

"I, indeed, for I bought them of Lycurgus, as you know, Socrates."

"It was he who made the land laws and went away, instead of adopting a Constitution, lest wiser men should change them." [Editor's Note.—Socrates appears to be mistaken here.] "But you, Bicyclades, do you let the farmers have those lots to farm?"

"No, for the farmers are poor; they cannot pay all that the land may be worth in five years, Socrates."

"Are they not poor because they have to work upon poor or distant lands?"

"It certainly seems that that would make them poor."

"But these poor men would get rich by tilling that valuable land if you would let them."

"It seems so, Socrates."

"Do you get produce from it, Bicyclades?"

"No, it produces nothing now; you know that I am land-poor, O Socrates."

"Then is it not you who would rightly be called 'a farmer,' Bicyclades, if you make other men poor in order to keep yourself poor also?"

"It is time that you drank your hemlock, Socrates."—The Game of Life, by Bolton Hall.

\* \* \*

### STATE AND MUNICIPAL OWNERSHIP IN SWEDEN.

#### VI. MUNICIPAL OWNERSHIP.

For The Public.

It is evident that in a country where the proper functions of government in regard to public ownership have been recognized by the national administration as they have been in Sweden, the municipalities could not have overlooked the duties involved in local government. Wherever it has become a fixed principle, recognized by the people, that certain public service cannot with advantage be left in the hands of private interests, there this principle will manifest itself in local as well as in state administration.

In Sweden the possibilities for the municipalities to own and operate plants for public service have been greatly facilitated by the extensive right to local self-government conferred upon the municipalities. This right is an ancient one in that country. It is not a product of modern legislation, but an inheritance from the time of the Vikings, although it has been, of course, properly defined as to its limitations in later years. In all affairs of a strictly local nature the national government has little or no power of intervention. In some cases its sanction to certain resolutions is required, as, for instance, in cases of involving the municipalities in public debt. But this is more a formality than a check on the authority of the local body, for hardly any cases are on record where the national government has overruled the municipality.

Each municipality can acquire for ownership and operation any kind of property. If in doing so any private interests should come to suffer, the proper redress will be sought for in the common courts, where the case will be tried in the same manner as a case between two conflicting private interests. The power of the local government also includes the power of taxation for all local purposes. The mu-

## The Public

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municipality may tax one, two or all of the groups subject to taxation, namely: 1, real estate not improved in respect to buildings on same; 2, real estate with buildings; and 3, income of capital or labor. At present all these various sources for revenue are utilized, but the very right of the municipalities to exclude some items from taxation at will may in some future day prove of great value in carrying through a tax reform, which is no less urgent in Sweden than in any other country.

The subjects for municipal ownership as usually understood by this expression are gas works, electric light plants, water works, and street car systems. The larger cities and municipalities own all their own gas works, 28 in all. Most of these were originally established by private companies, but the people soon realized what private operation of the gas works meant, as well in regard to prices as in regard to the quality of the service. The old gas plants were all acquired by the cities by purchase, according to agreements made at the time of granting the franchise. In fact it has become an established rule never to grant any franchises to public service corporations without entering a clause providing for the right of the municipality to acquire the property at a certain price, determined mainly by the actual cost of buildings and equipment. This course has been often followed by the national government also, in regard to private railroads, and in some cases the right has been made use of, adding to the state railway system some of its very most important and paying lines. It must be understood, however, that in doing so, there has been no violation of any private rights or interests. Individual investors have always been compensated in full, and although some complaints were heard from those who were not any longer permitted to share large dividends at the expense of the public, public opinion has always been in favor of having the public own what the public can conduct to the best advantage of the majority.

If now we return to the question of municipal gas works, one example may suffice. The price of gas in Stockholm is about 70 cents for 1,000 cubic feet, and the gas is of excellent quality. When comparing the price with the price charged elsewhere, we must also consider that the domestic coal supply of Sweden is totally insufficient for the country's demand, and the coal used for the gas works has to be imported from England and Germany, which adds materially to the price of coal in Sweden. However, in spite of the low price asked for gas, and the disadvantage of the country in regard to insufficient domestic coal supply, the gas works of Stockholm are a source of considerable revenue for the city, netting about \$600,000 a year. What this figure means is more easily comprehended when considering that Stockholm is a city not fully as large as Cleveland, and that gas is by no means used as extensively in the former city as in the latter. It can cause no wonder that the private gas companies in this country are guarding their franchise "rights" so zealously when evidence of public ownership, which they themselves admit is not as economical, and consequently not as profitable, shows such enormous success. In view of this the public is more to be blamed for permitting the extortion to continue than the gas companies for making use of rights conferred upon them by the

## Spread Democratic Principles Now

A subscriber said to us recently: "In those parts of my town where a number of new subscriptions to THE PUBLIC were obtained some months ago, we made a much better showing for municipal ownership, at the last election, than we expected to." Others in other localities have often spoken or written to the same effect. It is a recognition of the success of THE PUBLIC in teaching and spreading democratic principles.

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THE PUBLIC has been reduced in price from \$2.00 to \$1.00 yearly, in order to place it easily within the reach of all. Moreover, it has been enlarged in size and improved in form. In making these changes the publishers relied upon securing promptly a much larger circulation. The circulation is increasing steadily, but it is essential to our purpose this year that it increase much more rapidly. The time is especially favorable for the extension of our influence.

