

Government are fully alive to all that can be said in favour of this ; nevertheless, the Government do not propose to put any additional duty on sugar. The reasons which led them to this determination are briefly these: Sugar may fairly be called a necessary article of food, the more widely and largely used of any food imported: it is extensively used in our manufactures, and it will always be available if at some future time, and upon some unforeseen contingency, a need for some additional revenue should arise; and it will moreover be available with the least possible disturbance of trade. We therefore think that the sum required should be raised by an increase of a general character.

I have given the subject of the tariff much anxious thought during the recess. The very numerous suggestions received from manufacturers, and the many conflicting interests concerned, of both producers and consumers, have received careful consideration. The Government have endeavoured in the duties proposed to adjust fairly between these conflicting interests the burdens to be borne. Recognising the fact that a free-trade tariff and a prohibitive tariff are equally incompatible with the amount which we must raise, and admitting, what must be admitted, that the imposition of heavy Customs duties necessarily affects the course of trade and industry, we have endeavoured, while making revenue our first object, so to adjust the proposed duties as to assist our local manufactures, without any more pressure, as we believe, upon the consumer than is inevitable, if we are to raise by Customs duties a yearly sum of not less than £1,450,000 for the purposes of ordinary revenue. And it does not seem to me that we can prudently reckon to do with less than that sum from the Customs, for some years to come, when we look at the total amount of revenue which must be raised, and at the other sources of revenue open to us.

I have said that careful attention has been given to the details of our proposals; but I can hardly hope in so complicated a matter as a complete revision of the tariff, where so many conflicting interests have to be dealt with and as far as possible reconciled, and where it is imperative, as in this case, to raise a large revenue,—I say I can scarcely hope that errors and anomalies will not be found. I trust, however, that if any such there are they will, with the assistance of the Committee, be amended or removed.

I will ask honourable members,—both Freetraders and Protectionists,—in approaching the consideration of the question of the particular duties proposed, to keep very prominently before their minds the one inexorable condition of the problem—the necessity we are under of raising a large revenue by means of these duties. If this essential point is given its due weight, a great deal of the difficulty which would otherwise attend the detailed discussion upon the tariff will, I am sure, be removed. I will not here give honourable members details of the proposed increases and alterations, because in a few minutes they will have to be read out in the form of a resolution for the approval of the Committee. I may, however, say that it is proposed to raise a large number of articles from 15 per cent. to 20 per cent. *ad valorem*, and some to 25 per cent., and to increase specific duties in many cases proportionately, due regard being given in both classes to the requirements of the colony and the conflicting interests involved. Some articles have been added to the free list, and some removed which experience has taught should not be free. The total amount which these duties will raise is estimated at £173,000; but I can only give this as approximate, as, under the circumstances, for reasons which will be obvious to honourable members, it is impossible to estimate with anything like accuracy the results of the considerable changes we are proposing.

I may here point out that £25,000 of this taxation would not be necessary if Parliament saw fit to raise the school age at which capitation is payable to six years instead of five, as at present, and to abolish the Education Boards. The Government do not intend to propose the alteration this year in deference to what they believe to be the wish of Parliament as expressed in the last session; but I feel it my duty to point out to the Committee where another £25,000 a year could be saved without any injury whatever to our educational system; and I would ask honourable members again to consider whether the colony can at present afford so large a sum to provide what is little more than nursery accommodation.