

THE PENSION OFFICE.

HOW UNCLE SAM PAYS HIS VETERAN PROTECTORS.

A Wonderful Machine Which Sends Money Quarterly to 425,000 Pensioners—Thirty Who Draw Cash on Account of the Revolutionary War.

WASHINGTON, Aug. 1.—Now that the pension office is attracting so much attention in the press of the country, and an investigation is being made of charges against the management, it may be interesting to inquire what the pension office is, and to take a look at its great distribution scheme in operation. It is not easy to comprehend the magnitude of the processes carried on in the huge red building, and unless we put ourselves in the hands of one who knows the bureau in all its complexities and ramifications, we shall make but sorry work of our effort to learn something about the mysteries of pension paying. Luckily we fall into the hands of such a good Samaritan, and he takes us a walk of a mile or more round the long corridors, showing us where applications for pensions come in, where they are filed and indexed, where they are assigned to various divisions for examination and review, first by law officers and then by medical examiners, where appeals are heard and the assistance of the board of review called in by disappointed applicants, where the reports of the 5,000 local examiners scattered throughout the country are received and filed, where hundreds of clerks sit day after day doing nothing but writing letters to pensioners, applicants and inquirers; and after we have completed the long circuit and taken this superficial look at the machine we appreciate better than ever before its wonderful capacity and the magnitude of the war which left such a necessity behind its pages of blood and destruction.

"This is the hardest working department of the government," says our guide. "We are now paying out money to pensioners at the rate of \$1,500,000 a week, but this is the smallest part of our trouble, for the payments are made at the local pension offices, located at eighteen cities. The pension agency at Columbus, O., is the largest one in the country, paying out more than \$8,000,000 a year. Next to that is the one at Indianapolis, Chicago being third and Topeka, Kan., fourth. Topeka is a small city, and Kansas is by no means one of our most populous states, but so many old soldiers have gone out there to make homes for themselves on the prairie that our pension payments are very large at that office, six and a half millions yearly. It may surprise you to learn that the agent at Knoxville, Tenn., pays out nearly four millions a year, and the one at Louisville, Ky., two and a half millions. So you see a good deal of our money goes to the southern and border states.

"A new senator from one of the northern states was in here one day, and he said: 'Well, there is one thing I am glad of—we don't have to pay any pensions to the southern states.' 'That is where you are mistaken,' I replied: 'we pay a great many pensions in the southern states. We have now on our rolls 15,000 pensioners in Kentucky, 8,000 in Tennessee, 4,000 in Texas, and about a thousand in each of the other gulf states. In the northern states there is not a county without all the way from half a dozen to five or six thousand pensioners. Of the states New York has the greatest number, 45,000, Ohio coming second with nearly 44,000, and Pennsylvania third with 43,000. Indiana has 4,000 more pensioners than Illinois, though the population of the latter state is much greater. Why this is so I can't tell. Into each of these five states the pension office sends more than a million dollars a quarter, in sums ranging from \$3 to \$500 to each individual.

"One of the curiosities of the pension laws is the large number of different rates that have been allowed. Between the rates of \$1 a month and \$166.66 a month, the highest and lowest rates, there are 149 different rates on the rolls. It seems odd to pay \$3.36 per month to some pensioners and \$2.66 to others, or \$13.33 to some and \$13.33 to others. Yet this is done under the various laws passed by congress. Twelve dollars a month is the pension drawn by 25,000 invalids and 85,000 widows, minors and dependents, a larger number than at any other rate. All but 8,000 of the widows draw this sum per month. Seventy thousand invalids draw \$4 a month, 50,000 \$6, 65,000 \$8, 20,000 \$10, 12,000 \$16, 14,000 \$24, 12,000 \$30, 3,000 \$36, 2,500 \$45, 1,500 \$50, and 1,000 \$72. Three widows and orphans draw \$100 a month, and four \$166.66 a month. More than 33,000 of the pensioners get from the government the pittance of \$2 a month or less, several hundred of these getting only \$1 a month.

