

had received, he had been led to suppose that the sentiments of that house perfectly corresponded with the ideas of their constituents, that to revive, protect and encourage the commerce, navigation, agriculture, and manufactures of the Union, were among the great objects for which the Constitution had been adopted.—The fishery he observed, was one of the most important among those objects.—Gentlemen on all hands, realized this truth.—Of all the various branches of business carried on in the United States, none perhaps had suffered more than the fisheries—shut out from the English ports entirely, and admitted into those of our allies upon severe restrictions, this most beneficial business had rapidly declined—was daily growing worse, and if loaded with additional burthens would be totally destroyed—this business employed 26,000 tons of shipping, and a great number of the poorer, though important part of the community, and was a nursery for seamen, which it had been the policy of the wisest nations to cherish and encourage—these vessels made four fairs annually, and took upon an average upwards of 400,000 quintals of fish—the greatest part of the fish could be sold in no other market but the West-Indies, and there molasses was the only return that could be obtained; this molasses was consumed in its original state in great quantities by the fishermen. The exportation of the fish employed nearly as much shipping as was engaged in taking it, several important mechanical branches depended upon, and were inseparably connected with this particular business.—If a doubt therefore could be raised upon the expediency of adopting a measure, that might essentially injure an interest so extensive, gentlemen could not think of being tenacious of such a measure. Mr. Ames thought he could raise such a doubt.—The Honorable Gentleman from Virginia had asked, how it was to be accounted for, that this business should be able to support itself before the revolution, when molasses paid a duty and foreign rum was free? To this Mr. Ames replied, that previous to the war, the business was carried on under a variety of advantages, which it was now deprived of, that the best markets were entirely cut off—Newfoundland, Quebec, those great marts we were excluded from.—He adduced a variety of other reasons why the present state of the business, would bear no comparison with its former situation, and then added, that to other present embarrassments, it was to be apprehended, that we might shortly be deprived of the only market left us for the principle part of our fish—as the merchants at L'Orient had represented to government, that it would be for the interest of their colonies to distill their molasses in the Islands, and that upon the strength of this idea, distill houses were erecting in those Islands. It had been objected, that encouraging the manufacture of country rum would diminish the revenue by lessening the consumption of foreign spirits—to this Mr. Ames replied, that he was happy to find that the Hon. Gentleman from Virginia, upon the use of brandy, furnished a full answer to this objection, and that was, that although brandy had paid no duty there, and Jamaica spirits an high one, yet the use of brandy did not increase, and the importation bore no proportion to West-India spirits—the truth was, the consumption of that country rum was not fashionable, and therefore would never be extensive, it was considered as noxious—it was offensive, and it was disreputable to use it—much had been said against the use of spiritous liquors—Mr. Ames was in sentiment with those opposed to their consumption—but at the present moment, gentlemen did not mean to take up the subject in a moral point of view—revenue was the great object now before them, and as it respected that, he conceived, the duty on an article which would amount to a prohibition, attended with the disagreeable consequences pointed out, must be impolitic. Mr. Ames next proceeded to consider the article of molasses as a necessary of life—necessaries he defined, such articles as are found salutary, and enter into the daily and common sustenance of all ranks, and more especially of the poorer classes of citizens—Some kind of sweetening was universally allowed to be of this description—Molasses therefore from its wholesome qualities, and its cheapness, was used very extensively by the people of the New-England States—it was used not merely as sugar, but entered into their food in a variety of ways—and was their only substitute for malt in the making of beer—the articles used in brewing at the southward were exempted from duty, and he conceived no good reason could be assigned, why a difference should be made between the common drink, of one part of the continent and that of another. This duty would operate as a very partial tax, in as much as in addition to it, the eastern States paid their full proportion upon all other articles.

From the foregoing observations, Mr. Ames concluded, that as the navigation of the Union, and more especially the eastern fisheries, would be so materially affected and injured by this partial duty—as it was an object of importance to encourage extensive manufactures—as it could not possibly enter in the views of the House to tax, heavily tax, the necessities of life—as this duty was so over-proportioned to the rest of the system—he was decidedly opposed to the sum of six cents per gallon on molasses—he mentioned one cent, or that it

should be included in non enumerated articles.

