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Practical Methods of Training the Returned Soldiers

By Mr. E. G. Cooley.*

AT a regular meeting of the Canadian Club held on the 5th March, Mr. Cooley said:

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Canadian Club,—It it with a great deal of diffidence that I attempt to discuss this question. I feel that no one knows exactly what should be done in all its details; that I certainly do not. I am interested in it for two or three reasons: in the first place, because I am the the son of an old soldier, who went through the Civil War, and I have heard the problems of pensions and of old soldiers discussed ever since I was eight years old; in the second place, I am very greatly interested in studying vocational education, having visited most of the countries of Europe and having followed what they have done. Since this war began I have been very greatly interested in the information which I have obtained both in Germany and in other countries. I am especially interested in what they have attempted to do in Germany, accounts of which I have read in German technical school periodicals. I hope you will be, like true-born Britons always are, ready to learn from anybody, even from the enemy.

This war is being fought by citizen soldiers, who must, at its close, be gotten back into the social organism, not as mere pensioners, but as active members of the producing class. In order to secure this, the returned soldier must be placed, physically and economically, as near as possible in the position he occupied when he enlisted.

In the States we often read eloquent descriptions of the famous review of Sherman's army in Washington at the close of the Civil War. We see the long files of these veterans as they pass for the last time in martial review before their absorption into the occupations of civil life. We usually fail to see, however, that it took years of preparation to make this an effective army, and that preparation was necessary for

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its absorption into occupation of civil life, an absorption that is always accompanied by much maladjustment and by much unnecessary loss and suffering. This loss and this suffering it is the duty and the interest of society to avoid so far as possible. In other words, preparation is not a process limited in its application to times of war, but is fully as necessary for times of peace.

In 1862, my father enlisted in an Iowa volunteer regiment for a three-year term of service, returning home for the first time in August, 1865. When he enlisted he was a sawyer, owning a small sawmill. When he returned, the mill had been lost, and he was compelled to find a new job in which he could support his family. A pension system for disabled soldiers had been instituted, but he returned unhurt. Subsequent changes in the pension system made it easy for him to obtain a pension, but for nearly twenty years he was too proud to avail himself of it. When he finally applied, he was immediately granted a pension of fifteen dollars a month.

In the meantime he tried manual labor in the harvest field, but found himself unable to stand it. He tried work at insurance and selling machinery with some small success, and served as village postmaster during the last ten or twelve years of his life. My share of his estate was $83.50. Still, he was more fortunate than most of the members of his company, as he was able to support his family decently, send his children through the village schools, and lived to the ripe old age of seventy-six.

Many of his comrades came home, however, with impaired health, with no business prospects, and were unable to care for their families in a satisfactory manner. Their pension was not large enough to support them, they had lost precious years without developing business or industrial aptitudes, and sometimes became public charges. They were an easy prey to rascally pension agents and equally rascally politicians who obtained their suffrages, not by advocating measures for the public good, but by promising increases in pensions. These abuses continue to this day. Organizations of old soldiers continue to agitate for increases of pensions. They feel that they have made sacrifices for the public good, and that substantial recognition of this is due them at the hands of the country they saved.

I believe these men are right is demanding this recognition, but I also believe that their country owed them something more than a pension system that was often subject to abuse and an element of demoralization. A system of mere money

payments for such services was heartless and mercenary. There should have been added some systematic plan for enabling the returned soldiers to regain their positions in civil life under as favorable conditions as possible.

What more could have been done, or, better still, what can the countries now engaged in war do to recompense fairly those who are jeopardizing their lives, their health and their families for the public good? I shall not deal in abstract speculation but I shall call attention to measures now taken to meet the situation by countries involved in the present war. These plans involve ideals that received little or no recognition during our Civil War. Some of these plans may seem socialistic, but that will not scare us to-day when governments are throwing to the winds their former individualistic ideals and are engaging in socialistic operations that include almost all departments of economic life. I need not enumerate them.

