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EDITORIAL

CONFIRMING SUE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

RAFTS of the toiling masses are in sackcloth and ashes; and more bodies are being got ready for more sackcloth, and more heads for more ashes. The “ability,” which capitalist Mallock-pundits impute to the capitalist class for managing, conducting and directing the workers, and by which the Mallock-pundits seek to justify the large profits pocketed by the capitalist class,—that “ability” is again approving itself a tragic fable. And yet, at such a time, amid the crash of industry, the mourning among the hundreds of thousands of laid-off workers; the wide-spread suffering implied by enforced idleness;—amid all this, notes of giddy-headed mirth, merriment and wassail come from the gilded palaces where our “ability”-impregnated American nobility is housed. From London the news comes that Gladys Vanderbilt is making preparations to be received in the company of her Hungarian bridegroom, Count Szechenyi, “as if she were a royal princess,” by the Vatican, where the Pope is reported to be ready to confer upon the couple the titles of Count and Countess of the Holy Roman Empire. Simultaneously the announcement is made that Theodora Shonts, the daughter of Theodore P. Shonts, whom Senator Tillman pitchforked for combining a lucrative Federal office with a lucrative railroad office, is to be married to the French Duc de Chaulnes upon an imperial scale.

The Eugene Sue stories—“The Infant’s Skull” and “The Iron Trevet”—are luminous historic sketches to read at this season. They explain the events of our own days; they confirm the lesson Sue meant to teach.

At the epochs of French history that the above-named stories deal with, the poverty of the serfs was no check upon the luxurious pleasures of the knights in their castles. On one occasion an actual famine devastated the land—not therefore did the knights stint themselves. On another occasion, still more resembling the

present experience of the American people, the “ability” of the ruling class had drawn foreign invasion upon the country; and the further “ability” of the ruling class exhibited itself by suffering disgraceful routs on the field of battle, whereby the country was thrown open to the ravages of the invader. Did the distress of the serfs sober up their “able” rulers? Not in the least. One of the most artistical reproductions of the events of those days is the chapters in Sue’s story sketching a wedding at which the craven bridegroom knight affected the hero with fictitious prisoners, from a fictitious battlefield on which he alleged to have exhibited his alleged prowesses.

It was not Nero alone who fiddled while Rome burned. Yet Nero’s case is no parallel. Parallels, instructive parallels, are the historic pictures that Sue unfolds. They tell the tale on the “ability” that marks a plundering class and its characteristic. The characteristic is to look upon the plundered worker as cheaper than cattle, and the sufferings of these as a divine dispensation. The “ability” consists in running things into the ground. It is the “ability” of the wood-louse, that, feeding upon its own home, brings its home down with a crash over its own head.

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