

PRESENT MODES OF TAXATION

There is no agreement anywhere on the true canons of taxation. Most economists teach that there is no science of taxation, just as they teach that there is no science of political economy. If it then be asked what are the economists engaged in teaching, or what these professors are professors of, no satisfactory answer can be given.

Certainly taxation is the only universal practice that lacks any generally accepted axiom or principle. It is the only universal practice to which the average man pays no heed save to object strenuously to his own assessment. That taxation is susceptible of laws which would insure the maximum of revenue with the minimum of burden, never seems to suggest itself to the majority of our citizens. Every man's efforts have been made to evade his own direct taxes, in which attempt he has only saddled himself unknowingly with a greater burden of indirect taxation.

It would take more space than can be given here to enumerate the many fallacies with which this subject is surrounded. Thus it has been held that the productiveness of a source of taxation justifies the tax, yet a very light tax may permanently dry up such sources, which feed the most profitable channels of the nation's industry and commerce. So, too, it is sometimes held that "equal" taxation should be the equal taxation of all property, and that any system which provides for the exemption of any kind of property is therefore unequal. Yet this is manifestly absurd. One of the most elementary recommendations for a tax is that it should be levied but once, yet even this rule is violated constantly. The observance of this rule gained for Napoleon's marshal in Egypt, General Kleber, the name of "The Just." How does our own system accord with this principle? The contempt of our legislators for such principles as

have been worked out by those who have given their lives to the study of the subject is on a par with the lofty indifference of those who draw salaries as professors of a science which they say has no existence. Yet the history of tax reform is and will continue to be the history of the progress of nations.—EDITOR.