

**THE TARIFF: SPEECH OF HON.  
JUSTIN S. MORRILL. DELIVERED  
IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED  
STATES, DECEMBER 8, 1881**

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The Tariff: Speech of Hon. Justin S. Morrill. Delivered in the senate of the United states,  
December 8, 1881 by Justin Smith Morrill

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THE TARIFF.

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SPEECH

OF

HON. JUSTIN S. MORRILL.

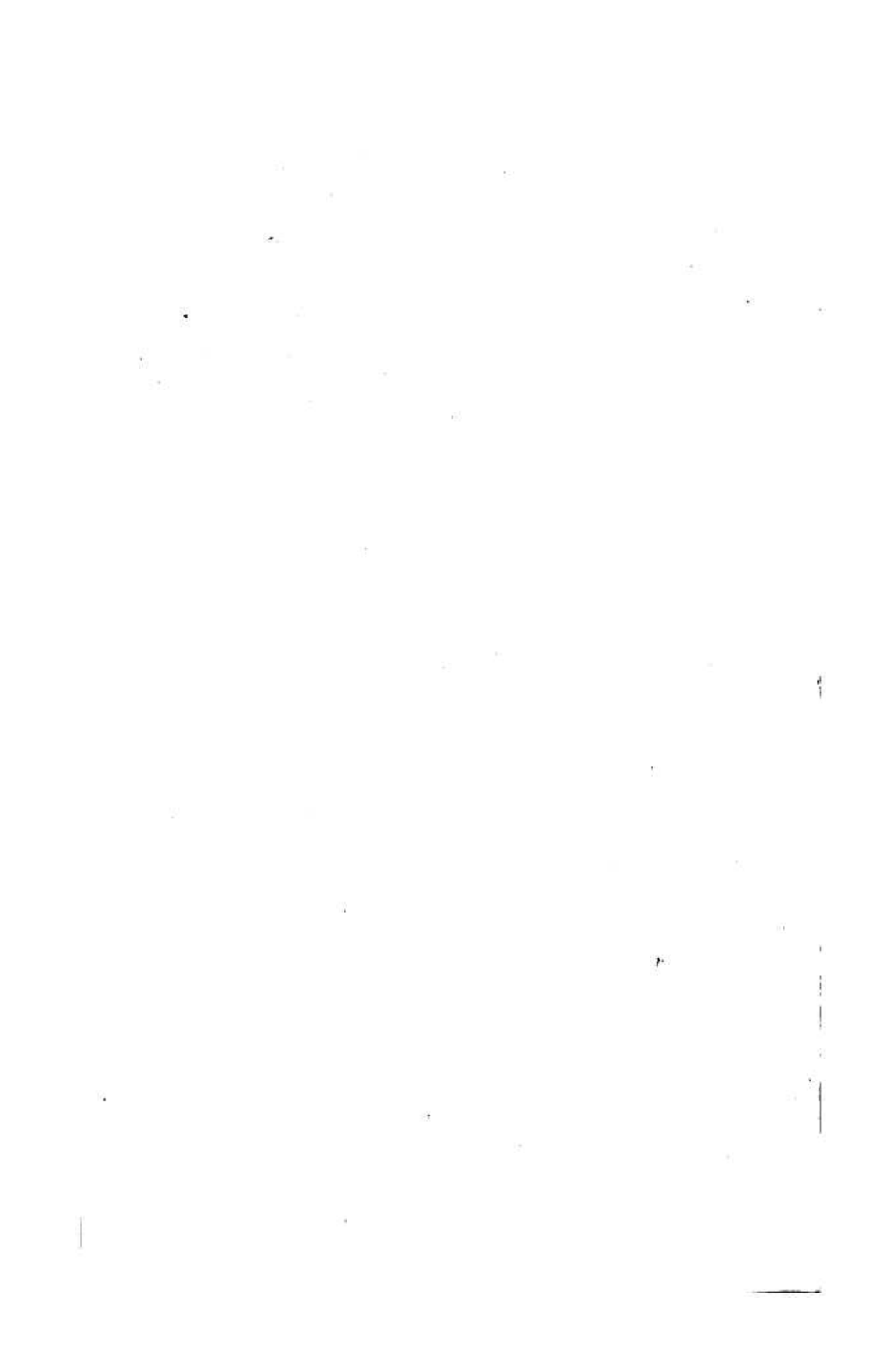


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## SPEECH OF HON. JUSTIN S. MORRILL.

