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SPEECH

OF

C. POULETT THOMSON, ESQ.

IN

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

ON THE 26TH OF MARCH, 1830,

ON

MOVING THE APPOINTMENT OF A SELECT COMMITTEE

To inquire into the state of

TAXATION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM.

LONDON :

JAMES RIDGWAY, PICCADILLY.

MDCCCXXX.

1857

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CHARLES WOOD AND SON, PRINTERS,
Poppin's Court, Fleet Street.

S P E E C H

ON MOVING

“ That a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the expediency of making a Revision of the Taxes, so that the means of paying the Sums voted by the House, and all other Charges, may be provided with as little Injury as practicable to the Industry and Improvement of the Country.”

[Mr. Labouchere having postponed a notice, in order to allow precedence to this motion, Mr. Poulett Thomson rose and spoke as follows :—]

SIR,

In rising to make the motion of which I have given notice, I have to acknowledge the courtesy of my honourable friend in postponing his very important notice; a courtesy and kindness which I should never have thought of demanding upon personal grounds; but which the vast importance, as well as the nature of the motion which I have the honour of bringing under the consideration of Parliament, may fairly claim; especially when, as I am happy to remark from what has passed in

previous debates, the subject has already attracted so much attention. It is painful to me at any time to solicit the indulgence of the House on my own behalf, and that feeling is increased upon the present occasion, when the importance of the subject, of which I propose to treat, renders me more than usually sensible of my own incompetency to do justice to it, and when I shall be compelled by its nature to trespass upon the patience of my hearers for a more than usual length of time. The deep conviction, however, which I entertain, that no subject was ever submitted for deliberation of greater importance than this, whilst it supports me in the task which I have undertaken to perform, gives me ground to hope that I shall not ask in vain for that indulgence, which this House is never backward in extending to those who claim it upon such grounds.

Sir, I am aware that in introducing so large a subject, as that of a great part of the taxation of this country, to the consideration of Parliament, I may expose myself to the charge of presumption. I may be told, that I am undertaking a task which does not become a member of this House unconnected with official station, and holding no responsible situation;—that I am trespassing upon the province of the Right Ho-

nourable Gentleman opposite, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whose immediate duty it is to regulate the financial concerns of the empire: but I trust that the nature of the motion which I have in view will serve to acquit me of such an accusation. I do not venture to propose to the House any plan of financial reform, any positive proposition of change; I am conscious that to do so would not become my situation: all that I shall venture to do will be to endeavour to lay before the House such a statement, as I trust may induce it to think, that it becomes it to turn its attention seriously to the state of the taxation of the country, to take the matter into its own hands, and through a committee of its own to institute such an inquiry as will lead to relief, if it appear that an alteration in the system can effect any; or, if it shall not, at least satisfy the people that no such relief can be afforded. Neither can I admit, that what has occurred during the last fortnight is any argument why I should relinquish the purpose I have in view, and leave in the hands of Government the inquiry which I propose. On the contrary, although I am fully sensible of the importance of the reductions which have lately been announced, they rather furnish me with an additional motive to persevere: for whilst I

give the Government credit for the full value of the sacrifices they have made, I cannot but regret that the principles, which were announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in proposing them, to which I entirely assent, should not have been more fully acted upon; and that, instead of contenting himself with a mere reduction of taxes, he should not have endeavoured, by a much more extended review of our whole system, to relieve this country to an infinitely greater extent without any greater sacrifice of revenue. The partial adoption therefore of measures similar to those which I imagine would be recommended by the committee which I propose, confirms me in the opinion of the propriety of urging its appointment, and at the same time relieves me from the possibility of being suspected of bringing forward this motion from party or interested motives. Far from being actuated by any such feelings, my sincere wish is to support and encourage ministers in the views which they profess to take, and to render them the assistance which I think they require to carry them into effect; I mean the concurrence and the recommendation of a committee of this House: and I may add, that I greatly rejoice that I am able, in introducing the statement which I shall have to submit,

showing the extremely injurious nature of a portion of our system of taxation, and the absurdity and unfitness for the end it proposes to have in view, of a great part of it, to be able to congratulate the Government upon having admitted the principle, and of having done something at least to remedy the evil.

It seems to me, Sir, that the object of this motion is one which in any times can hardly fail of being a most desirable one. No man will deny, that when a revenue is to be raised at all, it should be raised in that manner which will take as little from the pockets of the people, and allow as much of that which is taken to pass into the coffers of the Exchequer, as possible; nor will any one assert, I presume, that in any country, and at any time, there can be so perfect a system of finance as to make any inquiry into the mode of collecting the national income needless. Under any circumstances then, and in any state of things, such an investigation as I propose to entrust to a committee would be one of the most important, and one of the most useful, which any legislative body could delegate to a portion of its members. But if this be the case, how much more momentous is such an inquiry at the present time, and under the present circumstances? Let any man

look impartially upon the condition of this country at the present moment, and say if he can, that such an inquiry is not imperatively called for, that it is not unavoidably necessary. It is nothing more than an act of justice to those who pay the taxes, and of justification to those who impose them. And how stands public opinion upon the point? It is curious indeed to observe, that there is only one single subject upon which all parties in the country without the least exception are agreed. Whether we look to the petitions on our table, or consult the opinions of public writers, or consider the debates in this House, we shall find a diversity of opinion upon all subjects but one. Some consider a greater reduction of expenditure necessary. Some deem further retrenchment impracticable. Some believe that relief might be afforded by a depreciation of the standard, by an issue of paper money: others condemn such a proposal as the most injurious that could be adopted. Some look to a parliamentary reform as a remedy for our distress. Some are opposed to any change of the kind. Many attribute the sufferings of the people to the system called free trade: the more enlightened and more reasoning part of society reject such an idea as absurd. In short, upon all these subjects a dif-

ference of opinion exists. Upon one only, whether you read the language of public opinion conveyed to you through the press, whether you listen to the voice of the people expressed at county meetings, or their prayers brought up to the table of the House, on one subject only is an opinion common to all; and that point is—that the system of taxation requires revision; that our imposts press too heavily upon the productive industry of the country.

I am not one, who am prepared to yield obedience to any opinion because it happens to be popular: but when I find one prevailing sentiment upon a subject of deep importance, I feel myself bound, I hold the legislature bound, to consider it with more than common attention. I have endeavoured to do so, and all the consideration which I have been able to give, all the investigation which I have been able to make, convince me that the opinion so universally expressed on this subject is not less just than it is general. In explaining the grounds upon which I have come to this conclusion, it is not necessary that I should venture upon any lengthened review of the state of the country. After the protracted debates on this subject, which have within these few days occupied the attention of the House, and in which

every possible topic connected with it has been discussed, it becomes needless for me to do so. It has scarcely been denied indeed by any one, that taxation was one of the main causes of the sufferings under which we labour. The honourable member for Essex indeed (Mr. Western) has stated his disbelief of this doctrine. He thinks, that because a heavier amount of taxation was borne during the war, the present reduced amount may be supported without inconvenience during peace; and his conclusion is (and an erroneous one I believe it to be), that therefore a relief from taxation will not be a remedy for the existing distress. I will not now stop to inquire whether the reduction talked of has been a real or only a nominal one. I will admit for the sake of argument, that there has been a reduction of our burthens; but admitting this, I differ entirely from the honourable member for Essex, and I am perfectly convinced that the greater weight then pressed less heavily on the industry of the country than the lesser amount does at present. Are there no circumstances to account for this result? Does it follow, that because this country sustained greater taxation then, she is now able to support even a diminished pressure? What was our condition during the war? Was the state of our industry the same? was it not indeed quite

peculiar? Owing to the discoveries of science, to the genius of an Arkwright, a Hargreaves, and a Watt, our industry had been developed in a manner and with a rapidity unparalleled in the history of man. Owing to the unsettled state of the world, the advantage of these discoveries was turned almost exclusively to the benefit of England. Our command of the ocean gave us the monopoly of the commerce of all the universe; our ships were alone the carriers of every nation; our passport alone was respected throughout the globe. There was a depreciation in the standard which rendered our taxation comparatively light; but above all, the same circumstances which gave us the monopoly of improvement and of commerce, not only confined our capital to our own shores, not only prevented it from migrating to seek employment elsewhere, but made England the rallying point, where alone the capital of other countries could find a profitable and secure investment. No wonder if with these advantages we suffered less severely from the pressure of taxation! To the state of this country during the war may be applied with greater truth what was said by Mr. Pitt of its condition during a previous struggle—

“ Per damna per cædes, ab ipso
Ducit opes, animumque ferro.”

With the peace all these advantages have passed away, and we have to meet the new state of things under the languor to which immense exertion must leave either an individual or a country subject. We enjoy no more the exclusive use of machinery. We possess no longer the monopoly of commerce. Our currency is again at its standard value. We have all the world for competitors in arts, in industry, in improvement. Our prices can no longer regulate,—they must follow those of other countries: but above all, not only does the capital of other nations no longer seek investment with us, but our own may find employment in other parts with equal security, and greater advantage. Nor is it our capital only, but the skill, the industry, the intelligence, which have been raised at home, which constitute our wealth and form our power, if oppressed here, will emigrate elsewhere; and we have to meet, not the competition of foreign industry alone, but that of our own native soil, transferred to climes where its scope is less controlled, and its exertions less oppressed. This is the danger we have to dread; and how are we to avoid it? I have said that our prices must follow those of other countries; prices, I need scarcely say, are made up of profits, of wages, and of taxation, which

falls upon the one or the other. Wages are, I fear, reduced to their necessary rate. Taxation then must fall upon profits, and so it is. We see the rate of profit unduly reduced, and the necessary result must be, that our capital, unable to compete with that of other countries less burthened than our own, will seek employment where it can find it unrestrained. How then can we hope to preserve it, and to support our industry, but by removing or reducing those burthens? If we refuse to do so, we force the capital, the skill, the ingenuity, which we have raised with so much care, to seek another field, where they can put forth their powers unmolested and unimpeded. We sacrifice the natural advantages we possess in our insular position, in our mines of coal, and of iron, the acquired advantages of our accumulated capital, our skill, our priority of industry and of art. We must sink in the scale of nations.

