

1. I have had occasion, holding the charge of this parish, to become intimately acquainted with the many disastrous effects of the system as it respects the pensioners and their families, and the great embarrassments consequent upon it in the administration of funds for the relief of the poor.

2. I cannot at this moment state the number of commuted pensioners who have become burthensome to the charity dispensed at the vestry; nor would it be by any means easy to do so, because several of the gentlemen who have there attended in their rotation of duty have probably omitted, when applicants of this description have presented themselves, to enter this particular circumstance in the book. If they are in health, moreover, they and their families are not considered subjects for relief according to the rules of the vestry; but the urgency of their wants has often been admitted as a dispensation from a rigid observance of rule. Having been on duty last week myself, I caused it to be noted whenever the applicants were commuted pensioners or members of their families, and the proportion of such applicants from that time, I can, in a day or two, state if required.

As to the more general inquiry with which the question is closed, I can only say that it is notorious that the streets swarm with beggars of the most wretched description in the shape of commuted pensioners and their families; and that the sufferings which many of them have undergone in the rigours of a Canadian winter, have been such as frequently to obliterate the recollection of the imprudences which have brought them on, as well as to disarm a feeling, which very generally prevails, that they are an odious and, in a manner, an unfair burthen imposed upon the charity of the city.

The Military Committee who administer to soldiers' widows and others, having a claim upon the compassion of the army, the collections made in church among the troops, have done what they could for these unfortunate objects; but they found them multiply so fast upon their hands, that, fearing they would swallow up the fund, they established a rule to relieve no commuted pensioners: from which, however, they are induced occasionally to depart, upon the same grounds which have influenced the vestry as stated above.

3. I presume that an exact account may be procured from the proper officers of the pensioners who have actually settled upon their land. I can only speak from the vast numbers who do not attempt to establish themselves upon their land, and the many who make a beginning, and abandon it to beg in Quebec. The actual settlers do not fall under my observation; but, from my too painful observation of the others, I should judge them to be very few indeed; and I believe that a great deal of the land has got into the hands of land-jobbers. (This, however, I do not say from any precise and positive information.)

I have been informed at the Commissariat-office that between 50,000*l.* to 60,000*l.* has been there paid out during the last summer to pensioners alone; and I believe that by far the greater proportion of the persons who received this money are now in a state of beggary. It is truly melancholy to reflect how large a proportion of the money itself has been spent in public-houses.

I have also learnt at the Commissariat that a printed address to these pensioners, which was drawn up by one of the churchwardens of this parish, exhorting them to lodge their money in the savings-bank, was quite without effect. Copies were put into their hands when they received their money, with an offer to send a person to conduct them to the bank, but there was hardly an instance in which they would listen to the proposal.

4. My opinion, generally, as it regards the present system, may sufficiently be gathered from my answers to the foregoing questions. I certainly regard the experiment as a complete and utter failure—more than a failure—it has brought ruin and misery upon the unfortunate subjects whom it was intended to benefit. In very many instances it has brought them to death.

As to the cause of the failure, I do not think it is to be found generally in "physical disability," but in the improvident habits of the pensioners, and their unfitness, generally speaking (for, of course, there are exceptions), for the routine of clearing and cultivating land. Men who have led a wandering military life heretofore, unaccustomed to steady labour, and not dependent upon it for their support, acting, in many respects, in mechanical obedience to martial discipline,—when they are made the masters of a large sum of money at once, and their own masters at the same time, and when they are herding together with old comrades, among whom habits of intemperance, more or less, prevail; such men so circumstanced, with the temptation, on one side, of the multitudes of public-houses which this city exhibits, and the cheapness of rum; and the uninviting task, on the other, of going into the depths of the forest to hew down trees for their habitation, and their clearing, with half a year's winter to contend with, are not calculated to make good settlers in Canada. I have spoken with great freedom of the effect of measures planned by greater and wiser persons than myself, but human sagacity could not foresee all the peculiar local difficulties which would impede the prosperous operation of the experiment; and in my humble judgment, it could only successfully be tried in the case of picked men of known and tried steadiness of character, combined with physical activity and strength.

I could support the foregoing observations by a multitude of examples, but I will only adduce one case, which is that of an old pensioner labouring under hernia, who, by his own confession, had 100*l.* at his disposal in 1831, when he came to this country. Before the winter set in, a very great part of it was expended in public-houses; upon the near approach