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The Senate, being as in Committee of the Whole, and having under consideration the bill (S. No. 22) to provide for the appointment of a commission to investigate the question of the tariff and internal revenue laws—

Mr. MORRILL said:—

Mr. PRESIDENT,— I have brought this subject to the early attention of the Senate because, if early legislative action on the tariff is to be had, obviously the measure proposed by Senator Eaton and passed at the last session of the Senate is a wise and indispensable preliminary, which cannot be started too soon. The essential information needed concerns important interests, vast in number, and overspreading every nook and corner of our country; and when made available by the ingathering and collocation of all the related facts will secure the earliest attention of Congress, as well as the trust and confidence of the country, and save the appropriate committees of both Houses weeks and months of irksome labor; possibly save them also from some blunders and from final defeat.

An enlargement of the free list, essential reductions, and readjustments of rates are to be fully considered, and some errors of conflicting codifications corrected.

If a general revision of the Bible seems to have been called for, it is hardly to be wondered at that some revision of our revenue laws should be invited. But changes in the framework of a law that has had more of stability than any other

of its kind in our history, and from which an unexampled growth of varied industries has risen up, should be made with much circumspection, after deliberate consideration, by just and friendly hands, and not by ill-informed and reckless revolutionists. When our recent great army was disbanded, war taxes were also largely dismissed, and we have now, and certainly shall have hereafter, no unlimited margin for slashing experiments.

We can expect no further examples of receipts exceeding the estimates by nearly \$100,000,000, nor of expenditures falling short \$200,000,000. Such violent waves, coming either to fill or to empty the treasury, are no longer to occur. Our normal condition, modified by national growth, must be resumed. We are to consider how much, if any, of internal revenue can be relinquished, and next where and how the tariff can be safely and wisely revised, so as to leave it properly productive and in harmony with all interests, preserving the proper equilibrium among the different branches of trade, and just to every section of the country.

The amount of revenue required must be determined; and the requirement for ordinary expenses, for interest on the public debt, and for pensions, as well as for some enlargement of our Lilliputian Navy, and the decent equipment of our military fortifications, is still so great that extreme protection is not so much the question as that of revenue; and with barely moderate discrimination in favor of American fields and workshops, not leaving them in danger of unfair foreign competition, little more, it is believed, will be found necessary. If, however, there must anywhere be rusty plows, blown-out furnaces, idle looms, unemployed men, and ragged tramps, then let the Old World retain these wretched evidences of hard times as long as a protective tariff will exclude them from our shores.

I have some remarks to make upon the general subject of the tariff, and prefer not to postpone them until the subject will necessarily be incumbered with details in their nature subordinate. It is not my habit to discuss the tariff upon every question before the Senate, and I shall, therefore, make



no apology, it being properly before us, for asking indulgence to give it some consideration, especially now, in the early and comparatively unappropriated time of the Senate.

In speaking to-day, I cannot avoid the use of language which will show that I am proud of our country and of its people, of its public spirit and industrial energy; but I do not claim to be singular. All hearts here are wedded to American institutions, and these, as we believe, are destined to historic immortality.

