

VISIT TO A SLAVE AUCTION.

Editorial Correspondence of The Utica Morning Herald.

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I have just returned from a slave auction. The more prominent beauties of the "Institution" are perpetually thrusting themselves upon one, "will be, 'all be." I as little dreamed, two hours ago, of attending a "negro auction" as I did of taking a trip to the moon. Let me tell you how it came about: I was sauntering along St. Louis-st., (in the "French part,") when I observed a crowd of negroes, composed of men, women and children, marching, under the escort of a white man, toward the St. Louis Hotel. A moment afterward, I observed another gang going in the same direction, and soon after a third. I had the curiosity to follow them, and as I entered the rotunda of the hotel observed, I should presume, no less than one hundred and fifty negroes ranged in front of the different auctioneers' stands. Operations had not yet commenced. Fresh "lots" of negroes were constantly coming in, and the various "dealers" were making examinations of the different "articles" on exhibition. The immense rotunda—an elegant and most fashionable affair—was thronged with speculators, buyers, dealers and lookers-on. Some were smacking their Havanas—some were taking their toddies—some were reading their morning papers—and some were chattering on politics, the money market and the weather. The auctioneers were slowly walking to and fro upon their elevated rostrums, like men who appreciate their importance, and occasionally stopping to answer an inquiry from a customer. The laugh—the joke—the stinging repartee—the sunny smile—the cordial greeting of friends—the courteous auctioneers—the elegant hall—the flash of fashion, and the atmosphere of gentility pervading the gay throng—how unlike the horrors of my gloomy imaginings. Yet what amazing callousness!

The clock strikes 12! A change comes over the spirit of the scene. The batons of the auctioneers, brought down against the solid marble, act with the potency of magic upon the babbling throng. Four auctioneers, in four several sections of the Rotunda, hammering away with frightful volubility, and still more frightful jesticulation, at four several parcels of human "chattels." These four gentlemen are shouting at the top of their voices, alternately in French and English, as if each made a point of striving to drown the voices of the others. But the gentleman on my right seems to carry off the honors, both as respects strength of lungs and rapidity of utterance. I wish dear reader, you were standing near me, for I can give you but a very indifferent daguerreotype of the efforts of this popular stump orator. He is now engaged in hauling upon the "block" a feeble negro woman, with a sad and sickly countenance. Having placed her in the proper position, with rather more expedition than gentleness, with commendable candor he informs the spectators that "this girl" (she is aged at least forty) "is always pretending to be sick, and does not therefore warrant her." He sells her, however, at a low figure—some \$400—and the next instant her place is supplied by a fine looking, bright-eyed young mulatto woman, with an infant, almost perfectly white, in her arms. He informs his patrons that "this girl is named ANN, aged 22, and free from the diseases and vices designated by law;" and proceeds, alternately in French and English, somewhat thus: "How much for this girl? *Quant donnez me pour cette Esclave?* How much do I hear for this splendid girl? Five hundred—*Cinque cents*—seven hundred—*six cents*. Gentlemen, look at this girl! Good nurse and seamstress. Do I hear one thousand? One thousand is offered—one thousand—going—going—sold to Cash, one thousand." Next is sold for \$1,200, a plantation hand named JIM; then a boy, aged about 50, named TOM, for \$1,000; then two boys—mulattoes—first rate coopers, for \$1,500 each; then a "family," composed of a mother and four children—the latter all mulattoes—for \$2,500. Our eloquent friend having disposed of his entire lot, proceeded, without hardly a moment's interruption, to sell a lot of real estate, &c.

The three other gentlemen auctioneers were driving on an equally flourishing, though not quite so rapid, a trade. One of them—a very handsome, youngish-looking man—was devoting himself exclusively to the sale of young mulatto women. On the block, at the time I approached his stand, was one of the most beautiful young women I ever saw. She was aged about 16 years, was dressed in a cheap, striped woolen gown, and bare-headed. I could not discover a single trace of the African about her features. She was much whiter than the average of Northern white women; her form was graceful in the extreme, and she carried in her head a pair of eyes that pierced one through and through. Unlike many of her fellow-captives, she seemed fully sensible of her degraded position, and shrank with true maiden timidity from the impudent stare of the hard-featured throng about her. Sensitive reader! what do you think became of that beautiful girl? She was struck off for \$1,250 to one of the most lecherous-looking old brutes I ever set eyes on. God shield the helpless victim of that bad man's power—it may be, ere now, that bad man's lust!

But I was destined a moment after to witness a far sadder, more heart-rending scene. A noble looking mulatto woman was sitting upon a bench holding in her arms two little children—one an infant, and the other a beautiful bright-eyed little boy of some seven or eight years. Her face wore a troubled and frightful look, as if she was conscious that some great evil was about to befall her. When her turn to be sold came, she ascended the platform, the babe in her arms and the little boy clinging to her skirts. The auctioneer offered to sell the "lot" together, but no responsible bids having been made, the mother and little boy were put up separately and sold to separate parties—the one going to Texas and the other to Mississippi. The final separation of the mother and child took place a few minutes afterward. I shall never forget the horror and the agony of that parting. The poor frantic mother begged and implored of "masser" to "buy little Jemie, too," (and I will do him the justice to say that he was much moved by her appeals,) and when she found that her appeals were in vain, she burst forth into the most frantic wails that ever despair gave utterance to. At last mother and child were forcibly separated and hurried off, to see each other no more on earth. My heart is not adamant, and I execrated with more than former ardor a system that could even permit such fiendish atrocities.

Thus I saw with my own eyes—thus had I thrust upon me almost—two of the most detestable and horrible features of the slave system—the sale of beautiful young women to lustful male owners, and the forcible separation of parents from their offspring. These things have been grossly denied by Northern prints and Northern clergy. That they are exceptional I believe to be true; but that they are tolerated in any civilized or Christian community, is a sad commentary upon the humanity of the age.

And these scenes in the Rotunda of the most fashionable hotel in the city! The air is soft and balmy, and the day is as beautiful as ever gladdened the heart of man. The golden sunshine, streaming through the crystal dome, bathes the spacious hall in a flood of radiance. Above, around this mart of human souls, a gay and giddy throng are holding joyous revelry. The great hotel is thronged with wealth and beauty, and the music of piano and guitar are blending with the still sweeter music of glad voices. Above the din of the hot and dusty street, and above the hoarser din of the mart below, is heard the loud laugh and heartfelt glee of the apostles of pleasure. Gay equipages are drawing up before the stately pile and "fair women and brave men" are proudly disappearing through its portals to swell the throng. Within these sumptuous halls—amid that gay and gleeful throng—amid that flash of beauty, fashion and wealth, where so many splendors are gathered together—who would dream that under the same broad dome, and in the effulgence of the same golden sunlight—crime, and sin, and despair, were holding high revel? Who would dream that the former drew their sustenance from the latter?

Well, well: the scene draws its own moral. Life is made up of startling contrasts. Splendor and misery, joy and sorrow, magnificence and beggary, march over side by side. If one wears the crown, some other must wear the cross. Wherever the sun shines, there also creeps the specter shadow. It is, after all, better to suffer the gloom of the shadow than be without the sunshine.

NOTE. —The place I have above described, I should have before mentioned, is the scene of "Uncle Tom's" sale after the death of St. Clair. Mr. Stowe has painted it well and faithfully.