Nor is this idle speculation. The history of the world reads us a lesson not to be disdained. No one can have studied this subject even but a little, without being struck with the similarity of the circumstances in which this country is now placed, and those of Holland during the last century. Whoever will take the trouble attentively to peruse that admirable work of M. de

Luzac, "*La Richesse de la Hollande*," will there see the operation of an erroneous system of taxation on the industry and condition of that country. Holland was formerly situated nearly as we are now. It had emerged from lengthened and expensive wars with a heavy burthen of public debt. It had not a numerous poor, but their place in its expenditure was supplied by the necessity of keeping up the dykes. From the foremost place in commerce and manufactures amongst the nations of the world, its industry declined gradually but steadily; and by that writer, as by all who have discussed the subject, that decline was accurately traced to one cause—oppressive taxation. So great was the anxiety of the Dutch government to acquire information on this important subject, that various commissions were appointed for the express purpose; one of the most interesting reports from which was that made by a commission appointed in 1751, in the reign of William IV, from which I shall, with the leave of the House, read the following extract, so applicable does it appear to me to the condition of this country at present. The extract is from a report of a committee appointed to inquire into the best means of amending the commerce of the republic. It says, "The oppressive taxes, which have, under various denominations, been imposed on trade,

must be placed at the head of all the causes that have co-operated to the prejudice and discouragement of our commerce and manufactures; and it may justly be said, that it can only be attributed to that, that the trade of this country has been diverted out of its channel, and transferred to our neighbours, and must daily be still more and more alienated, unless the progress thereof be stopped by some quick and effectual remedy." This was the language of those who inquired most closely into the subject in Holland. Let us at least guard ourselves in time from the chance of being called upon to institute similar inquiries some years hence, and of receiving a similar explanation.

But I may perhaps be told,—This is all very true: taxation is clearly an evil: we know it; but we have entered into engagements; we have plighted our faith. It is here that I wish to meet my opponents. I agree with what was said by the honourable member for Callington on a former night, upon the necessity of maintaining inviolably the public faith. I entirely concur with him. I go further; for I should say, although you are oppressed by this heavy responsibility, I am not only ready to maintain that amount of revenue which is requisite to support it, which may be necessary to uphold all esta-

blishments conducive to the dignity, safety, and honour of this country, but I am prepared to assert, that under a good system all these burthens may be rendered light, and not only the existing engagements of the country religiously adhered to, but that she may be placed in a situation to make further exertions if necessary, and wield a greater power than ever she did before.

It is not of the amount of revenue that I complain: it is not of the extent of taxation. It is not the sum of money which passes into your treasury,—it is the manner in which you raise it, which checks your industry, destroys your energy, and must leave you at last to ruin and poverty. It is not by the amount of taxation that the injury which it inflicts is to be measured,—it is by its effects. It is the incidence of taxation to which we have to look. This is the only standard by which we can measure the taxation of any country; and this has been the concurring opinion of all who have studied the subject. We find it in our own country; we find it in others. I have already referred to the state of Holland, I might appeal to France and Spain. All the writers upon Spain, Ulloa, Usteritz, and others, concur in opinion that the decline of that country was more to be attributed to the imposi-

tion of the *Alcavala*, the most odious tax ever imposed in any country, than to any other circumstance whatever; and the flourishing condition of Catalonia and Valencia, where it did not exist, amply confirm this view. Sully, Vaubanc, Turgot, and others, agree in attributing the miserable condition of France to the system of taxation more than to any other cause; but to the incidence, and not to the amount. Sully showed, that in order to raise a revenue of 30,000,000 francs, 150,000,000 were actually taken from the people. When M. Turgot came into the administration, he had an exact calculation made of the expense required for keeping up the roads: he found that it would amount to 10,000,000 francs; whilst it appeared that by the system of *Corvée* the execution of repairs was carried on at an expense of 40,000,000 to the people. Turning to English authorities, I find that on the importance of the incidence of taxation, Adam Smith has the following passage, with which I must trouble the House.

“Every tax ought to be so contrived as both to take out and keep out of the pockets of the people as little as possible, over and above what it brings into the public treasury of the state. A tax may either take out or keep out of the pockets of the people a great deal more than it

brings into the public treasury in the four following ways:—First, the levying of it may require a greater number of officers, whose salaries may eat up the greater part of the produce of the tax, and whose perquisites may impose another additional tax upon the people. Secondly, it may obstruct the industry of the people, and discourage them from applying to certain branches of business which might give maintenance and employment to great multitudes. While it obliges the people to pay, it may thus diminish, or perhaps destroy, some of the funds which might enable them more easily to do so. Thirdly, by the forfeitures and other penalties which those unfortunate individuals incur who attempt unsuccessfully to evade the tax, it may frequently ruin them, and thereby put an end to the benefit which the community might have received from the employment of their capitals. Fourthly, by subjecting the people to the frequent visits and odious examination of the tax-gatherers, it may expose them to much unnecessary trouble, vexation, and oppression; and though vexation is not, strictly speaking, expense, it is certainly equivalent to the expense at which every man would be willing to redeem himself from it.”

Let the House but examine our present system, and say how far it agrees in almost every

respect with the description of that kind of taxation, which Adam Smith so justly deprecates. How are the taxes raised in this country, in which it should be our peculiar care to throw no impediment in the way of the productive employment of our capital and of our labour? Let gentlemen look at the returns upon the table, which show that 6,000,000*l.* of taxes are levied upon raw materials, and upwards of 2,000,000*l.* on your own manufactures*.

Nor is it surprising that our system should be faulty. If any one feel astonishment, let him consult the history of British taxation, and he will cease to entertain any. By far the greater part of our taxes were imposed during a period of excitement and of disturbance, whilst we were struggling for our existence, and only thought how to meet the exigency of the passing hour. In the year 1793 the whole revenue raised was only 17,000,000*l.*, and this amount was carried rapidly in the course of a few years by successive taxation to the enormous sum of 70,000,000*l.* No wonder then that true principles should have been lost sight of, and that the system then adopted upon the pressure of the moment should have been faulty in every respect. Let me not

* See Parl. Pap. 1829, 172.

be told that Mr. Pitt gave the sanction of his name to such measures: I know he did; but it was in defiance of his own principles, and in contradiction of his own recorded opinions. I know, that yielding to the necessities of the times, urged on by a desire of providing means for a war, every year of which he believed would be the last, he departed from the principles which in better times had guided his policy. But it is to those times, from 1783 to 1793, that I would appeal. Were Mr. Pitt now alive, I would call upon him to support my proposition upon the principles which he himself then laid down, when he carried those measures into execution, upon which, now that the spirit of party has died away, his fame as a financier (and as a financier only do I speak of him) is acknowledged to rest—his two great measures, the commutation act, and the commercial treaty with France. Fatal indeed has it been to this country, that events interposed to prevent him from following up such policy as this. But if the sound judgment of Mr. Pitt yielded to the pressure of the great struggle in which we were engaged, no wonder if his successors should have committed similar errors, and that we should see each succeeding Chancellor of the Exchequer wield his power without regard to

any principle or any interest. It was reserved, indeed, for Mr. Vansittart to show by his administration the soundness of Swift's remark, that the arithmetic of the exchequer is not like the arithmetic of common life: for him it was reserved to despise the principles of philosophers and statesmen, to disregard the experience of all previous times, and assume as a mathematical proposition, that by doubling his rates of duties he would double his revenue. But I shall not stop to blame the minister, and still less to impugn the parliament who could sanction his measures. It is easy, indeed, to believe, that the statesmen who could gravely propound the astonishing proposition, that the one pound note and a shilling were worth the guinea, which was currently sold at twenty-seven shillings, and the House of Commons which could sanction such a monstrous absurdity, should not have been difficult in coming to an understanding upon other matters of finance as preposterous and as ridiculous. My wish, however, is not to find fault with the minister or with the parliament, but to expose the errors of both, and apply a remedy. It is only necessary indeed for the House to make itself acquainted with the subject, to see the propriety of reviewing it. The manner in which, in the days to which I allude, taxation was treated is truly ludicrous.

The legislature seemed to treat taxes as an amusing game, and the House will scarcely believe the various changes, the tricks, the experiments of all kinds, to which, in the course of a few years, the taxation of the most important articles of our consumption have been repeatedly subjected. Let me just state a few of them. I find that the tax upon tobacco, one of the most important articles of revenue during thirty-five years, from 1789 to 1825, has been changed eight times. It was once 350 per cent.; it was let down to 200 per cent.; it was raised again to 1200 per cent.; and let down again to 800 per cent. Wine, during the same period, was changed ten different times in England; eleven in Ireland. Foreign spirits in twenty years were altered eleven times; sugar in thirty years seventeen times; tea seven times; and glass five times. Surely here we have proof that our taxation has been imposed without much consideration, and upon no very definite principles. This is what I propose to consider. In proceeding to state my views, and the course which I should recommend to be taken, I shall I fear have to enter into a detail of figures, which I trust the House will pardon; but it is by figures and by facts that this question must be decided, and not by rounded periods, or by eloquent sentences.

I propose to divide the taxes, which I shall have to consider, into two branches. First, those which press most injuriously on the raw materials used in our manufactures, or on the manufactures themselves, and which ought to be repealed altogether; and, secondly, the class of taxation which is the principal object of my motion, and to which I wish to call the particular attention of the House; those taxes, of which the rates are far too high, and a great reduction in which will, I shall be able I hope to show, be followed by no reduction whatever of revenue.

