

## A Water-Logged Ship of State

**W**HAT are the true functions of government? To what degree may legislation go in its purely restrictive features, beyond the preservation of equal liberty? The question is not easy to answer, but the answer would be easier if the question were more frequently asked. It is one of the current superstitions of a political democracy that there is no limit to the uses of legislation. Thus it comes about that the volume of laws is so great in every state as to beggar calculation; federal legislation is almost equally voluminous.

Many of these laws are so full of absurdities and contradictions as to add greatly to the number of lawyers, thus making an unnecessary addition to a largely unproductive class of the population. No theory of limitation or check upon the output of these legislative factories is applied, the only limit being the length of the sessions and the physical endurance of the legislators. According to Thomas R. Preston, president of the Hamilton National Bank at Chattanooga, Congress and the forty-eight states have passed 132,000 new laws.

Writing twelve years ago, the Hon. Samuel W. McCall, in his "Business of Congress," called attention to the enormous bulk of America's federal laws, in the making of which the United States is easily the foremost among civilized peoples. He says that few men can be familiar with the multitude of these statutes, and that the mass of present-day citizens can know little or nothing about them. The Sixty-seventh Congress passed 921 laws in the 624 days of its active life.

In every state in the Union there are warehouse commissions, railroad commissions, special commissions, and scores of utility boards. The literature of these, combined with that of the federal commissions, comprise an extensive library which few could hope to read in a lifetime. The reports of the Interstate Commerce Commission alone form a collection of many bulky volumes.

It is to the interest of the people to have "least government;" it is to the interest of the politicians to have "most government," for this means more salaries for their class and more jobs for their underlings. This furnishes the "irrepressible conflict" between the forces that make for and against good government. As long as the public is apathetic about these matters the victory is with the politicians, while the people are putting extra burdens on themselves and on every conscientious official.

It is time that the whole process was reversed, for as it is, ideal citizenship is becoming impossible, and the people are being swept into an engulfing anarchy of law. Laws multiplied without restraint, of whose meaning and intent few can be certain, are little better than no laws at all, and by making of today's situation a hopeless muddle for the citizens are fast bringing government into contempt.

JOSEPH DANA MILLER in *Christian Science Monitor*.

## Problem In Land Values

**T**HE kernel of the problem is in the land "values"; in this Mr. Quick is absolutely right. It is noteworthy that between 1910 and 1920 the largest increase "in value" per acre of farms (except in the cotton States) was in the middle corn and spring wheat States where the present distress is most acute, and where yields—especially wheat—show the most conspicuous decline.

We are asked in a word, to guarantee the spring wheat producer, who raises less than ten bushels to the acre on high "valued" land, "profit" on his work. There is no way under heaven to do this save by taking the money from some one else's pocket, no matter what process be adopted. Such "farmers" are marginal producers and never can be anything else while they "farm" in this way. One must sympathize with their distress, but one must also face the facts as to its source.

THOS. F. WOODLOCK, in *N. Y. Sun*.

## Assessments For Subways

**I**N his opinion supporting the legality of special assessments for part of the cost of the proposed Sixth Avenue subway, Corporation Counsel Nicholson mentions the "special, actual and tangible benefits" the properties to be taxed would enjoy. A study of the benefits from subway construction was largely responsible for the amendment to the Rapid Transit Act under which it is proposed to levy these assessments.

Sixteen years ago the Transit Committee of the City Club made a survey of land values in Upper Manhattan and the Bronx served by the branches of the original subway which had been in operation seven years. Previous to 1900 these areas had been increasing in value about the same proportion as in the city as a whole. After the subway was built the values rose much more rapidly. Careful calculation showed this excess to be \$80,500,000.

The cost of the old subway was \$43,000,000. Land-owners north of 135th Street and in the Bronx area could have paid for the whole line, and would even then have nearly doubled the money they put into it. If they had paid for only the sections of the subway in areas in which this gain was recorded, the cost of the improvement would have been 15 per cent. of the profit in Manhattan and 18 per cent. in the Bronx.

The result of this study of land values was the law permitting the assessment plan in subway building. Borough President Miller's proposed Sixth Avenue subway is its first practical application.

For sixteen years the city has been taxed and taxed to pay for subways. Enormous values have been created by the Brooklyn extensions, the Lexington and Seventh Avenue lines. A few property-owners have profited.