

The Examiner.

"THIS IS TRUE LIBERTY, WHEN FREEBORN MEN—HAVING TO ADVISE THE PUBLIC, MAY SPEAK FREE."—EURIPIDES.

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CHARLOTTETOWN, P. E. ISLAND, MONDAY, APRIL 17, 1848.

[No. 37.]

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY.

THE LAND TAX DEBATE.

(Concluded.)

Mr. *LeLacheur* would not give his support to the proposal for any increase of the Assessment on cultivated land; for he was perfectly satisfied that not only the Leaseholder, but the small Freeholder, find a difficulty in paying the present Tax. Hon. gentlemen should remember the many difficulties of the Agriculturists. This was a rent-paying Country, naturally affording but little manure, and offering very few resources for procuring it. Instead, therefore, of adding to the already overburthened shoulders of the farmer, every opportunity ought to be taken to relieve him from a part of his load. It was true, some few might be relieved by a repeal of the duties on tea and other articles of consumption; but it was grievous to contemplate the fact that, in the neighbourhood of his residence, there were then hundreds that not only could not procure Tea or Molasses, but were actually without food, and, of course, had no seed for the ground. His hon. Colleague could vouch that he drew no overcoloured picture of the distress which existed in his neighbourhood: He (Mr. Thornton) well knew that there were upwards of forty families then depending on the charity of others for subsistence; and he (Mr. LeLacheur) had no doubt there existed similarly lamentable cases in many other parts of the Island, where the crops had been bad. Hon. Members residing in and near Charlottetown had little, very little idea of the state of the rural districts; but, unless he were a false prophet, the melancholy truth would be brought under their notice by complaints and petitions almost incalculable before the close of the session; and most unsafe would it be to turn a deaf ear to their prayers for relief; for what then would be the prospect of the succeeding year? It was needless to insist upon the truth, that if they did not plant neither could they reap. He would not therefore give his vote for any increase of the Tax on cultivated land.

Mr. *J. Longworth* would offer but a few remarks before the question should be put; for, so much having been said, it would be only wasting time to go at length into the question again. He thought an increased Tax would be beneficial to the people for many reasons. First, because if the duties on the necessaries of life should be remitted to a greater amount than the increase of the Land Tax, a greater number of the inhabitants would feel the benefit. Secondly, because if the Tax on land should be allowed to expire, the Quit Rent would no doubt be revived; and, leaving out of consideration the stringent means of collecting it, the whole amount of that Tax would leave the shores of the Island; whereas the whole proceeds of the Land Tax would be kept within the Colony. And, thirdly, because as the Titles stand, that exaction—the Quit Rent—might be collected in British Sterling. The hon. Member for Prince County (Mr. Clark) had said the people would be taxing themselves. How could that proposition be maintained, if the duties—which all would admit were too high—on Tea, Molasses, Sugar, &c. were reduced? These articles were become necessaries of life, and the people could not dispense with their every day use.—[Mr. *LeLacheur* begged the hon. member's pardon, but he did not hesitate to say that, in many parts of the Island, those articles were known only by name, and could not be procured by the people.] The hon. Member resumed. He was well aware much distress had been caused among the people by a failure of the crops; but he trusted they would not suffer from a succession of bad crops. Sorry, indeed, should he be to have to legislate upon such an expectation. But notwithstanding the hon. member's observations, he (Mr. Longworth) thought the people of this Island had great cause to be thankful, when they contrasted the most deplorable situation of other parts of the world with their own. The House should bear in mind that the proposed

increase had been brought under their notice, by the Colonial Minister, and consequently urged upon their consideration by His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor. It did, therefore, seem a most favorable time to secure a great addition to the revenue, which would be sanctioned by the Home Government. He did not approve of the proposition, supported by some hon. members, for increasing the Tax on Wilderness Land only, and not on cultivated Land. Any such distinction should not have his support.

Mr. *Macintosh*. Notwithstanding all that has been said of the advantages to be derived from an increased Tax on land, and a consequent decrease of duties upon articles of consumption, he was not of opinion that the proposed alterations, if effected, would be found to have that beneficial tendency, which some hon. members expected they would have. What those hon. members asserted seemed plausible enough at first sight; but they forgot, or omitted to take into consideration, the extent to which barter prevailed in the transactions of the country. The people often gave their labour in exchange for other things than money: for money could not at all times be had. He very much questioned whether a man would get more Tea for a day's work, after the duty on Tea should be repealed, than he got then. To increase the Land Tax, and at the same time to reduce the duties upon Tea, Sugar, and Molasses, would therefore amount to nothing more than demanding from the people a certainty for an uncertainty. He could not support any motion for an increase of the Tax.

