

In the last issue of Labyrinth R. L. Porter described the enormous fortunes which might be won by successful chariot racers. This account could be paralleled in other areas of Roman life, and suggests an important contrast with our own world. During the Imperial period the rewards for success were very high, and the gap between the ordinary man and the successful one was much wider than anything with which we are familiar.

One example can be found in the pay scale of the Roman army. We know that centurions were men of authority: the words of the centurion who talked with Jesus have a typical ring. "I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." (Matt. 8, 9). All centurions held positions of responsibility, and the top centurion in a legion was the ranking enlisted man and an important person indeed. He could be compared to a regimental sergeant-major. But the top centurion drew pay which no modern sergeant-major would even dream of. His pay was thirty times that of an ordinary soldier. We might take the pay of a modern soldier to be about \$10,000 a year: can you imagine a sergeant-major, however distinguished, drawing \$300,000 annually? One can easily see that an ambitious soldier had a very strong inducement to merit promotion under the Roman system.

Similarly equestrians are often described as being the equivalent of our small businessmen, but once again the real contrast between an ordinary Roman and an equestrian can be made more vivid by use of figures. A labourer in the early Empire could perhaps hope for an annual income of HS 1500 - if he were able to find steady work! An equestrian who had only the minimum property to qualify for that order, and who got the typical interest of 12% on his holdings, would have an investment income of HS 44,000. To put it in another way, a labourer would have to work steadily, and spend nothing at all, for some 265 years to amass the HS 400,000 needed to become an equestrian.

Senators were the elite of the Roman world, and there were only about 600 of them. There were, however, many other men who had the wealth which would have qualified them as senators if they had wished to follow public careers. The minimum holdings of a senator amounted to HS 1,000,000; yet the interest on the minimum would be HS 120,000. Many senators, no doubt most of them, had well above the bare minimum. The younger Pliny has a good deal to say about money in his correspondence, and he keeps saying that his fortune is very modest for his class. The evidence suggests, however, that his holdings were worth about 20 times the senatorial requirement. If so, his income would have been HS 2,400,000: again, we realize the gulf which separated Pliny from his poorer fellow-citizens.

Apart from the equestrians and senators was another wealthy group: the freedmen, the ex-slaves, who had struck it rich in business. We get a picture of this group in Petronius' novel The Satyricon, where one of the liveliest parts is a description of a dinner party given by one of these nouveaux riches, Trimalchio. Trimalchio and his friends might not be quite literate, or their manners above reproach, but plainly money was no problem for them. They had come a very long way from their original status as slaves.

A study of money and classes in the Roman empire is fascinating. There was plenty of money to be made, and the lucky could make it in quantity. The gaps between classes were enormous, and the incentive provided by financial rewards was high. The sky was the limit!