

SANITARY COMMISSION,

No. 47.

New York, August 5th, 1862.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

President of the United States :

MR. PRESIDENT :

The great loss of life, from other causes than injuries received in battle, during the recent campaign on the peninsula of Virginia, has excited a marked degree of public attention, and is alleged to have materially discouraged volunteering. It cannot be doubted that many who would be influenced by no fear of death in an encounter with the enemies of their country, shrink from those dangers under which the strength of the Army of the Potomac is known to have been so greatly wasted before it left its works on the line of the Chickahominy. That exhaustion from excessive fatigue and privation, was the chief of these dangers, is now generally and not unreasonably believed.

In letters written, after personal observation of the Army of the Potomac, by the Secretary of the Commission, which were placed in your hands early in July, it was urged that the only efficient security immediately available against a great aggravation of this evil, and consequent danger of disaster, was the exercise of the executive power to command men for the instant reinforcement of the reduced and jaded regiments in the field. Moved by the same considerations, we addressed you, on the 21st of July, in an argument favoring the same proposi-

tion, fortified by a careful compilation of statistics bearing upon it.

The object of the present communication is to urge that the loyal militia of the nation should be thoroughly organized, under the inspection of Federal Officers, medical and military, and that the States should be called upon to maintain in camps or other schools for the preparation of recruits for the army in the field, a constant force of at least a million.

We urge this as a measure necessary to satisfy the demands of the People, and as justified by proper consideration for the health of the Army in the field.

Any doubt which may arise as to the propriety of our addressing you a statement of our conviction of the demands of the People in a matter of this nature, will disappear when it is considered, that in speaking for the Sanitary Commission, we speak also for its thousand associate members, citizens of the most eminent discretion and patriotism throughout the land, and for hundreds of thousands of loyal men and woman who have made it their organ and mouth-piece with Government, who bestow upon it means of usefulness to the amount of millions, and to whom it is pledged to act with energy wherever it can, in all that concerns the health of the Volunteer Army.

In the theory of our Government, every citizen is a soldier at the command of the President, and it is the duty of the President in time of war to command the soldier-citizen, before the latter is bound to withdraw himself from his ordinary occupations in the peaceful organization of society. Hence, under ordinary circumstances, it is no reproach to the citizen that he fails to volunteer.

Yet it is a matter of regret that the reinforcement of the army by volunteering has not of late been more rapid, and that the quality of the volunteers at present offering is not better than we have reason to fear that it is. We have

earnestly sought to ascertain to what the comparatively slow progress of volunteering is due, when there is in no other respect evidence of want of patriotic spirit among the people. We are compelled, with all respect and deference, to state our deliberate conclusion that it is mainly due to a widespread want of confidence in the intention of the Government so to use the whole strength of the nation as to obtain the certainty of immediate and complete success in the movements in which the volunteers are to take part. Men will not volunteer for a lingering war. They will not volunteer if they believe that ten soldiers are to fall under typhoid fever, to every one who falls in an advance upon the enemy. When you order, they will obey; but at present there unquestionably is a general indisposition to volunteer upon your mere invitation. And we think that we have indicated why this indisposition is so general as it is.

The question now arises:

Will the order this day promulgated, for a draft of 300,000 men, to reinforce the armies in the field, satisfy the demand of the people, and restore the needed confidence?

We answer, that in our judgment it does not reach the root of the difficulty.

That difficulty lies chiefly in the fact, that the force of our armies engaged in active operations has always, *in the end*, proved to be insufficient for the work which has been imposed upon them; that regiments, when depleted by battle and disease, have remained long in their weak condition, and yet been required to perform guard and fatigue duties which they would have found severe when in their full strength. That in consequence of this, and often solely in consequence of this, the men and officers have become harrassed, feverish, exhausted of strength, depressed, and despondent, and have communi-

cated their feelings to friends at home, and finally to the whole community.

What remedy for this difficulty would meet the wishes of the people?

In the beginning of the war, many hundred thousand men not then able or disposed to volunteer at once, formed themselves into squads and companies for instruction in military drill, thus recognizing the necessity for large reserves to be put in training as an essential element of efficient national defence. Government, however, did not avail itself in any manner of the great strength and security offered in this disposition of the people, and members of these organizations having acquired some degree of proficiency in the manual, and finding it impracticable, by purely voluntary action, to proceed further, have, for the most part quietly disbanded. The disposition indicated by their formation, however, still exists.

