

BLACK RECONSTRUCTION AMERICA

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by the same author

- DARKWATER:
- VOICES FROM WITHIN THE VEIL
- DARK PRINCESS
- BLACK
- RECONSTRUCTION
- AN ESSAY TOWARD A HISTORY OF THE PART WHICH BLACK FOLK PLAYED
IN THE ATTEMPT TO RECONSTRUCT DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA, 1860-1880

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TO THE READER

The story of transplanting millions of Africans to the new world, and of their bondage for four centuries, is a fascinating one. Particularly interesting for students of human culture is the sudden freeing of these black folk in the Nineteenth Century and the attempt, through them, to reconstruct the basis of American democracy from 1860-1880.

This book seeks to tell and interpret these twenty years of fateful history with especial reference to the efforts and experiences of the Negroes themselves.

For the opportunity of making this study, I have to thank the Trustees of the Rosenwald Fund, who made me a grant covering two years; the Directors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who allowed me time for the writing; the President of Atlanta University, who gave me help and asylum during the completion of the work; and the Trustees of the Carnegie Fund who contributed toward the finishing of the manuscript. I need hardly add that none of these persons are in any way responsible for the views herein expressed.

It would be only fair to the reader to say frankly in advance that the attitude of any person toward this story will be distinctly influenced by his theories of the Negro race. If he believes that the Negro in America and in general is an average and ordinary human being, who under given environment develops like other human beings, then he will read this story and judge it by the facts adduced. If, however, he regards the Negro as a distinctly inferior creation, who can never successfully take part in modern civilization and whose emancipation and enfranchisement were gestures against nature, then he will need something more than the sort of facts that I have set down. But this latter person, I am not trying to convince. I am simply pointing out these two points of view, so obvious to Americans, and then without further ado, I am assuming the truth of the first. In fine, I am going to tell this story as though Negroes were ordinary human beings, realizing that this attitude will from the first seriously curtail my audience.

W. E. BURGHARDT DU BOIS

Atlanta, December, 1934.

CONTENTS

<u>I.</u>	<u>THE BLACK WORKER</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>II.</u>	<u>THE WHITE WORKER</u>	<u>17</u>
<u>III.</u>	<u>THE PLANTER</u>	<u>32</u>
<u>IV.</u>	<u>THE GENERAL STRIKE</u>	<u>55</u>
<u>V.</u>	<u>THE COMING OF THE LORD</u>	<u>84</u>
<u>VI.</u>	<u>LOOKING BACKWARD</u>	<u>128</u>
<u>VII.</u>	<u>LOOKING FORWARD</u>	<u>182</u>
<u>VIII.</u>	<u>THE TRAN SUBSTANTIATION OF A POOR WHITE</u>	<u>237</u>
<u>IX.</u>	<u>THE PRICE OF DISASTER</u>	<u>325</u>
<u>X.</u>	<u>THE BLACK PROLETARIAT IN SOUTH CAROLINA</u>	<u>381</u>
<u>XI.</u>	<u>THE BLACK PROLETARIAT IN MISSISSIPPI AND LOUISIANA</u>	<u>431</u>
XII.	THE WHITE PROLETARIAT IN ALABAMA, GEORGIA, AND FLORIDA	487
XIII.	THE DUEL FOR LABOR CONTROL ON BORDER AND FRONTIER	526
<u>XIV.</u>	<u>COUNTER-REVOLUTION OF PROPERTY</u>	<u>580</u>
<u>XV.</u>	<u>FOUNDING THE PUBLIC SCHOOL</u>	<u>637</u>
<u>XVI.</u>	<u>BACK TOWARD SLAVERY</u>	<u>670</u>
<u>XVII.</u>	<u>THE PROPAGANDA OF HISTORY</u>	<u>711</u>
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	731

739

INDEX

I. THE BLACK WORKER

How black men, coming to America in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, became a central thread in the history of the United States, at once a challenge to its democracy and always an important part of its economic history and social development

Easily the most dramatic episode in American history was the sudden move to free four million black slaves in an effort to stop a great civil war, to end forty years of bitter controversy, and to appease the moral sense of civilization.