Mr. SYLVESTER observed, he thought that the House was ripe for a decision—gentlemen differed so widely, that he despaired of getting better information—he was therefore in favor of, and would propose a medium duty to save time.

Mr. MADISON still advocated the duty, and as he supposed it a reasonable one, he wished that it might now be fixed, as gentlemen must be sensible that variations in the revenue laws would be sacrificing our best friends—Mr. Madison observed, that the exports from Massachusetts were not one third so much as those from Virginia, and that consequently her imports were proportionably greater, and her burthen of taxes enhanced: He further observed, that he considered that the poor of one state was upon a par with those of another, and therefore could not see the propriety of any distinction's being made.

Mr. FITZSIMONS was opposed to any diminution. The duty, he observed, would not fall on the manufacturer, but on the consumer of the article; and as more than 1000000 gallons of rum would be exported, on which a drawback would be allowed, he could not think the duty would fall so heavy: He observed, that the present trade was greater than it was before the war: That there could be no revenue without taxing necessities: The tax on fishermen for this article, would not be more than 3-4th of a dollar pr. annum; and he conceived it was local to oppose it.

Mr. GOODHUE observed, That the duty on Molasses had been passed over, to give gentlemen time, who expected information on the subject from their constituents at the eastward; but the post on Saturday had not brought any dispatches on the subject. He would therefore, he observed, endeavour to give the House all the information upon the subject, at present in his possession: Molasses, Sir, is the production almost altogether of the French West-India Islands; and is purchased chiefly for fish and lumber. The fish which is exchanged for it, is of inferior quality, by reason of being caught and cured in the hottest of the season, that none but the negroes of those islands can be induced to make use of it.

We are restricted by the French from taking any production in exchange for our commodities from those Islands but this article, the rum made from it, and salt. The only reason for allowing us to vend our fish there is, to take off their superfluous articles—their policy having prohibited the importation of molasses and rum into the mother country, lest it should interfere with their wines and brandies: From these facts, it is evident, that the fishery rests on the molasses business. They stand, or fall together.

But, Mr. Speaker, molasses is a necessary of life, when used in substance, particularly so to the poorer class of the people in the eastern States, who use it instead of sugar: the duty of 6 cents is 30 pr. cent. on its value—equal to the duty on rum, and double to that on sugar: even luxuries are not taxed so high. Massachusetts imports 3000000 gallons of molasses, annually, which at 6 cents, would be 180000 dollars; more than Pennsylvania pays on rum and sugar together. This article has never been rated high by any of the states: a plain proof that the sense of the people is not in favour of so exorbitant a duty. We ought to be circumspect in the business before us; nor give just cause of uneasiness to our constituents; especially at the commencement of the Constitution: for though I would not venture to say, that Massachusetts would not be as quiescent and submissive to every measure of Congress, as any state in the union, yet I must say, that they will consider this duty, or any thing near it, as injurious to their trade, fisheries and manufactures, and contrary to the principles of justice, or national policy. It has been said, that Massachusetts ought not to complain, as the amount of her imports are not more than one third the amount of those in Virginia; but the gentleman has brought no evidence to prove it: I can say, Sir, and I believe upon good grounds, that the imports quite as much. This duty is compared to the duty on shoes, and candles; but Sir, one cargo of molasses would pay as much at 6 cents duty, as the whole quantity of candles probably imported into Virginia in a year. I beg leave to add one more observation—it is, that the British Parliament imposed, at one time, 3 pence sterl. a gallon on molasses—Not one farthing of duty was collected, while it continued so high, so odious was it to all ranks of people; and they were compelled to lower it to 1 penny.—I hope we shall learn wisdom from the example.

Mr. GERRY observed, that he was in favor of a revenue by impost, except on necessities, and raw materials, because on all other articles it may be considered as a voluntary tax, for the person who was finally to pay it, had it in his power to avoid the tax, by not consuming the articles dutied; but it must be admitted, that imposts were burthensome on commerce, as the importer must advance the duty, and that being usually raised from some of the dutied articles, would oblige him to force a sale to a loss: It must also be admitted, that he would be subject to bad debts, and that the imposts thereon would be his loss. It was therefore necessary to be judicious in choosing the articles, and in determining the quantity of impost, for it might

