

On Excise, or Duties on inland Trade and Business.

To balance the several branches of a national revenue, in such manner, that no order of citizens may be oppressed, and no kind of useful business discouraged, is the most difficult duty of a financier. Any man who is clothed with power, and determined on the obtaining of a revenue, may find ways and means to take it from the people; but it is only a great and prudent man, who can combine public and private interests, by enriching the national treasury, in such ways as stimulate general industry, and overburden no order of people. A genius, natively adapted for such calculations, may fix on leading principles, and conjecture with surprising success; still it is experience which must perfect the system. That rapid growth of empire which we may expect, with such fresh resources as always appear in a new country; under the guidance of a masterly hand, and matured by a few years experience, will establish American credit in the opinion of all mankind. But to make a successful beginning, the public must exercise patience, and give time for the several parts of a system, to be brought forward in orderly succession; and when the whole is produced, there will be a fit time to judge, how near the first attempt hath approached to such perfection as we may expect, and wherein alterations may be expedient. No man, who hath abilities to provide otherwise for himself, will long serve a factious people; and when jealousy begins to arise, between the great denominations of citizens, who pursue different employments, it threatens a retirement of those characters, who are most fit to guide. The importing merchants have set a noble example of patriotism, in aiding an impost by their influence; if the retailing merchants and planters discover equal magnanimity, we may defy the predictions of our enemies, that America will be always faithless.

Impost and excise are among the names by which taxes on commerce and business have been called. In the American sense of these words, impost is a tax on merchandise, payable at the port of entry, by the importing merchant; and excise is a tax on certain kinds of business, or a duty on merchandise paid by the retailer after a sale of his goods. Though the same article be charged with both duties, there is an obvious reason for separating the times of imposition and payment. The nature of importation, requires it to be made in larger quantities of the same article, than will command an immediate sale; and an impost must be paid before the merchant can receive any returns by his business. If too high an impost be charged, it in effect prohibits importation, by requiring from the importer a sum greater than he can pay; for though he recharges it to the purchaser, there must be a previous advance of the duty, which is beyond his power. This remark will be found true in all mercantile states; but especially in America, from the prevalent custom of giving a long credit to the retailing trader. Were an impost to be imposed, of four times the present sum, it would amount to a prohibition on three fifths of our importing merchants; and throw business into the hands of a few who have great wealth—This would be destructive to many worthy merchants, and operate as a monopoly to raise prices unreasonably on the consumer. There are many articles of luxury which ought to contribute a large share to the national revenue; among these are wines, and ardent spirits of every kind.—The man who will indulge his vanity and appetite, in ways which have a corrupting influence on republican virtue, is a fit subject for such kinds of taxation, as he may avoid or voluntarily take on himself. So great a tax on these articles, at the port of entry or at the distillery, as they ought to pay, would prohibit importation for the reason abovementioned; but divide the tax, let one part be paid on importation, and the other by the retailer, after an actual consumption of the article and the evil is prevented. I care not by what name this last tax is called, for names are arbitrarily imposed, and have such a meaning as the legislature is pleased to give them. Impost and excise do not mean the same thing in any two states on earth. In England, an excise means taxes on various kinds of manufacture and internal business, and is wholly different from those excises used by several states in the union, which are duties on the retail sale of imported articles. In other European countries, impost and excise have meanings as different as the several languages of the people; and by means of our general descent from that country, and a community of language, excise is an unpopular word in America; for which reason perhaps this name ought not to enter a revenue system in the United States—though our duties on inland trade and business, should be established on equitable principles, and with a most fa-

cred regard to the rights of men and citizens, the idea associated with that word, will not be removed for half a century.

To accommodate myself to the reader's understanding, I have used the word excise in my past essays, for all duties on inland trade and on certain lucrative branches of business; and I believe it is the sense of the people, that such duties ought to constitute one great branch of the national revenue.

Every principle of national policy requires, that the use of certain foreign articles should be discouraged, by a higher tax, than can be imposed at the port of entry; without forming a virtual monopoly, in favor of a few overgrown importers, or great foreign companies; who would pay any tax, if they might be richly repaid, by a subsequent sale in the country.

Every principle of virtue requires, that the superabundant use of certain articles, which are destructive to the morals, health and industry of the people, should be checked by taxation.—If the intemperate, who disturb our neighborhood, and corrupt our youth, will not benefit the public by their industry and thrift, they should be made subservient to the national good, by contributing largely to its income—So small a quantity of ardent spirits, is necessary for medicine, and the real comfort of life, that a high tax will injure no one, but those who use them to excess; and such have no right to complain of an evil, voluntarily brought on themselves.

Sumptuary laws, or laws against excess in dress and living, have been found necessary in many states, and they are needed in this country. An absolute prince, may prohibit luxury and extravagance in dress, by his positive injunctions; but the experiment will not succeed with a people, who have such ideas of liberty, as prevail in the United States—a more safe method is to discourage foreign superfluities, and encourage our own manufactures by duties judiciously imposed. It is better to enrich our revenue at the expence of prodigality, than of industry.—The prodigal are self devoted to ruin, and as the event cannot be prevented, for the contagion of their example let them make the only possible atonement, a contribution to the necessities of the country which hath protected them. Wrought silks of foreign manufacture, ought to be considered as superfluities in the United States; and a duty on all these would encourage the home cultivation and manufacture, for which the middle and southern states are well adapted. To select all the articles, which ought on these general principles to be dutied, is equally beyond my present design, my information and capacity. Certain branches of business within the country, which are productive to the managers, and firmly established, might contribute a share to the national revenue. Our empire extends through a greater variety of climes than any other on earth; in some part of the whole, almost every production of nature may be found, and every work of art will soon be fabricated.—Policy leads to a preference of home productions and manufactures, and a mercantile intercourse between the northern, middle, and southern states—Until this takes place we are not an independent people, in so high a sense as we might be; and the encouragement of such intercourse, depends on the regulation of revenue. To take up these general principles and form a system of duties on inland trade and business, of general benefit, must be a work of time—the task is difficult—the scope is broad, but I firmly believe, the gentlemen, in your treasury department, have an eye of discernment which can measure it.

