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OBSERVATIONS.

Councilman Mockett's remark that he had heard no demand for economy in the last campaign, that the cry had been for honesty was a surprise to many who have believed that he was aware of the enforced economies of a people laboring under an increasing tax assessment and of the reason for their desperate interest in the last election. The interest that men and women have taken in recent municipal elections has been based on a hope of relief from a taxation that is making real estate in Lincoln an unprofitable holding and which has destroyed values more than the influence of hard times. If Mr. Mockett failed to hear and understand the growl of the taxpayers for a reduced assessment in Lincoln and Lancaster county, or construed it to be only a demand for a high-minded, freehanded administration, regardless of the price, he lacks the acumen THE COURIER has given him credit for. A table showing the increase in taxes of a piece of property on O street between Eleventh and Twelfth in ten years with the corresponding decrease in earning capacity of the same property would be an interesting and instructive object lesson. On other streets, or further up O street, where many buildings have

been more or less deserted for years the discrepancy between the net earnings and the taxes would be greater still. The taxpayers of Lincoln have elected honest men for councilmen from no abstract admiration of virtue but because the lack of administrative integrity and ability for many more years will bankrupt the city. Such is the irrefutable conclusion derived from a comparison of the city's income and its expenses. The one cannot be enlarged without a confiscation of property and the other must be cut down or the municipality cannot discharge more than two thirds of the amount of its obligations.

In 1887 the assessed value of the taxable property in Lincoln was in round numbers \$3,600,000; that year the tax levy for city and school purposes was 37 mills. In 1897 the assessed value of the taxable property in the city was in round numbers \$5,200,000; that year the levy for city and school purposes was 514 mills. Here was an increase in ten years of about 40 per cent in the rate of taxation and an increase in the same period of about 45 per cent in the assessed value of the taxable property. It is a safe assertion that the population of the city was as large and the actual value of the taxable property of the city greater in 1887 than in 1897, yet the tax levy of the latter year called for more than twice as much money as that of the former and that exclusive of district paying taxes which were not payable in 1887. In other words, in 1887, there was levied in this city a tax for city and school purposes amounting to \$133,200, while in 1897 there was levied a tax for the same purposes amounting to \$269,100; this is exclusive of district paying taxes. Not only has the amount collected by the municipality doubled but by reason of the depressed condition of business for the past five years the tax is tenfold more oppressive than it was when the people were prosperous. This lamentable condition of financial affairs called for a remedy which could be found only in retrenchment and in a reduction of municipal expenditures. An element which had been active at the last municipal election indulged the belief that the city council as now organized, consisting of a strong republican majority, would in its administration of city affairs move along a line of rigid economy and that it would effect a material reduction in expenses.

The salaries paid by the city last year exclusive of expenditures by the board of education amounted to nearly \$80,000. It was thought by prominent republicans who in the recent city

campaign had materially assisted in the election of a republican council that in view of the financial condition of the city there should be a general reduction of expenses and as salaried positions were about to be filled it was necessary in order to effect a present reduction that a new salary ordinance should be enacted before appointments were made. With this object in view an ordinance was prepared which was introduced by Councilman Webster and which if enacted would have affected a reduction of about three mills in the tax levy based upon the assessment of 1897. It is stated that a conference held by a majority of the council at which this ordinance was discussed, Councilmen Woodward and Geisler objected to any outside interference in municipal affairs, their position being that it is impertinent for those who pay taxes to presume to draft an ordinance having for its object the reduction of taxes. The ordinance came up for consideration at the meeting of the council last Monday evening and was defeated. Among republicans its active opponents were councilmen Woodward, Mockett and Dobson, while its supporters were councilmen Webster and Winnett. The council did pass an ordinance making a small reduction in the salaries of officers who will not be effected until after another municipal election and reduced the monthly compensation of the city jailor \$5 per month. This is a present saving of \$60 per year.

There is in the city of Lincoln a vast amount of improved property the income of which does not pay the taxes and which can not be sold for its assessed value. This is not a fact of which citizens can be proud but it is a condition which the municipal authorities refuse to remedy although the remedy is at hand. The property in which THE COURIER is published is owned by a woman. In 1897, the income from the property was less than the expense of taxes, insurance, water and heat, omitting repairs. Unfortunately this is the condition of a vast amount of improved property in this city. Vain will it be to erect auditoriums or to seek to induce manufactures or capitalists to locate here if those entrusted with the management of municipal affairs persistently refuse to adopt measures looking to retrenchment. The republicans have a working majority in the city council and it is within the power of that majority to reduce the taxes of this city at least one third if it be so inclined. It had the opportunity to commence the reform last Monday night but it lacked the disposition.

We find ourselves again living in an

epoch. The year 1898 will be remembered as the beginning of the American-Spanish war. The causes will be analyzed and the president and congress will be judged by the coldly critical non-sympathetic, non-partizan mind of unborn posterity. Somehow the assumption of an office of responsibility by a man who does not pretend to be a demigod, confers upon him, in most cases, a god like discretion, wisdom and dignity. Many of the presidents have not been distinguished in pre-inauguration days from the 12,400,000 of their fellows by anything but a trick of knowing how to get votes, by knowing how to smile and when to be hail-fellow well met and when to be austere, by the possession in short, of an inspired tact. But after the baptism of the inauguration the man is never the same. The wisdom and caution of sixty-two million people descends upon him; he is the president of the United States not John Brown or William McKinley, but the incarnate country of the north and south, the east and west. He is no longer the citizen of a state, he is not a democrat or a republican or a populist. He is the anointed of sixty-two million people and his awful isolation and responsibility has never yet failed to grave deeper lines in his face than time can cut in any ordinary eight. The Episcopal service recognizes that of all heavily laden souls the president bears a burden that no previous experience can have fitted him for. The mysterious regeneration that all presidents obviously experience is one of the proofs of an overruling providence, which makes inspired rulers of candidates hastily snatched from a helter skelter nominating convention. Men go to school for sixteen years in order to prepare themselves to live a life of no especial consequence to a community, but there is no preparation for a life, any mistake in which may cost the country so much that a hundred years hence the American millions may be suffering for it. That which has guided the fortunes of America has made the best presidents out of a rail splitter, a canal boy, and a surveyor and so long as prayers ascend the president of the largest and freest country on the globe will have wisdom to reject the frequently foolish advice of an unconcentrated congress.

To live in an epoch is to be a part of a large action. It is to lose individuality and selfishness, to be no longer trivial, to be not troubled about what we shall eat and wherewithall we shall be clothed. It is to be one of a race that has struck an heroic and disinterested and threatening attitude in order to give freedom a dwelling place