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THE LIFE AND WRITINGS
OF
TURGOT

COMPTROLLER-GENERAL OF FRANCE 1774-6

EDITED FOR ENGLISH READERS

BY

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Free Trade.—The idea that the duties we put, either on our own commodities exported, or on foreign commodities imported, are paid by the foreigner is a chimera, for the foreigner sells his merchandise to any one nation at the same price he gets for it from other nations, the duty of import resting necessarily at the charge of the nation establishing it. A government intending to establish certain national manufactures by laying duties on merchandise or raw materials imported, favours these manufactures only at the expense of all others of the nation [and of all consumers]. The manufacturing interest in general is not promoted, because, by placing obstructions to commerce, the development of manufactures is restrained. . . . All the presumed advantages of these combinations of duties in favour of national commerce against foreign commerce are illusory; all their disadvantages are reciprocal and are increased, the one side by the other. Foreigners employ the same means against our commerce. This ‘mercantile’ and jealous policy is injurious to all States, without being useful to any; it makes of commerce, which should be a tie between nations, a new source of divisions and of wars. It is the interest of all peoples that commerce should be everywhere free and exempt from duties. The first nation giving to others the example of this enlightened and humane policy, by liberating its productions, its industry, its commerce from all prohibitions and all duties, will raise herself rapidly to the very highest prosperity, and will soon compel other nations to imitate her, to the great advantage of the whole world. (‘Turgot’s last written State Paper’ (1776), *Œuv.* ii. 358–68.)

The American War.—M. de Vergennes places the problem before us, whether France and Spain should desire to see the subjection or the independence of the English colonies, and he observes that it is not within ordinary human foresight to prevent or to divert the dangers that must result from either event. This remark appears to me to be very just, because