

**IS PROTECTION A  
BENEFIT? A PLEA  
FOR THE NEGATIVE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649358977

Is protection a benefit? A plea for the negative by Edward Taylor

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**EDWARD TAYLOR**

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# IS PROTECTION A BENEFIT?

A Plea for the Negative

BY

EDWARD TAYLOR

Industry makes to Legislation the modest request of Diogenes to Alexander:  
"Stand out of my sunshine." — *Bentham*



CHICAGO

A. C. McCLURG AND COMPANY

1888  
12-11

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## PREFACE.



**N**O one who has been observant enough to note the trend of public sentiment in this country can fail to see that the tariff question is coming to the front. For more than twenty years our national politics have looked toward the past, and not toward the future. It would be difficult to name a prominent question upon which the parties, as parties, have made a direct issue. The pretended issues grew out of or survived the Rebellion; the real contest arose from the earnest desire of the parties out of power to get in, and the equally strong desire of the party in power to stay in,—“the one striving to rout the outs, and the others to oust the ins.”

But the country may now indulge in the belief that the issues of war-time are no longer dominant, but have passed into history. We have fallen upon better years, when in our campaigns arguments upon economic, political, and moral questions are likely to take the place of the old-time appeals to local prejudices and sectional animosities.

In this betterment of our political affairs the question of the tariff is to be prominent. It has been a lively question in our past history, and it is likely to remain with us as an issue for yet many a year. It is a question upon which every citizen, and especially every voter, should have an intelligent and emphatic opinion. The difficulties should not appall, since they are far more imaginary than real. At the close of a day of discussion on the appointment of the Tariff Commission, a member of Congress petulantly remarked, "I don't understand the tariff question, and I shall not try to understand it." This hopeless avowal of ignorance is unworthy even a private voter, and it ought to be sufficient to lay the professed statesman upon the political shelf so high that no campaign step-ladder will ever reach him again.

It should be kept in view that the present issue is not between direct and indirect taxation. Such a question may arise in the future. Absolute free trade is not now contended for by any considerable number of our people. The living contest lies between revenue-tariff advocates and free-traders — as they are interchangeably termed in the rather loose speech of the times — on the one side, and the advocates of a protective tariff as an ultimate fiscal policy on the other side. The argument here presented is confined to this purpose and scope.

While yet a young man in college I was much impressed with the beauty and harmony of economic laws as they were reflected from the pages of



our text-book, written by an honored American, Professor John Bascom, late President of the University of Wisconsin. A somewhat careful inquiry during the succeeding years into the subject of national revenues and the effect of commercial legislation has brought the mature conviction that "protection" is the most pronounced misnomer of the age. This volume springs from a desire that others should perceive and hold this now vital truth. I have written for the average citizen who cares to reflect upon a public question which has always been important, and apparently is soon to be supreme in our politics.

I have written as a student of economic science, not as a political partisan. All will agree that the question of industrial freedom, like civil freedom, ought to be superior to the contests of parties. The divergence of opinion relates solely to methods. On the issue of protection, which in recent politics has been but dimly outlined, the parties have no coherency, free-traders among Republicans and protectionists among Democrats being numbered by thousands. The crystallization of public opinion into coherent parties upon the question will come as a result of broader knowledge and a better realization of the interests involved.

Many of the thoughts and arguments here presented are original in form and substance, but many of them also are the ideas of others recast to suit the present purpose. Economic principles are of slow growth. Like the laws of physics and the great inventions in mechanics, they have become

known only from the labors of many men and many years. All men build upon the foundations laid by their predecessors. That would be a very barren and profitless book which should ignore our one hundred years of tariff history, and the ideas evolved by that wrestle of policies.

Free-traders in this contest, like Martin Luther in his, have nailed their theses to the door; and until sound argument and the experience of the nation shall throw upon their principles at least a reasonable doubt, they propose to avow, advocate, and defend them. But no one may appear as "Sir Oracle." Modesty is a graceful attitude in every one who would approach this question in discussion. Much has been well said on both sides, and the advocate of free trade has something to beat more substantial than the air. Neither body of pleaders can with any gracefulness claim, even in thought, to be the embodiment of all that is true; nor can free-traders make to protectionists, any more than protectionists can make to free-traders, the ironical suggestion of Job to his comforters, "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you."

I can not speak for protectionists; but it has been my constant aim to give an impartial, though necessarily a brief, statement of their opinions. The advocates of the restrictive policy are mostly honest men, who sincerely desire the highest material prosperity of our country. That they are mistaken, I believe and have tried to show. Their writers have given ample expression to their views. They will not

find them distorted, I hope, after passing through a free-trade medium. Unfairness would be even more fatal to my purpose than sophistry.

"On all great questions much remains to be said;" and no one can hope to settle for others a question like this. He will do enough if he can excite thought, provoke inquiry, and stimulate discussion, knowing that conviction comes to the best minds rather from their own activity than from a passive reception of other men's opinions.

No puzzling question of economic or moral reform can ever be finally settled or cease to be an issue until it is adjusted as it ought to be adjusted. Truth is inherently strong, and it has within itself the germ of ultimate victory. There is much fact, as well as much exaggeration, in the epigram, "Truth survives a cyclone, but error dies from a pin-scratch." The great American heart always beats right, and the national good is always, in the end, the net product of public agitation. Newton's apple did not more naturally and certainly fall to the earth than does the public conscience approve of that which is equitable and just, and condemn that which is partial and oppressive.

It is not strange to me, therefore, that those who believe in untrammelled commerce and industry are a mighty host, and that men are perceiving that free speech, a free press, free schools, a free ballot, and a free church are no more the legitimate outcomes of popular government than free trade. I have the greatest confidence that investigation and thought, with a fuller knowledge, will lead our