From the day of its birth, the anomaly of slavery plagued a nation which asserted the equality of all men, and sought to derive powers of government from the consent of the governed. Within sound of the voices of those who said this lived more than half a million black slaves, forming nearly one-fifth of the population of a new nation.

The black population at the time of the first census had risen to three-quarters of a million, and there were over a million at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Before 1830, the blacks had passed the two million mark, helped by the increased importations just before 1808, and the illicit smuggling up until 1820. By their own reproduction, the Negroes reached 3,638,808 in 1850, and before the Civil War, stood at 4,441,830. They were 10% of the whole population of the nation in 1700, 22% in 1750, 18.9% in 1800 and 11.6% in 1900.

These workers were not all black and not all Africans and not all slaves. In 1860, at least 90% were born in the United States, 13% were visibly of white as well as Negro descent and actually more than one-fourth were probably of white, Indian and Negro blood. In 1860, 11% of these dark folk were free workers.

In origin, the slaves represented everything African, although most of them originated on or near the West Coast. Yet among them appeared the great Bantu tribes from Sierra Leone to South Africa; the Sudanese, straight across the center of the continent, from the Atlantic to the Valley of the Nile; the Nilotic Negroes and the black and brown Hamites, allied with Egypt; the tribes of the great lakes; the Pygmies and the Hottentots; and in addition to these, distinct traces of both Berber and Arab blood. There is no doubt of the presence of all these various elements in the mass of 10,000,000 or more Negroes

transported from Africa to the various Americas, from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

Most of them that came to the continent went through West Indian tutelage, and thus finally appeared in the United States. They brought with them their religion and rhythmic song, and some traces of their art and tribal customs. And after a lapse of two and one-half centuries, the Negroes became a settled working population, speaking English or French, professing Christianity, and used principally in agricultural toil. Moreover, they so mingled their blood with white and red America that today less than 25% of the Negro Americans are of unmixed African descent.

So long as slavery was a matter of race and color, it made the conscience of the nation uneasy and continually affronted its ideals. The men who wrote the Constitution sought by every evasion, and almost by subterfuge, to keep recognition of slavery out of the basic form of the new government. They founded their hopes on the prohibition of the slave trade, being sure that without continual additions from abroad, this tropical people would not long survive, and thus the problem of slavery would disappear in death. They miscalculated, or did not foresee the changing economic world. It might be more profitable in the West Indies to kill the slaves by overwork and import cheap Africans; but in America without a slave trade, it paid to conserve the slave and let him multiply. When, therefore, manifestly the Negroes were not dying out, there came quite naturally new excuses and explanations. It was a matter of social condition. Gradually these people would be free; but freedom could only come to the bulk as the freed were transplanted to their own land and country, since the living together of black and white in America was unthinkable. So again the nation waited, and its conscience sank to sleep.

But in a rich and eager land, wealth and work multiplied. They twisted new and intricate patterns around the earth. Slowly but mightily these black workers were integrated into modern industry. On free and fertile land Americans raised, not simply sugar as a cheap sweetening, rice for food and tobacco as a new and tickling luxury; but they began to grow a fiber that clothed the masses of a ragged world. Cotton grew so swiftly that the 9,000 bales of cotton which the new nation scarcely noticed in 1791 became 79,000 in 1800; and with this increase, walked economic revolution in a dozen different lines. The cotton crop reached one-half million bales in 1822, a million bales in 1831, two million in 1840, three million in 1852, and in the year of secession, stood at the then enormous total of five million bales.

Such facts and others, coupled with the increase of the slaves to which they were related as both cause and effect, meant a new

THE BLACK WORKER

world; and all the more so because with increase in American cotton and Negro slaves, came both by chance and ingenuity new miracles for manufacturing, and particularly for the spinning and weaving of cloth.

