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EDITORIAL

A NOVEL PROLETARIAT.

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THE Panama Canal scheme, originally estimated to cost \$135,000,000, is now announced to require not less than \$300,000,000. The history of the scheme, and the steady rise of the figures requisite to “put it through,” suggest the rise and bloom of a brand new style of proletariat—the special product of “triumphant capitalism.”

The word “proletariat” originated in Rome. Between the proletariat of old Rome and the modern proletariat or working class, there is a marked distinction. The difference has been well expressed in the sentence: “The Roman proletariat were fed by the ruling class; the modern proletariat feeds the ruling class.” The original proletariat was not the working class. The work of Rome was done by slaves. The proletariat were the Roman paupers clad with certain civic rights that the ruling class found it advisable to propitiate. The applause, at other times the dagger, of the proletariat were things that rival members of the Roman patriciate competed for. In competing for the same, largesses were used. Individual donations, sometimes donations by decree of the Senate, were showered upon the proletariat. Corn and games—the former to feed, the latter to entertain—were freely, bountifully, extravagantly bestowed upon the proletariat of Rome. “Triumphant capitalism” has given birth to a novel proletariat—the idle rich, whose wealth is not sufficient to meet their depraved wants. These idle rich are paupers in their peculiar estimation. As such, and being the spawn of a social system based upon an oligarchy, the novel proletariat of capitalism is treated by the Capitalist Class on the same principle that the patriciate of Rome treated the city’s slums.

As in old Rome largesses were awarded to the slums, so are they now. In old Rome the largesses were bestowed upon actual slums; in the modern Rome (or Babylon?) of capitalism the largesses are demanded by and are bestowed upon a

peculiar slum element, an element that is a part of the ruling class itself. In old Rome the largesses consisted of corn and games; in the modern Rome (Babylon?) of capitalism the largesses consist of “appropriations,” which are showered under various guises upon the slums of the Capitalist Class itself. This is the explanation of nine-tenths of all appropriations—this is the explanation of the Panama Canal scheme, and of the majestically rising figures of the exorbitant amounts demanded from, and granted by Congress.

The important thing to detect is not that in which things, seemingly alike, are unlike; the important thing to detect is that in which things, seemingly unlike, are alike. At first blush, nothing would seem more unlike than the slum-paupers of Rome and the well groomed, gouty and insolent capitalists of to-day. The treatment that both demand and receive from their Government casts the X-ray through their essential characteristics. They are both pensionaries of the State; they are both slums; they are both a social scum.

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