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A conservative remembers but does not think.

Some Denver fakir is reported to have invented a system of "mental gymnastics" for muscular development. He says his patients "don't have to exercise at all—simply to think." This idea that thinking is easy accounts for many things. Yet, straight and honest thinking, with a sense of responsibility for results, is about as laborious work as mortals ever engage in.

Following the example of the American administration in the Philippines, the Virginia constitutional convention has voted against incorporating into the oath of office of the delegates a pledge to support the constitution of the United States. The reason is in each case the same—intention to violate or evade the constitution.

The grocers of Great Britain are giving their customers gratuitously much-needed lessons in fiscal science. A label taken from a package of tea has been sent us from London which reads: "Owing to increased duty this tea is advanced 2d. per pound." Lessons of that kind would not come amiss on this side of the Atlantic, where a belief prevails, fostered by our amiable president, that the tariff is paid by foreigners as an inducement to us to let them send their goods into our markets.

The struggle of the Boston Elevated railway to clinch its monopoly of the

streets of that city for 50 years has brought out the value of franchises of that sort in a striking manner. The corporation offered to construct the proposed Washington street subway, costing at least \$6,000,000, and give it to the city, free of cost, at the end of that term. The 50-years term was reduced to 40, before the bill was reported to the house, and still the company was eager to construct the subway and give it to the city for 40 years' monopoly. But the most interesting development of the fight, after all, was the dependence that is coming to be placed upon the referendum for the protection of the community against such schemes when legislatures prove false to the public interest. The majority in the house for the monopoly was overwhelming, including almost the entire democratic contingent from the city—a very significant "give-away." The bill made no provision for a referendum, although twice before referendums had been held on less important subway legislation. The main effort of the opponents came, therefore, to center upon an amendment providing for a referendum. In this effort were joined many conservative citizens to whom the referendum has heretofore been odious as smacking of populist devices. At the head of the movement was Gov. Crane himself, an extremely conservative capitalist. He squarely announced, at the critical moment, that he would sign no bill that did not provide for the submission of the act to a popular vote. The subsidized press, including republican organs, went wild over this unlooked for stand of the governor, charging him with not only interfering unlawfully with the legislative branch, but also with gross inconsistency, as he had refused, with equal determination, last year, to permit a popular vote on the absorption of the

Boston & Albany by the Vanderbilts, or on the consolidation of the Fitchburg with the Boston & Maine. But the governor was immovable. And when, despite his warning, the legislature passed the bill without a referendum clause, he for that reason promptly vetoed it. Gov. Crane is a distinguished gain for the referendum.

That so large a majority (for it was nearly up to two-thirds) should have been controlled by the Boston lobby in opposition to a referendum, is remarkable in the face of the fact that both parties of the state are on record in their platforms in favor of the referendum. The democratic platform of last year declared its condemnation of—

the present republican administration of this state for its subservency to monopoly. It has betrayed the confidence of the people. The refusal of the republicans to allow the referendum on the Boston & Albany lease is absolute evidence that it is the party of monopoly.

That lease was allowed by Gov. Crane, and his act allowing it is the basis of the present accusation of inconsistency. Yet democratic representatives join with republicans in voting against referendum on the subway bill. It is a pleasure to record in this connection the action of the Bryan club of Cambridge, which, though a democratic organization, has formally thanked the republican governor for his action on the referendum question. As the mover of the resolution put the matter, the republican governor "has saved the great democratic metropolis from its democratic representatives."

Philadelphia is not so fortunate in its chief magistrate. The most un-

blushing street grab in the history of corruption in American politics has just been consummated there. It is a grab which in its possibilities extends to all the cities of the state. Senator Quay is the leader of this cynical assault upon public rights. Under his direction a new kind of railway bill was "jammed" through the legislature and signed by the governor. It provided in general terms for the incorporation and regulation of street railway companies—for elevated, underground or surface purposes, or all these—giving to them the right of eminent domain. This right, with reference to particular property, attaches by the law to the corporation first claiming it in its charter and describing the property it requires. Before the public was aware of this new law, Quay's pirates had filed charters covering the streets of scores of Pennsylvania cities. If the law holds, they thereby acquired the first right to condemn those streets for street railroad purposes, and the right will be good for seven years without being used at all. In other words, these charters have now a salable value, as mere legal rights to blackmail cities. Among the charters were 14 for Philadelphia, covering every feasible traction route—surface, elevated and underground—in the fraternal city.

