there the readiness with which individuals, as well as States, turn to
something rotten” in the state not known as Denmark. He dep-
locutor in the national minstrel show.
America’s children. He serves at the Supreme Court’s inter-
the thoughts of the nine men who sit in judgment upon
their cold, formalized decisions.

Perhaps that incident explains why members of the Supreme
Court and House of Representatives of the United States listen
with respectful attention to Hatton W. Sumners when the Texan
from the Dallas district arises in the courtroom or on the floor.
They know that he rarely opens his lips until he has done some
“thinking” of his own — often original and sometimes startling
in the ideas which that neglected art produces. It is little won-
der that his colleagues refer to the shy, kindly, taciturn chair-
man of the House Judiciary Committee as “the Socrates of
Capitol Hill.”

It explains also why the Supreme Court reform bill, even had
the Senate approved it, and the Government reorganization
measure were doomed to death as soon as this nonconformist
with the ill-fitting clothes, slouchy stance and difficult Tennessee
drawl had lifted his voice against them. When he opens his
mouth the political dogs don’t bark if they know what’s good for
them.

Supreme Court’s Interlocutor

Mr. Sumners, however, is an important personage for another
reason. He serves as the only human link between two
Federal branches of the Government — the executive and the
legislative — and the Supreme Court. On numerous occasions
he has been selected by his fellows to plead the cause of the
House before the high tribunal, and he has always won. And
though he learned law by reading tattered tomes in the same
back room where he slept and ate in Garland, Tex., the late
Chief Justice Taft once called him “the finest constitutional
lawyer in Congress.” The House at that time had for a member
the late James M. Beck, former Solicitor General, and there sat
in the Senate a man named William Edgar Borah.

Unlike most Congressmen, Mr. Sumners stood in no awe of
the black-robed jurists. He discovered that they were as hungry
for human companionship as he was. A bachelor, he often spent
evenings swapping ideas and anecdotes and philosophies with
them at their offices or homes. He came to know their outlook
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labor-saving devices be temporarily abandoned. Instead of a rigid program of crop control he urged a study and readjustment of a marketing system which makes the farmer wander all over the country in search of a “place to sell his greens.”

He abolished the procedure under which presidential electors brought their ballots to Washington five months after everybody else knew the results, thus saving $40,000 quadrennially. With dry humor that was typical, he argued that this horse-and-buggy method of letting the people in on the secret was “not safe” — some convivial electoral chairman might fall off the train and forget what candidate his State had voted for.

His one-man crusade against expensive state funerals for deceased members of Congress exemplifies his solemn concern for seemingly trivial matters. It reveals his absorbing interest in the psychology of people as it conditions their regard for government. It is doubtful whether so strange and yet so logical an argument has ever been made to the Congress on the problems of death — public extravagance — government dignity:

“In days when the popular respect for government depended on awe and aroused in the people by pomp and splendor, there may have been real justification for this sort of thing. But among a people supposed to follow principles as distinct from persons and where public officials are private people temporarily called to public office, the expenditure of public funds for congressional funerals cannot be justified.”

His thriftiness with his own and the taxpayers’ money derives from his boyhood of poverty — he was a “root, hog, or die” sort of chap. Saturdays in his Tennessee birthplace, when other fellows were swimming or nutting, he rode the mule to the mill to have the family corn ground. He went to school only three months a year. Moving to Garland, he had barely enough to eat, trading legal services for scant meals and hard bedding. Even now he can’t eat heavily, his lunch consisting of a bowl of soup dedicated to early deprivations.

Worth $200,000 today, he doesn’t know how to enjoy or spend it. Recently he moved from a humble, friendly inn on Capitol Hill to one of Washington’s smart hotels. But the soft mattress and rich food irked him and he stole back to the lowly hostelry. He really needs a chauffeur to drive him around, “but I can’t bear the thought of luxury,” he explains. Like his buddies on the Supreme Court, he believes in Spartan simplicity for the governed and for the Government.

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