"It has been said that all the veterans of the late war, or nearly all, are on the pension rolls. This is not true. For 5,800,000 men who went into the war of the rebellion, only 425,000 pensioners are now carried on the rolls. So you see that there is but one pension for every seven soldiers. The rolls show 20,000 pensioners of the war with Mexico; 15,000 of them survivors. There are more than 10,000 pensioners of the war of 1812, about 700 of them being survivors. Not a single survivor remains of the Revolutionary war, though 80 pensioners on account of that war are still on the rolls, all of them widows. This is rather strange, considering that the last battle of the Revolution was fought about 108 years ago, but some of the survivors of that war were lusty old chaps, who married late in life and left young widows to draw their pensions for them. Say a youth of 16 served in the Revolution. At 65 years of age he married a girl of 20; that girl would be only 80 years old now. Rather odd that a century of time, full of so much history, can be so easily spanned by the lives of man and wife, isn't it?"

"I suppose," continued the guide, "we passed by rooms after rooms filled with

young women working typewriters, that this is the greatest institution for letter writing in the world. In a year the commissioner of pensions receives nearly three millions of communications, about two millions of which are answered immediately. Just think of a mail of ten thousand letters a day, the answers to many of these requiring hours of investigation and research and the writing of letters varying in length from a single page to ten pages of type written sheets. Without the typewriter we should have to have in this office 3,000 clerks, and now we do the work with less than 1,400. But do you wonder that we need them all? Why, in one year the commissioner receives about 100,000 letters from congressmen making inquiries about the pension of their constituents. Of course these must be promptly and carefully answered, or there will be a row somewhere.

"Some very queer letters come here. Every once in a while some poor woman writes, inclosing an old daguerreotype of her missing husband, and asking the pension office to search the world for him. One woman wrote Commissioner Black asking to have the school house in her neighborhood placed in the center of the district, saying it took her boy so long to go to and from the school that he wasn't of much use to her about the house. Of course she needed him, as his father is a crippled soldier. Letters of advice concerning the conduct of the pension office pour in by the thousand, and it is a dull mail that does not bring a curse upon the head of the commissioner because somebody's pension has been refused. People think the pension office can do anything, grant them big pensions without form or evidence, loan them money, make holiday gifts, and so on. One of the saddest letters I ever read was from a woman out in Ohio who had lost a boy in the war. He had been shot in the swamps near Baton Rouge, La., and his body was never recovered. She implored the pension commissioner to send men down there to hunt the swamps for his bones, and declared she would die happy if she could recover the remains of her boy and have them buried beside herself.

"The chief disabilities for which pensions are granted? That is a question everybody asks. There appears to be a general curiosity concerning the injuries men receive in battle and army life. Well, in round numbers 120,000 pensioners suffered gunshot wounds. Eleven or twelve thousand of these were hit in the face, 2,300 in the neck, 9,000 in the chest, 3,500 in the back, 11,000 in the shoulder, 14,000 in the hand, 21,000 in the thigh, 19,000 in the leg and 7,000 in the foot. Of the amputations 8,000 were of the arm, 1,400 of a part of the hand, and only 4 of the hand itself. While 2,800 legs were taken off and 1,400 parts of feet, only 4 amputations of the foot alone are on the records. More than 40,000 cases of disability are charged to rheumatism, and more than 55,000 to chronic diarrhea. There are about 800 cases of total blindness, the same number of loss of sight of one eye, 150 cases of one eye lost, 16,000 diseases of the eyes, 1,500 of total deafness and 9,000 of partial deafness.

