

Lancaster Intelligencer.

TUESDAY EVENING DEC. 5, 1883.

The Annual Reports.

The president's message and the reports of his cabinet officers sent to Congress and given to the country at this season appear in full in the morning papers of to day and will be read by few persons at the great length at which they are printed.

There is nothing eventful in our relations with foreign countries, the United States being at present as nearly as possible in the delightful state comprehensively described by a former president, "at peace with all the world and the rest of mankind."

Mr. Blaine's attempt to embroil us with the South American states, and possibly England, failed and gets a parting kick from the successor to Garfield. By far the most interesting domestic subject that engages public attention is the surplus of our revenues caused by burdens of taxation that oppress the people, obstruct business and threaten the prosperity of the country.

We are raising money at a rate far beyond our wants and beyond even the necessities of the redeemable national debt. The president reviews the secretary's report in this matter and accords with his suggestions, which we print and which are elsewhere commented upon. It is notable that with all the campaign tariff agitation of the opposition and the cries of Democratic "free trade" and "attack upon American industry" the Republican federal administration makes bold demand for a reduction of duties.

The report of the tariff commission is presented simultaneously with the other public documents, and it points the way to a general reduction of from 20 to 25 per cent. in existing custom rates. The commission reaches the conclusion now so patent to the best intelligence of the country, that "high duties have a tendency to create prejudice, to encourage unsafe investments of capital, to cause a plethora of certain commodities; that the time has come when a reduction from the high war rates can safely be made, and that the increase in the productions by the older industries is sufficient to admit of a reduction without impairment of ability to compete."

Legislation in accordance with this view cannot be long delayed, though in effecting it Congress will find, as the commission did, that the selfishness of human nature leads the representatives of every industry to think that theirs is the one which still needs protection.

One of the most important points suggested in the state papers of this year is the reduction of letter postage to two cents per half-ounce. Cheap postage is a characteristic of advanced civilization and it is a universal benefaction. Our postal department is gradually becoming self-supporting and as it approaches that stage there should be reduction of rates where it is most felt and most needed.

The present rate of carrying letters is too high and has been maintained too long. Besides, a reduction will so largely stimulate the mail service as to soon compensate in part if not altogether for the reduced revenues.

The only part of the message which is not a careful following of the lines marked out by the department reports is that which relates to the civil service; and while it is prolific of the usual complaints that it is impossible for the chief executive to give personal directions to the 100,000 appointments for which he is responsible, it is barren of suggested remedies for the evils which arise and prevail under our present system.

The president is unquestionably right in his declaration that "it matters little to the people at large what competent person is at the head of this department or that bureau if they feel assured that the removal of one and the accession of another will not involve the retirement of honest and faithful subordinates, whose duties are purely administrative and have no legitimate connection with the success of any political principle or faction."

But nobody seems yet to have devised a means to reach this end which is acceptable to our lawmakers and above the suspicion of a jealous people. The president constructs for himself a defense against the charges of the Garfield faction that he has been the creature of the Stalwarts in striking down the friends of his predecessor; to shield himself from this accusation he shows conclusively that the percentage of his renmvals was far less than Garfield's. But we presume he doesn't expect anybody to concede that any principle of civil service reform characterized an administration in which Blaine was the ruling spirit. There is a mild hypocrisy in Arthur's affected disapproval of Hubbellism.

Tariff and Taxes.

The suggestions of the secretary of the treasury in regard to the financial affairs of the country seem to be wise. He advocates a reduction of taxation and makes plain the necessity for it in the exhibition of the fact that the revenues are far in excess of the necessary expenditure. There will be no disagreement with him on any hand in this recommendation, though there is not unanimity as to how the reduction of taxation should be effected. The manufacturing interest generally favors the abolition of the internal revenue, expecting thereby greater protection from the tariff that will need to be levied on imports to raise the required revenue; but it is a question whether the manufacturers do not make a mistake here. What they want is a tariff rate high enough to forbid foreign importations of their wares; and if they are given such a duty it will follow that no revenue will be derived from such source. The secretary recommends the retention of the tax on tobacco and spirits; and there can hardly be a question that revenue can be raised from these articles of luxury with far less injury to the country than from other more innocent and necessary things. In fact, it may even be said that the tax upon them is beneficent, since it tends to limit their use. There are certainly many things objectionable

DEPARTMENT REPORTS.

SEC. FOLGER'S VIEWS AT LANCASTER.

The enormous surplus threatening popular prosperity is the subject of the report.

The telegraphic summary of the president's message printed in the INTELLIGENCER yesterday presented its most salient points. It also briefly stated the leading features of the department reports. But the annual budget of the secretary of the treasury, by far the most important of these annual documents, has some points worthy of popular attention, and copies of extracts are herewith published from Mr. Folger's annual report.

The secretary of the treasury's recommendations.

There are now in the treasury unused assets to a large amount, and the daily receipts into the treasury from customs and internal revenue taxation are about a million a quarter. It is plain from this, and the statement with which this report begins of the estimated expenditures for the next fiscal year, that the receipts from revenue are, and are likely to be, in excess of the needs of the government.

From the inequality between daily large receipts and comparatively small daily disbursements there comes an evil effect upon the business of the country. The collections by government are taken out of the money market in sums and at dates which have little or no agreement with the natural movement of money, and are returned to it with the same inadaptation to commercial or financial requirements. Occasionally the large disbursements of the government have created a plethora of funds, and frequently a large and continuing surplus of business have caused such a scarcity of floating capital as to check the proper movement of legitimate business. It is not only that the amount in the treasury is so much kept from the use of community; the fact becomes an incentive and an inducement to those who, for their own ends, conspire to keep from that use other large sums. We have believed that the laws of the states against primogeniture, the entail of estates, and the accumulation of personal property, stood in the way of keeping up wealth in this manner. If, however, a single hand holds the power over others that great wealth gives. But so it is that today there are men so rich that, by conspiring together, they can at will put and hold hand on near as much money as government can lay out in a year.

The power thus had is used from time to time. It results, that violent and sudden contractions and expansions afflict the business community, and the government is an unwilling aider and abettor therein. It has come about that the treasury department is looked to as a great, if not a chief, cause of recurring stringencies, and the treasury is called to for relief. Every secretary of the treasury for years past has had it brought clearly to his mind, and official expedients have been used to remedy the evil. Little saving value has been accomplished thereby.

There is no advisable and lawful mode of disbursing an existing excess of assets, but that of the payment of the public debt. The debt is substantially of two principal kinds— that payable at the pleasure of the government, and that payable at a fixed date in the future. The former is also of two kinds— that bearing interest at three and a half per cent, and that at three per cent. The latter may not be called in for payment while any of the former is outstanding and uncalled. So is the law of its creation.

Of the former there are outstanding and uncalled over seventy millions. The interpretation put by the department upon the various laws out of which that debt has arisen, requires that a call for it, for any amount, be for the maturity and for the cessation of interest a date three months off. This somewhat hampers the department in so making calls as to keep up a timely succession. For calls at three months off there must either be the funds in hand therefor, or the call must be made, or the maturity must be relied upon the probable prospective receipts.

To wait before making a call until the funds are in fact in hand would be to increase the evil of which I am speaking. To call in reliance upon receipts to come and upon the maturity of the debt, or upon current or business prosperity they may be lessened, and thus embarrassments ensue; so that, practically, the department cannot with prudence work in this matter up to what may turn out to be its full ability.

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