I begin then, Sir, with the taxes upon such articles as I consider in the light of raw materials, or manufactures, and which press hard upon the industry of the country; many of them unfit to be objects of taxation at all, in my judgment; and others exposed to such obnoxious, and harassing, and expensive regulations, as to make them, in a national point of view, not worth the trouble and expense of collecting. I shall instance but a few, but these the most injurious. To begin with timber. The nett revenue from that is about 1,550,000*l.*; an enormous sum to be levied on an article which necessarily enters into our buildings, our ships, and must be of first necessity in the industry of the country. But I do not find fault with its

amount : my objection is to the manner in which it is imposed. By the papers laid upon the table of the House it is clearly shown, that by our impolitic exclusion of the timber of the Baltic, except at a scale of duty amounting almost to a prohibition, we tax the consumers of this country to the extent of 1,500,000*l.* more for the supposed benefit of a particular class, but which is in reality as much a dead loss to the country as if it were thrown into the sea*. Nor is this the only evil ; for whilst you force the consumer to pay an exorbitant price, you make him take an inferior article, quite unfitted for the purposes for which he requires it. This is one of the blessings we owe to Mr. Vansittart's administration, who by his proceedings in 1809, 1810, and 1813, on the vain pretext of ensuring a supply and rendering us independent of foreign aid, imposed this tax upon the country, forced a bad article upon the consumer, and destroyed a trade, which gave employment in 1809 to no less than 428,000 tons of British shipping, or one-fourth of the commercial navy of the kingdom †. I shall not, however, dwell upon this article, because I am aware that there are political considerations, however futile in my

* See Parl. Pap. 1828.

† See Lord's Report on Foreign Trade.

opinion they may be, which are involved in its discussion, and because the subject is of such magnitude, and of such importance, as to be worthy of a separate discussion; and I cannot believe that it will not soon obtain one. I shall only affirm my belief, that by changing the system, by reopening the trade to the Baltic, you have it in your power to relieve the consumer to a great extent, and to increase your revenue at least one-half.

The next article to which I come involves purely financial considerations. It is hemp; the duty on which amounts to only about 70,000*l.* The rate is about 4*l.* 13*s.* per ton, or about 16 per cent. The House will recollect, that I last year called their attention to this subject. The duty levied on this article is at once the most absurd and the most monstrous of any in your customs; for whilst you tax an article in its raw state, not produced at home, of the first necessity for the greatest interest of this country, your marine, you admit it in a manufactured form to be used in your shipping, if purchased and manufactured abroad. You hold out a premium to the manufacturers of foreign countries, whilst you deny to your own even an equality of position as regards the raw material, which might give them a chance of fair competition. This is indeed breaking not only every

sound principle, but even those principles which have hitherto guided your policy; and the result I need scarcely add has fully proved the wisdom of your law; your marine suffers, your importation has declined to one-half, and your own manufacturers are ruined.

I come next to soap, the gross duty on which I find to be, in 1828, the last year I have an account of, 1,414,954*l.*; the nett only 1,210,754*l.* The duty on hard soap (and the revenue on soft soap is next to nothing) is three pence per lb. or 110 to 130 per cent. or in some cases even more. This is a large sum, and I must fairly own that I do not think it at all an unfit object of revenue. But it is clear that the duty is far too high to answer the purpose, and the regulations for collecting it lead to frauds of the grossest description. There is no duty in Ireland, and it is notorious that a large quantity of soap is smuggled back again from that country into England. There is no fixed rule for the collection of the revenue: there are no less than seven different modes of levying it: in London there is one way, in Liverpool another, in Hull a third, and so on. This is meant to avoid fraud, and the result is to invite it, and of course to harass the fair trader. I know of two houses who avail themselves of some of the existing regulations to carry on an extensive business entirely

with the capital of the government. I will shortly explain how. There is a drawback on the exportation of soap to Ireland, which is paid immediately, whilst the duty is not required until the expiration of six weeks from the manufacture of the soap. Two houses in Liverpool exporting their soap to Ireland, immediately after it is made receive the drawback, which exceeds in amount the value of the soap, and which they have not to pay in the shape of duty for nearly five weeks, during which time therefore they hold in their hands the capital of the government, and actually trade with it. But there is no end to the various frauds which arise under this system. I should tire the House were I to enter into a further detail of them. I will only remark, that I am satisfied if the duty be reduced to 60 or 70 per cent at the outside, if it be levied equally over the United Kingdom, and above all if the regulations be simplified, your revenue would rather increase than diminish.

But if I pass by this duty so easily, I cannot do so with the next article I come to, one which enters largely into the manufacture of soap—barilla—the duty on which was, in 1828, 59,249*l.*; at a rate, in spite of late reductions, of 100 per cent. That duty was avowedly imposed for the exclusive benefit of a few families

in Scotland, who vainly hoped to protect the manufacture of kelp. This plan has completely failed: for whilst the manufacturer has been oppressed, the producer of kelp has quite lost his market, since he has been met by the introduction of a factitious alkali, or what is called *Soude Factice*, which has completely undersold him. Is it to be borne, that for the sake of protecting nominally a few individuals, or to raise such a miserable duty, you should oppress one of your most important branches of manufacture?

I may be told perhaps that this is a trifle. Not so however is the next article to which I shall allude, that of sea-borne coals, the nett duty on which in 1828 amounted to 833,072*l.* It is quite impossible to justify the continuation of this tax for one hour. Since its imposition, circumstances have entirely changed; and whoever will refer to the debates which took place so often upon this subject, will find that the grounds on which it was defended are completely different from those of the present day. At the various periods at which this duty was imposed, — for instance, during the early periods of the war, — coals were principally used for fuel; and although the tax fell heavily on individuals, and affected their comforts, it did not operate on the

manufactures of the country. But now, when that article has become so important in this respect, is it politic, is it just, to compel manufacturers to establish themselves in inland parts, where they can obtain coals at a cheap rate, and to prevent them from fixing their works on the coast or in the capital? On what principle of equity or of justice can you call on the manufacturer of Norwich or of London to pay a duty on an article from which you exempt his neighbour at Manchester or at Paisley? Whoever will inquire but briefly into this subject, will see the injurious effects of this duty. In the glass manufacture, for example, it has completely driven the manufacturer of the metropolis from the coarser to the finer kind of goods. Under the general use of steam power, which prevails more or less through every branch of industry, it must seriously injure almost every manufacturer who comes within its operation. It is, I maintain, utterly indefensible; and I should propose its removal with as little delay as may be.

I shall not trouble the House with any more remarks upon the taxes on raw materials. I hold in my hand a list of two hundred and seven, many of which could in my opinion be most advantageously dispensed with, and others essen-

tially reduced; but I shall call its attention to the taxes on those articles of manufacturing industry which are peculiarly oppressive, and peculiarly deserving of inquiry—I allude to those on glass, paper, and printed calicoes.

The gross duty on glass for the year 1828 amounted in Great Britain (I exclude Ireland, as it is a mere trifle; only 20,000*l.* and has been lately imposed) to 953,257*l.*; the nett duty to 577,725*l.* the difference being either returned or sacrificed in the collection. And here I would entreat the House to remark, that for the sake of such a sum as half a million, a charge of collection on nearly a million is incurred. The duty is 6*d.* per lb. on flint, but equal to 7*d.* from the mode of its collection: in other words, upwards of 100 per cent.; the glass, when made, selling for 1*s.* to 14*d.* This too is a very much reduced duty from what it was: and here the House will observe an admirable illustration of the effect of heavy duties on consumption, and consequently on revenue. In 1794, the last year in which the duty was 21*s.* 5*d.* per cwt. for plate and flint, and other kinds in proportion, the quantities paying duty were as follows:

Flint & Plate.	Broad.	Crown.	Bottle.
Cwts. 67,615	20,607	83,940	227,476

The duties were successively raised to 49*s.*; and

at last by Mr. Vansittart, in pursuit of his favourite theory, in 1813, to 98*s.* ! And let us see the result : in 1816 the consumption had declined to

Cwts. 29,600	6,140	55,502	155,595
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In 1825, Government saw a part of their error, and reduced the duty by one half, still leaving it too high : but mark the effect : in 1828, the last year for which I have the returns, the consumption rose to

Cwts. 68,134	6,956	90,603	224,864
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Still however only about the same as in 1794. It appears, therefore, that notwithstanding the increase of population and general luxury, the consumption has been kept down by your improvident system, and is actually now less than it was five and thirty years ago. But here again the duty is far from being the greatest evil. Let any one turn to the act, he will find thirty-two clauses of regulations, penalties, prohibitions, all vexatious to the manufacturer, and all to be paid for by the public. I have said, that the duty on flint glass is 6*d.* per lb., the glass when made selling for 1*s.* But the excise officer has the power of imposing the duty either when the glass is in the pot at 3*d.* per lb., or after it has been turned out at 6*d.* ; the glass

when turned out gaining 100 per cent. It is found more advantageous to the revenue to exact the duty on glass in the pot at *3d.*; and in this way the duty is raised to *7d.* Nor is this all: the manufacturer is driven by this method into the necessity of producing frequently an article which he does not want. He makes the fine glass from the middle, the coarser from the top and bottom of the pot. He frequently wants only fine glass, and he would remelt the flux of the coarser parts if he had not paid duty upon it; but of course he is unable to do so. All the glass manufacturers whom I have consulted agree that the whole cost of the excise to the consumer, besides the duty, which is 100 per cent., is 25 per cent.; and besides, there is great inconvenience and oppression from the frauds which are daily taking place. And observe the effect which is produced upon your trade both at home and abroad.