"Of course the pension office carries gladness to many thousands of homes. But at the same time it does a great deal of harm, as you would see if you could look into the thousands of cases of fraudulent pensions with which the office has had to deal. Many thousands of men have committed perjury in order to get a pension of \$8 or \$10 a month, and more than that, have induced their friends to commit perjury for their benefit. I often wonder at the good nature of physicians and surgeons in helping poor devils to get pensions to which they are not entitled. Doctors sometimes have wonderfully retentive memories, as in a case which was put through the other day. The surgeon had seen the claimant but once in his life, and that more than a quarter of a century ago. Yet he presumed to remember the condition of the man's lungs at that time, though he had passed but five minutes in his company while on his rounds of vaccination. We have had applications come in here for pensions on account of decayed teeth, falling hair, bunions and corns that were brought on by the long marches of the war, for falling eyes that were perfectly good till the claimants had reached the age of 60 or more, for frost bites and bad teeth. One man wanted a pension for obesity. He persisted in his declaration that it was on account of his life in the army that he afterward grew so fat he couldn't see his knees or do a day's work. He didn't get a pension, however, nor did the man who complained that his army experiences had so demoralized his morals that he could no longer follow his profession of preaching the Gospel.

"There was a queer case out west, now nearly forgotten, in which a young man who taught school during the war, and who hurt himself while out hunting just as his twin brother returned home from the south, managed to get a pension for amputation of the leg. It happened that the brother who was in the army had been discharged from the hospital shortly before leaving the service, with a slight wound in the leg, and as this wound chanced to be in the same place, and of much the same character as that which his brother had suffered, the latter on losing his leg personated the soldier and drew pension for nearly a dozen years. The wound in the leg of the soldier quickly healed, and the twins exchanged identities.

"The soldiers of the late war are now scattered all over the world," concluded the guide. "Every quarter pension money orders or checks are sent to Mexico, Alaska, Central and South America, China, India and even to Greenland and Iceland. All told there are nearly 2,500 pensioners who reside in foreign countries, many of them the widows of soldiers who have returned to their native lands to pass their declining years with the old folks at home."

Apache county, in Arizona, is larger than the state of Massachusetts, yet it has not a single doctor within its borders.

ABOUT DAVID SWING.

A CHICAGO PHILOSOPHER AND THEOLOGIAN OF NOTE.

He Was First Made Famous by His Opposition to Orthodox Doctrines and Subsequent Expulsion from the Church—The Father of Mississippi Valley's Literature.

CHICAGO, Aug. 1.—When I opened the book of De Tocqueville on "The American Democracy" it was with a natural thrill of satisfaction that I read his prophecy concerning our Mississippi valley. "It is," he said, "the most magnificent dwelling place prepared by God for man's abode." Out of that home, De Tocqueville thought, a dominant race of men should spring. As I am but a scribe I can best touch upon those influences of this soil that have become aspirations within scribes. As our architects have already breathed their hopes, I as a tradesman in letters may whisper of thoughts which I attribute to the black loam of the Mississippi valley. As the builders tell you of the vast structures at Chicago, I must beg attention with my homely tale of western philosophy and learning. What is literature in the west? What spirit animates its brotherhood? In what way and how soon is the library of the Mississippi valley to be added to the richest treasures of a world?

If I study my own organism with any profit, I behold a restless hope of applause, or perhaps of fruition, although I am not capable of grasping the idea of fruition merely for itself. If I look on nature, I am impelled to believe that the desire for notice is in all things. A cowboy might call it "the hunch to yawp," and as that expression comes from the soil, I look on it with favor. If I behold myself publishing a book, why should I not also take notice of the mental phenomena accompanying that vain act? The reviewer of the east regards that book as the challenge of an enemy, and I at once swear a warfare against him. If I see a school of bull-head minnows close to the shores of a lake, in two inches of water, shall I not also discern the shadowy presence of a formidable father fish in the deep, with eyes of fury for all prey hunters?

