hampton, than the best mode of saving John Bull's pocket, when by doing so they inflict an injustice on the old soldier. An official may gain élat by being economical, but parsimony is not the way to gain the esteem of the old soldier or to render him contented. Four Hundred Suits of Clothing is no doubt something to be saved, but when the veteran keeps his midnight vigil, or as the old song says, "walks his lonely round," and hears the breeze whistling through his "big coat " to the tune of the "Jolly Beggars," what must be his opinion of those who have been placed over him as guardians as well as commanders? Why nothing but this, that if they had power o'er the elements they would even deprive them of the luxury of such music.

Let us hope for better things, and that the good and social well being of the Pensioners, will at once command the earnest attention of their gallant Commander.

Yours truly,

PRO BONO PUBLICO.

P.S. - Since writing the above I have read the letter of a "Free Mechanic" in the *Inquirer*, and can only say that I regret he should have thought proper to so gratuitously insult a whole body of men while clumsily endeavouring to give the Colonel a little of what Sam Slick calls "Soft Sawdur" 'however he is certainly about as argumentative as the celebrated Yankee lawyer who was engaged in the interesting case of the Kettle v. Pot, who it is recorded thus concluded his defence:- "There are three points in this case, may it please your honor; in the first place, we contend that the pot was cracked when we borrowed it; secondly, that it was whole when we returned it ; and thirdly, that we never had it. " A Free Mechanic's" logic being of a similar kind to that of the "down-east" Lawyer! it would be dangerous to contend with such a formidable opponent.

To the Editor of the Perth Gazette & W. A. Times. SIR, - Having seen a letter in the *Inquirer* signed "A Free Mechanic," I gave it my careful perusal, and am reluctantly compelled to state that a more pitiable display of feeble imbecility I have never seen in print.

He commences by stating that we get pay, pension, and land free gratis, and still are 14 allotments of land on which Pensioner in Perth, three only are of * * the others being worthless sand, unable to get on, when the fact is, we have earned our pensions in such places as India, China, the Crimea, &c., and we are still earning our pay by mounting guard, with two nights in bed, which is considered hard enough in dry weather, but in the rainy season we often get wet going, we with the relief, and after remaining in wet clothes in a sentry-box for two hours, we get wet again returning; and then our bed is a hard wooden bench until called upon again for duty. This duty consists of protecting the Government-house from unseemly intrusion, and the Commissariat Stores and Colonial Treasury from being robbed, &c, and also the escape of prisoners from the prison, and these duties we do well, which each sentinel must proclaim every half hour, by calling "All's Well." And with respect to the free

grants of land, can any person tell me of one man who ever got such a thing in Perth?

Again he says, "very few men of any account enlist as soldiers, except as sappers." Now, Sir, every person, except the poor raving creature himself, must know that there are hundreds of reasons which induce young men to enlist - such as a parental castigation or reprimand, an inconstant lover, an interdicted marriage, a smooth-tongued recruiting sergeant, or the flaunting emblems and enlivening strains of a good band, &c. &c. Each of these reasons sends its quota to the ranks, whilst very very few join the army in order to better their condition; nearly all join the first recruiting sergeant they meet, without reference to any regiment in particular. And as for our utility as Colonists, can any man find better farm labourers than what we possess in our limited force? Let men be required for reaping, thrashing, mowing, &c, and you would soon see how many you could be supplied with, whilst carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, weavers, cutlers, &c, are also to be found amongst us. With respect to our activity, if our Commanding Officer will allow it, we will select ten, twenty, thirty, or fifty men, who will match themselves against an equal number of any one calling in the Colony, to take a friendly turn with them at any manly exercise, such as running, walking, swimming, wrestling, &c, or should our opponents require more testing exercise, a friend of mine will lend the gloves.