I shall also speak of Great Britain; not with any hate, but in the words of Holmes,—“Our little motherland—God bless her!” for how much is there in the grandeur of her life of centuries, her literature, and laws, that challenges unstinted admiration. But it is enough that her ways are not our ways; enough that she imposes the laws upon her own people; and when she straddles across the Atlantic and intrusively seeks to impose her free-trade shackles upon the United States, I claim the right to protest against it with as much of plain and homely emphasis as I may be able to command. Pardon me if I repel with some warmth the idea that America is ever to be exhibited as one of the fettered captives of a far-fetched and ill-planted “Cobden Club.” Not that I do not appreciate the great merits of Mr. Cobden as an eminent Englishman; but his principles of free trade are no more entitled to American homage than his principles of monarchy.

No suspicion of partisanship can adhere to me if I do not outrun the fulminations against free trade of the late Democratic candidate for the Presidency; and I am confident that a “tariff for revenue only” does not excite in me more intense disgust than in the Democratic vice-presidential candidate of 1876, who vigorously supports in the “North American Review” the measure for a tariff commission. “All parties,” said General Hancock, “agree that the best way for us to raise revenue is largely by the tariff. So far as we are concerned, therefore, all talk about ‘free trade’ is folly.” Now, that is quite in the line of what I propose to say.

Governor Hendricks, while treating "the plate-glass politics" of Southern Indiana with magnificent disdain, exhibits no want of sense at least when he writes that "Congress cannot look to revenue only, but must exercise judgment and discretion, and that in the exercise thereof regard must be had to the interest and welfare of each particular object of taxation and to its comparative importance in the country. The rates cannot be uniform. A horizontal tariff is impossible."

These sentiments are not those of men in their dotage, but of live men, possibly not yet wholly retired from all political service, and on these questions they must be enrolled as acceptable political backers.

In considering the questions before us, — questions, in the words of Dr. Johnson, where "the greatest powers of the understanding are applied to the greatest number of facts," — I regret that my ability is so unequal to their importance, and while I hope to advance my opinions with that modesty which is always decent, I must admit that they are opinions not suddenly formed, but such as are based on principles which have come down to us from our fathers undimmed by lapse of time, and which appear to me as the head-lights of a prosperous country now having but one heart and fifty million proprietors.

#### ALL TAXATION UNATTRACTIVE.

Perhaps there is no subject of equal importance more constantly before legislators than the various and complex systems of taxation, upon which all civilized governments depend for enduring support, and none less attractive or so unlikely to be patiently and laboriously investigated by the majority of those whose duty it may be to revise this joyless class of statutes. The subject affords play neither to sudden wit nor to loitering imagination, but from first to last tires everybody with a wilderness of statistics, frigid facts, and debatable problems.

The imposition of even necessary taxes upon those through

whose favor we derive all of our legislative authority is not fascinating work, and to some it appears so likely to obscure professed love for the people, or so threatening to official longevity, that they prefer a defensive record adverse to all taxation. They would not imperil congressional honors by taxing such necessities of life as tobacco and whiskey, and they denounce the wrong which does not leave them both free to every head of a family, and to all who may declare their intention to become the head of a family. These tender friends have no idea of subjecting tender-footed constituents to any burden beyond that of regular and eager support at the polls, and they lean to an alliance with those who maintain the good time coming, when the word *not* shall be expunged in the next revision from all the commandments; when holidays shall be equally rewarded with working days; when mines and quarries shall spontaneously open where fortunes can be had without digging; when paper-money, hitched to undiscoverable gold, shall be created by the fiat of the Government, and be distributed every morning like manna to hungry Hebrews; when not only those who are lazy can be lazier still, but when all monopoly and ownership of property shall cease, and every one have or be the donkey he covets.

But in our country common sense and common schools and the common people are more than a match for any school of demagogues. It is satisfactory to feel that we may here safely appeal, not in vain, to the broad interests of a broad land, to the knowledge and virtue which should guide statesmen, and to the example of illustrious men, whose lasting glory it will ever be that they bound together the people of a continent with a coherence that is fixed and invincible.

Not to have confidence in Congress would be to impeach our own institutions, as well as to adopt the sneers and doubts of hereditary enemies, who have been wont to include Americans among those whom

"No king could govern, and no god could please."