otherwise destroy the source of this revenue. The precaution he thought had not been taken, in dutying molasses: The trade itself was in Massachusetts at a low ebb, and could hardly be supported. Should a duty of 6 cents pr. gallon be now levied, a cargo and outfit, of 10000 lawful, which would procure about 22,000 gallons of molasses, would pay 3961. duties, being nearly 40 pr. cent. on the capital: In addition to the premium of insurance and sailors wages, which must always be paid on the arrival of the vessel, the merchant must now raise money to pay the impost, which would greatly distress him in the present scarcity of specie—infer on him a considerable loss, and discourage the trade: and the evil would not terminate here for a large quantity of this article was consumed by the poor of the seaports, who to subsist themselves and their families, were under the necessity of qualifying with it their indian meal, and other articles, not being able to procure flour or meal, and they used it with water, and in their beer, which being generally made of spruce, or hops, were no breweries, he said, in that part of the continent; and this he considered as a misfortune, but by no means a sufficient reason for thus taxing the poor. If a proposition should be made for laying a duty on the ordinary beer used by the poor of other States; or if beef and pork could not be procured among ourselves in sufficient quantities, and it should be proposed to lay an impost on those articles, would not gentlemen, from all quarters, consider it as oppressive—surely they would—and must be so considered in the present case—for molasses was a necessary ingredient of the food and drink of the poorest people of some of the States; and the loading this article with so high a duty, would so raise its price, as to lessen the consumption, and thus be an additional discouragement to the trade; but the evil would be still more extensive. The distillers now purchased molasses in the Eastern States, free of duty, and an impost of 6 cents pr. gallon, would raise it 30 pr. cent. and render it necessary for distillers to have capital proportionably larger, or to manufacture less rum. This circumstance, and the decision of the House not to allow a debenture on rum exported, will lessen the demand of molasses for distilling, and prove a further discouragement to the trade: true it is that rum is injurious to our citizens, but the establishment of distilleries, as well as the importation of rum, has had the sanction of our laws, and therefore the distillers are not chargeable with the evil. If it is necessary at once to destroy these manufactories, the proprietors ought in justice to be reimbursed the cost thereof by the public; but if the article is still to be in use amongst us, should not good policy induce us to give a preference to our own manufactures? It must then be evident this duty, by discouraging, will greatly lessen the molasses trade, and with it the demand for fish, which is exported for the purchase of that article. The fishery is already distressed, by the restrictions and impositions of the nations who are endeavoring to rival us, and who apply as a bounty on their own fish, the duties imposed on ours; and if the demand should cease for a considerable part of our fish, which can only be carried to the West-India markets: This important branch can no longer be supported: This duty moreover would take from every fisherman, who with his family, will consume about 30 gallons of molasses a year, about two dollars, which will in effect operate as a poll tax: Already have propositions been made to some of our merchants in that branch, to remove to Nova Scotia—and such discouragements would promote the emigration of our fishermen: The loss of the fishery would extend itself to ship building, there being at least 27,000 tons of shipping employed in taking, and half as much more in carrying to market that article: The ship-builders therefore, and the numerous mechanics dependent on shipping, would be immediately affected by this duty; and it would extend itself through the whole system of the eastern commerce: The inequality of this duty is evident by comparing it with the impost on sugar, which is only one third of its value, whilst that on molasses is one third, and sugar is a luxury, whilst molasses is not. If the full force of these objections should not be admitted, no one can deny, that there will be a risk in adopting the measure proposed: And are we not hazarding the disaffection of the numerous citizens concerned in the molasses trade, fishery, distilleries and ship-building, who warmly advocated, and expected benefit from the constitution; when the impost proposed will defeat itself, surely it can never be good policy to lay the duty so high, as to exceed the risk of smuggling. If the risk is 5 pr. cent. and the duty 40 pr. cent. there can be no doubt that the merchant will smuggle the molasses more especially as he will consider himself oppressed, and will be compelled to do this, or to give up the trade; and if we multiply revenue officers, till they eat up the revenue, they will not be able to prevent the measure: It must appear then, that in lieu of this high duty, we impose a moderate excise on rum, or a small impost on molasses, we shall not only avoid the injuries which will otherwise extend to our commerce, but shall also greatly increase the revenue itself: He therefore moved that the words "on molasses 6 cents" should be struck out.