A manufacturer, who has lately travelled through France, the Netherlands, and Germany, has assured me, that our manufacturers could advantageously cope with foreigners, were it not for the duties imposed by the government. Labour is as cheap in this country, our ingenuity is greater, and materials are also as cheap; it is,

then, the vexatious, onerous duty alone, that gives the foreign manufacturer the advantage over the English. But the effect of the duty goes further; it operates to prevent all improvement in the article, because, to improve, experiments must be made; but a man, with a duty of 125 per cent. over his head, is not very likely to make many experiments. This argument applies especially with respect to colours. A manufacturer has assured me that he has never been able to produce a beautiful red, because the duties have prevented his trying the necessary experiments without his incurring a great risk or loss. Thus a miserable duty, amounting to only 500,000*l.*, and upon which a charge of 10 per cent. is made for collecting, is allowed to impede our native industry, to put a stop to all improvement, and be a source of endless oppression and fraud. I really cannot believe that the legislature will resist such an appeal as the manufacturers of this article could make to them, or refuse to relieve them from the gratuitous injury which is inflicted on them.

I now come to the duties levied on paper, the gross produce of which for 1828 (Ireland again excluded, where the duty only amounts to 23,900*l.*) I find to be 743,422*l.*, the nett amount 699,544*l.*; from which the charge of col-

lection remains to be deducted. The duty is on some kinds of paper $1\frac{1}{2}d.$, on others $2\frac{1}{4}d.$, on others $3d.$ per lb., varying from 50 to 150 per cent. on the different kinds of paper! Surely I need scarcely press upon the House the utter impolicy of taxing to such an extent an article of such infinite importance to this country. It is in fact a tax upon science, upon knowledge, on the diffusion of education, and of useful information. But here again the amount of the tax levied forms but a small part of the expense to which the public must necessarily be put to repay the manufacturer for all the trouble and annoyance to which he is subject by the regulations of the law under which he carries on his business. The vexatious nature of this act is almost incredible. I must trouble the House with some slight description of them in the words of the manufacturers themselves. One of them upon whose accuracy and honour I can rely writes to me thus:—

“ We are bound to give twenty-four or forty-eight hours’ notice (according to the distance the exciseman lives) before we can change any paper, and to keep it in our mills for twenty-four hours afterwards before we send it to market, unless it has been reweighed by the supervisor; to have the different rooms in our manufactories

lettered ; to have our engines, vats, chests, and presses numbered ; and labels pasted on each ream ;—should we lose one label the penalty is 200*l.* I generally write a request for five hundred labels to the excise at one time, and should any person get into my mill, and steal or destroy them, the penalty would be 100,000*l.* I believe there is not any kind of paper pays more than 20*s.* per ream duty. If the penalty were 40*s.* it would be quite sufficient to answer every purpose for the security of the revenue. We are obliged also to take out a yearly licence, and a mill with one vat pays as much as one that has ten.”

Another says, “ It is no slight aggravation of the evil, that the laws are so scattered and confused as to render it almost impossible for anybody to have a perfect knowledge of them, and frequently what is a great annoyance to an honest man, is no check to a rogue. It is true, the excise laws are seldom, or perhaps never, acted upon to their utmost rigour ; but still they confer almost unlimited power on those who have the administering of them, over the property of all who come under their influence ; and I am persuaded that they never could have existed, if they had affected the whole of the community.”

This last observation I think well deserving the serious consideration of the House. It is in fact the real grievance of your excise laws, and I can safely affirm, that if there be a law under their influence which requires revision, it is that which we now have before us.

But I now turn to the last tax of this description, on which I shall think it necessary to dwell. The subject has already been partially brought before the House during the last session, by my honourable friend the member for Montrose, in moving for some returns of which I shall avail myself—I mean the tax on printed calicoes. It is matter of surprise to me, that this most impolitic impost should have been allowed to continue, especially when it was declared by the committee of 1818, to be “partial and oppressive, and that its repeal was most desirable.” Who, indeed, can examine it, and not feel the truth of this observation. Is it credible, that in order to raise a nett revenue of 599,669*l.*, a gross tax should be imposed of 2,019,737. ? and yet this was the return according to the paper on your table for the year 1828 ! And these figures are still far from showing us the real cost of the collection of this tax. That must be taken upon the gross produce, and supposing the rate of collection for the excise to be 5 per cent. which is

less than it really is, you have a cost of 20 per cent. on the nett produce of this tax for charges. In addition to this from all the inquiry I have been able to make, the increased cost to the manufacturer is fully 5 per cent. upon the whole quantity made, so that you have thus two sums of each 100,000*l.* levied on the public for the sake of exacting a duty of 600,000*l.* But the revenue is again in this case far from being the measure of the injury you inflict. The inequality of the tax constitutes its chief objection. The duty is levied upon the square yard at $3\frac{1}{2}d.$ per yard. Thus the piece of calico which sells for 6*l.* duty paid, contributes equally with that which is worth 5*s.* per yard. You levy an onerous and oppressive tax of 100 or 150 per cent. upon the poor who are the purchasers of inferior cottons, whilst the rich who buy only the finest kinds pay but 10 or 15 per cent.

I have thought it necessary, Sir, to detail these taxes to the House, as those relating to this branch of my subject, which I consider most injurious, and the repeal of which I should most earnestly recommend, as soon as it can be done consistently with the revenue required for the wants of the country. They amount after all to but a moderate sum; but the gain to the public from their abolition is not to be measured

by their pecuniary amount, although that would considerably exceed any loss to the exchequer. For convenience sake I will just repeat what in my opinion would be the amount of both. I take hemp at 70,000*l.*, barilla at 69,000*l.*, coals 800,000*l.*, glass 577,000*l.*, paper 699,000*l.*, printed calicoes 599,000*l.*, making a total of 2,814,000*l.*, but which, deducting the charges of collection upon the gross duties respectively, cannot produce to the exchequer more than about 2,600,000. The gain to the public, however, by the removal of this amount, I think I am fairly justified in taking at a sum of at least 3,600,000*l.*, even if we only look to the positive pecuniary saving by their having no longer to defray the increased cost of every article which is subjected to these onerous duties, and the vexatious regulations which attend their exaction; but the real gain would be infinitely greater, if we take into account, as we ought, the new employment for capital, the skill, the improvement in art which would at once be brought into action, if the various branches of industry which now languish under the pressure of these taxes were set free.

If I be asked what substitute I propose in the place of those taxes which I desire to see reduced, I should reply, that a very large proportion of

their amount, if not the whole, might be supplied by a reduction in the expenditure of the country; but should that not be found practicable, there are certainly various sources of revenue to be found, infinitely less burthensome to the community. The bounties on the fisheries, the bounties on linen, both useless and mischievous, should be abolished, and would constitute a considerable sum. Various plans have already been suggested, and more could undoubtedly be found of raising so small a sum in a way much more advantageous to the industry of the country. One, for instance, has been suggested by Mr. Humphreys (I mention it only because every thing which comes from him is worthy of attention), of equalizing the duty upon stamps and transfers, and applying the legacy duty to real property, as well as personal estate; the last item alone he calculates would yield 1,500,000*l.* I do not mean to say that I am by any means friendly to the adoption of such a measure; on the contrary, I should be adverse to it in the way he proposes it; but I merely advert to it, or to the plan suggested by my honourable friend the member for the Queen's county, to show that if ever the attention of a committee were drawn to the whole subject, I have no doubt that means would be found of supplying whatever might be re-

quired, without taxing productive industry to the extent which the taxes I have enumerated do.

And here, Sir, I take the opportunity of saying a word on the great question introduced the other night by my right honourable friend the member for Liverpool into his speech,—I mean the question of a great mutation of taxation, and the substitution of a direct tax upon income for a large portion of our indirect taxes. I think it but just to myself, and but fair to the House, to declare my concurrence in the view which he takes upon this subject. I agree with him in thinking, that under proper regulations, and with sufficient securities, such a change would be beneficial in the highest degree to the industry and improvement of the country: but having said thus much of my own individual opinion, which I should be ready at a proper time to justify and support, I must declare, that the consideration of such a plan forms no part of my present motion, and I feel myself therefore by no means called upon to discuss it.

I shall now therefore pass to the consideration of the second branch of my subject, by far the most important part of it; the second class of taxation which I propose to consider, namely, of those articles in which a considerable reduction of rate may in my opinion be effected with-

out producing any falling off in the revenue. It is to this important point that I am anxious more particularly to direct the attention of the House, as it is upon this subject that I think a committee would be eminently useful. The more I have considered this branch of our revenue, the more convinced I have become, that we have within our own power the means of greatly diminishing the pressure upon the people, and of affording them increased means of enjoyment without injuring in any important degree the income of the state.