While on this subject, I cannot refrain mentioning the impolicy and injustice of those partial systems, which have obtained in a number of states, under the name of excise. That politicians of a little territory, pressed for expedients, should patronize them before the formation of a general government, is not so strange; but that any should persevere at the present crisis is unfortunate—Every thing of this kind is in its nature anti-national, and leads to jealousy and contention between the states—It is contrary to the spirit of our constitution, which wisely provides that commerce, with all its interests shall be under the controul of one nurturing parent—and it will give rise to counteracting schemes of revenue, which will for a time oppress the people, and in the end defeat the whole. It ought further to be observed, that the manner of collecting state excises, has been and will be such, that the rich who purchase in large quantities, escape payment, and the poor who buy of a retailer, in small proportions, are subjected to the duty. Certainly this is not good policy or justice.

P. S. Since writing the above, the Observer has heard of a little Treatise, which he would recommend to the perusal of the people of Connecticut. It is entitled, "An enquiry into the Excise Laws of Connecticut"—and is supposed to be written by a gentleman of known literary merit—in which he hath clearly proved, the impolicy and injustice of all state excises, and local systems of revenue, by commerce, and their inconsistency with the rights of a general government.

With equal eye each tender plant they see,
And point their opening beauties to the day;
But if perchance, some weaker than the rest,
Recline their heads, by nature's hand deprest,
Let double diligence thy hours employ,
To make them objects too, of future joy.

THERE is a weakness that many parents discover in their conduct towards their children, which is invariably attended with unhappy effects—and that is, partiality in their deportment towards those who infensibly become the objects of peculiar tenderness, while the rest of the same flock are treated with neglect. But the ideas on this subject I would wish to impress on the minds of my readers, are contained in the following quotation from that excellent production, the "Worcester Speculator" in their observations, viz.

Parents are the trustees of Heaven; infant souls are loaned to them to form for usefulness here and happiness hereafter; in the discharge of this all important trust, the nicest attention should be paid to the forming of their minds, and they ought carefully to avoid a discovery of any partiality, as it has a tendency to irritate and sour the temper and disposition, and will indelibly stamp the character through life. To administer favours with equal liberality, ought to be the leading principle in the magna charta of every domestic republic; yet so strangely have parents, from the first formation of families, mistaken the elements of domestic police, that we have too often found them, in the most inhuman manner, detaching favourites from among their branches, on whom they lavish every attention, unnaturally indulging the freaks of their own fancy, and suffering the scale of favour to preponderate with the most unreserved caprice.—Inhuman gratification! ill grounded partiality! If it be bottomed on any superiority of talents, that superiority must arise from nature or from education; if from nature, parents, as the instruments of nature, ought to be the least to aggravate these misfortunes; if from education, as the guardians and instructors of their offspring, they but rebuke their own delinquency.—Unnatural and unjustifiable is the conduct of such parents—unhappy and fatal have been the consequences which ever did and invariably will result from such treatment; yet how bitter, how agonizing is the reflection to every philanthropic soul, that the baneful influence of this partiality is not confined to, nor does it all evaporate in the small sphere of domestic convulsions—
"Just as the twig is bent the tree's inclined."

The early impressions of infancy will indelibly stain our minds for life.—When children are forced, by a parent's unequal hand, into a consciousness of their inferiority, it enlarges on them with their acquaintance with mankind.

PRICE CURRENT.—NEW-YORK.

Table with two columns listing various goods and their prices. Includes items like JAMAICA Spirits, Antigua Rum, St. Croix, Country, Molasses, Brandy, Geneva, Do. in casks, Muscovado Sugar, Loaf, Lump, Pepper, Pimento, Coffee, Indigo, Do. French, Rice, Superfine Flour, Common do., Rye do., Indian Meal, Rye, Corn, Do. (Northern), Beef, Pork, Oats, Flax-seed, Ship bread, Country refined, Do. bloomery, Swedes do., Russia do., Pig-iron, German steel, Nails American, Do. do. do., Do. do. do., Do. do. do., Do. do. do., Pot ash, Pearl ash, Bees-wax, Mackarel, Herrings, Mahogany, Dominico, Honduras, Logwood, Do. chipped, 2 inch white oak plank, 1 inch do., 2 inch white pine plank, 1 1/2 inch do., 1 inch do., 1 1/2 inch do., Pitch pine scantling, Cyprus 2 feet shingles, Cedar 2 inch do.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Gazette of the United States circulates in every part of the Union—being honored by subscribers in Georgia, South and North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New-Jersey, New-York, Connecticut, Rhode-Island, Massachusetts, New-Hampshire, and District of Maine, Canada, Europe, and the West Indies. This extensive circulation renders it a proper vehicle for ADVERTISEMENTS of a general, commercial and governmental import.—By the particular desire and advice, therefore, of a number of its patrons, this paper will be open for the reception of advertisements of the above description; which as they will convey intelligence of an interesting nature, the Editor hopes their insertion will meet the approbation of his friends in general. Should the number at any time amount to more than a page in the Gazette, they will be given in a Supplement. JOHN FENNO.

Published by JOHN FENNO, No. 9, MAIDEN-LANE, near the Ujwego-Market, NEW-YORK.—[3dols. pr. an.]