The giant forces of water and of steam were harnessed to do the world's work, and the black workers of America bent at the bottom of a growing pyramid of commerce and industry; and they not only could not be spared, if this new economic organization was to expand, but rather they became the cause of new political demands and alignments, of new dreams of power and visions of empire.

First of all, their work called for widening stretches of new, rich, black soil—in Florida, in Louisiana, in Mexico; even in Kansas. This land, added to cheap labor, and labor easily regulated and distributed, made profits so high that a whole system of culture arose in the South, with a new leisure and social philosophy. Black labor became the foundation stone not only of the Southern social structure, but of Northern manufacture and commerce, of the English factory system, of European commerce, of buying and selling on a world-wide scale; new cities were built on the results of black labor, and a new labor problem, involving all white labor, arose both in Europe and America.

Thus, the old difficulties and paradoxes appeared in new dress. It became easy to say and easier to prove that these black men were not men in the sense that white men were, and could never be, in the same sense, free. Their slavery was a matter of both race and social condition, but the condition was limited and determined by race. They were congenital wards and children, to be well-treated and cared for, but far happier and safer here than in their own land. As the Richmond, Virginia, 'Examiner put it in 1854:

“Let us not bother our brains about what Providence intends to do with our Negroes in the distant future, but glory in and profit to the utmost by what He has done for them in transplanting them here, and setting them to work on our plantations. . . . True philanthropy to the Negro, begins, like charity, at home; and if Southern men would act as if the canopy of heaven were inscribed with a covenant, in letters of fire, that the Negro is here, and here forever; is our property, and ours forever; . . . they would accomplish more good for the race in five years than they boast the institution itself to have accomplished in two centuries. . .

On the other hand, the growing exploitation of white labor in Europe, the rise of the factory system, the increased monopoly of land, and the problem of the distribution of political power, began to send wave after wave of immigrants to America, looking for new freedom, new opportunity and new democracy.

BLACK RECONSTRUCTION

The opportunity for real and new democracy in America was broad. Political power at first was, as usual, confined to property holders and an aristocracy of birth and learning. But it was never securely based on land. Land was free and both land and property were possible to nearly every thrifty worker. Schools began early to multiply and open their doors even to the poor laborer. Birth began to count for less and less and America became to the world a land of economic opportunity. So the world came to America, even before the Revolution, and afterwards during the nineteenth century, nineteen million immigrants entered the United States.

When we compare these figures with the cotton crop and the increase of black workers, we see how the economic problem increased in intricacy. This intricacy is shown by the persons in the drama and their differing and opposing interests. There were the native-born Americans, largely of English descent, who were the property holders and employers; and even so far as they were poor, they looked forward to the time when they would accumulate capital and become, as they put it, economically "independent." Then there were the new immigrants, torn with a certain violence from their older social and economic surroundings; strangers in a new land, with visions of rising in the social and economic world by means of labor. They differed in language and social status, varying from the half-starved Irish peasant to the educated German and English artisan. There were the free Negroes: those of the North free in some cases for many generations, and voters; and in other cases, fugitives, new come from the South, with little skill and small knowledge of life and labor in their new environment. There were the free Negroes of the South, an unstable, harried class, living on sufferance of the law, and the good will of white patrons, and yet rising to be workers and sometimes owners of property and even of slaves, and cultured citizens. There was the great mass of poor whites, disinherited of their economic portion by competition with the slave system, and land monopoly.

In the earlier history of the South, free Negroes had the right to vote. Indeed, so far as the letter of the law was concerned, there was not a single Southern colony in which a black man who owned the requisite amount of property, and complied with other conditions, did not at some period have the legal right to vote.

Negroes voted in Virginia as late as 1723, when the assembly enacted that no free Negro, mulatto or Indian "shall hereafter have any vote at the elections of burgesses or any election whatsoever." In North Carolina, by the Act of 1734, a former discrimination against Negro voters was laid aside and not reenacted until 1835.