If Government had required, one year ago, that a million of militia should be put under systematic training, mainly in camps, the measure would have been exceedingly popular. It would be so now.

The choice of men being made in the first place by lot, and the employment of permanent substitutes being permitted, the laws of trade would be sufficient to select from each community those who possessed more valuable qualifications for military service than for other service to the country. What a citizen is disposed and able to pay for a substitute to take his place in a camp of militia, as a general rule, indicates approximately the importance to the community of the function he is already performing in the industrial economy of society. The services of those who are influenced by cowardice, laziness, or disloyalty, to pay extravagantly, however valueless they may be to the community in which they live, must be still less desirable in a military point of view, while men who,

from ardent patriotism and inclination for a military life, are induced to make unusual sacrifices rather than procure substitutes, are of the highest military value. A million of militia deliberately gathered as we have proposed, would consist in large part of young men without important business trusts or dependent families, but who yet have, at present, such obligations resting upon them that they cannot volunteer. Thousands of such men would gladly accept a duty overriding those obligations, and legally and morally disengaging them from their present home-keeping duties.

Suppose that a million men had been thus in a great measure *detached in advance from their ordinary business entanglements and obligations* and each man accustomed, under training, however imperfect, to act in company and regimental relations with others. When the sudden and urgent call for three hundred thousand volunteers was made a month ago is it likely that there would have been a month's delay in meeting it? Had there been such a resort for recruits, would there have been occasion for this call? We believe not. We believe that had such a reserve been established every regiment of the army of the Potomac would have been kept by volunteers from it at very nearly its maximum strength, and in this case, that the great loss of life and depression of spirits which occurred in that army through disease consequent upon fatigue and exhaustion would have been in a great measure avoided.

The necessity of a measure of this kind was brought to the notice of the Commission, and the propriety of urging it upon the government seriously considered, nearly a year ago. Its purely sanitary necessity was then, however, deemed to be too remote to justify the proposed action. But, in the progress of events, there is no longer room for doubt that its advantages, in a sanitary point of view, would have been of the greatest possible value.

Similar advantages, we respectfully submit, would attend the same measure, if taken at this time. From sanitary considerations alone, no regiment in the field should be allowed to remain seriously weakened in force for any considerable period. Holding full regiments in reserve, ready to be brought, as full regiments, into active service, does not remedy the evil. Reinforcements purely of raw recruits, will not obviate it. But a million of trained militia, already withdrawn from ordinary occupations, and held in reserve, far in the rear of active military life, would, in all probability, supply an adequate guard against it.

It is needless to point out the vast advantages under which men drawn from such reserves (whether as individual volunteers or drafted regiments) would take the field. They would have acquired not merely military training, but ability to take care of themselves in camp, and experience in cooking, in camp police, in personal cleanliness, and in everything that affects their sanitary condition. Above all, they would have passed through what may be called the acclimating period of military life, during which the available strength of many of our newly raised regiments has been reduced more than one half by measles and other like diseases.

The number we have named as proper to be kept in reserve, will not be thought excessive, when it is considered that according to experience thus far in the war, 123,000 men must be annually recruited to maintain a force of 500,000 in the field, in full strength.*

The total number of men who are to fall sick and die, or be disabled, by sickness, in the Army will necessarily be proportional to the time which is required for the suppression of the rebellion. A sustained force sufficiently large to crush

* See statistics furnished by Mr. Elliott at p. 6 of the printed copy of our communication of July 21st.

all opposition before it, is therefore desirable, if only from a purely sanitary point of view. The same considerations clearly apply, and with even greater force, to losses in actual conflict, which are within certain limits inversely as the strength of the attacking party. We may also remember that the actual expenditures of a war are also always in proportion to strength, and that an overwhelming force, sustained to the end, is therefore necessarily the cheapest.

We finally beg to observe that the effective military force which a nation is able to sustain in the field, not that which it can raise under the spasmodic excitement of emergencies, is the measure of the respect and consideration it is likely to receive abroad as well as at home.

We have the honor to be, Mr. President,

With great respect,

Your obedient servants,

HENRY W. BELLOWS,

W. H. VAN BUREN, M. D.,

C. R. AGNEW, M. D.,

WOLCOTT GIBBS, M. D.,

GEO. T. STRONG,

FRED. LAW OLMSTED,

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