If, Sir, there be one principle more clearly established than any other in financial science, it is the axiom of Dr. Swift, that in the calculations of revenue two and two do not always make four, but much more frequently only one—in other words, that there is a point in taxation, where by increasing the amount of your duties, instead of increasing your revenue you defeat your own purpose; and that on the contrary, by lowering duties which have been unduly raised, you not only augment the means of enjoyment of the consumers, but you increase the actual amount of your revenue. Wherever we turn in the history of our own taxation, we find this doctrine amply illustrated. Unfortunately we

have too many examples of the one principle, that increased taxation does not increase revenue; but we have likewise proof enough of the other, that augmented revenue may follow diminished duties. The history of Ireland affords the most striking illustration of the first of these rules. A case is there established, which is written in characters too legible not to serve as a guide to future financiers,—one which ought to bring shame upon the memory of its authors. The revenue of Ireland in the year 1807 amounted to 4,378,000*l.* Between that year and the conclusion of the war, taxes were successively imposed, which, according to the calculations of chancellors of the exchequer, were to produce 3,400,000*l.*, or to augment the revenue to the extent of 7,700,000*l.* What was the result? Why, that in the year 1821, when that amount, less about 400,000*l.* for taxes afterwards repealed, ought to have been paid into the exchequer, the whole revenue of Ireland amounted only to 3,844,000*l.*, being 533,000*l.* less than in 1807, previous to one farthing of these additional taxes having been imposed. Here is an example to prove that an increase of taxation does not tend to produce a corresponding increase of revenue, but on the contrary an actual diminu-

tion. The contrary principle, that for which I contend, is equally well illustrated in the later periods of Irish financial history; but it is singularly well exemplified upon the largest possible scale by that of the United Kingdom within the last few years, and to that I propose to refer. By the papers laid before the Finance Committee, it was shown, that between the years 1823 and 1827, taxes were repealed which should have produced a loss to the revenue of 9,182,571*l.* But what was the nett loss? only 3,308,316*l.*; the enormous difference of 5,874,255*l.* being made up by increased consumption. With such examples before us, with such facts staring us in the face, can we doubt for a moment, that by acting in a similar way we may confidently look for similar results? Let us examine then how far our system of taxation affords us the opportunity of following out this principle. When we come to this consideration, it is curious indeed to observe the ample means we have of doing so. I shall have occasion by and by to advert to some duties of minor importance; but I would first draw the attention of the House to the five great branches of indirect taxation in this country, all taxes levied upon articles in most general use amongst all classes of society in this country, amounting to no less a sum than upwards of 15,000,000*l.* These five great sources

of revenue were as follows in the year 1828, the last I have the accounts of, for the United Kingdom.

Nett produce of Sugar.....	£.5,002,000
Tea.....	3,177,000
Tobacco	2,793,000
Foreign Spirits .	2,921,000
Wine	1,699,000
	<hr/>
	£. 15,592,000
	<hr/>

Now it is plain, that if we can, by diminishing the rates of duties on these articles, and at the same time not only not diminish, but perhaps even augment the revenue, — on articles so essentially necessary to the comforts of all classes of society, we shall be effecting a most important service, and conferring a vast benefit upon the country. And yet, Sir, I am prepared to assert, that not only would that be practicable, but that such a result would be inevitable. I am prepared to show, that in doing so the House could scarcely be said to be trying an experiment, or risking any thing whatever; for we have only to go through the history of the taxation of every one of the articles that I have mentioned, and we shall find that each affords the clearest possible illustration of the truth of what I affirm. This is what I propose now to do; and although I shall, I fear, have to trespass much on the pa-

tience of the House, I rely upon their indulgence for being allowed to produce so interesting a case.

I begin then with the article of wine. And here I must allude to an opinion which was delivered by the right honourable gentleman opposite, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in opposing a proposition of my right honourable friend, the member for Invernessshire, last year, for a reduction of the duty on sugar. He contended that an increase of consumption and of revenue might follow the reduction of duty on an article of luxury, but would not, to the same extent at least, in articles of general consumption. From that proposition I dissent; and I maintain directly the reverse. Still, as wine may be considered partly an article of luxury, and partly of necessity, I trust that I shall obtain the concurrence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who maintains his principle, as well as of those who agree in mine, which I believe to be more correct. Indeed, it is only necessary to refer to facts, to be convinced that the application of this principle to the duties on wine would lead, not to a diminution, but an increase of the revenue. The House will not be a little surprised, I am confident, by the extraordinary effects which have followed the duties that have, from time to time, been laid upon

this article. A century ago we consumed in this country, upon an average, annually, 14,000 hogsheads of French or Bordeaux wine. It appears, that we now only consume, with the present high rate of duty, 1,400 hogsheads. The right honourable gentleman opposite seems to doubt this statement, but I can assure him that it approaches as near as possible to accuracy. But it is not my intention to refer to such remote periods, I come to a calculation as to the duties levied, and the effect of their imposition upon this article, since the year 1786. It is to be borne in mind, that at that period Mr. Pitt took infinite pains to carry into effect a commercial treaty with France, and with that view, and for the purpose of facilitating the execution of that treaty, he lowered, to a very considerable extent, the duties upon French wines consumed in this country. That system of commercial taxation then introduced by Mr. Pitt, had it been persevered in, would have conferred great and lasting benefits on this country and upon France. Now the average annual consumption of French wines in Great Britain, separately from Ireland, from 1791 till 1793, amounted to 270,000 gallons; the duty was then but 3*s.* 9*d.* per gallon, the average amount of duty was 52,000*l.*: the annual average consumption of all foreign wines for those three years amounted to 7,500,000 gallons,

and the total amount of duty levied thereon, to 1,122,000*l.* In the year 1813, when the duty had been raised 320 per cent., the consumption of French wines in this country declined from 270,000 to 36,880 gallons; the revenue by the increase of duty only rose to 73,000*l.* from 52,300*l.*; and thus, though the duty had been increased from 3*s.* 9*d.*, which it was in 1791-3, to 16*s.* 5*d.*, that is, though the duty upon French wine had been in this manner actually quintupled, there had been only an increase of one-third in the revenue.

I will now refer to the duties raised in 1820 and 1822. At that period the duty had indeed been lowered from 16*s.* 5*d.* to 11*s.* 5*d.* upon French wines, but it remained at 7*s.* 8*d.* upon other wines: the consequence was, that the annual consumption of French wines had increased to 171,000 gallons—the duty increased to 102,000*l.* yet the total annual consumption of foreign wines amounted to only 5,000,000 gallons—the total revenue raised to 1,803,000*l.* Here is a complete proof of the truth of the principle for which I contend. The increase of the duty had been followed by a great diminution in the consumption of wine, but by only a trifling addition to the amount of the revenue as compared with 1791; for, though at this period,—I mean 1820 and 1822,—the duty was lowered

from 16*s.* 5*d.* to 11*s.* 5*d.* on French wine, which had therefore increased, it remained the same on other kinds, and the total consumption of foreign wines in this country had fallen off from 7,500,000 gallons, which it was when the low rate of duty existed in 1791, to 5,000,000 gallons, and the revenue was only raised from 1,122,000*l.* to 1,803,000*l.*, though the duty had, in the interval that elapsed between those two periods, being raised 320 per cent.

Now, what was the effect of lowering the duty? In the year 1825 the duty on French wine was reduced to 6*s.* per gallon, and the duty upon other foreign wines to 4*s.* per gallon; the consequence was, that the consumption of French wine increased to, in 1828, 550,000 gallons, producing a revenue of 136,000*l.*, and the total consumption of foreign wines rose to 7,580,000 gallons, producing a revenue of 1,506,000*l.* Thus, though the duty was lowered 50 per cent. you had a positive increase of revenue from French wines of 35 per cent. with an increased consumption of 300 per cent., and taking all foreign wines, the revenue was only diminished 12 per cent., whilst the consumption was augmented 45 per cent. This was the case with the duties on wine in England. I will now refer the House to Ireland, where the effect of an increase of duty is still more re-

markable. In Ireland, in the years 1789 and 1790, when the duty upon French wine was 33*l.* 7*s.* per tun, the average annual consumption amounted to 490,000 gallons, producing a revenue of 62,000*l.* The duty upon other foreign wines was then 22*l.* 4*s.* per tun; and the total consumption of foreign wines at that period in Ireland amounted to 1,400,000 gallons, producing a revenue of 135,000*l.* From that period the duty was successively raised to 44*l.*, 54*l.*, 64*l.*, 75*l.*, 87*l.*, and 105*l.*, and at length it was raised by Mr. Vansittart to 139*l.*, and thus the duty remained until 1814, when the rates were assimilated to those in Great Britain. What was the effect of this increase of duty? A gradual decline, until in the years 1820 and 1822, when the duty had been raised to 11*s.* 5*d.* per gallon on French wine, and to 7*s.* 8*d.* on other foreign wines, the consumption of French wine in Ireland amounted to no more than 21,500 gallons, producing a revenue of 12,300*l.*; and the total consumption of foreign wines in Ireland amounted to only 566,000 gallons, producing a revenue of 188,000*l.* Thus, therefore, though in this instance the duty had been raised 500 per cent., the revenue upon French wine, compared with that produced in 1788-90, had been reduced one-fifth part; the total reve-

nue upon the consumption of wine in Ireland had been only raised 30 per cent., and the consumption had been diminished 60 per cent. In the year 1825, when, as in this country, a still greater reduction was made in the duty on wine in Ireland, the consumption of French wine increased there in 1828 to 55,000 gallons, producing a revenue of 16,700*l.*; and the total consumption of foreign wines in Ireland increased to 1,003,000 gallons, producing a revenue of 193,000*l.* Thus, though the duty had been, in this instance, reduced 50 per cent., the revenue had actually increased 6 per cent., and the consumption had increased 50 per cent. But still the consumption of wine in Ireland is less by one-third than it was in 1790, though the population in that country has more than doubled since that time*.

These facts are sufficient to prove the utility and propriety of applying the principle of reduction to the duties upon these articles. I will ask, after such instances, whether, if the duty were now reduced to 3*s.* per gallon on French wine, we should not still be likely to collect a revenue equal to the present? It may be said, however, that there is a treaty in the way, be-

* See Parl. Pap. article Wines, September, 1829.

tween this country and Portugal, to prevent us proceeding further with such reductions, and that it would not be right to do any thing in that way now. I do not want to have any thing done hastily. I do not want the Government to make a sudden alteration in the system, but I sincerely hope that our interests will not be sacrificed to the miserable idea of keeping up a connection with Portugal, and that no such consideration will prevent us from taking our neighbours' produce when they can give it us good and cheap, it being quite obvious, that they must afford us a market in return for our own. France, it is said, would not take our goods in return for her wine—but that is absurd. If we take her wine, she must take our produce in return, or something for which our produce has been exchanged.

