

ently. Nay, a single citizen could, if he so desired, call upon the law of the State to restrain him after election. The majority concluded to take a chance on natural law. They felt in a dim and half conscious way that if natural law had held the planets in their orbits and had made two and two, when added together, four since the beginning of time, possibly it would sustain Houston during one man's term of office. Besides, any citizen could stop him at any time with an injunction. The plunge was made. Pastoriza suspended as much of the statutory law as he thought his fellow citizens could stand—for he had to consider the solitary chucklehead who might swear out an injunction. The heavens did not fall. Houston did not sink into the earth. The milk in the cows' udders did not curdle. A great many people lived in momentary fear that these and other things would happen, but they were restrained from action by the opinion of their neighbors. A man may feel in his own mind that the earth is flat, but he will hesitate about swearing out an injunction against a ship that proposes to sail around it.



Mr. Pastoriza shut his eyes tight when he looked for personal property, and opened them just a little bit when he looked for houses; but when he came to vacant lots his eyes were wide open. This of course was very naughty; for statute law commanded him to keep his eyes open all the time, and he was putting his office in jeopardy by giving any heed to natural law, which forbade him even to squint at houses or any other products of labor. The strangest thing about it all was that no citizen of Houston could be found with sufficient courage to go into court and attempt to prove that the earth was flat. A good many still thought so, and a few said so; but none had the audacity to take their belief into court. They chose rather to wait till the next election, when the secret ballot would enable them to oust Mr. Pastoriza without themselves betraying the fact that it was their heads, and not the world, that was flat. But when election day came it was found that a greater number of voters than before expressed approval of the natural law. Then the popular Tax Commissioner squinted worse than before in making his assessment—except when he came to vacant lots. When he assessed lots he used the Texas measuring stick. Still no one had him enjoined, though a fewer number talked louder than before. Now this audacious man approaches another election. He again announces his allegiance to natural law, and challenges any one to

enter the lists with him—and no one dares to pick up the gage he has thrown down. By suspending some of the Texas statute laws, and permitting natural law to operate, Houston has found it easier to do business, and the flattest-headed man in town is ashamed to interrupt it. One man, backed by natural law, is a host. s. c.



The South Dakota Legislature's Duty.

In abolishing capital punishment the South Dakota legislature has made a beginning at following the recommendations made by Governor Byrne in his remarkably sound and progressive message. But the most important recommendation remains still to be followed, the one in regard to a change in the tax system so as to differentiate between land and products of labor. This is the more important because it will be not only a wise fiscal measure but the beginning of a badly needed social reform. The Governor has done his duty in pointing the way to place the State in the van of progressive and prosperous commonwealths. The legislature's plain duty is to follow. s. d.



Conserving the Rights of the People.

Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior, makes a clear statement of the people's rights in the water power on the lands controlled by the Federal Government. The ownership of this power, he says, must not be permitted to pass into private hands, as has been the previous policy of the country; but should be leased to developing companies on terms that will permit a fair return to capital, and at the same time secure the lowest rates to consumers. Secretary Lane thinks the Ferris bill, which has passed the House and is now pending in the Senate, conserves these rights, and meets the present situation as nearly as present knowledge and conditions will permit. That phrase, "as nearly as present knowledge and conditions will permit," should not be lost sight of, either by the public or by its representatives. It is because legislators in the past have ignored such limitations that we are now having so much difficulty in righting the mischief that has come from their ignorant actions. By presuming to grant in perpetuity rights that morally they could hold only during their own lives, they have so bound the world that the people can secure no relief today except by repealing laws that have hitherto been looked upon as unrepealable. The Secretary himself verges upon this error when he says: "With possibly few exceptions the valuable power sites on lands not

owned by the Federal Government have passed into private ownership in perpetuity. They can not be recovered except at a prohibitive expense, nor can control be exercised thereover in any manner, except it be by regulation of transmission and delivery as a public utility."



Such an admission begs the whole question of natural rights. It cannot be stated too often that the earth belongs to the living; that this generation has the same right to it that the first generation had; and that it has no more right over it than the last generation will have. Each generation in turn has not only the right to use the earth, but the right to repeal the laws passed by any preceding generation that tend to limit that right. To say that power, generated by water that has been falling for countless ages, was free to anybody up to the moment that Congress passed an act, and that from that moment on to the end of time it became the private property of the person upon whom it was conferred, and to his heirs and assigns, is a monstrous perversion of reason and a denial of every sense of justice. Were there no other alternative it would be the right of this generation flatly to repeal any act of any preceding generation that interfered with present rights. Fortunately, however, it is not necessary to resort to any such drastic action. The very act that conferred title to water power upon private individuals limited that title by the obligation to pay whatever taxes might be assessed upon it. The amount of that power to tax is not limited. Hence, whenever the public comes to an understanding of the situation it can recover all the substance of its rights in the alienated water powers through the simple means of taxation. If there be any who wish to plead ignorance of such limitation to their right, let them heed the warning that is now heard upon every hand. The coming generation is certain to tax land values, and those who are unwilling to submit to such a tax should turn their holdings into labor products.

S. C.



Oklahoma's Plight.

Oklahoma was opened for settlement 26 years ago. The first comers were allowed to take each for himself a 160 acre farm or a town lot. No one could legally take more than his share. After five years' residence these settlers secured absolute title. So here was a pretty fair approximation to a State of small landowners or peasant proprietors. After 26 years what is the result? According to Mr. O. M. Morris of Duncan, a member of the Oklahoma

legislature, writing in the January number of the *International Socialist Review*, about 90 per cent of the farms of the State are mortgaged for all that they will sell for. The census of 1910 shows a majority of farmers to be tenants and 76 per cent to be either renters or mortgagors. In less than a quarter of a century a State of small independent proprietors has become one of tenants. There is nothing very strange about it. It is the inevitable result of a land system under which industry is penalized through taxation of labor products, and encouragement is offered to land speculation and other predatory activities.



Oklahoma has only gone through the experience of other places in a somewhat shorter time. Wherever private individuals are allowed to appropriate land values for their own use speculation becomes the primary object of land ownership, and productive use becomes secondary. Had Oklahoma legislators of twenty years ago been wise the State would not have gotten into its present plight. Had they provided that land values be taken in lieu of all taxation for public purposes the land would have remained in the hands of those who wanted to use it, and would have been kept out of the hands of those whose hope of profit is in the industry of others. When Oklahoma's constitution was framed provision was made therein for many things. But the framers overlooked the vital land question. It is not too late, however, for the people to remedy the oversight.

S. D.



Praying for Public Revenue.

"Has Heaven one million for schools?" asks the *Chicago Tribune* of January 23 in reporting the fact that the local school fund for this year is short by that amount. The *Tribune* is the last paper that should ask such a question. One reason why the shortage exists is the *Tribune's* lease on school property which enables it to withhold legally every year thousands of dollars morally due the school fund. It would be quite in order for the School Board to ask the *Tribune* to do the fair thing, overlook its legal power, and pay to the schools all that it has withheld since its lease began. That would be a less humiliating and much fairer method than what has been proposed—that the teachers make up the deficit out of their well-earned salaries.



To ask Heaven for a donation of one million dollars or any other sum for public expenses would