

Paving Stones of the Slavery Road

The author of the following pointed comment on the proposals of a certain distinguished public servant for the post-war world is JESSIE TREDWAY MATTESON, former Registrar of the Henry George School of Social Science in New York and recently appointed to the same official position in the Chicago extension of the school. Further interesting details of Mrs. Matteson's activities in the educational work of the Georgist movement will be found in the news columns of this issue of THE FREEMAN.

★ FREEDOM OR SLAVERY—which shall it be? No creature on the face of this earth—not even Hitler himself—will admit that he wants slavery for himself or others. Man yearns for freedom—yet the goal seems ever to recede. We watch humanity through the ages, moving down the road toward slavery—“vaporizing about liberty with a whip in one hand and a chain in the other.”

There is less excuse for Americans to lose sight of the goal than for most peoples of the earth, for circumstances have permitted us to enjoy a greater degree of individual liberty. Instead of making use of this knowledge to obtain more freedom, we seem only to become more smug each day. Losing sight of the ultimate goal of complete human freedom bounded only by the equal freedom of every other individual, we congratulate ourselves because we are approaching slavery at a slightly slower pace than our benighted neighbors.

Prominent among those writing on post-war planning is New York's Park Commissioner Robert Moses, whose program is outlined in two articles in recent issues of *The Reader's Digest*. Mr. Moses is unquestionably sincere in his desire to see the brotherhood of man an accomplished fact, and for that deserves all credit.

Yet, throughout his articles, written in protest against the emotionalism of idealists and other impractical people, one finds mention of the “unspeakable Japs,” and of a “decent existence for *all who merit it.*” (Italics mine.) “Does any sane person contend” something with which Mr. Moses is not in agreement?

Leaving aside all claims to sanity, I should like seriously to contend that freedom, by definition, can be attained only by the *removal* and never by the multiplication of restrictions.

The specific restrictions which seem important to Mr. Moses are tariff and immigration laws, and the control of certain geographical areas by chosen people in other geographical areas. He does not present these as new ideas, nor does he go to the extremes advocated by certain other publicists and politicians today. He merely accepts some “moderate” restrictions along these lines as being necessary for the welfare of America. The absence of such restrictions he sees as mistaken generosity toward other countries, generosity which will be rewarded by economic and social disaster.

Mr. Moses' conclusions are based on solid fact. He has studied history and statistics which bear out every point he makes. He has seen the figures on the millions of immigrants who have come to this country since its founding. His experience has shown him closed factories, race riots, slums—the logical result, he claims, of too much immigration.

He has studied the history of the tariff in this country and has observed the comparative prosperity of Americans. Obviously, lowering of tariff barriers, then, involves the lowering of the American standard of living. He takes time here to criticize the “shallow thinkers” who claim that good will is fostered by free trade, and asks “is there anything in past human experience to support this oratory?”

He makes a special plea for imperialism, saying that its virtues have been overlooked recently. In particular he praises the “stronger-than-iron” bonds of the British Commonwealth of Nations, and the “honorable” government of the East Indies by the Dutch. All of these opinions can be buttressed by hard facts in many books.

But there are other books—books which show just as clearly that there is living space on this earth for many more millions than inhabit it today, and that greater population logically means greater production—not starvation and slum living. There are books which show people of differing religions, cultures and political beliefs freely exchanging their labor products and believing (insanely?) that *each* has reaped a profit. And then there are more books which claim that the stronger-than-iron bonds of the British family are indeed strong, because they rest on military force—and others which say that the Dutch, so moderate, kindly and liberal at home, in the colonies have been rapacious, perfidious, infamously cruel, surpassing even the Inquisition in the tortures conceived for their victims.

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Which books are right? Certainly the books which a man of Mr. Moses' distinction would choose should be wise selections. Yet the factual evidence on the other side suggests that the opinion of authority, no matter how great, must bear critical inspection.

There is another criterion, more reliable than hard fact, by which to test the recommendations of our leaders—the criterion of simple, fundamental principles.

For instance, if one's study of human nature indicates that people are burdened with excess energy and therefore do things the hard way to work off some of the surplus—then trade barriers, which increase the amount of labor necessary for the satisfaction of desire, are good, regardless of what the book says.

Or again, one might observe the generosity of nature and man's increasing adaptability in using it to create vast stores of wealth, and speculate on the prevalence of poverty and war. Then, one can either blame the

Lord for putting too many people in the world, or look to see if there has been any human interference with production and distribution.

And as for the ownership of one group of men by another, one might ask: If some men are subject to ownership by others, then are not all men, even I, subject to enslavement? If those inferior people on the other side of the earth are not "ready for freedom" yet, will prolonging the waiting period by restrictions make them any more ready?

And so the paving stones of the Slavery Road are easily recognized by one who keeps principles always in mind—even while snatching a few minutes' reading on a crowded subway. He does not have to decide which are "good" and which are "bad" restrictions; it is enough for him to know that restrictions restrict, and therefore carry mankind in the direction of slavery.

Slavery has been tried and found wanting. Freedom waits.