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Daily Appeal.

THE PENSION BILL.

SPEECHES OF MR. ATKINS, OF TENNESSEE, McCLERNAND, I regret exceedingly that the consent of my friend from Missouri (Mr. Clark) to my proposition to be heard in opposition to leading down this bill with amendments, I will not question the motives of honorable gentlemen, but I hoped that the sense of the House would be taken upon the original proposition. In my judgment, it should be restricted to the pensioners in the soldiers who were engaged in actual service in the war which existed with Great Britain.

Besides being requested by the Legislature of my State, I could not be less than opposed this bill, approaching as it does, in part, the chivalrous people of Tennessee—the field of Jackson, and Carroll and Coffee, and others, whose martial deeds have added such a lustre upon the escutcheon of our common country. Admit, sir, that I owe it to the memory of the honored dead, to see well to the rights and interests of the gallant living. In restricting myself to the bill I have indicated, I would not be understood as detracting in the least from the well-earned fame of any of our soldiers, who have participated in any of the wars that have occurred since 1815—the Seminole, Creek, or Mexican wars. They have all acted bravely and patriotically, and deserve the gratitude of their country. When time shall have bowed their manly forms, and whitened their locks with the frosts of age, they will look back, as I do, upon the services of the war of 1812—to my nothing of the thousands whose old age has been spent since to the tomb—I doubt not the Revolutionary sires of the people will be far more prompt to remember their services, and to throw the fostering arm of the Government around them, and shield and protect them from want, or from shielded and protected the nation's honor from the insults of an arrogant foe, and the heartlessness of innocence from the indecent outrages of a licentious soldiery.

Sir, we have been asked, by the gentlemen from Alabama (Mr. Cobb,) in the course of this debate, why the distinction between the soldiers of the war of 1812 and those of the Mexican war? I have shown why. But I will not rest the question there. I will appeal to the gentlemen who participated in that sanguinary struggle; whose deeds of valor have decked their own and their country's brow with a crown of unfading glory; and ask them if their gallant and admiring country is to have delegated as their Representatives upon this floor of the American Senate. Will you say that the cases are similar? Do you feel that there is the same justice and necessity to allow you this relief, that there is to the surviving veterans of the second war of independence? From the nobleness of your hearts I know you the patriotic but just response, No! You are in the meridian of life, while all of them are descending towards the vale of years, and have barely reached its culmination, and is pouring its boundless splendor upon your pathway; while, with them, the sun of life is nearly set, and its dim and slanting shadows falling before their feeble footsteps, too plainly warns them of the near approach of the dreary night of death. Very many of them are standing with one foot in the grave, and the other upon its brink, poor, penniless, and dependant upon the gratitude and beneficence of kind friends and relatives; while others, perhaps, more fortunate, but may depend upon the cold charity of a pitiless and mercenary world. Sir, when the soldiers of the Mexican war, or of any other war, shall have lived near half a century from the date of their service, as have those who we propose to be benefactories by this bill, their surviving brothers will be feeble, decrepitude, and indigence, shall be manifest like them; they will Congress, I doubt not, be ready to do them justice.

Gentlemen talk about this bill as a bounty, as a gift. We do not come as supplicants to his House. We do not ask it as a bounty; we demand it as our due. Let no man call it charity for their heroic services. Will any gentleman say that the debt has been discharged? Has eight dollars per month, and one hundred and sixty acres of wild land, compensated them for the labors of the camp, the toils of the march, and the dangers of the field? Do you count as nothing the sacrifices they made in leaving home with the thousand charms that cluster around it; the parting from wife, children, friends, all, to brave the bloody hazards of the battle field? Sir, it was not money; a higher and a nobler sentiment controlled their actions and animated their hearts.—Say love of country, and patriotism and the honor of the American soldier prompted them to rally to their country's defense, not counting the cost, why cannot the same disinterested, liberal, and patriotic spirit prompt us to rush to the relief of their necessities, and drive back the demon want from their door? There are but few of them left, and every year makes the number less, and if them were ready to make a free offering of their life upon the altar of their country's home. Thousands fell, and their dust and dirge is now chanted as a pean to the nation's glory and the glorious cause of liberty and freedom. Shall they linger out in obscurity and poverty the evening of a life, the morning of which was illustrated by deeds of such noble daring?

Will not the country awake to a high sense of the moral obligations and legal right which demands of it to protect these old men, now that they, or many of them, are unable to protect themselves? Is this a bounty? Is it a free some money? When did any gift measure, intended to benefit the country or mankind, originate that did not cost money? Will the country men of this generation? Never! Their hearts are too full of patriotic fire. Before we complain of the cost, let us first search the heavy and ever expensive expenditures of the Government. I for one, sir, will vote to pay for a ten per centum reduction upon the salary of every officer of the Federal Government, from the President down to the gardener of your public grounds, if it will facilitate the passage of this measure. Two or three millions annually in all that will be required under this bill. But what if it should? Will you stop to count the cost? Did those brave old warriors stop to count the cost, when the clarion note of war announced their foes in the field? when the British regulars, trained under the third disciples of the Iron Duke, were marching under Packenham to the queen city of the South, the gateway of our southern and western commerce, with his troops fresh from the victorious fields of Europe, flushed with the boastful watchword of "beaten easy and boasting, did the gallant spirits who rallied around the flag of Andrew Jackson, stop to count the cost? No! But with an utter abandonment of self, and reckleness of life, with their heroic leader at their head, drove back the British Lion upon the plains of Chalmette, thus prevent the capture of the queen of the cities of our sister over that of the regular. No brighter gem stole the diadem of fame that encircles the fair brow of Columbia, than that which answers to the memorable victory of the 8th of January, 1815.

The question is not what it will cost. Is it right, is it just, is it magnanimous, is it humane, and lastly, is it grateful? Bring any charge you will against the Government. Say it is parsimonious, say it is false, heartless, unjust, oppressive; but do not subject her to the charge of ingratitude, that "foulest whelp of sin." Shall this country be more unmindful of its defenders than other nations? Shall poverty learn the mortifying lesson that our Government is willing to keep a million upon a standing army, and not a cent to the brave volunteer, when old age has overtaken him, and poverty has laid its heavy hand upon him? Will not those who have fought and bled for their home receive services. Will any gentleman say that the debt has been discharged? Has eight dollars per month, and one hundred and sixty acres of wild land, compensated them for the labors of the camp, the toils of the march, and the dangers of the field? Do you count as nothing the sacrifices they made in leaving home with the thousand charms that cluster around it; the parting from wife, children, friends, all, to brave the bloody hazards of the battle field? Sir, it was not money; a higher and a nobler sentiment controlled their actions and animated their hearts.—Say love of country, and patriotism and the honor of the American soldier prompted them to rally to their country's defense, not counting the cost, why cannot the same disinterested, liberal, and patriotic spirit prompt us to rush to the relief of their necessities, and drive back the demon want from their door? There are but few of them left, and every year makes the number less, and if them were ready to make a free offering of their life upon the altar of their country's home. Thousands fell, and their dust and dirge is now chanted as a pean to the nation's glory and the glorious cause of liberty and freedom. Shall they linger out in obscurity and poverty the evening of a life, the morning of which was illustrated by deeds of such noble daring?

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