

28th March 2023

Auctions

“Well, I ain't no slab of meat to be auctioned off ...”

From the 1978 movie, “Goin’ South”, *spoken by Henry*

The year 193 is an interesting one in Roman history. Dubbed “The Year of the Five Emperors”, it begins when the Senate choses Publius Helvius Pertinax, against his will, to succeed Commodus as emperor. Pertinax tries to get the empire’s finances back in shape, re-establish army discipline and deal with food shortages among the poor. He doesn’t last long! On 28th March, he’s assassinated by some of the Praetorian Guard. And then ... the empire is *auctioned off*. Marcus Didius Julianus, the highest bidder, offers 300 million sesterces – about £60 billion in today’s terms. But he doesn’t last long either. After a brief spell when Clodius Albinus and Pescennius Niger claim top spot, Lucius Septimus Severus is proclaimed Emperor by his troops. Turbulent times – auctioning the empire and all.

There are several UK TV programmes which have auctions in their show: *Homes Under the Hammer*, *Bargain Hunt* and *Flog It*, are a few examples. I’ve bought things at auctions, and I’ve sold things at auctions. Everything has its value. You pay what you think you should pay. And the more you want something, the more you’re willing to pay.

But here’s a thing ... I came across a quote recently by a Canadian writer, Shahzi Bokhari, from *Raise the Hammer*. She writes:

We have a shameful history in how we have treated black persons. Human Rights ... were violated at the hands of White colonists during slavery. Black people were auctioned off while chained and likely naked ...

My own granny, while no slave, was “auctioned” at the “Feeing Markets” in Glasgow when she was a teenager, where she and her sister waited to go with the highest bidder to work on this farm or that.

In any culture, in any age of history, when people are so subjugated that they become “things” to be auctioned off, we should be ashamed. Auctioning your long-hidden treasures from your attic, or even your empire if you have one, is one thing. Treating people as “a slab of meat to be auctioned off”, as less than human, to be claimed by the highest bidder, is quite another. We have a shameful history indeed ...

A prayer for today

My worth? As a child of God ... I’m priceless! Amen