

Modern Science Rehabilitates Soldiers Wounded in Battle

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At the present time there are many soldiers in the army hospitals in this country who have been crippled in the course of duty. In many cases these men are receiving the preliminary training which will be finished by civil boards authorized to continue the work begun by the surgeon-general. It is hoped that business men in general will accept these trained men on an equal footing with men who have not been crippled. These men will receive a training which will make them competent in the trade or profession which they elect to follow.

According to the vocational rehabilitation act recently enacted by congress, those disabled in the military and naval forces of the United States have been placed under the joint authority of the surgeon-general of the army and the federal board for vocational education. The surgeon-general has jurisdiction from the time the person is injured until he is restored to good physical condition, when he receives his honorable discharge from the service. The federal board then offers him vocational re-education and training which will enable him to return to useful active employment, and the United States employment service department will find him a job.

Discouragement

When a man is returned from the battle line disabled, with one or both feet or hands gone, or blind, life is likely to look to him like an utterly hopeless thing. Before he entered the service he lived a complete existence, and no matter what was his station in life he had the full, unhampered use of a normal and complete body.

Upon becoming a part of the war machine, life became more than ever an affair of action—strenuous action, in which he was constantly wearing himself to utter weariness, and then glorying in the added strength that came as the first fatigue wore off. He was subjected to training of which physical perfection was an ideal. When he got to the line, he had come fairly close to that ideal. He bordered on the superman.

And then—the crash. He became, it seemed to him, nothing, or worse than nothing; a mangled body with its spark of life, a body trained to the point of mastery, but now a pitiful, helpless body that he could not master.

Awaken Hope

Not only was the glorious strenuous life of the fighting man over, but the evenly-ordered, mild-mannered life of the normal civilian was likewise forbidden to him. He could not work, he could not play, he could not, perhaps, read, he could not move except with difficulty. There rose before him the vision of a blank existence as a crossing watchman or a pencil vendor. While the body lived on, the soul was deadened. Ambition was killed. For how can there be ambition when there is no hope?

The first step in the work of re-

construction, then, is to awaken the hope that arouses ambition.

A potent factor in getting the best of the disabled men's discouragement is informing them of the many instances where men, seemingly totally and hopelessly disabled, have refused to be downed by fate, have surmounted the obstacles imposed, and have "come back." As the work of reconstruction goes on, there are more and more of these cases to cite as an inspiration to men who have just been crippled in battle.

Choice of Trade

The choice of a trade to be learned depends not only on the nature of the disability of the man, and on what physical faculties he still retains, but just as much on his temperament and his natural inclinations. A line of activity is not decided on unless it is apparent that it will be congenial, and the sort of work to which the man in question is temperamentally suited.

The prospect of steady employment is also seriously considered. Disabled men are discouraged from taking up trades that for the moment are booming, but that will, in normal times, fall off in wages or in the matter of demand for help.

When possible, a man who is prevented by his injuries from continuing his former pursuit is encouraged to select a new occupation which is in some way related to it, so that he will be able to apply to his new work the knowledge and experience of the past. So it will be seen that the choice of occupation is not made in a haphazard or arbitrary manner. Expert vocational counselors advise the men according to the circumstances of each individual case.

Many Opportunities

There really is almost no end to the opportunities open to a man who has been, for the fortune of war, bereft of the complete use of his body. Boundless encouragement is indicated in this list, for instance, of agricultural occupations which may be pursued successfully by certain types of war cripples. It was prepared by the director of an agricultural school in France. The twenty-six occupations are:

Overseer (proprietor, farmer, worker or share system); small farming on the share system (labor); agricultural superintendent; gamekeeper; caretaker of properties; gardener; driver of agricultural machines; contractor for agricultural machinery, mechanic; vine-grower; nurseryman and seedsman; tree cultivator; cultivation of willow for basket-making industry; grazer (herd raising); cowherd; dairy employe; butter maker; cheese maker; steper and stripper of flax and hemp; cider maker; sheep raising expert; hog raising and fattening specialist; silk-worm industry; small live stock raising; rabbit raising; fish culture; bee culture.

And this is but one of the many fields open to war-mutilated men in this vast opportunity for vocational re-education.

In Canada the work that is just getting fairly well under way in our own country has long been in successful prosecution.

Canadian experience, a member of the military hospitals commission said recently, shows that of the wounded and disabled returned to Canada, only about ten per cent will be unable to return to their former occupations. The percentage of totally blind is small.

They are training their men there for about two hundred different occupations. Technical schools and institutions are being used, and, moreover, through the co-operation of manufacturers and employers, a great many men are being trained in the industries themselves. Those in charge of the work in Canada have not found any evidence of a desire on the part of the manufacturers to exploit the men, and they have received, one of their number has said, splendid co-operation from the labor men. Their whole aim is so to train the men that they will hold the jobs because of their efficiency, and not because of any compassion for them.

An aim of our general work of reconstruction is to fit men, disabled by war, for existing and standard industries, rather than to develop special

trades, devices and machinery. A man who has had this training should be able to go out and get a job in the same way that any other man would, fitting into normal demands, using regular tools and machines, getting ahead by his own ability.

Special concessions are not expected, or desired. The object is to make a man normal again. If he receives special consideration, the purpose of the work will be defeated. Every man or woman who gives alms but not opportunity to the disabled man—be he soldier, sailor or civilian—is an enemy of reconstruction, one of our own army officers said recently. One gift of money that is not actually earned may utterly stifle the ambition of a handicapped man.

"They don't want your charity—they demand their chance," is the way that a magazine writer has well put it. "We, the stay-at-homes, the brothers and sons of scarred and marred men sacrificing their persons, writhing in agony for our sakes—we must be reconstructed, too—must reconstruct our impulses—must lose the Tarpeian Rock attitude toward the crippled—must learn to measure the worth of a fellow by his enterprise and capacity and give him the preference at every post and in every engagement—if he can deliver the goods. A civilization that won't do its duty by its defenders isn't worth fighting for—prepare to prove that this one is."

Avenues of usefulness open up in

the most unexpected directions. Besides training men who have lost one or both legs in such pursuits, as stenography, telegraphy and other usual occupations involving manual dexterity, less well-known vocations are being pursued with gratifying success.

At Walter Reed hospital, in Washington, for instance, returned soldiers are making rugs, by the methods used by nomadic tribes of Asia. The beauty of the hand-made Oriental rug has never been attained with modern machines, so the secrets of making Persian and Turkish rugs are being taught to ex-bollermakers, carpenters, tinsmiths, bricklayers, men of countless former trades, who have given their best on the battlefields of France and are now applying that same enthusiasm in cheating the war devil.

All reconstructed soldiers are not to be returned immediately to civil life as soon as they are restored. Some will have a chance to get back into the war organization. Some injured soldiers will be able to go back to full duty and return to their units, after getting special training. Others, who can only be fitted for limited service, will be trained to act as instructors in hospitals, typists, bookkeepers and in similar vocations.

Special vocational training is for men no longer fit for military service. But no soldiers will be discharged from the service, it has been announced, even though they are unfit for further military duty, until they have attained a complete recovery, according to the nature of their wounds.

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