Germany naturally was the first to engage in these plans, but the other nations soon followed. Through German periodicals on vocational education I have been able to learn something of their method of dealing with this problem.

The German people regard it as a debt of honor to give especial care to the soldier who returns home with limbs lost or health impaired. They cannot pay this debt by providing merely a well-deserved pension, a government job, or both. They must consider both the future welfare of the man and of the State. They must manifest their personal interest in the future happiness and efficiency of the returned soldier as well as care for the problem of conserving the still usable knowledge, skill and experience of the worker. They must attempt to return these men to civil life as fully equipped as possible to perform their functions as breadwinners, as producers, when their services as destroyers are at an end. The future happiness of the man and the welfare of the nation will be conserved by such measures.

The Germans are attempting to secure again for returned soldiers the possibility of earning an honest living through his own personal efforts, and without in any way impairing his pension rights. The pension is to be regarded as a handicap to enable him to compete in the battle of life, not to induce him to give up the contest without an effort;—as a stimulant, not as a narcotic.

They attack this problem while the soldier is still in the hospital. They provide good medical care, orthopedic treatment of injured limbs, special committees for vocational

guidance and employment, and well organized courses for vocational instruction.

They regard the period of convalescence as a danger if the patient is encouraged to think and talk only of his misfortunes and his disabilities. The patient must be shown that his injured limbs may still be of use if he has the *will* to use them. He must be given incentives to work, and be shown how he may again become a useful member of society.

In the hospital, in addition to the usual medical care, the patient is provided with orthopedic treatment designed to restore the use of the injured portions of his body. They aim to both heal the wounds and restore the usual functions of the body. They call the attention of the patient to the advantages of artificial limbs, special tools and apparatus for the partially crippled, and enable him to secure them.

Many of the injured soldiers will ordinarily give little attention to the question of their future employment. They believe the State will and must provide for them. They fear, too, a loss of their pension rights as soon as they begin remunerative work. The Committee on Vocational Guidance attempt to remove this fear by governmental assurances that they need not be unemployables in order to secure a pension, that the pension is meant to overcome a handicap, not to keep the pensioner out of competition with his fellows.

The committees intercede with former and other employers to supply work to the soldier that he is able to do efficiently. They advise the soldier as well as the employers as to the man's capabilities, and thus make it easier to secure the proper kind of work. In some cases the soldier has been so badly injured that he can do only some special kind of work, work that will require special training in special tools or machinery. For this as well as the ordinary work in their vocation special courses of instruction are provided without cost to the patient. They seek to compensate him for his loss of physical power by technical training. I shall outline the courses given in the hospital school at Aachen. Similar courses are given all over Germany.

I. Courses which may be entered at any time:
   1. Courses in writing for those who have lost an arm or a hand, 10 hours a week.
   2. Courses in geometrical drawing for similar cases, 6 hours a week.
   3. Courses in civics, 6 hours a week.
   4. Courses in industrial design and correspondence, 6 hours a week.

   5. Arithmetic and geometry, 6 hours a week.
   6. Commercial arithmetic, 6 hours a week.
   7. Commercial law and correspondence, 6 hours a week.

II. Shorter courses (6 to 7 hours a week):
   1. Courses in business bookkeeping, 4 hours a week.
   2. Industrial cost calculation, 4 hours a week.
   3. Industrial bookkeeping, 6 hours a week.
   4. Stenography, 8 hours a week.

III. Technical drawing for different branches of work.

IV. Workshop practice for 16 different trades.

V. Light employment in gardening and agriculture—various phases of it according to what a man is still able to do. This course is only one of hundreds.