The next step with reference to Philadelphia was to rush through the councils a grant of the routes claimed by those 14 Quay companies, on the cheapest possible terms. And the terms granted were indeed the cheapest possible. These street car rights to the enumerated routes were granted for nothing, and fares were fixed at five cents! This gigantic swindle went through the councils without a hitch. Only Mayor Ashbridge's veto power now stood in the way of the corporations, and that was known to be a broken reed for the public to lean upon.

But John Wanamaker came forward with an effort to stop the robbery. He wrote to the mayor a letter

that will always count one for Mr. Wanamaker when his record as a public-spirited citizen is in question. Declaring that he was in no wise interested in railroad enterprises, yet, for the purpose of justifying the mayor in vetoing the robbery, Mr. Wanamaker offered for the franchises about to be given away, the sum of \$2,500,000. In explanation, he said:

My offer of \$2,500,000 is not because I conceive that sum to be the measure of the value of the franchises granted by these ordinances, for I believe them to be much more valuable, but merely as an indication to your honor in concrete form of the magnitude of the gift conferred upon private citizens without return to the people. It seems to me that to give away such franchises for nothing when others stand ready to pay millions for the same rights is little short of public plunder. I earnestly urge upon your honor, therefore, that you will veto the ordinance now before you and secure, as you can so well do with your known influence in the legislative body, the sustaining of your veto, in order that new ordinances may be drafted conferring the franchise in question only upon the payment of a sum of money into the public treasury commensurate to the value of the grant. I will cheerfully pay the sum I have named, but I suggest to you that if the new ordinance required the franchise to be put up at auction and sold to the highest bidder, an amount largely in excess of that which I have designated could be readily secured.

Discussing the matter in other parts of his letter, Mr. Wanamaker reminded Mayor Ashbridge that—

every attempt in the councils to require the corporations favored by the ordinances to limit the fare to three cents and to give free exchanges and other propositions having in view the public interest were incontinently voted down. As the case stands to-day before you, therefore, the people will get nothing for these franchises, their treasury will not be one cent the richer, passengers will have no cheaper transportation, and the only gainers will be those financially interested in the projects to which your honor is asked to give the sanction of your approval. As I have already said, it is not my desire to embark in the business of passenger railroads; but I do not feel like standing idly by while gifts of such enormous money value are made so recklessly, rashly and hurriedly to predetermined corporations without any return to the people whose property is to be used for private specu-

lation and from whose pockets will come every dollar that goes into the corporate treasuries.

Mr. Wanamaker was right in supposing that his offer, large as it was, was only a trifle in comparison with the real value. The enormity of this steal is almost beyond calculation. When asked about the matter, Mayor Johnson, of Cleveland, who has been all his life a street railroad operator, replied:

The most recent wholesale giving away of public franchises in Philadelphia is one of the greatest outrages ever perpetrated in America. It is a repetition of what recently occurred at Columbus, O., and has taken place in many other American cities, but in this case is on such a stupendous scale that it should arouse not only Pennsylvania, but the whole country. Unless we can stem this tide of public corruption in the granting, public regulation and taxation of franchises, our whole political system is in danger. Under the direction of political bosses, subservient legislatures and city councils, aided by the mayor of Philadelphia and the governor of Pennsylvania, the people of that state have been deliberately robbed of more than \$100,000,000.

Besides the public-spirited offer from Mr. Wanamaker, the mayor knew that A. L. Johnson's syndicate of experienced street car operators and wealthy capitalists was endeavoring to secure franchises at a three-cent fare with universal transfers, as a business investment. But, as had been suspected, the mayor did not hesitate an instant in signing the obviously corrupt franchises which the councils had voted to the Quay combine. The referendum would have prevented that grab. It would prevent every grab except when a majority of the people themselves want to make it. In view of the experience of Philadelphia and the more gratifying experience of Boston, is it not time for other communities to protect themselves by making a referendum vote the condition of all street franchises?

The Philadelphia street car question now goes into the courts, and the fight will be triangular. At one point of the triangle is the Elkins-Widener combination, which owns the franchises now operated. At another are

the Quay conspirators, who have killed two birds with one stone by acquiring enormously rich pickings for one thing, and for another by getting even with Elkins and Widener for political disloyalty to Quay. The third contestant in the triangular fight is A. L. Johnson, who acquired the necessary corporate rights under the old law, and has applied for street rights on the basis of three-cent fares and universal transfers, but no payments either into the public treasury as a tax or into the pockets of officials as bribes or blackmail.

