

were concerned with 4,421 estates during the year, so that in only one estate out of every 368 did direct heirs pay succession duty. Do not these figures prove conclusively that our revenue is derived mainly from very large estates, that the vast majority of estates escape our Act altogether (51 out of every 52 in 1896), and that indirect or collateral heirs pay by far the greater part of the duty?

It is at the same time, all admit, capable of abuse, and in this respect it does not vary from any other mode of raising revenue. Under certain conditions it might even become the thin end of the socialistic wedge, harmful and dangerous.

In France, for example, as much as fifteen per cent. or twenty per cent. even is taken from the value of a single succession and there is no deduction even for debts, but in this and other respects France is a conspicuous exception to the almost universal rule. Different schools of economists at variance as to many questions of taxation, revenue and finance, fully agree as to the wisdom and fairness of this legislation. For example, Prof. Ely, of Wisconsin University, a well-known writer and admittedly high authority in such matters, warmly approves of it. Andrew Carnegie, the equally well-known capitalist and millionaire, goes to extremes in supporting it. He vigorously meets the arguments of those who object to inheritance-taxes because they constitute a tax upon capital. Not long ago in a lecture delivered in New York City, speaking on this very point, he used these words:—"Every dollar of taxes required might be obtained in this manner (viz., by inheritance taxes) without interfering in the least with the forces which tend to the development of the country through the production of wealth." And many years ago John Stuart Mill not only advocated progressive inheritance taxes, but contended also even that there should be a limit to the amount which anyone should be allowed to take either by inheritance or bequest.

It is well argued, we should bear in mind, that we should regard succession duties not as a tax on property, but as a condition of inheritance, a regulation of inheritance, a regulation of bequest.

For many reasons this legislation is popular, it well accords with unquestionably sound theory, since under it those pay, and those pay most, who are most able to pay.

No means of obtaining revenue can be less oppressive. In what other way would payments be made more willingly? Succession duties take nothing from the heir which they have actually enjoyed, they deprive them rather of something which they never had. And further, in the case of distant relatives it is not a very easy matter to give a perfectly satisfactory reason for the existence of intestate inheritance. When property is acquired accidentally, and perhaps unexpectedly, the heir is more able to pay, and does pay with but little reluctance.

Moreover, it is difficult to evade payment, and it leaves but little opportunity for fraud. We readily see how important this is when we notice to what extent income taxes, for example, are evaded.

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