Two features of these plans are of special interest. The first is the importance they attribute to inducing the patient to continue in the line of his former employment, if possible. They seek to avoid the loss of skill, knowledge, and experience that would result from a change of occupation, a loss both to the individual and to the community. The second feature is the importance they ascribe to keeping the patient from rushing to the city after some clerical job. This would also mean a loss of technical knowledge and skill, a loss that would be felt when the war was over and business competition begins again. The welfare of the individual as well as of the community would be jeopardized by such changes of occupation and changes of home. When changes of occupation are inevitable the committees seek to secure a wise choice. In such cases the courses of instruction are especially important. I may say that they have found, in dealing with the problem of the returned soldier, that the unskilled man presents the most difficult problem. If he was in a factory, the loss of physical power makes it impossible for him to maintain his original job. They have undertaken special training in a school at Düsseldorf, where they give a course of six or seven weeks, which is able to turn out a man who can turn out a valve or run a lathe; then they have gone to the employer who is in great need of skilled men, and they have induced him to reorganize his shop so that specially trained men can be employed. The problem still presses very hard, but they think they are on the way to a settlement of it.

The plan so far seems to be mainly for the man who works for others and for those who have suffered of limbs or health. The Germans do not admit that the day of small industries is over. The plans for the returned soldier should therefore include help for the small independent shopkeeper, small

mechanic and small farmer, both for those who return well and for the injured. Usually, in time of war, the man, like my father, finds his business gone when he returns, while his competitor who stayed at home has become rich, partly on account of the war in which he has lost his all. He usually finds his capital gone or seriously impaired, his special knowledge of conditions inadequate. Something should be done to remove his handicap and to enable him to resume his former independent status. One effect of this great war, as of every other great war, is to increase the number of mere wage earners, and reduce the number of independent men, on the farm, in the shop, and in the store.

In Germany they are proposing to provide a system of long-time, low-interest loans for such returned soldiers, as well as courses of instruction and other forms of assistance.

The whole plan—pensions, vocational and employment committees, courses of instruction, and loans,—is dominated by the ideal that the returned soldier shall suffer no unnecessary handicap in his efforts to resume his place in active life. Is this not the wisest plan, from the standpoint of the community, and the fairest to the man who has suffered for the public good?

I am assuming that you will provide an adequate system of pensions— all governments do this. You can not fully compensate the disabled soldier for his losses and his sufferings, but by pensions, by bureaus of vocational guidance and employment, by orthopedic treatment, by courses of vocational instruction and by loans you can do much towards putting him on an even footing with his more fortunate brother who has stayed at home. You should aim not merely to support pensioners, but to secure happy and efficient citizens of the commonwealth.

You will need some new machinery to do this, and I learn that you have it already. Many will take advantage of your college and secondary course of instruction; some can not. Your system of continuation schools is a most practical instrument for this purpose. In Germany these practical schools are already being used for the instruction of the injured soldiers.

In Germany preparedness has meant far more than mere military training. The same instrument for training men to manipulate artillery and the machinery of a submarine, or build an emergency road or bridge, is now being used to train the convalescent for the coming times of peace. Unless the world wakes up, she will "get the jump on them," just as she "got the jump on them" when the war began.

Perhaps it will not be untimely to describe one of these continuation schools. The spirit of the continuation school is adaptation. Its aim is to put at the disposal of the worker in shop, office, or on the farm, what the individual most needs for mastering his life's work, whether as a clerk, an apprentice, or a farmer. This is the sort of question the continuation school faces every day and does much towards answering. It combines theory and practice as needed; its course of study is worked out by persons in the vocation itself, employers and workingmen; it is managed and supervised by persons from the trade with the advice and aid of educational experts. It is proving a splendid instrument for meeting the new problem, preparing the returned soldier for his re-entry into civil life. Its spirit of adaption enables it to meet the new problem as it met the old one.

I am very happy to learn—and it made it seem almost unnecessary for me to read my paper—that you have already undertaken nearly everything I have put down here, as well as other things. It is a great satisfaction to know that you have attacked these problems so vigorously, and I hope successfully. I want to thank you for the honor and privilege of addressing you, and for the patience you have displayed in listening to my little talk.