A complaint in South Carolina, in 1701, said:

THE BLACK WORKER

“Several free Negroes were receiv’d, & taken for as good Electors as the best Freeholders in the Province. So that we leave it with Your Lordships to judge whether admitting Aliens, Strangers, Servants, Negroes, &c, as good and qualified Voters, can be thought any ways agreeable to King Charles’ Patent to Your Lordships, or the English Constitution of Government.” Again in 1716, Jews and Negroes, who had been voting, were expressly excluded. In Georgia, there was at first no color discrimination, although only owners of fifty acres of land could vote. In 1761, voting was expressly confined to white men.¹

In the states carved out of the Southwest, they were disfranchised as soon as the state came into the Union, although in Kentucky they voted between 1792 and 1799, and Tennessee allowed free Negroes to vote in her constitution of 1796.

In North Carolina, where even disfranchisement, in 1835, did not apply to Negroes who already had the right to vote, it was said that the several hundred Negroes who had been voting before then usually voted prudently and judiciously.

In Delaware and Maryland they voted in the latter part of the eighteenth century. In Louisiana, Negroes who had had the right to vote during territorial status were not disfranchised.

To sum up, in colonial times, the free Negro was excluded from the suffrage only in Georgia, South Carolina and Virginia. In the Border States, Delaware disfranchised the Negro in 1792; Maryland in 1783 and 1810.

In the Southeast, Florida disfranchised Negroes in 1845; and in the Southwest, Louisiana disfranchised them in 1812; Mississippi in 1817; Alabama in 1819; Missouri, 1821; Arkansas in 1836; Texas, 1845. Georgia in her constitution of 1777 confined voters to white males; but this was omitted in the constitutions of 1789 and 1798.

As slavery grew to a system and the Cotton Kingdom began to expand into imperial white domination, a free Negro was a contradiction, a threat and a menace. As a thief and a vagabond, he threatened society; but as an educated property holder, a successful mechanic or even professional man, he more than threatened slavery. He contradicted and undermined it. He must not be. He must be suppressed, enslaved, colonized. And nothing so bad could be said about him that did not easily appear as true to slaveholders.

In the North, Negroes, for the most part, received political enfranchisement with the white laboring classes. In 1778, the Congress of the Confederation twice refused to insert the word “white” in the Articles of Confederation in asserting that free inhabitants in each state should be entitled to all the privileges and immunities of free citizens of the several states. In the law of 1783, free Negroes were recognized as a basis of taxation, and in 1784, they were recognized as voters in the territories. In the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, “free male inhabitants of full age” were recognized as voters.

The few Negroes that were in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont could vote if they had the property qualifications. In Connecticut they were disfranchised in 1814; in 1865 this restriction was retained, and Negroes did not regain the right until after the Civil War. In New Jersey, they were disfranchised in 1807, but regained the right in 1820 and lost it again in 1847. Negroes voted in New York in the eighteenth century, then were disfranchised, but in 1821 were permitted to vote with a discriminatory property qualification of \$250. No property qualification was required of whites. Attempts were made at various times to remove this qualification but it was not removed until 1870. In Rhode Island they were disfranchised in the constitution which followed Dorr's Rebellion, but finally allowed to vote in 1842. In Pennsylvania, they were allowed to vote until 1838 when the "reform" convention restricted the suffrage to whites.

The Western States as territories did not usually restrict the suffrage, but as they were admitted to the Union they disfranchised the Negroes: Ohio in 1803; Indiana in 1816; Illinois in 1818; Michigan in 1837; Iowa in 1846; Wisconsin in 1848; Minnesota in 1858; and Kansas in 1861.

The Northwest Ordinance and even the Louisiana Purchase had made no color discrimination in legal and political rights. But the states admitted from this territory, specifically and from the first, denied free black men the right to vote and passed codes of black laws in Ohio, Indiana and elsewhere, instigated largely by the attitude and fears of the immigrant poor whites from the South. Thus, at first, in Kansas and the West, the problem of the black worker was narrow and specific. Neither the North nor the West asked that black labor in the United States be free and enfranchised. On the contrary, they accepted slave labor as a fact; but they were determined that it should be territorially restricted, and should not compete with free white labor.