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voters. For although corrupt councils may have been the immediate cause of giving away public franchises without discrimination, and without any obligations on the part of the corporation, the fact remains that it was by the will of the voters these councilmen were elected; and it cannot too often be repeated that it is a thoughtless and empty phrase to say that no matter whom you elect they will serve their own ends when in office. This is to accuse oneself of inability to be honest and it is an insult to American integrity. In private affairs dishonest employes are dismissed. Let the public make it a rule to dismiss also the dishonest employes of the public life, and public ownership need carry with it no apprehensions.

Equally successful with the gas works of the Swedish municipalities have been the electric light plants, many localities, some of which have only a few thousand inhabitants, possess their own electric light plants. As a curiosity it may be mentioned that Hernosand, a town of about 7,000 inhabitants, was the first municipality in Europe to establish an electric plant for street illumination. Statistical information is meager as to the actual financial outcome of many of the municipal-owned plants, because public ownership has in Sweden been considered as such a self-evident phenomenon that there never was a reason for collecting the facts for argumentative or agitative purposes. However, if popular opinion be awarded any esteem for good judgment, we must admit that municipal ownership has proven no less a success in Sweden than has state ownership. No one has ever suggested that private corporations would handle the business to greater advantage for the public. Corrupt councilmen are practically unknown, a very evident fact when considering that the private interests which induce corruption are eliminated. Publicity and a well devised merit system in all governmental service have been reducing the temptations and the possibilities for dishonesty in public life to a minimum.

Private water works have been wholly unknown to municipal life in Sweden. It was so evident that to supply the inhabitants with water was a proper public function, that no thought was ever given to private enterprise in this connection. As water is so necessary a commodity the rule has also always been to conduct the water works with a view to simply paying expenses, and not to try to gain any revenue for the city's treasury from this source.

The street railways in Sweden are comparatively little developed. The cause for this is that Sweden has only a very few cities of such dimensions as to make street car lines a necessity. It must also be borne in mind that the cities of the European continent are always more congested than American or English cities and occupy a very much smaller space for the same population. Only the three largest cities in the country are provided with street car systems, but recently there has been a strong movement for the development of this convenience all over the country. The municipalities, however, are wisely conservative before entering into any new transactions. When thoroughly convinced that there is a need for the municipality to act, the action usually is well prepared. Of the systems mentioned, two are owned and operated by the municipalities, and one, in Stockholm, by a private company. In the latter case,

# Announcements

## MEETINGS, LECTURES, DEBATES, ETC.

**Chicago**—Twelfth annual convention of the Congress of Religions, June 3 to 7. Sermons at various churches on the 3d on "The Greatest Need in Religion To-day." Reception at Abraham Lincoln Center on the 4th and discussion of "The Church and Its Mission," etc. Discussion of social problems at different centers and churches on the 5th, and church problems on the 6th. For programme write Cyrus A. Osborne, field secretary, Lincoln Center, Oakwood and Langley avenues.

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the city has reserved the right to acquire the system at the end of every fifth year, and this understanding is of such a beneficent influence that the service is nearly as cheap and probably as good as in the cities where the public owns and operates the lines.

It may be proper to mention in this connection a form of municipal ownership peculiar to Sweden. Many towns in the middle and northern section of the country possess enormous property values in public forests. These are never sold, the principle being recognized that the municipality here possesses an asset the value of which is continually growing. Only the right to the lumber of certain sections is sold yearly to the highest bidder, the purchaser being under obligation to replant after having cut the trees. Thus the municipality possesses an inexhaustible supply of revenue, and in fact many of the towns thus provided with means for a natural taxation of public domains do hardly pay any taxes at all individually for local purposes. Here is a lesson in taxation for those who do not recognize the true principle of collecting revenue. It appears in a peculiar form, but the principle of Henry George was in fact in operation in a crude form at the very time that he gave it a more definite expression.

Those who have fear that the enormous business which would be added to the governmental functions of American municipalities if all properly public utilities were owned and operated by the public would cause corruption, forget that the very officials who now handle the business of a private corporation honestly can equally well handle it with honesty under the auspices of the municipality. But in order to remove the possibilities for temptations to corruption it must be recognized that all acts of the public officials must be as open to the public as they would be to private stockholders in a company. The dishonest official must be under fear of removal by the public as easily as he is now dismissed by the company for the same offense. Municipal affairs and national politics must be separated by the means of a proper merit system and civil service regulations. There should not be left too many appointments to be made by the personal judgment of mayors and various municipal commissions. And, above all, there should be direct expression of the will of the people in regard to all public questions, which would go far to insure integrity because of preventing the undue influences of machine rule and partisanship, in non-partisan questions.

ERIK OBERG.

+ + +

**A CREED.**

This most to know:  
 (Much else is only chaff  
 The centuries blow  
 One to another.)  
 That God to men the Father is,  
 And man to man a brother.

—Julian A. DuBois.

+ + +

"So you were all through the civil war, were you?" someone asked the old colored veteran who was cheering the band.

"Ever' step of it, suh!"

"At the surrender, too?"

"Ever' step of it, suh!"

"What did General Lee say to Grant?"

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