

REPORT

Of the Committee on Revolutionary Pensions on the petition of Daniel Small, Elias Foss, Benjamin Day, and Harvey Libby, praying an extension of the provisions of the Revolutionary Pension acts.

FEBRUARY 2, 1825.

Read: Ordered that it lie upon the table.

The Committee on Revolutionary Pensions, to whom was referred the petition of Daniel Small, Elias Foss, and others, inhabitants of the town of Limington, in the state of Maine, have had the same under consideration; and

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The petitioners set forth, in substance, that they were soldiers in the army of the United States during the Revolutionary war, and have long entertained the expectation that Congress would adopt measures to reward and compensate the surviving officers and soldiers of that army, for their fatigues, privations, and losses; that this expectation was partially realized by the Pension Act of the year 1818, designed for the relief of those in indigent circumstances, under which many for a short time received a small pittance, who, by a subsequent modification of the law, were stricken from the pension list. The petitioners express their opinion, that the act of 1818, is unequal, as it has no regard to particular merit, privations, and losses, nor to any difference in the soldier's term of service; and indefinite, "as it is impossible (they say) to draw a correct line among the many claimants, who are so nearly equal, in their means of supporting themselves:"—that many are receiving pensions whose services were less, and whose circumstances are easier, than those of other applicants whose claims are rejected: that pensions are granted to some who were supported by towns, parishes, or corporations, and that in these cases, towns, parishes, or corporations, are relieved rather than the pensioners. The petitioners further state, that some of them served the whole, others, a greater part of the war, and endured its privations and hardships, until the object of the contest was obtained; that they

enjoy the blessing of liberty in common with others, but have received for their services only a small stipend in depreciated currency, and returned to their families in poverty. The petitioners pray that Congress will alter or modify the pension laws, or pass a new one which shall "reach the case of every one, according to their respective merits, or at least shall do justice to every one where losses can be proved."

So far as the application of the petitioners relates to losses of property sustained in the Revolutionary war, the subject properly belongs to another committee. It is believed that no law, on the subject of revolutionary pensions, could be devised, so perfect as not to be liable, in its operation, to some objections. If an act should be passed embracing the cases of all the individuals who were engaged in the revolutionary contest, some portion of the pensions granted by it would still operate incidentally to the benefit of towns, parishes, and corporations; or if the attempt should be made "to reach the case of every one according to their respective merits," it would doubtless still happen in many instances, that less deserving individuals would receive large portions of the public bounty, than others, of greater merit. If the act of 1818 is justly complained of by the petitioners as "indefinite," in consequence (as they allege) of the impossibility of drawing a correct line or (distinction) among the many claimants who are so nearly equal in their means of supporting themselves," the committee believe that it would also be extremely difficult, if not utterly impracticable, especially after the lapse of so many years, to distinguish, with any tolerable degree of accuracy, between the relative merits of all the surviving soldiers of the revolution.

A material question presented by the petition, for the consideration of the committee, is, the expediency of extending the provisions of the Revolutionary Pension Acts, so as to embrace the cases of all the surviving soldiers of the Revolutionary army. The original Pension Act of the year 1818 confines the granting of pensions to those soldiers who served the requisite time, on the Continental establishment, and who, (coming, in other respects, within the provisions of the Act,) by reason of their reduced circumstances in life, shall be in need of assistance from their country for support.

In the year 1820, the subject of Revolutionary Pensions was deliberately reviewed by Congress. The necessity for this review, as the committee believe, was occasioned, not only by the rapid increase of the list of pensioners beyond what was anticipated, at the time of the passage of the act, and the corresponding burthen upon the Treasury; but also, in consequence of many individuals having availed themselves of the benefit of the law, who did not stand in need of the assistance of their country for support, and who, were therefore, not its proper objects. The supplementary act of May 1st, 1820, sanctioned the principle, by which the granting of pensions was limited to the indigent, by directing the Secretary of War, on the receipt of the schedule of property, and the oath required by the act, to strike from the pension list the names of all persons, who, in his opinion,

were not in such indigent circumstances as to be unable to support themselves without the assistance of their country. The Pension Acts were again reviewed in 1823. An examination of the supplementary act of the 1st of March, of that year, will show that the same restrictive principle was again sanctioned, and the committee are under the impression that more than one proposition, at various times made, to extend the provisions of the acts to those persons who served in the militia, were negatived.

From what is above stated, it appears that Congress, in repeated instances, have virtually determined that the principles of the Pension Acts are as comprehensive as is consistent with a proper regard to the financial resources of the Government, and that it is inexpedient to extend them to the cases of those persons who performed militia services during the Revolutionary War; or to those who served on the Continental establishment, but who do not stand in need of the assistance of their country for support.

The committee beg leave to repeat, what was observed by them on another occasion, that the amount paid to Revolutionary Pensioners, under the present acts, restricted as their provisions are, was, for the year 1823, upwards of one million four hundred and forty-nine thousand dollars, and to invalid and half-pay pensioners, upwards of three hundred and thirty thousand dollars; and that within the last eight years, there has been paid "to the pensioners of the Revolution," the sum of nine millions four hundred thousand dollars, as appears by the last annual report of the Secretary of the Treasury.

The committee are not insensible to the merits of those individuals who served their country with fidelity and zeal, either in the militia, or on the Continental establishment, in the Revolutionary struggle; and they are impressed with the belief, that, if Congress should consult their wishes and feelings alone, a disposition would be found to award to all who were engaged in that struggle ample pecuniary allowances: they conceive, however, that the enjoyment, by the surviving soldiers of the Revolution, of the invaluable rights and privileges secured by their services and sufferings, and the certainty of transmitting those rights and privileges to their children, are among the noblest rewards of patriotism and valor.

To provide for the payment of liberal pensions to all those persons who were engaged in the Revolutionary contest, and who yet survive, including those who are not in such indigent circumstances as to need the assistance of their country for support;—if within the ability of the treasury, would, it is believed, seriously embarrass the financial operations of the Government.

After the most mature consideration, which the committee have been enabled to bestow upon the subject-matter of the petition, they are of opinion that it is inexpedient to extend the provisions of the Pension Acts, as prayed for by the petitioners, and therefore deem it their duty to recommend the adoption of the following resolution, viz:

Resolved, That it is inexpedient to grant the prayer of the petitioners.

