

social ills, but it will educate the masses regarding those ills and provide the means of applying effectually whatever remedy proves best.

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Another result is the generation of a social consciousness as against the old insane spirit of party fealty. Men to-day will even refuse to consider thoroughly the proposals of an opposing party; or, even if they favor those proposals, will remain silent. But an entirely new alignment of forces appears when a referendum is taken. Men disregard party and vote their convictions upon issues so presented. A higher good is visibly at stake than party success—the good of all. In this atmosphere is born a new conception of citizenship and a passion for social service.

Did you note Mr. Johnson's word, "the voters as a rule desire to serve the best interests of the people"? Thus the field of what we may call the social psychology of the Referendum opens before us. We may not now follow its pleasant, cheering pathways, but I trust I have made clear the truth that the most important consequence of Direct Legislation is not the intrinsic value of the laws that are voted up or down, but the fact that the *people are doing it*. The social intelligence and political muscle so developed render it easy for the people to take care of themselves in any emergency. If they make mistakes, they can readily rectify them and learn caution from that experience.

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From this school of citizenship there comes forth a body of voters who cannot be fooled, who cannot be bribed to sell their birthright for a mess of pottage, and who cannot be frightened since the exercise of their powers brings self-confidence and courage.

In such a democracy it is impossible for tyranny of any type to flourish, and the "man-on-horseback" type of leader shall find scant room for the display of his personality, however spectacular that may be, or the exercise of his dangerous powers.

"Has the President of Switzerland returned from abroad?" "I do not know, but he lives just across the street. You can find out there." *O wise Swiss!*

GEORGE JUDSON KING.

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I suppose the result must be . . . the establishment of society under a wholly new idea. . . . The leading features of any such radical change must be a deep modification of the institution of property—certainly in regard to land, and probably in regard to much else.—Harriet Martineau.

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE

THE SOMERS SYSTEM FOR VALUING REAL ESTATE.

Cleveland, June 26.

The unit system of valuing land and buildings used in the recent quadrennial valuations in Cleveland, was devised by Mr. W. A. Somers (vol. x, p. 2), formerly City Engineer of St. Paul, Minn. He started an investigation which resulted in the completion of this system about sixteen years ago, and during all these years he has been a close observer and careful investigator of site values in very many of the large cities of the United States. His system undertakes to furnish persons charged with the appraisal of land values in cities, with a standard of measurement.

The Somers unit system itself may be likened to a yard stick. It is a method by which judgments of value may be easily applied to sites having varying conditions and differing sizes and shapes.

Into the value of a city lot enter three factors. These three factors are location, size, shape. Comparing the value of one lot with another, one must necessarily compare or attempt to compare three factors on one hand with three on the other. The impossibility of comparing three separate and distinct things with three other separate and distinct things must be apparent to any one. The trouble that we have always had in ascertaining land values is largely due to the failure to recognize the existence of these three factors. Obviously to make an intelligent comparison, two of the three factors must be eliminated.

Under the Somers unit system, size and shape are at first eliminated and only location is considered. Thus we are able to compare street with street, block with block, one side of the street with the other side of the same street—comparisons that are easily made.

This makes it easy, first, for the appraiser to use the knowledge and judgment that he may possess in comparing and arriving at valuations; and, second, for the people of the community to convey to the appraiser their notion of the comparative values of various locations.

The size and shape are eliminated by assuming a lot a foot wide and one hundred feet deep in every instance. Thus, at all times we are considering the same size and shape. That being so, we pay no attention to the size and shape of any particular lot but simply compare one location with another. Location, of course, is the chief factor in the value of a city site. Every such site gets its value through its frontage, because through its frontage there is access to the life and business of the city, and in no other way can there be such access.

By obtaining values on unit feet, as they are called, the whole method of appraisal is simplified; and when such unit feet are valued, the application of the value to varying sizes and differing shapes and locations, with reference to corners and alleys, is performed mathematically by means of a table of values that Mr. Somers after very wide investigation has devised. Lots that have various depths have a

certain percentage of value as compared with the unit value. For instance, a lot fifty feet deep from the front has 72½ per cent of the value of a lot one hundred feet deep, the widths being the same. But a lot one hundred and fifty feet deep has 115 per cent of the value of a lot one hundred feet deep, widths being the same. Mr. Somers has worked out the value of each foot so that any depth may be computed.

