

**Taxing water out of land values.**

The city of Detroit is having, according to the Detroit News, an enlightening experience regarding the importance of taxing building sites at full value regardless of improvements. At a real estate sale a few days ago, lots which had been held at \$60 a front foot were disposed of for from \$25 to \$33. There had been indeed a boom which had burst, and this might be held to account to some extent for the break in prices; but the Detroit News attributes the decline in part at least to a reform in the principle of assessing for taxation. Until recently it has been customary in Detroit to assess vacant lots lightly; but latterly the assessors have assessed such property at its real value. As a result the speculative owners, unable to carry it, have been obliged to throw it upon the market. This result will tend to serve the double purpose of making building lots cheaper and buildings consequently more plentiful; which means, other things remaining the same, that rents will be lower and work more abundant.

**The needed Democratic alignment.**

The substitution by the Democratic national committee, of August Belmont for George Foster Peabody as its treasurer, is significant of a tendency among the Democratic managers which needs to be checked. While it appears upon the surface to be, as Thomas A. Osborne's paper, the Auburn Citizen, observes, nothing but the substitution of one New York banker for another, those who look below the surface will find, as the Citizen goes on to explain, that it is in reality the substitution of a reactionary Democrat for a progressive Democrat.

In the course of its explanations of the significance of this change by the Democratic committee, the Citizen makes a shrewd analysis of present conditions in the Democratic party. It divides the party into four general groups—radicals, reac-

tionaries, opportunists and liberals. The reactionaries it describes as those "who clamor for a return of what they call 'conservative Democracy,'" but who are apt to include in that term "all those entrenched privileges against which the radicals have set their faces." It regards as opportunists those who are ready to barter any party principle for success at the polls. Among the liberals it includes those Democrats who believe in democratic theories "but perhaps are a little doubtful as to how these theories ought to be applied to modern conditions," yet "are ready to go as far and as fast as is ethically right and politically wise."

In these circumstances the Citizen looks askance upon the dropping of Peabody, a liberal whose sympathies are in large measure with the radicals, and the appointment of Belmont, who, though a Democrat by birth, is "democratic neither by nature nor training" and belongs to the group of reactionaries. But Mayor Osborne's analysis of Democratic conditions has a deeper purpose than to distinguish two individuals in this manner. It is made the basis of as sound advice as was ever urged upon a political party. "If the Democracy is to become once more an effective political party," this Citizen editorial proceeds, "it can only be by a union of those we have called radicals and liberals." To this the editorial wisely adds: "The opportunists will follow, and the reactionaries must be allowed to go; they are a drag upon the party and any effort to retain them can only be at the sacrifice of vital principles." This editorial is a most encouraging sign. What is needed in American politics is precisely this union of what Tom L. Johnson calls the conservative radicals with what he calls the radical conservatives.

**Roosevelt's politics without principles.**

In his message President Roosevelt declared against "the government undertaking any work which

can with propriety be left in private hands;" and, correlatively, for the government's "overseeing any work when it becomes evident that abuses are sure to obtain therein unless there is governmental supervision." The wisdom of these observations if not as deep as a well seems to be as dark as a cellar. At any rate they are foreign to any rational classification of public and private functions. Had Mr. Roosevelt said he did not believe in the government's doing any private business, nor in its allowing private corporations to do any public business, he would have laid a stable foundation of political principle. But a foundation any more stable than a balloon is not what Mr. Roosevelt wants for his political philosophy.

**Railroad passes.**

When Robert Baker went to Congress from New York two years ago he scandalized his fellow members and drew toward himself the finger of official and journalistic scorn by refusing the customary bribe of a railroad pass. But the seed of Mr. Baker's sowing is bearing fruit. The New York Central, the Pennsylvania and the Reading have abolished passes. They have at last discovered that "the spirit of the interstate commerce laws does not favor free passes." It seems that they have contemplated this course for the last three years, beginning about the time that Baker made an uproar about it. Had the newspapers known that this policy was in contemplation by the railroads at that time, they might have restrained the mirth they indulged in at Congressman Baker's expense.

Mr. Baer (the self-appointed representative of God in the coal mines), explains the action of the roads of which he is president by saying that he has always "opposed the giving of passes to members of courts, legislators, mayors, members of city councils," etc.; and the Pennsylvania issues the following statement showing