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A Seed Planted

Benjamin Tucker

26 May 1888

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A dialogue that succinctly illustrates the legal robbery known
as taxes.

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Time: Thursday, May 17, 7:30 P.M.

Place: Residence of the editor of *Liberty*, 10 Garfield Ave., Crescent Beach, Revere (a town in the suburbs of Boston).

Dramatis Personae: Charles F. Fenno, so-called tax-collector of Revere, and the editor of *Liberty*.

In answer to a knock the editor of *Liberty* opens his front door; and is accosted by a man whom he never met before, but who proves to be Fenno.

Fenno — “Does Mr. Tucker live here?”

Editor of *Liberty* — “That’s my name, sir.”

Fenno. — “I came about a poll-tax.”

Editor of *Liberty*. — “Well?”

Fenno — “Well, I came to collect it.”

Editor of *Liberty* — “Do I owe you anything?”

Fenno — “Why, yes.”

Editor of *Liberty* — “Did I ever agree to pay you anything?”

Fenno — “Well, no; but you were living here on the first of May last year, and the town taxed you one dollar.”

Editor of *Liberty* — “Oh! it isn’t a matter of agreement, then?”

Fenno — “No, it’s a matter of compulsion. “

Editor of Liberty — “But isn’t that rather a mild word for it? I call it robbery.”

Fenno “Oh, well, you know the law; it says that all persons twenty years of age and upwards who are living in a town on the first day of May-“

Editor of Liberty — “I know what the law says, but the law is the greatest of all robbers.”

Fenno — “That may be. Anyhow, I want the money.”

Editor of Liberty. — (taking a dollar from his pocket and handing it to Fenno).

Very well. I know you are stronger than I am, because you have a lot of other robbers at your back, and that you will be able to take this dollar from me if I refuse to hand it to you. If I did not know that you are stronger than I am, I should throw you down the steps. But because I know that you are stronger, I hand you the dollar just as I would hand it to any other highwayman. You have no more right to take it, however, than to enter the house and take everything else you can lay your hands on, and I don’t see why you don’t do so.”

Fenno — “Have you your tax-bill with you?”

Editor of Liberty. — I never take a receipt for money that is stolen from me.”

Fenno — “Oh, that’s it?”

Editor of Liberty — “Yes, That’s it.”

And the door closed in Fenno’s face.

He seemed an harmless and inoffensive individual, entirely ignorant of the outrageous nature of his conduct, and he is wondering yet, I presume, if not consulting with his fellow-citizens, upon what manner of crank it is that lives at n°10 Garfield Ave., and whether it would not be the part of wisdom to lodge him straight away in a lunatic asylum.