When two streets intersect, the values in both rise as the intersection is approached. This upward tendency has been called, for want of a better term, the "corner influence." Mr. Somers has found that this "corner influence" extends not to exceed 100 feet from the corner on both streets—not evenly nor by jumps, but in a rapidly falling curve from the corner, the course of the curve being entirely dependent upon the effect of one value upon another. Therefore, every time there is a differing relation of values on the two streets there will be differing conditions as a result. Scarcely any two corners, especially in the business section of a city, are alike, and no percentage rule will fit. If, perchance, one should by accident hit upon the proper percentage to add to the ordinary value of a given lot because it is on a corner, it would be found that the same percentage would not apply in the case of any other corner lot.

By dividing each corner influence into 100 squares of 10 feet each, and diagramming all the lots at a given corner upon these 100 squares, the values of each owner are distinguished. By adding up the values of each of the squares in the assignment to each owner, the values are properly and equitably distributed; provided, of course, that it is possible to find out in any way the value of each square when the unit value on each contributing street is known. It is exactly this information that Mr. Somers has worked out.

Each combination of two unit values necessitates its own table, and to work out this computation access must be had to these tables, several hundred in number. Other tables based upon the same underlying principles have been devised for the purpose of computing the values of irregularly shaped plots, of corner lots with acute or obtuse angles.

Mr. Somers has also devised an equitable plan of assigning additional values to lots abutting upon alleys or public places that are not thoroughfares and that are used for purposes of light, area and access for merchandise.

To value buildings, Mr. Somers divides all buildings into four classes in accordance with their use, and each of these classes is sub-divided into divisions in accordance with their construction. It is a comparatively easy matter to measure each building to be valued, and ascertain by investigation the cost of material and labor to produce a square foot or cubic foot, as the case may be, for any one of the divisions referred to. The calculation to ascertain the total value of any building is thus found to be very simple. From this reconstruction of value must of course be taken an agreed amount for age, condition and lack of utility, if any.

I have attempted to describe as briefly as possible and in a very general way the practical side of the application of the Somers unit system. It is a scientific and mathematical tool by which values of prop-

erty, largely intangible, may be ascertained easily, satisfactorily and quickly.

E. W. DOTY.

INCIDENTAL SUGGESTIONS

WE HAVE SINNED.

Chicago.

One day, now many years ago, I found John P. Altgeld reading a copy of *The Public* in which was given an account of a banquet held in New York city by the "get together" Democrats, who are always for harmony when they can lead the procession and dictate party policies. Bryan had been defeated twice, and they believed that he surely would not trouble the party again. The slogan was: "Get together, you lean hungry Democrats—so long out of office—and unite on some acceptable candidate, and drive the Republicans out of power." Midnight approached and no discordant sound had been heard. The knowing ones winked at each other, as if to say, "All's well." Finally our friend C. E. S. Wood of Oregon got up and discharged such a fusillade of anti-monopoly material that these representatives of predatory wealth were dismayed. "Oh, Schilling," said Altgeld, "I can't tell you how glad I am to know that the time has finally come when these pirates can't meet anywhere any more without some one's getting up and exposing their designs."

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I thought of all this the other day when I learned that the Evanston Congregational Church Club had been discussing the subject of graft as manifested by the last legislature of our State. Some of these church members confessed their shame in having worked and voted for the member who is accused of having distributed the "jack pot;" others regretted the lack of strength and moral fiber that make up the characters of many of our public men. "Graft everywhere!" they exclaimed. "Graft in San Francisco, in Pittsburg, in Chicago and Springfield! Graft in the nation, in the State, in the city! O Lord, deliver us: what must we do?" Finally our friend A. P. Canning got the floor and said:

"Brethren, the fact of nation-wide graft is admitted, ranging from small amounts to the gift of a nation's natural resources by political puppets. The request of the first speaker, that he be considered a transgressor, because he aided in the election of one of the officials under charges, is a hopeful sign. No doubt the man was honest when you elected him, and surely the people are not guiltless when they turn into the political arena millions of dollars in franchises and special privileges as prizes for Big Business and weak politicians. I am glad we are approaching this graft problem today in the attitude of sinners, and not of pharisees; the spirit of the 'publican' will work wonders in politics, just as it does in religion. Is it any wonder so many of our young men of excellent reputation go to our legislative halls fired with an ambition to serve the country, but return dishonored and disgraced? Honesty and integrity will accomplish much if you give it a chance. But vice becomes very alluring when the only key that opens the door to dignity and fame is