What was this industrial system for which the South fought and risked life, reputation and wealth and which a growing element in the North viewed first with hesitating tolerance, then with distaste and finally with economic fear and moral horror? What did it mean to be a slave? It is hard to imagine it today. We think of oppression beyond all conception: cruelty, degradation, whipping and starvation, ' the absolute negation of human rights; or on the contrary, we may think of the ordinary worker the world over today, slaving ten, twelve, or fourteen hours a day, with not enough to eat, compelled by

THE BLACK WORKER

his physical necessities to do this and not to do that, curtailed in his movements and his possibilities; and we say, here, too, is a slave called a “free worker,” and slavery is merely a matter of name.

But there was in 1863 a real meaning to slavery different from that we may apply to the laborer today. It was in part psychological, the enforced personal feeling of inferiority, the calling of another Master; the standing with hat in hand. It was the helplessness. It was the defenselessness of family life. It was the submergence below the arbitrary will of any sort of individual. It was without doubt worse in these vital respects than that which exists today in Europe or America. Its analogue today is the yellow, brown and black laborer in China and India, in Africa, in the forests of the Amazon; and it was this slavery that fell in America.

The slavery of Negroes in the South was not usually a deliberately cruel and oppressive system. It did not mean systematic starvation or murder. On the other hand, it is just as difficult to conceive as quite true the idyllic picture of a patriarchal state with cultured and humane masters under whom slaves were as children, guided and trained in work and play, given even such mental training as was for their good, and for the well-being of the surrounding world.

The victims of Southern slavery were often happy; had usually adequate food for their health, and shelter sufficient for a mild climate. The Southerners could say with some justification that when the mass of their field hands were compared with the worst class of laborers in the slums of New York and Philadelphia, and the factory towns of New England, the black slaves were as well off and in some particulars better off. Slaves lived largely in the country where health conditions were better; they worked in the open air, and their hours were about the current hours for peasants throughout Europe. They received no formal education, and neither did the Irish peasant, the English factory-laborer, nor the German Bauer; and in contrast with these free white laborers, the Negroes were protected by a certain primitive sort of old-age pension, job insurance, and sickness insurance; that is, they must be supported in some fashion, when they were too old to work; they must have attention in sickness, for they represented invested capital; and they could never be among the unemployed.

On the other hand, it is just as true that Negro slaves in America represented the worst and lowest conditions among modern laborers. One estimate is that the maintenance of a slave in the South cost the master about \$19 a year, which means that they were among the poorest paid laborers in the modern world. They represented in a very real sense the ultimate degradation of man. Indeed, the system was so re-

actionary, so utterly inconsistent with modern progress, that we simply cannot grasp it today. No matter how degraded the factory hand, he is not real estate. The tragedy of the black slave's position was precisely this; his absolute subjection to the individual will of an owner and to "the cruelty and injustice which are the invariable consequences of the exercise of irresponsible power, especially where authority must be sometimes delegated by the planter to agents of inferior education and coarser feelings."

The proof of this lies clearly written in the slave codes. Slaves were not considered men. They had no right of petition. They were "devisable like any other chattel." They could own nothing; they could make no contracts; they could hold no property, nor traffic in property; they could not hire out; they could not legally marry nor constitute families; they could not control their children; they could not appeal from their master; they could be punished at will. They could not testify in court; they could be imprisoned by their owners, and the criminal offense of assault and battery could not be committed on the person of a slave. The "willful, malicious and deliberate murder" of a slave was punishable by death, but such a crime was practically impossible of proof. The slave owed to his master and all his family a respect "without bounds, and an absolute obedience." This authority could be transmitted to others. A slave could not sue his master; had no right of redemption; no right to education or religion; a promise made to a slave by his master had no force nor validity. Children followed the condition of the slave mother. The slave could have no access to the judiciary. A slave might be condemned to death for striking any white person.