Again, we are accused of getting drunk in a greater proportion than civilians. This arises from different reasons: a military man is always under the surveillance of non-commissioned officers, he can neither leave his house nor in many cases sleep on his bed, but he is seen by one whose duty it is to confine any person whose walk, talk, or actions denote an extra glass; whilst the civilian is never interfered with, unless he is unable to take care of himself, or that he is annoying the public, and in no case must he be interfered with in his own house. A military man is often called out of his house to undergo an examination, should any person report him drunk, or he may be

called upon for duty when the civilian need respond to no call, and could call upon the police if his house was annoyed, and if boys were confined the Pensioner would be fined ten pounds and the civilian would be fined ten shillings. He also asserts that he does not want us here, and calls for a subscription to send us back to Ireland. Of course a tradesman, of whatever kind, would wish to keep the market to himself, in order that he might charge what he likes for his work, but his employers are of a different opinion, and wish to cheapen the labour market, and if he cannot support himself how can he subscribe for sending us home, not to Ireland alone but to England, Scotland, and Ireland. But I am informed that a good tradesman can get work, and is often annoyed at people calling themselves tradesmen who were never anything at all of the kind; if you ask a mason's labourer what was his trade at home, he will certainly answer that he is a mason; if he happens to be a coal trimmer in a steamer, he will try to pass himself as an engineer; or should he be a travelling tinker or merry andrew, he will call himself an engine driver; and judging from the imbecile contradictory tenor of his letter, I should say that your "Free Mechanic" belongs to the latter class, that he is a well-known character, and that Perth has been favoured with a visit from no less a personage than "Old Bob Ridley," as there is no other person in existence who would ever write a letter so full of contradictions and nonsense.

A more serious writer from Champion Bay seems to charge us with inefficiency, in not preventing outrages there. I sincerely deplore the murder of an industrious settler, and all I can say is this: that if a number of mounted men were to patrol the disturbed district, the natives would not be so bold, and if twenty or thirty such men are required they could be supplied from our force, ready to take the saddle in twelve hours. Such a roving enterprising life would be just the thing, and quite congenial to the habits of huzzars, lancers, artillery men, and dragoons, whose hearts would bound with glee at being once again in the saddle, and with the familiar swords in our hands instead of a musket. But no man dare do but what

he is ordered, and if we are ordered to go we will be ready.

A great many persons say we are useless here, and that soldiers would be better, but if your Colony has to pay their passage out, supplying them with clothes and rations whilst here, and sending them home again and making up the Regiment to its original strength, the Colony would soon find its mistake, and in the event of a soldier dying the widow could not be compelled to go to Europe unless she thought fit to do so; their boots, clothes, bedding, &c, would be supplied from home, and thus throw many out of employment, and whilst the soldier can spend but 3d. or 4d. per day, it is quite customary for a pensioner to spend £3 a month on necessaries.

Your Colony has a standing army of about 200 men, and we are blamed for everything. It is said that one policeman is worth six of us; such a nonsensical assertion is childish, our duties are quite different, as much so as the branches of a tree are to its stem. I ask any man of common sense can His Excellency's mansion be left unguarded, or the Colonial Treasury, or Bank, left without constant protection? Or would a constable be fool hardy enough to enter a crowd and arrest a prisoner in it, if he knew he had no person to support him? He certainly would not; but he knows that by calling at the main guard he could get ten armed men in twenty seconds - that there is a bell in the guard-room, the ringing of which would bring sixty or seventy men to his back in a few minutes, and that our small duty force would soon be supported by the Volunteer Rifles, and thus be an over match for anything in reason. But break your 200 veterans, and you will make men of property insecure, constables timorous, and burglars brave, for what could your small police force do against even forty determined characters?

In conclusion, I would suggest the idea of giving every pensioner four acres of land, and no more; give him time for the payment of the Town Trust dues; his labour on the land would be the security, and let him have the option of selling it if he has a mind, provided that the Town Trust is paid, and

you will by this means do what will benefit the Colony, viz., reclaim the bush, and increase your produce.

Trusting you will give this publicity as the opinions of one of the Enrolled Duty Force,

I am, Sir,

A Sentinel"

(Ed: With thanks to Robert Richardson for this article. -It just adds flavour to what can now be found on Trove)