Mr. *Thornton*. I recollect, Sir, the opposition made by the proprietors to the present Tax at the time when it was imposed; and it is, no doubt, also fresh in the recollection of many others who are still members of this House. The Proprietors may not, it is true, have the same power now which they possessed then, though their inclination may be unchanged. But be that as it may, I am not for treating their interest with the Home Government as of little importance; and, therefore, I think it best not to provoke their opposition by going too far with the Tax. I fully agree with the hon. Member for Prince County, (Mr. Rae,) that first of all, we ought to know to what purposes the Tax is to be applied, whether it may be at the old or a new rate. Then we may be better able to judge whether or not it will help to lighten the burthens of the Tenantry, or increase them. One hon. member says, let Education be better provided for by an increased Tax. Another says increase the Tax on wilderness lands to punish the proprietors. But, if this be done, I think, with Mr. Macintosh, it will make them more rigorous with the Tenantry. Taking all things in consideration, I am for acting with great caution; for I must say I entertain many doubts on the subject of the Tax, and would not put additional power in the hands of the proprietors; for I think it will be difficult enough to obtain a renewal of the present Tax.—"No! no!" from the hon. Speaker.—The hon. Member, in continuation observed, the hon. Speaker may, from his having been at head quarters in England, be better informed with respect to the views of the Imperial Government on the question than I am; but, as I said before, I entertain considerable doubts on the subject, and, therefore, am for a renewal of the present rate, and no more.

Mr. *Rae* reminded the hon. Member (Mr. Thornton,) that his (Mr. R.'s) proposition was to put the increase in a separate Bill; a mode of proceeding which the hon. member must perceive would altogether do away with the danger of which he seemed so apprehensive.

Mr. *J. Longworth* said, the revenue arising from the duty on tea was very large, and it was useless to contend that a reduction of the duty would not be felt as a relief by the farmers.

Mr. *Mooney* knew the merchants too well to think the Country people would derive much benefit from a reduction of duties. Any advantage to the Tenantry of which it might be productive, would be so trifling that it was not worth talking about.

Messrs. *Hugh McDonald* and *D. Montgomery* spoke against any increase. The question being then put, the resolution was agreed to. On a subsequent day, when the House went into committee on the Bill, the Tax on wilderness land was fixed at a halfpenny, and that on cultivated, at a farthing per acre.

FRIDAY, April 7.

WAYS AND MEANS.

On motion of Mr. *Thornton* the House again went into Committee on Ways and Means: Mr. *LeLacheur* in the chair.

Wines.—Mr. *Palmer* moved a resolution to assimilate the duties on Wines to the Nova Scotia scale. It was opposed by several members, on the ground that it would be no advantage to the poorer part of the population. Ultimately Mr. *Rae* moved an amendment that the duties on those articles be not altered, which was carried.

Leather.—The Petition of the Mechanics of Charlottetown, praying for protection, having been read, Mr. *Palmer* addressed the committee at some length, and concluded by offering a resolution to lessen the duty on sole and harness leather from 2d to 1d per lb.; and to lessen also the duty upon upper and trimming leather from 4d to 3d. The resolution was agreed to.

Boots and Shoes.—Mr. *Palmer* called the notice of the Committee to the low duties which is at present levied on Boots and Shoes imported to this Island; and as the importers of these articles enjoyed very handsome profits from the trade in them, he thought they could afford to pay a higher duty than what was now required of them; and this increase would afford some protection to the Home Manufacturer, whom the Legislature ought to encourage. He concluded his remarks by moving that the duty be increased from 10 to 15 per cent.

The Hon. Mr. *Coles* opposed the motion. The poorer classes, principally, were the purchasers of the boots and shoes imported into this country, because they could be obtained at a much lower price than what they could be made for in the Island; and were the duty to be increased, the price of the article would of course be increased likewise; and the burden would then fall upon those who were the least able to bear it.

Mr. *Douse* expressed his surprise at the complaints made by the mechanics of Charlottetown. He alluded to the prices charged by mechanics for their work in this Island, and said that he could purchase a suit of clothes in London at as low a price nearly as they would be made for in this Island. He (Mr. D.) thought that if they were a little more industrious and attentive to their business than they are at present, they would not be so ready to complain.

The hon. *Speaker* made some remarks to the same purport. He censured the negligence of Mechanics and particularly the Shoemakers and Tailors; who, if they received an order for work, they were sure to delay it long after the time promised. The charges made by mechanics, he thought, in many instances, were enormous.

After some further remarks from other hon. members, Mr. *Palmer's* resolution was put and negatived.

Molasses.—Mr. *Whelan* rose to propose a resolution. He had delayed bringing it forward until that late hour, hoping that some hon. member—having a more extensive knowledge of the subject than he himself had—would call the attention of the Committee to it before rising. The object of his resolution was to take the duty off Molasses, in which he thought the House ought to concur, as such a measure would not fail to prove advantageous to a large portion of the population, who use the article very extensively, and who were suffering, as the House well knew, from a visitation of Providence, which has left them without the means of subsistence. He thought the present duty on Molasses as too high, and particularly so in the circumstances of the country. In former years there was no Colonial duty on the article, and no Imperial duty when imported from British plantations, in order to give encouragement to the Fisheries, which a majority of the House seemed to consider as entitled to the fostering care of the Legislature. If then, (continued he) the article was allowed to come in duty free in former years, why not exempt it now? The revenue is larger—the wants of the country are greater—poverty is more extensive. When he remembered the liberal sentiments expressed by hon. members while the House have been in Committee on Ways and Means, and the anxiety expressed to alleviate the distress of the country, he could scarcely venture to anticipate a very decided opposition to the resolution, and without further remarks he would submit it to the consideration of the House.