Why should I not preserve my book after it is in print? What is it in me, doing this thing, irrespective of my sense of merit—for I know now, exactly, that I can never be as Gibbon. I am not like Shakespeare. Look on us, then, O reader, as flowers in the field. The great sunflower spreads to heaven. His ambition is undeniable. His efflorescence is mighty—patent—victorious. Beside him, with equal variety and equal straining, pushes a daisy out of the earth. Its rivalry of the gigantic stalk is evident to my eyes. And over there is a white rose, which hopes to outdo all other bloom in the field. Everywhere, in all these bursts out of the soil, there is private ambition, disquieting to many, grateful to few.

Relying on nature, and the ever living God of nature, I have looked, too, upon our field of letters. The weeds are full in flower. The roses are few. The sunflowers are splendid in their disdain, and fat. We who are walking weeds are social, like bunch grass. As I have become independent in thought—that is, true to the soil that feeds me in every breath and every breaking of my fast—I find that I owe something of allegiance to other stalks in this region. Has any man led me to hope eminence may come to my valley and rest on one of its sons? Yes. There is a man named David Swing, who sits in his lonely home, "as sad as Plato," and about his person there gathers the aroma of greatness. We approach him with respect. His name adorns Chicago, city of a million. I thought so ten years ago. I am surer of it now. Who is David Swing, that his existence should give me these thoughts and this allegiance?



DAVID SWING.

When he was young he was a professor of dead languages at a school in Oxford, O. When he had been translated to Chicago he impressed our busy people with the qualities of his mind. At that time the orthodox hell was falling out of fashion, and Professor Swing, turned to minister, softened it, in order to adjust John Calvin to George Peabody. There was a little fellow, bound in old calf that rubbed off, dry, musty and marvelously acute in theology. His name was Patton. He is now a great light in London, I guess. He assayed this hell of the young professor, and served notice on David Swing to take himself and his mitigated hell, or no hell, out of the church.

I asked Professor Swing yesterday how that hit him. Did he want to go? Does the dart of the persecutor hurt its victim?

He said no, and finally he said yes. He said his wife grieved. "And then, perhaps, he wiped a tear out of his eye. But he assured me that the wicked doctrines of the orthodox church were passing away, and quoted the last assembly and its trials. He dwelt on the word "universal," thinking many things which I could not grasp—about all believers coming together, as in the early centuries.

I was a very young man when Patton triumphed over David Swing. I read the proceedings in the Presbytery and blamed David Swing for not getting out. Yesterday he said he got out willingly—he intended to leave. I believe the "churching" made David Swing famous over a good part of the world. Presbyterians of the Hudibras type held him up for Satan, but only aided in distinguishing him. At last he settled in a house near the lake on the west side—and became eminent. I asked him how it felt to be eminent

—was he eminent?—was there a boom in May and a dull season in August? Whether or not his learned mind informs him on these matters I cannot say. He shrunk from thinking on the subject. He said the callers were not many. He saw all of them. Men, I believe, are afraid of him. He is a wise man, and does not reply to argument. His silence repels. He said there was one letter a day from total strangers to which he always replied.

When the Central church was formed it was believed the propaganda would soon die out. Poor David Swing would soon be left without support. A theatre was rented, and the scandal of many in Christendom. It has come, of late years, that this theatrical idea—this accident—has put David Swing forward as the pope of Chicago. Strangers visit Central Music hall out of gentle deference to religion and urgent response to curiosity. I reckon that a good part of the worldly "eminence" has spread forth from this.

In town there is a resentment against David Swing. The Philistine declares that Swing preaches to millionaires. I blamed him for it yesterday. He said it was "a lie." He preaches to 1,500 poor men each Sunday. He told me that over a thousand did not pay a cent. He did not regret the lie. He merely observed that it was a lie, as he would notice that the electric lights of the restaurant were a part of the architecture. I would love him if I could get near to him. In telling him this I learned he had never had an intimate man associate—he said "chum." We talked of Robert McIntyre, and the great man said McIntyre was delighting the people. McIntyre was not bogus. I told the great man that Robert and I had debated coming over to 403 Superior street. "I feel," said David Swing of the stranger, "that I am as well acquainted with McIntyre as with you." True, every word. Were I to live ten thousand years I should never be nearer to this thinking man—a man of solitude, hurt by almost every word he hears, yet not once complaining—not learning—stabbing with his own words, as he is stabbed. If there were a woman who constantly retreated from men—who had read all the books that all her circle together had read—this woman would be a David Swing.