The Cleveland board for the decennial revision of tax valuations proves to be no better disposed to support Mayor Johnson in his efforts to equalize taxation by shifting the onerous burden somewhat from the shoulders of small property owners to rich monopolists who now escape so large a share, than were the county auditors who stood so valiantly by the tax-dodging railroads. Yet Mayor Johnson's propositions with reference to the decennial appraisalment are simple, sensible and fair. He explained them at two meetings in the city hall last week, at which the decennial board, the annual city board and a large representation of local property owners were in attendance upon his invitation.

Taking the Fourth ward for the purpose of illustrating his plan (which is the plan adopted successfully in St. Paul a few years ago by W. A. Somers, when he was assessor there), Mr. Johnson displayed upon a large blackboard a map of the ward with its streets and squares outlined. Each square was numbered in a circle to distinguish it for reference. Within the squares, at each of the four sides and midway between street corners, was written the actual market value per front foot (100 feet deep), as ascertained by the tax experts of the city tax bureau; and opposite these figures but within the street instead of within the square, was set the actual market value of the same property

as found by the tax officials. A few extracts from the map will indicate the fluctuating valuations which these officials have made. They have valued some property worth \$200 per front foot at \$120, some worth \$400 at \$354, some worth \$150 at \$147, some worth \$800 at \$406, some worth \$2,200 at \$2,190; some worth \$350 at \$267, some worth \$350 at \$260, some worth \$350 at \$215, and so on. The Somers plan, which Mayor Johnson recommends, contemplates the adoption, as the unit of valuation, of one foot front (100 feet deep) at the point on a square farthest from the value influences of the corners. It was for that reason that the mayor expressed upon the map those interior, lowest, or unit values. According to the Somers theory, a mathematical calculation upon a regular scale from the units, will yield (not accurately, to be sure, but with reasonable approximation), the value per front foot of all the rest of the land of the square to which the units belong.

In the course of his explanation at the first meeting, Mayor Johnson soon had his theory brought to a striking test. "Here is a square," said he, pointing to his blackboard map, "where the value of a front foot on one side is \$200, and on the other three sides it is respectively \$300, \$400 and \$500. Now these are the units of value by which we can ascertain the value of every foot front on the four sides of this square." A member of the decennial board, Mr. B. F. Phinney, interrupted: "Do you mean," he asked, "that after finding these units of value you can ascertain the value of all the property in that square without viewing the property?" "Absolutely," replied the mayor; "absolutely. We can assess every foot of land in the city without seeing it." But Mr. Phinney was incredulous, and other members of the decennial board exclaimed that it could not be done; whereupon Mayor Johnson took the units of a square the true values of which were well known by those present, and using the Somers system, which he

had been explaining, calculated with substantial accuracy from those units the values of the rest of the square.

What followed we quote from the Cleveland Plain Dealer's report:

"This is Somers' system," said the mayor, "and by it all property in St. Paul was assessed. No system is infallible. This one is not, for, after all, it is only the judgment of men. What I contend is that by this system you can arrive more nearly at the true result. It is simpler than any we know of and certainly better than the one on which you have always worked." He then pointed out glaring inequalities as they exist in present values, and demonstrated how it would have been impossible for such errors to have been made by following the unit rule of values. "Now, what I want you to do," continued the mayor, "is to meet here and take up one ward of the city after the other. I will have maps drawn like this, showing you what we regard as the true values. You need not accept them; you can make such changes as you like. Let the people know when the various wards are to be considered and ask them to come in and give their ideas as to the value of their property. It makes no difference to me what values you place on the properties. All that I ask is that you agree on some unit of value so that all property will be assessed uniformly and fairly. Let us find the true value and then you can put it on the duplicate for 60 or 20 per cent. of its value—I don't care which, just so it is all treated alike."

But uniformity of tax valuations is one of the last things that your ordinary tax equalizer wishes to arrive at; and, since Mr. Equalizer Phinney had been so neatly headed off by the mayor in one direction, Mr. Equalizer Healey tried another. "How many years," he asked, with a confident expression, "do you imagine it would take us to assess property according to your method?" Mr. Healey fared as ill as Mr. Phinney. "Let's see," returned the mayor—

there are 42 wards in the city. It would take just 42 afternoons to arrive at the unit values. After that it is a mere matter of work for clerks. You gentlemen come here with the people and agree on the unit values. Then we will have the map photographed with the figures you have agreed on; the board can be cleared and another map drawn. The photo-