I now proceed to a most important article—I mean tobacco. Tobacco has become an essentially necessary article of consumption amongst the lower classes of society in this country. It may be considered by honourable gentlemen as a luxury, but amongst the lower classes in this country it has become an article absolutely necessary to their comfort; and there is none upon which the imposition of high duties tends more to lead to a contraband trade. I will show, that the principle for which I contend may be also-

most advantageously applied to this article. I will state to the House the average consumption of tobacco in Great Britain, at different periods, according to the returns on the table*. In the year 1795, when the duty was 1*s.* 3*d.* per lb., the consumption of tobacco amounted to 10,972,000 lbs., producing a revenue of 659,000*l.* In the year 1806 the duty was raised to 2*s.* 2*d.*—now that duty might be considered fair enough, and not too high. The consequence was, that it did not affect the consumption, which increased to the extent of 3,000,000 lbs., the consumption in 1812, the last year of that duty, being 15,043,000 lbs., and the revenue produced 1,679,000*l.* Afterwards the duty was successively year after year increased, until it was actually doubled—that is, raised to 4*s.* per lb.; and the consequence was, that in the year 1824, that is, the last year before the duty was changed, and a reduction made in it, the consumption of tobacco amounted to only 13,083,000 lbs., and though the duty had been doubled, the revenue, instead of being raised to 3,400,000*l.*, only amounted to 2,627,000*l.* In the year 1825 the duty on tobacco was reduced to 3*s.* per lb. The consequence was that the consumption of tobacco

* Parl. Pap. Sess. 1829.

increased in 1827 to 14,704,000 lbs.; and though the duty had been lowered one-fourth, the falling off in the revenue, which should have been 656,500*l.*, was only 404,000*l.*, for the revenue produced amounted to 2,223,000*l.*

In the case of Ireland the argument is still stronger; and it is to be recollected that tobacco is even a greater necessary in Ireland than it is in this country. From 1794 till 1797 the annual average consumption of tobacco in Ireland amounted to 7,947,000 lbs.; the duty was then only 8*d.* per lb., and the revenue produced amounted to 215,000*l.* Now in the year 1820, the consumption had diminished to 2,582,000 lbs., being about one-fourth of what it had been in 1797, while in the mean time the duty had been raised to 4*s.* per lb.; and thus, though the duty had been raised 600 per cent., instead of producing, as one would have expected, a revenue amounting to 1,290,000*l.*, it only increased the revenue to 516,000*l.*, being not quite double the revenue raised in 1797. In the year 1825, the duty on tobacco was reduced to 3*s.* per lb., and the consumption in 1827 had increased to 4,041,000 lbs., and the revenue produced amounted to 603,037*l.* Thus though the duty had been reduced one-fourth, instead of producing, as might have been supposed, only 387,000*l.*, it produced 603,000*l.*, or one-sixth more than

the higher rate of duty produced. The population in Ireland has doubled since 1794; and it is only reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the consumption of tobacco should also have doubled since that period: yet here there is a difference of 4,000,000 lbs. between the consumption now and that in 1794. It is quite preposterous to conclude that a population of seven or eight millions would be content with a consumption of 4,013,000 lbs., when a population of three millions, in 1794, consumed 7,500,000 lbs. The article being, then, of prime necessity amongst the lower orders in that country, it is quite plain that smuggling to a vast extent must be going on at present in it. I would certainly myself propose leaving a duty of 200 per cent. upon this article, but at present we have a duty of 900 per cent. upon it, which only holds out an extraordinary temptation to smuggling. According to all accounts laid before the House on the subject, smuggling in this article in England, Ireland, and Scotland, is carried at present to the greatest possible extent. I have heard it stated, and I have the fact upon the best authority, that numbers of vessels are constantly leaving the ports of Flushing, Ostend, &c., carrying contraband tobacco to this country. It is a fact which was established in evidence before a committee of this House, that seventy cargoes of

tobacco, containing 3,644,000 lbs., were smuggled in one year on the coast of Ireland, from the port of Waterford to the Giant's Causeway alone*. In Scotland, the smuggling in this article is also carried on to a great extent. There is no doubt that the only mode of meeting this system of smuggling, and effectually putting it down, consists in fairly reducing the duty upon this article. I think that if the duty upon it were reduced to 1s. or 1s. 6d. per lb., the revenue would be greatly served, and smuggling put down.

The next article to which I shall advert, is that of foreign spirits, which again affords the most convincing proofs of the principle in question. In the years 1789 and 1790, the average consumption of brandy and gin in Great Britain was 2,113,000 gallons; that of rum 2,217,000 gallons; the duty on brandy and gin was then only 5s., and the duty on rum only 4s., and the revenue produced amounted to 1,000,000*l.* In the years 1816 and 1817, when the duty on brandy and gin had been raised to 18s. 9d., and the duty on rum to 11s. 6d., the consumption of brandy and gin amounted to 900,000 gallons, and that of rum to 2,871,000 gallons, producing a revenue of 2,470,000*l.* Thus though the duty

* See Revenue Enquiry.

had been increased nearly 400 per cent. upon brandy and gin, and 300 per cent. on rum, the revenue had been only a little more than doubled, and the consumption had fallen off, notwithstanding an increased population, by one-fourth. But there is a still stronger case, in reference to the mode in which those articles have been taxed. In 1801 and 1803, when the duty was 9s. 5*d.* on brandy and gin, and 7s. 6*d.* upon rum, the total average consumption amounted to 5,799,000 gallons, producing a revenue of 2,468,000*l.* In 1816 and 1817, when the duty upon the former spirits had been raised to 18s. 9*d.* and on the latter to 11s. 6*d.*, the total consumption amounted to only 3,771,000 gallons, producing a revenue of 2,470,000*l.* Thus in this case, though the duty on brandy and gin had been doubled, and that upon rum raised 50 per cent., the revenue was only increased 2,000*l.*, instead of being increased by 2,000,000*l.* as might have been supposed.

I shall now advert to the reduction of the duties upon those spirits, to show how it has acted in increasing the revenue. With regard to rum alone. From the year 1822 till 1825, the average consumption was 2,757,000 gallons, producing a revenue of 1,544,600*l.*; in 1826-28, when the duty was reduced to 7s. 1*d.*, the average consumption of rum increased to

4,314,000 gallons, and the revenue produced amounted to 1,537,000*l.* Thus, though the duty had been reduced one-third, the revenue still continued the same. That I take to be a case in point. But perhaps it will be said that the increased consumption of rum was owing to a falling off in the consumption of other foreign spirits. No such thing. The total consumption of brandy, gin, and rum, had increased from 4,237,000 gallons, the average amount in 1822-1825, to 5,994,000 gallons in 1826-1828, and the revenue had risen from 2,993,000*l.* to 3,123,000*l.*, thus proving that a reduction of duty had been followed by an increased consumption of all kinds of foreign spirits, and by a corresponding increase of the revenue.

Perhaps it will be said that I do not make a sufficient allowance for a falling off in the consumption of English, Scotch, and Irish spirits, occasioned by the consumption of foreign spirits. I am prepared with an answer for that objection; and here again I will show, that a reduction of duty has been attended by an increase of consumption and of revenue. It will be found that in 1821 the spirits made in Scotland amounted to 2,229,000 gallons; the duty was 5*s.* 6*d.*, and the revenue produced was 727,000*l.* In 1828, after the duty had been reduced to 2*s.* per gallon English, the consumption increased

to 5,716,000 gallons, and the revenue produced amounted to 809,000*l.* In Ireland, in 1821, the amount of the consumption of spirits was 2,649,000 gallons, the duty was 5*s.* 6*d.* per gallon, and the revenue produced was 912,000*l.* In 1828, after the duty was reduced, the consumption rose to 9,937,000 gallons, and the revenue increased to 1,395,000*l.* Here permit me to say are instances which admit of no misconception, which require no arguments to support them! It was given in evidence formerly, before a Committee of this House, and previous to the reduction of the duty upon spirits in Ireland, that 10,000,000 of gallons were consumed in Ireland, and that 7,000,000 of that was contraband spirits. I quote that fact to show how a fair and moderate rate of duty tends to put an end to that system which is created and maintained by an immoderate and excessive rate of duty. But it may be said that the reduction of the duty on spirits tends to the diffusion of immorality and drunkenness. Now that I take to be a very idle and silly objection. I think that nothing can be more absurd than an attempt on the part of the legislature to control by law the dispositions of the people, as to what drink they shall take and what they shall not take. I will refer those who make suggestions of that kind to what took place in 1743 or 1745, when the

gin act was brought in, and when a heavy penalty was imposed upon any one who dealt in gin. Yet it was proved that, in spite of that, 6,000,000 of gallons of gin were consumed in London alone.

There are two articles more to which I shall advert, namely, sugar and tea. Before I do so, I wish to observe, that by the reduction of duties upon tobacco and spirits, we shall not only increase the revenue, but that we shall be thus enabled to put down the system of smuggling, which high duties encourage and maintain, and we can then dispense with the expensive coast blockade guard, which it is necessary to keep up at present. By doing so, by reducing the duties upon spirits and tobacco, we shall equally serve the revenue and promote the morals of the country. From the evidence of Mr. Dean, an officer of the government, before the finance committee, it would appear, that the smuggling in these articles alone renders the maintenance of the preventive establishment absolutely necessary; and that for this purpose only is the country called upon to bear an expense of nearly 700,000*l.* I need scarcely urge upon the consideration of the House the great advantage that would result to the country from getting rid of the whole of that system, and of the demoral-

izing practices of which it is the unavoidable cause. It is well known that all along the coast smuggling prevails to a great extent—it is equally certain that it arises from the causes which I have stated, and that the establishments for checking it, which they do but imperfectly, are scarcely a less evil than the offence against which they are directed.

