

LIBERTY A DIVINE TREASURE—By Rogelio Casas Cadilla, Cuba

In remote times, some merchants who came from Asia and others from Africa gathered together at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates in order to buy and sell their merchandise. They created a city which was called Babylon, and trade free from taxes and other hindrances made it exceedingly prosperous. They spoke various languages in this city. There was peace and plenty for all and when they spoke they understood one another.

Equality for all was the basis of their happiness. In due time these merchants became rich. They built residential areas, constructing palaces and hanging gardens, but they were not willing to pay any taxes. It was necessary to render services to them, building roads for them and attending to their gardens and still they exempted themselves from payment. It came to pass that those men who delighted in the immunity which gave them their wealth, were able to compel later comers to pay customs and duties, tolls and sales taxes and other levies. That which is immoral requires police to enforce it, because this form of tax is detested by all people in all climes.

With more and more police required to defend the rich, the cost of living for the poor rose ever higher. The rich became richer and the poor poorer. In the end, Babylon, by losing its liberty ceased to live, because when liberty is lost, life ends. As a result Babylon disappeared from the map, and the palaces fell into ruins.

In Greece some sailors, natives of the Island of Crete, founded that nation on the basis of liberty of commerce. Soon, the Mediterranean became full of Greek shipping taking merchandise to their country and exchanging goods with others. But these ancient merchants grew into grand gentlemen unwilling to pay anything on account of their palaces, and steadily the taxes on the poor became heavier. Pericles, with an iron hand, forced the unhappy poor to pay the account which the new rich would not pay; and while creating a military caste to enforce the law brought about the tyranny of Philip of Macedon, followed by his son Alexander the Great. Within 100 years the people were reduced to a poverty beyond belief. Within 200 years Athens had disappeared, and there remained only wolves amidst the ruins. The people, the ancient palaces, all had disappeared. Such is the nature of things. When liberty is lost, life ends.

Rome tells the same story. Some colonists laid the foundations of a great monarchy which very soon turned into a paradise for the rich and a hell for the poor. All was done on a foundation of military force and oppression. Cicero, her greatest philosopher and orator, said: "To work is a disgrace and the merchant is a thief. A person begins to be decent when he retires from business; when he becomes a landed proprietor and sees that his sons are brought up as soldiers to defend the country." And thus ended the life of this great charlatan, who changed his coat many times.

In Spain it was more or less the same. The court of Henry of Trastamara opened the doors of Spain to all religions and races, until Spain had a population of 32 million and became the strongest and the richest country on this planet. There were industries of all kinds which amazed the intellectuals of other countries. There was a profound respect for the opinions of others, and freedom of production. One should read the records contained in old documents and conserved by some ancient Jewish families (the "sephardim") expelled from Spain by the tyranny of the Catholic Kings. But to the aristocrats the liberty of others is disturbing. They alleged that Henry was an impostor and they denied his daughter the right to reign. By blood and fire they organised the national "bachata." So began the breakdown of the country's reserves and thus emerged the tyranny of the aristocrats who hated commerce and who had possessed themselves of all the land for which they paid not one cent in tax. Let

the poor pay. Let the breadwinner and the dispossessed pay. The nobles do not pay. The noble never buys, he "conquers." In this way it came about that within 200 years Spain was reduced to a population of four millions, its roads covered with overgrowth through lack of use.

In the days of Charles XI (The Magnificent) taxes were absurd and terrible. The sales tax, called "the excise," was 100 per cent. The greatest office in the State was that of the inventor of "imposts." In order to avoid payment, people did not travel by the roads, but travelled over the open country hiding from the King's guards. Merchandise for America was sold to the free merchants of Holland and England whose boats were loaded on the beaches to evade the 100 per cent. tax, and so traffic disappeared from the ports. The King did not collect sufficient to maintain himself and perforce went to the monks to borrow what he needed. Meanwhile, the guards and soldiers, not receiving pay, turned to banditry. They carved the country into customs zones for their own behoof and offered to give back 40 per cent. of the taxes, at the same time announcing the dire consequences which would follow to anyone who attempted to evade them. People who travelled from Santiago de Compostela on pilgrimage had to pass through 27 customs barriers before reaching the French frontiers, besides paying taxes and bridge tolls for the right of way. One saw in the faces of these inhuman tax agents the greed with which they scrutinised each traveller and whoever was known to be rich was further held to ransom.

Blessed be Liberty. Nobody realises how priceless it is. Liberty is treasure and the magnet for prosperity. It is virtue and it is love. One law only, the "Impost Unique" on land values and the freedom of exchange, is the solution if the world is to return to sanity and peace. But they hear my prayer as those who listen to the rain. To those who own the land and to owners of lots it is like "preaching a sermon in the desert," and to the people who continue to be crushed by their own blind selfishness and their own ignorance.

Always the same causes producing the same effects. It cost Henry IV of Navarre his life to implant justice. When Louis XVI was King of France, Turgot said to the French aristocrats: "The people cannot pay any more; if you deny us you will lose your heads." And so it was. The people of France tore down the Bastille with the cry "Freedom or Death." In Spain, Cardinal Cisneros asked the aristocrats to pay and comply with their promise to the Catholic Queen, who left the lands to the people, to give them to the people; and the aristocrats plotted the death of Cisneros for his "heresy" in calling on the rich to pay.

Tacitus, the celebrated Roman historian, said to the Roman patricians: "The Roman people ask for justice, they demand freedom from taxes, they demand land. But you give them laws and more laws, which are new collars for them, because each day the legions are increasing in order to aggravate the oppression of the masses. You must know that the corruption of States is in the number of its laws. The more laws, the worse the government." The patricians created the legions who ate up Rome. When the legions were gorged with the blood of the people, they killed the rich, then the Emperors and finally they sought out the patricians themselves in their homes. God is just, and the justice which Tacitus pleaded for came late but in retribution it came home at last.

I do not believe that landed proprietors are so stupid that they cannot judge what the absence of tariffs means. Goods would have free entry and landowners, making their due contribution to the revenues, would themselves find recompense in the increase of wealth that prosperity would bring. But I repeat—"To preach sermons in the desert!"

(Translated from the Spanish by William Brebner and abridged.)