

LETTERS TO "GREENBOY."

VI

GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP.

This time it is municipal, state and national government ownership of public franchises that you are interested in. Whereby you give evidence that your head is level. "Charity begins at home." Taxation of municipal franchises, so as to relieve the owners of real estate of a great part of this burden paves the way to municipal ownership of street railways, gas and electric plants and other valuable franchises.

In my opinion we are not ripe for government ownership of means of transportation and communication and I trust we never will be. A standing army of civil employes of the government is a far greater menace to our institutions than our little army of infantry, cavalry and artillery. A bureaucracy of government clerks, subject to civil service examination and promotion is not only the first step but the first mile post in the establishment of hereditary office.

No sane person questions the wisdom or possibility of municipal ownership of public conveniences. The real question is how to bring it about and the particular fear of timid and apprehensive persons is lest the corporations having the monopoly of transportation or other public franchise should have their feelings lacerated. It is suggested that these privileged people be handled with velvet gloves and approached with fear and trembling. Which reminds one of the erstwhile famous song of "Hildebrand Montrose" who advised his sweetheart that as a token of recognition he would "strike her with a feather."

History does not show one instance in which a monopoly has ever voluntarily made restitution to the people of rights of which they had been despoiled. The iron jaws that have closed on the bone of privilege never open nor even relax until they are broken.

Municipal ownership of public franchises is successful in a number of cities and has failed of being brought to a culmination in others. But the question has taken a firm hold. It is permanently in the air and has come to stay.

Brushing aside as visionary and impracticable the peremptory seizure of local franchises as advocated by our anarchistic friends, two methods are feasible. One is to pass and carry out a legislature enactment by which the property of the monopoly is assessed to its actual value and then acquired by the city. The second and perhaps best method is to tax them out of existence. By using the taxing powers of the municipal government to their utmost limit, two birds are killed with one stone. It takes the burden of taxes from real estate and places it upon the shoulders of public franchises. Then keep on doing it until they are ready to sell out or quit. This is in effect the purport of the Ford franchise tax bill passed by the New York legislature and which Governor Roosevelt had the courage to sign in the teeth of the greatest pressure ever brought to bear upon a public man. The bill declares all franchises granted by local authorities assessable as real estate.

These franchises are, as a rule, the most profitable kind of property in the community. They cost their possessors nothing or next to nothing and they produce larger profits than any other species of property. Take the case of the street railways. The steam railroad buys and pays for its roadbed and is taxed on it the same as other real estate. In the case of a city traction company the people spend thousands of dollars in grading and paving the streets and then hand them over to a corporation without compensation.

Our municipal authorities have been

blind—or else been blinded—to the opportunities presented for utilizing franchise revenues for defraying the expenses of municipal government. It has been figured out that the taxing of public franchises would relieve real estate owners or from one-third to one-half of their tax burden.

By the way—you manifest preposterous anxiety lest our friends the democrats or fusionists, or whatever they are, should seize upon this vital question as an issue. Calm yourself. In the Old Testament, in the chapters concerning themselves with Abraham, you will find this passage: "Fear not, Abraham, for I am thy shield and exceeding great reward." Abraham Lincoln once said "The Lord has His purposes." Rest assured that these purposes, so far as American politics are concerned are entrusted to the republican party. The democratic party and its allies exist chiefly for the purpose of being "ferriest the government."

J. H. TYNDALE.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF PATERNITY.

The disgruntled person who thought that life might be tolerable if it were not for its pleasures was unable, probably, to command the simple and profitable form of satisfaction which comes from living in the house with a nice child. To be sure, one nice child is a scant allowance. At least six is preferable, if one can find keep and education for so many. Jason Jackson, of Boston, who loves all sports, and searches life's pockets for pleasures, appreciates children with a man's irresponsible joy, and loves to have them about in all stages of growth. It was he who admitted, with a new baby in his lap, that he liked to have always one nice soft one in the house. All properly constituted parents share that like, though it is a very exceptional family nowadays that lives persistently up to its preferences in this particular. It is the disposition of all the world in these days to run to town; and town life, full of distractions and elaborations, and calculations and costs, undoubtedly favors small families. The possessions of great treasures inevitably involves cares, and mothers remember, even if fathers forget, that children don't grow up as they should without thought being taken for them. Though there are folk to whom children are a trial, and to whom a certain scale of living, and strawberries in March, and the opera, and timely journeys, and various privileges of an unencumbered life, are worth more than young faces at the breakfast table and kisses at bedtime, the general conclusion of mankind is that nice children are God's best gift.—E. S. Martin, in Harper's Magazine.

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