I now come to the article of sugar, and upon this I shall not feel it necessary to say much; both because the subject has been already so ably discussed in former debates, and because I really think that my case has been almost admitted. No one surely will be found to deny, that if without any sacrifice of revenue we can assist that very suffering interest, the great body of West India proprietors, it is our duty to do so. But when, in addition to that, we can benefit so essentially the great body of the people of this country, who more or less all consume sugar, I really cannot express my astonishment that some reduction of this duty should not already have taken place. What does all the evidence of past experience, both of your accounts and of your own officers, say? Why that a reduction of duty is unavoidably followed by increased consumption and even of revenue, and that of course the opposite result follows an

opposite course. Let us take the consumption of sugar in 1801, when the duty was 20s.; it then amounted to 2,773,000 cwt. In 1821, twenty years afterwards, when your population had increased in Great Britain from 10,000,000 to 14,000,000, it remained stationary, nay, it had rather fallen off, for it amounted only to 2,676,000 cwt.; and why was this? The price had increased from natural causes, and you had raised your duty to 27s. During the few past years, the natural price of sugar has fallen materially, and the effect is visible in the increased consumption, which in 1828 amounted to 3,285,000 cwt. But what would be the case if you were to diminish your duty to 18s. or 20s.? Is it not to be supposed, that with a population of 17,000,000 in Great Britain, and above all with one of 7 to 8,000,000 in Ireland, rising in wealth and in means of purchasing every day, your consumption would rapidly augment, and your revenue with it? The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in arguing this question last year, supposed that a reduction of duty to 20s. would be followed by a loss of revenue of 400,000*l.*, allowing for an increased consumption of 500,000 cwt. I am of opinion, that a far greater increase of consumption would really take place, and I may refer him to the evidence of Mr. Irving, in

his Letter laid before the Finance Committee, for a proof of what I say. I have not the slightest doubt, that if the duty were reduced to 20s. the revenue would be a gainer and not a loser by the transfer. But I shall not go at any further length into this article, and I pass to the next.

I mean, tea. I certainly am not for proposing a reduction of the duty upon this article as long as the monopoly of the East India Company continues, for that I believe would only be taking money out of the pockets of the public to put it into those of the company. But the trade ought to be thrown open, and the enormous duty reduced at the same time. I wish too more particularly to allude to tea, because the history of its taxation furnishes the most striking example of the effects of various duties upon it, and serves to illustrate and confirm in the clearest manner, the principle for which I am contending.

In 1745 the duty was 4s., and the consumption amounted to only 750,000 lbs., and the revenue was 151,000*l*. In the following year the duty was reduced to 1s. per pound, and the immediate result was, that the consumption increased to 2,000,000 lbs., and the revenue instead of falling off actually amounted to 243,000*l*. From 1748 to 1783 succeeding Chancellors of

the Exchequer, disregarding the experience of what had then taken place, successively raised the duty to 119 per cent. at which it stood in 1783, when the consumption was only 5,857,000 lbs., and the revenue 700,000*l.* At this period Mr. Pitt introduced his celebrated commutation act, by which the duty was reduced to $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., and let the House mark the immediate effect. The consumption rose in 1787 to 16,692,000 lbs., and the revenue raised was 343,000*l.* Thus, though the duty was reduced to one-tenth part of what it was, the revenue only fell off one-half. The duty was again changed, but it still remained moderate in 1799 at 25 per cent., when the consumption had gradually increased to 24,853,000 lbs. Since then unfortunately a different system has prevailed; the duty has been successively raised to 96 and 100 per cent., and let us observe the effect. In 1828, the consumption only amounts to 26,000,000 lbs.; so that although we have increased in population nearly to the extent of doubling, the amount consumed remains but what it was thirty years ago. Can any thing be more striking than these facts? And what is the necessary inference? It must be, that as the consumption of what is called tea has increased far beyond that extent, the article passing under that denomination must be an adulterated one.

By the reduction, therefore, of the present enormous high duty on tea, we should not only benefit the revenue, but we should benefit the consumer, by promoting an increased consumption of the genuine article, and by getting rid of the adulterated article that is now so common. It was given in evidence before the Committee of Smuggling, in 1783, that 4,000,000 lbs. of spurious tea were sold in this country, although the consumption of duty-paid teas was only 5,000,000 lbs. If that was the case then, what must be the fact now? We have, before the East India Committee, the evidence of a gentleman, a foreigner, well acquainted with the tea of other countries and of this, who declares that he does not believe that what is called "tea," which he meets with in inns and shops in the interior of the country here, has the slightest infusion of the real plant; that, in fact, it is all composed of sloe leaves. I should certainly not desire to interfere with the home manufacture; but, seriously, such a system of fraud and adulteration ought to be put an end to. I conceive that a reduction of the duty on this article would tend materially to increase the revenue; and I scarcely think that any one can doubt that such would be the result.

I should apologize to the House for the length of time that I trespass upon its indulgence; but

I consider it necessary to state the grounds upon which I seek for the appointment of this Committee. I make no specific proposition; I merely call for a Committee of Inquiry. If I obtain that Committee, I should like to see these reductions made in the duties I have spoken of; a reduction in the duty on tobacco to 1*s.* 6*d.* per lb.,—in that on foreign spirits to 10*s.*—in that upon tea to 50 per cent.—in that upon foreign wines to one half its present amount, and in that upon sugar to 20*s.* These reductions, I am satisfied, would be followed by an increased revenue.

I shall now advert to the article of stamps. I moved, some time ago, for returns of the amount of stamp duties upon sea policies, fire insurances, and the stamps upon newspapers and advertisements. The stamps paid upon sea policies, in the year 1816, amounted to 282,000*l.*; and the ships entered inwards and outwards for all parts of the world, in that year, amounted in tonnage to 3,954,000 tons. Now, in the year 1826, the last for which I have the returns, the amount of stamp duties paid upon sea policies amounted only to 219,000*l.*, and the amount of tonnage of the ships entered outwards and inwards in that year was 5,154,000*l.*; thus showing an increase of business to the amount of 1,100,000 tons, or one-fifth over 1816, and a

diminution of duty of two-fifths. Whence could this arise but from our high rate of duties, which drove insurers to make their policies in the United States or Holland, where they could insure at a cheaper rate? I know of my own knowledge that such has been the case, and that policies are daily entered into in the United States, in Holland, in Germany, and other countries, instead of being made here, in consequence of the difference of the stamp. Can it be otherwise in these times, when a difference in price of $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. is sufficient to influence the destination of commercial business, and is of material consequence in the present low rate of profit? Now, if we reduced to a reasonable extent this tax, we should bring back this business to ourselves, and at the same time increase the revenue by the change. If his Majesty's Government persevere in this pernicious tax, they must send all insurers across the water.

With regard to fire insurances, the case is yet more flagrant. The premium in the fire insurance offices in London, in cases of common risk, is calculated at 1*s.* 6*d.*, and upon that 3*s.* stamp duty must be paid to government. This tax of 200 per cent. obviously prevents many from insuring who would otherwise insure. Many who would be anxious to insure their property at the expense only of 1*s.* 6*d.* per cent.

are deterred from doing so when they reflect, that upon that insurance they must pay a duty of 200 per cent. to the government. What has, in fact, been the consequence of this high rate of duty? A man having one house, with valuable furniture, may even under this duty insure it; but does that hold good with respect to the great proportion of risks? Even in those cases in which there is but one insurance to be effected, the possessor of property will be little inclined to pay three times the real value of the risk incurred to secure himself; but of course whenever that risk can be divided, as is the case in farm buildings, in cottages, in many houses belonging to the same owner, in all those cases in which, by the division of the chances of fire, a proprietor may become his own insurer, he will see the advantage of doing so, and abstain from applying to an office at all, and of course from contributing any thing to the revenue. Does not the amount of insurances clearly show that something is defective in the system? In 1806, when the duty was 2*s.* 6*d.*, the capital insured in Great Britain was 262,716,000*l.*, in the ten years ending 1815 it had increased to 402,360,000*l.* The duty was then raised to 3*s.*, and in the eight following years, the last for which I have returns of the capital, in 1823,

it had only increased to 420,804,000*l.*; and the revenue, which under the low duty had increased in ten years from 266,000*l.* to 518,000*l.*, or doubled, only rose from 592,000*l.* to 631,000*l.*, or between 7 and 8 per cent., though no doubt there has been an immense increase of capital and property in this country during that period. If the Government duty were reduced one-fourth upon fire policies, I am sure the revenue would be, in that instance, materially increased.

I shall now direct the attention of the House to the stamp duties upon newspapers and advertisements. My noble friend near me has already adverted to that subject. But I would go further than my noble friend, who has recommended that the present duty of 4*d.* upon newspapers should be reduced to 2*d.*, for I would reduce it to 1*d.*, and I am sure the revenue would benefit by the reduction. We can only judge of the effect of these stamp duties by comparing the state of our newspapers and their circulation with those of other countries. The inhabitants of the United Kingdom lay a high claim to superior intelligence, and to a high literary character. Now let the state of the newspaper press show how the matter really stands.

