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# Money and the Taxing Power

BY W. H. ASHBY.

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BOOK 2.—Chapter XX.

Writers, who have failed to comprehend the facts regarding the so-called "Bank of Venice," have called these payments of taxes in advance, "deposits of metal," and have thereby confused themselves and their readers. There was no "deposit." The owners understood perfectly that the bullion would never be returned to them. No promise of its return was either expressed or implied.

On the contrary, all knew that the bullion was gathered for the sole purpose of being sent into foreign lands to be exchanged for the services and materials required to carry on the operations of the government.

It is competent for a government to make anything it may appoint to that office, a peremptory receipt by its tender, against its own tax levies. Since every litigant must submit himself to the jurisdiction of the court to which he appeals, as his only lawful means to enforce collection of his claims, and accept what it decrees—or nothing—it is likewise competent for government to determine that the same thing it accepts as proof of payment against tax levies, shall be a like receipt by tender against all judgments, and pass to the creditor with that power.

There is no force of demand for coin, except that which is generated by the universal and urgent struggle among men for it, caused by statutes compelling its use by them as the sole means of cancelling tax levies and judgments. Those "coins" inscribed upon the books of the republic of Venice performed every function and office of metallic coin, better than coins of metal ever had done or can do.

In fact, this system afforded to the business men of Venice and finally of the commercial world, the very convenience which we saw a while ago is the sole benefit a bank of deposit and exchange can confer—when well paid for it; and this service the government of Venice performed with vast advantage to itself, not only without expense to the people, but without the possibility of loss to them, except in its own complete overthrow.

Anyone looking with the eyes of common sense can perceive that through its operations in the Chamber of Loans, the government of Venice was simply exercising the taxing power, by "coining" its "money," as a means of anticipating the revenues of the republic for future years. Instead of coining that money upon some private favorite's gold and giving it to him for nothing—as has been the fraudulent habit in this country from the foundation of the government—the Venetian government "coined" its "money" upon its own books in the Chamber of Loans, and actually received for the "coin" thus inscribed the quantity of value there expressed. In the metals, gold and silver, which commodities the government in turn exchanged for the services and materials required in its operations. Had the United States kept for its own use all the gold and silver bullion brought to its mint and given in exchange paper certificates bearing the same power that is stamped on American Eagles, it would have done the same as the Venetians did.

This proceeding has been called a "forced loan," and the officials who organized the system, not fully understanding it themselves, appear to have thought of it at first as such, for they named the agency for carrying it out, the "Chamber of Loans," and at first allowed a low rate of usury upon the quantity of value received. But it possessed no element of a loan. There was no more expectation of repayment than there was in the case of the collection of the tax in kind upon cotton, and other articles in the southern states by the confederate states government during the civil war in this country.

The Venetian owners of gold and silver metal did not deposit it as a loan, expecting that repayment would ever be made. They knew that the "money" inscribed or "coined" for their use, and placed to their credit upon the books of the republic, was all they would ever receive from the government in return for the metal delivered. But they quickly perceived that the "money" of Venice "coined" upon those books performed every function and office capable of being performed by any coin, with greater facility than by use of any cumbrous metal.

It speedily became apparent to all Venetians—and mankind cannot too swiftly re-learn the fact—that the quantity of value expressed in "money" upon the face of "coin," is not determined by the quantity of the force of demand for the material upon which it is stamped, as such material; but that it is determined absolutely by the intensity or languor of the force of demand for it as a peremptory receipt by its tender, "in the public offices and in the courts," against tax levies and judgments.

As those Venetian "coins," inscribed upon the paper books of the republic, performed every function of coins stamped upon disks of gold, and performed those functions better than metallic coins could do, they were always at a premium over gold and silver coins upon which was expressed a like quantity of value.

In order to understand this, it is only necessary to remember always that a coin has no office and performs no functions, except that to which it is appointed by the statute "in the public offices and in the courts;" and that anything whatever empowered exclusively to perform this service is "coin," and must feel the full strength of the force of demand generated by all tax levies and judgments within the jurisdiction that "coins" it.

There was no longer any need for gold and silver, nor any competitive struggle for its possession among the citizens of Venice; "at those improved "coins," written upon the books, performed every function with far greater facility than metallic coins could do. Just as the imperfect and clumsy implements of barbarians in other departments of human activity are constantly superseded by more perfect appliances, so were cumbrous metallic disks, the "coins" of barbarians, displaced and discarded by a better form of "coin."

Gold and silver coin in Venice, like Othello upon the same spot, found its "occupation gone." The government was able to use, as a commodity in exchange with surrounding barbarians, who knew no better, the entire quantity of gold and silver metal to be found in the republic; while at the same time the far superior Venetian "money," "coined" upon books belonging to the government—and not to a private person, performed with such facility all the functions previously performed by metallic coins. "At those "coins" of Venetian "money" written in the books, were constantly at a premium over metallic coins of like denominations during six hundred years; and so remained until the republic itself was destroyed by General Bonaparte at the end of the eighteenth century. I surmise, without authority, that during this time metallic coins were deprived of the power of tender and were not exempt from taxation or execution, as the coins upon the books were.

The government in order to prevent further depreciation of gold and silver coin and to maintain their price, stopped all usury upon the Venetian "money" coined upon its books. But even this could not prevent it from soaring to a premium over the cumbrous coin of savages, and a statute had to be enacted fixing the price of gold and silver. Even aided thus by statute, these two so-called "precious metals" stood during 600 years at a discount of 2 per cent in Venice, which during all that period of time remained the clearing house of the world.

(Continued Next Week.)

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