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EDITORIAL

THE “CUSTOM” OF RULERDOM.

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A NUMBER of Meriden, Conn., “gentlemen of social standing” have memorialized President Taft on the subject of the towering price of sugar in a memorial that displays considerable literary skill, skillfully applied to recent occurrences.

The memorial sets forth that “from corset springs under scale beams to bribery of United States officials, nothing has escaped the notice of the Sugar Trust that could be used to rob the people”; that, having been notified by the Canadian government that, “if they started any hold-up operations, they would go to jail as soon as they could be found,” the Sugar Trust Magnates “decided not to do business in Canada”; that “the jail is the place to punish the Trust pirates”; that upon these pirates, “fines have no more effect than shot blown from a bean-blower{”}; for all of which reasons the Meriden gentlemen aforementioned request the President to instruct the Secret Service and the Department of Justice “to camp on the trail of the Sugar Trust till its hide is stretched on the wall.”

All this is pretty literature, illuminating actual events in recent history. From all this one should expect that our Meriden memorialists are versed in ancient history, and in the philosophy of history also. They are not. One passage in the memorial betrays the shortcomings of its drafters in the matter of historic in, fore, and hind sight.

These memorialists are indignant at the doubling of the price of sugar. No one can blame their indignation on that score. But they are also and very particularly indignant at the reason they ascribe for the doubling of the price. On that score their indignation is “unhistoric.” They say: “The Sugar Trust has been to great expense for defence of charges of grafting and for heavy fines for being caught with the goods, and we believe the price of sugar has been advanced to cover these ex-

penses.” Indignation on this head, and by members of a ruling class, at that, does violence to history, hence is unfounded.

The “right to recoup” is a “right” immemorial, exercised by him who has the power, and enforced by him who can. If the feudal lord’s estates were devastated by war—the taxes were increased upon his serfs and vassals to make up; if he was taken prisoner and had to be ransomed—the moneys were raised from the possessions of his vassals and serfs; if for any reason his expenses were increased—the fact thereof was felt, and the amount thereof was sweated in the shape of doubled and tripled taxes. An opening passage in Eugene Sue’s medieval historic novel *The Pilgrim’s Shell* describes the bailiff of the Lord of Plouernel addressing the huddled serfs in these words: “Witness the order of the very high and very mighty Neroweg VI, lord of the county of Plouernel, by the grace of God. . . . Lord Gonthram, eldest son of the very noble, very high, and very mighty Neroweg VI, Count of Plouernel, having attained his eighteenth year, and being of knight’s age, there shall be paid to him, according to the custom of Plouernel, one denier by each serf and villein of the domain, in honor and to the glory of the knighthood of the said Lord Gonthram.”

The process of recouping for loss, or added expenditures, is a time-honored process of Rulerdom. It may be called “the custom of Rulerdom.” The Sugar Trust does no more than live up to the “custom.” My Lords of Meriden had better hearken to the warning that Bismarck sounded to the present Kaiser, when the latter tried innovations, not to find fault with the bricks of a structure of which he was himself a brick.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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