In opening the debate on the tariff bill, Mr. Underwood made but slight reference to the income tax, leaving that to Mr. Hull, of Tennessee, who drafted it. On Saturday, Mr. Hull presented the case for this tax. In a long speech, the full report of which has not yet appeared in the Congressional Record. So far as can be judged from the press reports of the speech, it will not be found to contain any satisfactory explanation of the curiously involved language and structure of the section; and a plain statement of the methods by which the tax is to be collected, a statement that intelligent persons would have no difficulty in following and no doubt in interpreting, remains an urgent desideratum.

Nor is it possible to compliment Mr. Hull on the manner in which he has presented the underlying principles. There are cogent reasons for such a tax, and Mr. Hull has not overlooked them; but he has jumbled them up with arguments which either have little inherent weight or are presented in a manner quite unworthy of the occasion.

A fairly collected income tax is intrinsically one of the most just taxes that can be devised. In our country, the question of levying a Federal tax of this nature has always—apart from any issue of Constitutionality—been complicated by the objection, sincerely regarded by many as very serious, that this source of revenue should be reserved for the separate States. There can be little doubt, however, that public sentiment at this time strongly approves resort to an income tax as part of the machinery for raising the revenue required by the Federal Government. In the present instance, it is expressly resorted to for the purpose of making up the deficiency in that revenue caused by the abolition or reduction of tariff taxes. These latter, when they are in the nature of protective duties, impose upon the people a burden far in excess of the amount that they bring into the Treasury; and, if levied on the necessaries of life, even though not protective, they are borne by the masses in a ratio far greater than that which can in any way be regarded as measuring their equitable share in defraying the expenses of government. This is true also of the internal revenue taxes. An income tax, with small incomes exempted and with rates on very large incomes rising according to some duly considered scale, tends to distribute the cost of government in a way that fulfills the requirements of equity.

Both exemption, however, and the graded rate are fraught with danger. That the $4,000 exemption—which the present bill contains, as did the act of 1894—is much too high, we believe to be the sober opinion of competent thinkers. A tax, general in its nature, yet such as to exempt thirty-nine men out of forty, offers a standing temptation to indefinite exploitation, not to speak of indefinite extravagance. No other country has a limit at all comparable with this, even after allowing for the far higher scale of American incomes in general. The principle ought to be that those should be exempt who must exercise great frugality in providing themselves with the necessaries of a simple life, and that all others should pay something, even though it might be very little. The expense of collection is given as a justification for the high exemption, but we cannot regard this as much better than a pretext. The real reason is that the collection of a tax on all incomes above $5,000, say, would involve the risk of great unpopularity for the bill. The expense of collection would, of course, be a much larger percentage of the tax in the case of the lower incomes; but it would still yield a substantial sum, and it would be worth vastly more than it cost in preventing the formation of a dangerous habit—the habit, on the part of almost the entire population of the country, of regarding a small class as the sole bearers of the burden of any fresh governmental expenditure, they themselves being interested only in its benefits.

Like considerations apply to the graduation of rates. As we go up in the scale of incomes, the number of persons upon whom the advancing rates fall rapidly becomes smaller; and once we let go the simple rule of uniformity, there is no automatic check on the temptation to exact a greater and greater percentage. But in spite of this undeniable objection, the propriety of drawing from those who are in the enjoyment of great incomes a larger proportion of their surplus than is demanded of the man of moderate resources commends itself too strongly to be denied. It does not embody any broad theory of "social justice," any doctrine that goes to the root of our economic institutions, any system the adoption of which would mean a radical change in the status of property rights; but it does appeal to the ordinary man's instinct of what those ought to do towards supporting the Government who are fortunate far above their fellows in their resources. The growth of wealth in this country, in the past few decades, has been enormous beyond all precedent. It is no hardship that the possessors of incomes above the requirements of the most comfortable—or, as it may be, the most luxurious—living should contribute one-fiftieth, or in the extreme cases one-twenty-fifth, of the excess to the public treasury. But it must be frankly confessed that—as we have said—the scheme opens the door to grave possibilities. With the rule of a uniform rate abandoned, there is absolutely no principle that can serve as a guide. Our only reliance against unreasonableness, indeed against the wildest excess, must be in the sound sense and right feeling of the American people. The time may come when the graduated income tax will put these to a severe test.

ABUSE OF PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGE.

The merits of the assault by Mr. Glover, the Washington banker, upon Representative Sims, of Tennessee, are to be aired by an official inquiry. Every one, including doubtless Mr. Glover himself, must deplore such a resort to physical violence. Mr. Sims's colleagues will probably manage to find some way of disciplining the technical offender. The incident will have its consolatory side if it brings sharply to public notice an abuse which has reached flagrant proportions in Congress.

The Constitutional provision absolving members of both houses from legal liability for their utterances had two good purposes in view: it was expected to give our lawmakers a sense of entire freedom in denouncing wrongdoing, and also to protect their constituents from being deprived of their services by arrests instigated by persons masking an unworthy design behind a pretended grievance. Parliamentary privilege of this sort is common to all constitutional governments; but nowhere was it in-