

SINGAPORE DUTY QUESTION.

We are glad to find the *Singapore Chronicle* at last joining with us in "fulminations" against port duties at this place, and lifting up his voice to scare away the ominous mischief. Our contemporary seems, however, to think it a hopeless task to write any thing on the subject which would ever be likely to meet the desired attention from the authorities. Probably enough he is quite right. But as for ourselves we had not certainly been writing upon that question in the hope of making any great impression upon Government by our arguments against the measure. The organs of authority are seldom very acute when the voice is raised against taxation of any kind, present or to come, and we did not expect to find them less obtuse on the present occasion. Our remarks were intended for the consideration of the public, of which we believed ourselves expressing the general opinion, respecting the imposition of any duties at this port, while we were in expectation of their very soon manifesting, in due form, their own sense of the injurious tendency of such a measure. If we were, ourselves, to point out or specify any particular course of proceeding on the part of the public with respect to this measure, it would be that a deputation of the merchants should, in the first place, be appointed to wait on the local authorities requesting to know the precise nature of the duties proposed to be levied, and thereby enable the public, at any meeting that might ensue, to express, in distinct terms, their views of the probable or certain effect of such duties upon our trade. There would, we imagine, be no objection on the part of the local government to comply with such a request, and give the information required; and, from the advantages and facilities which, in many respects, such a course presents, we think it perhaps the most advisable that could be pursued.

With respect to the merchants contributing to the expense of maintaining a steamer for the "suppression of piracy in the straits," as suggested by our contemporary, we think the proposal involves a commutation of duties which will be very little relished and, besides the other manifest objections which we think exist to such a scheme, it is not from piracy in the straits that our native trade materially suffers.

It seems to be beyond all question the general opinion here that the imposition of duties will have the certain effect of diminishing the native trade, which, in the absence of all protection, and in spite of piracy, has, up to the present time, been going on increasing altho' there can be little doubt that it would have been much more extensive, but for the prevalence of piratical habits and practices in these seas. If this opinion is at all indicative of the event, it would follow that *protection* to that branch of our commerce, based upon a system of duties, would be rather an injury than a benefit; and that, therefore, considered purely in a commercial point of view, it would be much better to leave matters as they stand. But then, it will be said, and with what justice no one will deny, that humanity requires that some check should be applied to the effusion of human blood, to the detestable butcheries, which never fail to accompany such a system of depredation. But the cause of humanity is not the cause of Singapore alone, nor ought any such argument to be used in order to try a pitiful revenue from our trade, a course which, if it help to good in one way, is sure to produce injury in another. The employment of such means for such an end and object is scarcely worthy of a government which represents in the east a nation which has so well asserted its right to lead the van in the cause of humanity, and which possesses the most powerful naval armament the world ever saw. We should like very much to know what all his Majesty's ships in this part of the world are doing at such stations as Calcutta, Madras, Bombay and Trincomalee, where there is never a pirate to be seen. How does the Indian Navy find full employment, or is it exclusively reserved for service on a particular coast, where an Arab dhow is now rarely ever seen? It is true we have occasionally one of his Majesty's sloop-of-war cruising up and down the Straits, but, saving in one or two particular instances, it would be idle to talk of any material good they have yet done in the suppression of piracy.

In a former number we promised to inquire whether this place was not already paying enough without further taxation, to entitle us to protection against piracy, but we will suspend our observations on that subject until our next number, when we shall be able to lay before our readers authentic statements of the Revenue and Expenditure of the settlement.