Looking at these accounts, "it is safe to say that the law regards a Negro slave, so far as his civil status is concerned, purely and absolutely property, to be bought and sold and pass and descend as a tract of land, a horse, or an ox." ²

The whole legal status of slavery was enunciated in the extraordinary statement of a Chief Justice of the United States that Negroes had always been regarded in America "as having no rights which a white man was bound to respect."

It may be said with truth that the law was often harsher than the practice. Nevertheless, these laws and decisions represent the legally permissible possibilities, and the only curb upon the power of the master was his sense of humanity and decency, on the one hand, and the conserving of his investment on the other. Of the humanity of large numbers of Southern masters there can be no doubt. In some cases, they gave their slaves a fatherly care. And yet even in such cases the strain upon their ability to care for large numbers of people and

THE BLACK WORKER

the necessity of entrusting the care of the slaves to other hands than their own, led to much suffering and cruelty.

The matter of his investment in land and slaves greatly curtailed the owner's freedom of action. Under the competition of growing industrial organization, the slave system was indeed the source of immense profits. But for the slave owner and landlord to keep a large or even reasonable share of these profits was increasingly difficult. The price of the slave produce in the open market could be hammered down by merchants and traders acting with knowledge and collusion. And the slave owner was, therefore, continually forced to find his profit not in the high price of cotton and sugar, but in beating even further down the cost of his slave labor. This made the slave owners in early days kill the slave by overwork and renew their working stock; it led to the widely organized interstate slave trade between the Border States and the Cotton Kingdom of the Southern South; it led to neglect and the breaking up of families, and it could not protect the slave against the cruelty, lust and neglect of certain owners.

Thus human slavery in the South pointed and led in two singularly contradictory and paradoxical directions—toward the deliberate commercial breeding and sale of human labor for profit and toward the intermingling of black and white blood. The slaveholders shrank from acknowledging either set of facts but they were clear and undeniable.

In this vital respect, the slave laborer differed from all others of his day: he could be sold; he could, at the will of a single individual, be transferred for life a thousand miles or more. His family, wife and children could be legally and absolutely taken from him. Free laborers today are compelled to wander in search for work and food; their families are deserted for want of wages; but in all this there is no such direct barter in human flesh. It was a sharp accentuation of control over men beyond the modern labor reserve or the contract coolie system.

Negroes could be sold—actually sold as we sell cattle with no reference to calves or bulls, or recognition of family. It was a nasty business. The white South was properly ashamed of it and continually belittled and almost denied it. But it was a stark and bitter fact. Southern papers of the Border States were filled with advertisements:—"I wish to purchase fifty Negroes of both sexes from 6 to 30 years of age for which I will give the highest cash prices."

*"Wanted to purchase—Negroes of every description, age and sex."
The consequent disruption of families is proven beyond doubt:
"Fifty Dollars reward.—Ran away from the subscriber, a Negro*

girl, named Maria. She is of a copper color, between 13 and 14 years of age—bareheaded and barefooted. She is small for her age—very sprightly and very likely. She stated she was going to see her mother at Maysville. Sanford Tomson.”

“Committed to jail of Madison County, a Negro woman, who calls her name Fanny, and says she belongs to William Miller, of Mobile. She formerly belonged to John Givins, of this county, who now owns several of her children. David Shropshire, Jailer.”

“Fifty Dollar reward.—Ran away from the subscriber, his Negro man Pauladore, commonly called Paul. I understand Gen. R. Y. Hayne has purchased his wife and children from H. L. Pinckney, Esq., and has them on his plantation at Goosecreek, where, no doubt, the fellow is frequently lurking. T. Davis.” One can see Pauladore “lurking” about his wife and children.³

The system of slavery demanded a special police force and such a force was made possible and unusually effective by the presence of the poor whites. This explains the difference between the slave revolts in the West Indies, and the lack of effective revolt in the Southern United States. In the West Indies, the power over the slave was held by the whites and carried out by them and such Negroes as they could trust. In the South, on the other hand, the great planters formed proportionately quite as small a class but they had singularly enough at their command some five million poor whites; that is, there were actually more white people to police the slaves than there were slaves.

