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## **XIII.15 Abuses of liberty**

- The Spirit of Law - Book XIII. On the relations which the levying of tributes and the magnitude of public revenues have with liberty -

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As a result of these great advantages of liberty, liberty itself has been abused. Because moderated government has produced admirable effects, this moderation has been abandoned ; because large tributes have been obtained, excessive ones were hoped for ; and for want of gratitude to the hand of liberty that was offering this present, they addressed themselves to servitude, which refuses everything.

Liberty has produced the excess of tributes, but the effect of these excessive tributes is to produce servitude in their turn, and the effect of servitude is to produce a diminution in tributes.

The monarchs of Asia hardly issue any decrees except to exempt some province of their empire from tributes every year. [\[1\]](#) The manifestations of their will are benefits. But in Europe, the decrees of princes cause distress even before they are seen, because they always address their needs and never ours.

From an unpardonable nonchalance which their ministers get from the government and often from the climate, the peoples of those countries derive one advantage : that they are not incessantly crushed by new demands. Expenses do not increase, because there are no new projects formed ; and if by chance some were formed, they are projects with their end in view, and not projects just begun. Those who govern the state do not torment it, because they are not endlessly tormenting themselves. But for us it is impossible ever to have any rule in our finances, because we always know that we will do something, and never know what it is we will do.

Here we no longer call a minister great who is the wise dispenser of public revenues, but the one who is resourceful, and one who finds what we call expedients.

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[\[1\]](#) This is the practice of the emperors of China.