I hold in my hand a return made to Parliament in 1821, with regard to the newspapers in

Great Britain and Ireland. It appears from this return, that there were then thirteen daily papers in London, with an average circulation of 2,200 each, making a total circulation of 36,000. By this return it further appears that there were 334 newspapers altogether in Great Britain and Ireland, of which twenty were daily papers, to wit—sixteen in London, and three or four in Dublin. Strange to say, Scotland, with all its wealth and intelligence, has not a single daily paper. The total amount of the circulation of these papers was 27,827,000, with a population of 23,000,000. Now if we look to the United States, we shall find that with a population of 10,000,000, the number of papers is infinitely greater. It is stated by Cooper that there are 800 newspapers in the United States, that of these fifty are published daily, and that the total circulation of them amounts to 64,000,000; thus establishing the fact, that the United States has five newspapers for its population in proportion to one in the British Isles. France establishes equally well this important fact, the bad effect of our stamp duties in preventing the circulation of newspapers. There are four daily newspapers in Paris, the circulation of which amounts to 50,000, and the total daily newspaper circulation in Paris is estimated at 80,000,

while the circulation of papers in London averages only 36,000. Yet in this country, according to the calculation of Mr. Colquhoun, there were in 1812, 128,000 heads of families, with an income of 800*l.* per year, a number now probably amounting to at least 140,000; double or treble what exist in France or the United States.

It would be also most desirable that the duty upon advertisements should be reduced, it is at present a most unequal tax, for the same duty, namely, 3*s.* 6*d.* is charged on an advertisement of one line or of fifty lines. This tax is a great obstruction in the way of advertising. Undoubtedly honourable members who have a double number of *The Times* laid upon their table in the morning, may be led to imagine, from seeing the crowd of advertisements in that immense sheet, that no such obstruction exists; but I would merely refer them to the United States, to show how much more advertising is resorted to where no duty upon advertisements exists. It appears from a statement upon which I feel disposed to place the fullest reliance, that the yearly number of advertisements in the United States amounts to 10,000,000, while the total number of advertisements in the United Kingdom only amounts to 963,000, or about one-tenth of the number that is published in the

United States. We have but to look to the walls of this metropolis to be convinced, that no indisposition exists on the part of the people here to advertise, and to perceive that the check upon their doing so consists in this duty. I should, therefore, be for reducing the duty, as I am sure its reduction would encourage advertising, and increase the revenue. I have read a letter on this subject from the able and intelligent editor of the *Scotsman*, an Edinburgh paper; and I quite concur with the writer in his views. I would recommend the perusal of that letter to the Right Honourable Gentleman opposite (the Chancellor of the Exchequer). I have examined the statements which he makes, and I find no flaw in them. He proves, I think, incontrovertibly, that the reduction of the duty on advertisements would increase the revenue, and that if the duty were lowered upon newspapers to one penny, we should have newspapers sold for twopence-halfpenny instead of sevenpence, as at present. I am for removing all obstructions against the diffusion of knowledge, intelligence, and useful information.

Sir, I have now endeavoured, very imperfectly I fear, to bring the system of taxation of which I complain, before the House. I have attempted, in the first place, to point out such

taxes as appear to me to be worthy of consideration, for the purpose of effecting their entire repeal. I trust that I have been able to show to the House, that the amount which they yield to the Treasury is far from compensating for the charge of their collection, for the barriers which they oppose to improvement, and for the injury they inflict on the industry of the country, and the fair increase of that class of manufacturing skill on which they press. At the same time, I am far from proposing to lop off even such an amount of revenue as they constitute,—as I have said, about 2,600,000*l.*,—at once, without that deficiency being supplied, either by reduction of expenditure, by the removal of some improper bounties, or by the substitution of some other impost. But still I desire that the subject should be fully considered; that the nature of these taxes should be narrowly inquired into, in order that they may be gradually removed as we are in a condition to do without them, or to obtain their amount from sources of taxation less injurious to the community. Such an inquiry surely is deserving of the attention of a Committee of this House.

But should there exist any doubt upon this point, it appears to me that there can be none as to the second branch of my subject; namely,

the propriety of reviewing the duties upon the great articles of consumption which I have enumerated, in order to ascertain whether their present state does not defeat the very object you had in imposing them; and whether, by reducing their scale, you may not even augment your revenue, at the same time that you relieve the burthens of the people. I have been obliged to trouble the House very much at length on these branches of revenue; but I trust that I shall be forgiven, when I remind them that each of the articles to which I have been obliged to refer them, furnishes the most apt illustration of the principle for which I contend, in both its bearings. Each of these articles to which I am now anxious to apply my principle has already put it to the test. In each we have seen, that an increase of duty beyond the bounds of moderation, has invariably produced a diminished consumption, and a but slightly augmented revenue; that, on the contrary, a diminution of duty has greatly increased the consumption, and has been attended seldom with any considerable falling off, frequently with even an increase of revenue.

Am I not justified, then, in maintaining that this would be the consequence now? Am I not authorized to hope, that what has been shown by experience always to follow, would now also en-

sue? But above all, have I not a right to call upon this House to inquire into the case, and to apply the principle, if it be satisfied of its correctness? That it would satisfy them that it is in their power to afford substantial relief to the people, with but little injury to the revenue, — I entertain not the slightest doubt. I hold in my hand a scale of future duties and consumption, which I have submitted to many who are best acquainted with this subject, and who agree in believing that I have rather underrated both the revenue and the probable consumption; — and yet, by adopting the duties I propose, — gradually of course, — a relief might be afforded to the people of between 6,000,000*l.* and 7,000,000*l.*, at the cost of less than 1,000,000*l.* to the Exchequer.

If, then, we have it in our power, by the reduction of duties, to yield relief to the people with perfect security, and without doing more than a temporary injury to the revenue; I do not think it possible for any man to object to our adopting such a line of conduct. Undoubtedly, Sir, I am not aware of the course which his Majesty's ministers intend to pursue upon this subject. I have already disavowed any hostile intentions, or any but the most friendly feelings to them, in bringing it forward.

In proposing that the whole taxation of the country should be taken into consideration by a select committee, as was done in the year 1783, and as was the intention of the Finance Committee, as I think is manifested in their fourth report,—I protest that I am actuated by no want of confidence in his Majesty's advisers. My object, Sir, is far different; it is to arm them with greater power to do good, and to assist them in the praiseworthy object, which they have already commenced, of reducing the burthens which press upon the people. My object, in short, on this subject is to give them that power which they cannot exercise effectually, as I conceive, without the assistance of a committee.

Sir, I am not sanguine enough to expect that the alterations which I have taken the liberty of proposing, can be made without producing some deficiency in the revenue in the earlier stages of their operation; a temporary deficiency, and temporary is all that it could be, might perhaps occur during the first year of reductions, and for this some expedient would be requisite. Supported by a committee, and carrying into execution its recommendation, the Government might fairly ask from Parliament a vote of credit for this purpose; and that, permit me to say, with much greater confidence, than if they were acting merely

upon their own responsibility. There is another reason which I consider to be a justification for asking to go into this committee, and which induces me to prefer this course. There are a great variety of interests deeply concerned in this subject; all of which may be fully heard in the committee, and their different claims impartially decided on. We should have an opportunity, amongst other things, of examining into the extent of smuggling, and into the various frauds on the revenue, occasioned by the imposition of high duties,—subjects which could be brought before a committee with a chance of obtaining a much fuller investigation than they could by any possibility obtain from the members of government, who are necessarily engaged with many other various and important occupations.

Whatever the determination of Government may be upon this motion, Sir, I trust that the tone and temper of my observations may make them sensible that I am only desirous to carry that object which they and I equally profess to have at heart—I mean, the reduction of such duties as press most heavily on the productive industry of the country. What the determination of his Majesty's Government may be on this subject, I repeat, I shall not presume to augur; but I trust that, be the decision of the

Government what it may, the House will support me in the motion which I have made for nominating a committee for the purpose of inquiring into this subject, and of having it laid open before them. In calling for an inquiry into the system of taxation, I appeal for support to those, who, on a late occasion, voted for the Honourable Baronet's proposal for a committee to inquire into the extent and causes of the national distress, and to report whether any and what remedies could be applied for its relief. I offer them here a motion which goes practically to the object which they had in view. In this committee they will have an opportunity, which they ought not to lose, of gaining that information for which they have recently expressed such strong anxiety.

I appeal also for support to those honourable members who opposed that proposition, conceiving that it was too vague and general in its terms, and that no good could be derived from acceding to it. Here they have a definitive proposition—here they have a motion for inquiry into a specific object for the relief of the people. I appeal likewise, Sir, for support to all those, who, in the course of the present session have presented petitions from the people, complaining of the

severe distress under which they are suffering. Here they will see a prospect, at least, of affording their constituents that relief to a great extent, without doing any injury to the revenue; and I cannot conceive how those honourable members can face their constituents, who are daily sending up complaints of the severity of taxation, and calling for some alteration in the mode of collecting it, if they refuse to enter into an inquiry, out of which no harm can come, and from which some good perhaps may arise. On the one side, if you grant this inquiry, you prove to the people that you are anxious to alleviate their distress, by affording them the articles most necessary to their subsistence and comfort at a cheap rate,—to the country, that you desire to afford this relief, but at the same time to meet the claims of the national creditor, and to preserve inviolate the public faith,—and to the world you will present the spectacle of a legislative body fulfilling its highest duty, occupied in the attentive consideration of the interests of those from whom it derives its power, and anxiously endeavouring to remodel its system so as to meet the necessities of this situation. On the other hand, if you refuse this inquiry, it can only be for reasons which I can

scarcely conceive; you can only do so under the notion, that Parliament is incompetent to conduct it; and allow me to say, in doing so, you will abandon the most important portion of your duty, and send the people discontented and dissatisfied away.

For these reasons, and upon these grounds, I put my motion with confidence into the hands of the Speaker, gratefully thanking the House once more for the indulgent attention with which it has listened to my observations. I beg leave to move, Sir, that “a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the expediency of making a revision of the taxes, so that the means of paying the sums voted by the House, and all other charges for the public service, may be provided for with as little injury as practicable to the industry and improvement of the country.”

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