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EDITORIAL

THE SLAVE MARKET.

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THE following is a passage from one of Eugene Sue's marvellous series of stories entitled *History of a Proletarian Family*. The passage describes an incident in one of the slave markets that were set up after some Roman victory, when the captives were retailed by the slave-dealers to whom they were sold wholesale. A captive, thus being retailed to a Roman centurion and who, in regulation style had been drugged to look docile and anointed to look supple, tells his experience:

The dealer lifted from my shoulders the woolen covering in which I was wrapped, and left me stripped to the waist; he thereupon made me get out of my breeches also. My master, with the mien of a man proud of his merchandise, thus exposed my nakedness to the customer.

Several of the curious, assembled outside of the stall, looked in and contemplated me. I dropped my eyes in shame and sorrow not in anger.

After the prospective purchaser read the writing which hung from my neck, he looked me over carefully, answering with affirmative nods of the head to what the merchant, with his usual volubility, was saying to him in Latin. Often he stopped to measure with his spread-out fingers, the size of my chest, the thickness of my arms, or the width of my shoulders.

His first examination must have pleased the centurion, for my master said to me: "Be proud for your master, friend Bull, your build is formed faultless. 'See,—I just said to the customer—would not the Grecian sculptors have taken this superb slave as a model for a Hercules!' My customer agreed with me. 'Now you must show him that your strength and agility are not inferior to your appearance.'"

My master pointed to a lead weight in readiness for the trial, and said to me while loosening my arms:

"Now put on your breeches again, then take this weight in your two hands, lift it over your head, and hold it there as long as you can."

I was about to do as I was bid in my stupid docility, when the centurion stooped toward the weight and attempted to lift it from the ground, which he did with much difficulty, while my master said to me:

"This mischievous cripple is as foxy as myself. He knows that many

dealers use hollow weights which appear to weigh two or three times as much as they actually do. Come, friend Bull, show this suspicious fellow that you are as powerfully as you are well-built.”

My strength was not yet entirely returned. Nevertheless, I took the heavy weight in my hands, throwing it over my head, and balanced it there a moment. A vague idea flitted at that instant across my mind to let the weight fall on my master’s skull, and thus crush him at my feet. But that gleam of my bygone courage died out, and I dropped the weight on the ground. The lame Roman seemed satisfied.

“Better and better, friend Bull,” said my master to me, “by Hercules, your patron God, never did a slave do more honor to his owner. Your strength is demonstrated. Now let us witness your agility. Two keepers will hold this wooden bar about a yard from the ground. Although your feet are in chains, you will jump over the bar several times. Nothing will better prove the strength and nimbleness of your muscles.”

In spite of my recent wounds, and the weight of my chain, I leaped several times with my joined feet over the bar to the added satisfaction of the centurion.

“Better and better,” repeated my master. “You are proven as strong as you are powerfully built, and as limber as both. It now remains to exhibit the inoffensive gentleness of your nature. As to this last proof, I am in advance certain of your success,” saying which he again bound my hands behind my back.

At first I did not understand what the dealer meant. But he took a scourge from the hand of a keeper, and pointing with its handle to me, spoke to the purchaser in a low voice. The latter made a gesture of assent, and my master passed the scourge over to the centurion.

“The old fox, still suspicious, fears that I would not strike you hard enough, friend Bull,” my master explained to me. “Come, do not make a slip. Do me this last honor, and gain me this last profit, by showing that you endure chastisement patiently.”

Hardly had he pronounced these words, when the cripple rained a shower of blows upon my shoulders and chest. I felt neither shame nor indignation, only pain. I fell down on my knees in tears and begged for mercy. Outside, the curious crowd, gathered at the door, roared with laughter.

The centurion, surprised at so much resignation in a Gaul, dropped the whip, and looked at my master, who by his gesture seemed to say:

“Did I deceive you?”

Thereupon, patting me with the flat of his hand on my lacerated back, the same as one would pat an animal that pleased him, my master said to me:

“If you are a bull for strength, you are a lamb for meekness.”

Is the above recount of no living interest to us in America? We are no heathen

Romans. What is more, did we not go through a bloody civil war and “smote the shackles from the slave”? That slave’s account can, then, be only of historic interest to us, interest in the history of conditions long ago gone by? Let’s see.

From the North window of the editorial room of the *Daily People*, in which this article is written, a certain spectacle can be seen almost any forenoon in the week. A crowd, rarely below 50, often larger, presses against the iron door of the powerhouse of the Interborough Traction Company. The men are all robust; none other need apply, according to the advertisement that summoned them. From time to time the iron door turns slightly on its hinges; the crowd outside thrills with the emotion of expectancy; through the aperture a few men squeeze themselves with dejected mien into the ice-bound street. They are the rejected ones. Then the whole crowd presses forward. The next batch, five at a time, forces itself in. Inside, they approach a table where a man takes notes and several around him “examine” the applicant. Those who are found to be Herculean enough and agile enough are then put to the third and last test—the test of docility. The test does not here consist in meekly submitting to a physical lashing. It consists in signing an “agreement” in which, “in consideration of employment”, the men sign away their lives and their character. Though not physically drugged, yet drugged by the mental poison of the capitalist press, the ones chosen feel happy that they have found a purchaser; the remaining and dismissed ones rush else-whither in search of better luck in the search for a master.

Has the Eugene Sue picture only a remote, or has it a living interest for us? History is a mirror in which to see our own lineaments. The forms of slavery change, but the thing remains—and will remain to blight the earth until the wage slave upturns the Capitalist System.

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