

National Tribune

A Monthly Journal devoted to the interests of the Soldiers and Sailors of the late war, and all Pensioners of the United States.

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HISTORY OF THE BOUNTY BILL.

At nearly every session of Congress since the close of the war, some sort of a measure has been proposed for equalizing the bounties paid to soldiers of the late war of the Rebellion. No nation on earth was ever more grateful for the services of its soldiers than the United States has shown itself. Yet the laws under which these services have been rewarded, and in which this gratitude has found tangible shape, have lacked the spirit of equity; have failed to extend to all the deserving the blessings that some have received; and have not been framed so as to give exact and equal justice to each soldier living, and to the family of each soldier dead.

Of all the numerous attempts that have been made to secure some legislation that should extend equal justice to all soldiers, none have been successful. While the great majority of the people have admitted the propriety and the necessity of such legislation, and have urged, from time to time, that Congress should take such action as would do away forever with the special legislation which is continually being asked for in cases where injustice has been done, that could be corrected under a general bill, still, something has always occurred to prevent the passage of the measure; or, when it had passed, to prevent its becoming a law.

No great popular measure was ever so continually and persistently delayed. Ever since it was first proposed, it has seemed to be fated to misfortune. While its opponents were few and its friends were many, it seemed to stumble along, while measures of less than half its strength have gone through without meeting an obstacle. It is the only great proposition growing out of the war that has received the cordial support of both political parties. State Legislatures have indorsed it, and petitioned Congress for its passage. The National Conventions of both of the great political parties have declared in its favor, and many State political conventions have followed their example. In fact, it has seemed as if the two parties were competing with each other to see which could give the Bounty Bill the strongest support.

In both Houses of Congress its advocates have included nearly all the men of influence of all political complexions. Its opponents have been few, and practically insignificant, with one or two exceptions, and have been men who, both from habit and from principle, have resisted every endeavor to recognize the courage and the patriotism of the Union soldiers.

Several times a bill to equalize bounties has passed either House of Congress; but as it left one, the other would change it, and in a squabble over technicalities, it has failed of becoming a law. On the evening of the last day of the Forty-third Congress, it finally passed both Houses, and lacked only the President's signature; but President Grant let it die on his hands. He had written a veto-message, but in the confusion of the last hours of the session it failed to

reach either house, and was never officially published. In that message President Grant, we regret to say, committed a great wrong against the soldiers who elected him President, and for whom, in every other way, he has always shown the greatest consideration. He gave as his reasons for refusing to sign the bill, that it was not apparent that the soldiers wanted it; when petitions for its passage, signed by hundreds of thousands of them, were within his reach. He said, again, that the bill was more for the relief of claim agents than the soldiers; when he knew the fees of attorneys are fixed by law, and they could get only a small percentage for their services. Again, he said that the revenues of the Government would not allow the expenditure of money the bill would necessitate; the fallacy of this last reason is shown in another column.

It is said that the President was persuaded to make this veto by Secretary Bristow and others; but, however that may be, it was his duty to sign it, and he should bear the blame.

Early in the session of the Forty-fourth Congress, the same bill was revived in the House of Representatives, and, although the Democrats had a majority of two-thirds, it was passed again, in June, 1876, by a vote of 141 to 46.

It was sent over to the Senate, referred to the Committee on Military Affairs, and reported back favorably by Senator Logan, who tried again and again to secure its consideration by the Senate, but failed to do so; and, in the confusion consequent upon the counting of the Electoral Vote, it was laid aside, and failed again of passage.

The bill will be revived at the approaching session of Congress. There are already enough members of the House of Representatives pledged to its support to secure its passage by that body; but there will probably be difficulty in securing the Senate to act upon it. The parliamentary rules of the Senate are such that one or two members, if they are shrewd and determined, can delay a measure almost indefinitely; and that has been the system of tactics resorted to by Senator Edmunds of Vermont, and other opponents of this bill, whenever it has been brought before that body in the regular order of business. But the friends of the measure must unite in securing it early attention at the hands of the Senate, in order to insure its passage.

ARREARS OF PENSIONS.

Among the other measures of vital interest to the soldiers and the families of those who were killed or died of wounds received during the war, which has been repeatedly brought before Congress, and will be introduced again at the opening of the coming session, is a bill to provide that all pensions on account of death, wounds received, or disease contracted in the service of the United States since March 4, 1861, which have been granted, or which shall hereafter be granted on application previous to Jan-

uary 1, 1880, shall commence from the date of death or discharge.

The bill provides that all pensions which have been, or may hereafter be, granted in consequence of death occurring from a cause which originated in the service of the United States since the 4th day of March, 1861, or in consequence of wounds or injuries received or disease contracted since said date, shall commence from the date of the death or discharge from the United States service of the person on whose account the claim has been, or shall hereafter be granted, or from the termination of the right of the party having prior title to such pension; provided that applications for pensions growing out of the war of 1861 have been, or shall hereafter be, filed with the Commissioner of Pensions on or before the 1st day of January, 1880. In all other cases, unless the application shall be filed within five years from the accruing of the right, the pension shall commence from the date of the filing of the application; provided further that the limitation herein prescribed shall not apply to claims by or in behalf of insane persons or minor children of deceased soldiers.

The second section provides that immediately upon the passage of this act the Commissioner of Pensions shall cause a copy of the same to be furnished each pension agent, whose duty it shall be to notify each pensioner upon his roll who shall be entitled to arrears of pension under this act, and it shall be the further duty of the Commissioner of Pensions to pay, or cause to be paid, to such pensioners, or if the pensioner shall have died to the person or persons entitled to the same, all such arrears of pension, as the pensioner may be entitled to, or if dead, would have been entitled to under the provisions of the first section of this act had he or she survived.

Section 3 repeals all acts and parts of acts in conflict with these provisions.

This bill has passed the House of Representatives several times, but has never been able to find its way through the Senate.

A very slight examination of the subject will convince the reader that the present law is defective, and works palpable injustice to thousands of the brave defenders of the flag, and their wives, children, and other heirs, by depriving them of pensions and arrears justly due them. If a soldier, or his representative, is entitled to a pension at all, it is clear that it should be granted from the date of death or of the time of discharge from service, provided the discharge is on account of wounds, or injuries received, or disease contracted in the service and in line of duty, or from the date of the development of the disease by which he is incapacitated for labor, provided the disease is traceable and due to the military service of the United States. This is eminently proper and right, and great injustice has been done, and is being done, to all who, from whatever reason, patriotic or otherwise, did not apply for pensions within the time required by existing law.