There have existed tentatively on the outskirts of journalism in Chicago a number of weekly and monthly magazines. These flowers have in no single instance gone beyond a demonstration of their own vanity. The almighty dollar, creator of the heavens and the earth hereabouts, has refused them his "ad," or his other patronage, and they have expired. Their withered memories strew these parts. For every one of them David Swing wrote. He wrote—as a man rarely refuses to act for pallbearer. He was the head and front of literature, and literature was to die cutting its teeth. We spoke yesterday of the envious, and their glare at all these obsequies. Both of us noted the naturalness of events. But he would not hope for a literature. He lives, like Socrates, in the testimony of his disciples, and I must doubt that David Swing will ever speak, except through our memorabilia. Laissez-faire is written on his face. "There is nothing to write," he says.

And I, who am buckled with the harness and hope to write until the day of my death—and always write of this valley—I strive to understand the forces that hold him so true to solitude and laissez-faire. Sometimes I attribute his indifference to the environment of theology. I told him I discovered the preacher in him. He said it narrowed his thoughts to the moral. He must put only certain stuff over the signature "David Swing." I answered him that learning was all moral and severe. He at once admitted it. He could not be Aristophanes. Yet I believe the man would be glad if he had been a voice of the soil, like Walt Whitman. Great is the man who writes as Whitman wrote, though fate has happily saved me from habiting the tenement of the gray poet.

David Swing has written some of the wisest and strikingest things I have seen on paper. His "I Have Forgotten," in the celebrated Easter Current of 1886, gave me hope. His latest scripture I have in a recent paper. "Of course," he says, "we can live and move and finally die, without having any new forms or new hopes for the western intellect. We can have our thinking and creating done in New York, Boston or London, but but it is difficult to avoid the wish that the Mississippi valley might cease to be a literary beggar and might aspire to a personal independence.

It is difficult, but David Swing is ready to do it. It is his disciples, not he, who have declared that they separately exist. He said he had been up late at a dinner. I found it to be a literary club. I asked if there were any other scribe in the lot except himself. He named Frank Gilbert. There are 150 men in the society. But he said all men were literary men. He said Gunguisolus could edit The Herald or Tribune.

In the eyes of this master his disciples could do so little, what was the sense of one pretending to be a better scribe than the others? I find him in himself well wedded to the statu quo. The literati of Chicago—not a one of whom can write. I fear—this suits him. His own English is careless. What odds?

He kindly went with me to our Press club. The fellows received him with distinction, such as I have not seen them accord to another Chicagoan. Opie Read took his pipe out of his mouth and talked like a father. The guest ate shrilly, irresponsibly—ready to go. The young men came forward and expressed felicitously their deep sense of respect for him and his attainments. At the billiard table on the way out he took a cue and observed that he should have played billiards but for the fact that in many things save writing he was left handed. To hear people remark the fact chastised him. At the foot of the stairs his face was flushed. He had passed through a scene that tried his nerves. JOHN MCGOVERNS.

Advertisement for the North Western Railway, featuring a large illustration of a train and text describing its routes and services between Lincoln, Omaha, Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul.

Advertisement for the Missouri Pacific Railway, featuring a circular logo with the text "MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILWAY" and text describing its "FAST MAIL ROUTE" and "2-DAILY TRAINS" between Atchison, Lavenworth, St. Joseph, Kansas City, St. Louis, and other points.

Large advertisement for the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway, featuring a detailed map of the region and text describing its extensive network, including main lines, branches, and extensions, and highlighting its "MAGNIFICENT VESTIBULE EXPRESS TRAINS" and "WEDDING INVITATIONS" services.