Considering the economic rivalry of the black and white worker in the North, it would have seemed natural that the poor white would have refused to police the slaves. But two considerations led him in the opposite direction. First of all, it gave him work and some authority as overseer, slave driver, and member of the patrol system. But above and beyond this, it fed his vanity because it associated him with the masters. Slavery bred in the poor white a dislike of Negro toil of all sorts. He never regarded himself as a laborer, or as part of any labor movement. If he had any ambition at all it was to become a planter and to own “niggers.” To these Negroes he transferred all the dislike and hatred which he had for the whole slave system. The result was that the system was held stable and intact by the poor white. Even with the late ruin of Haiti before their eyes, the planters, stirred as they were, were nevertheless able to stamp out slave revolt. The dozen revolts of the eighteenth century had dwindled to the plot of Gabriel in 1800, Vesey in 1822, of Nat Turner in 1831 and crews of the Amistad and Creole in 1839 and 1841. Gradually the whole white South became an armed and commissioned camp to keep Negroes in slavery and to kill the black rebel.

THE BLACK WORKER

But even the poor white, led by the planter, would not have kept the black slave in nearly so complete control had it not been for what may be called the Safety Valve of Slavery; and that was the chance which a vigorous and determined slave had to run away to freedom.

Under the situation as it developed between 1830 and 1860 there were grave losses to the capital invested in black workers. Encouraged by the idealism of those Northern thinkers who insisted that Negroes were human, the black worker sought freedom by running away from slavery. The physical geography of America with its paths north, by swamp, river and mountain range; the daring of black revolutionists like Henson and Tubman; and the extra-legal efforts of abolitionists made this more and more easy.

One cannot know the real facts concerning the number of fugitives, but despite the fear of advertising the losses, the emphasis put upon fugitive slaves by the South shows that it was an important economic item. It is certain from the bitter effort to increase the efficiency of the fugitive slave law that the losses from runaways were widespread and continuous; and the increase in the interstate slave trade from Border States to the deep South, together with the increase in the price of slaves, showed a growing pressure. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, one bought an average slave for \$200; while in 1860 the price ranged from \$1,400 to \$2,000.

Not only was the fugitive slave important because of the actual loss involved, but for potentialities in the future. These free Negroes were furnishing a leadership for the mass of the black workers, and especially they were furnishing a text for the abolition idealists. Fugitive slaves, like Frederick Douglass and others humbler and less gifted, increased the number of abolitionists by thousands and spelled the doom of slavery.

The true significance of slavery in the United States to the whole social development of America lay in the ultimate relation of slaves to democracy. What were to be the limits of democratic control in the United States? If all labor, black as well as white, became free— were given schools and the right to vote—what control could or should be set to the power and action of these laborers? Was the rule of the mass of Americans to be unlimited, and the right to rule extended to all men regardless of race and color, or if not, what power of dictatorship and control; and how would property and privilege be protected? This was the great and primary question which was in the minds of the men who wrote the Constitution of the United States and continued in the minds of thinkers down through the slavery controversy. It still remains with the world as the problem of democracy expands and touches all races and nations.

BLACK RECONSTRUCTION

And of all human development, ancient and modern, not the least singular and significant is the philosophy of life and action which slavery bred in the souls of black folk. In most respects its expression was stilted and confused; the rolling periods of Hebrew prophecy and biblical legend furnished inaccurate but splendid words. The subtle folk-lore of Africa, with whimsy and parable, veiled wish and wisdom; and above all fell the anointing chrism of the slave music, the only gift of pure art in America.

Beneath the Veil lay right and wrong, vengeance and love, and sometimes throwing aside the veil, a soul of sweet Beauty and Truth stood revealed. Nothing else of art or religion did the slave South give to the world, except the Negro song and story. And even after slavery, down to our day, it has added but little to this gift. One has but to remember as symbol of it all, still unspoiled by petty artisans, the legend of John Henry, the mighty black, who broke his heart working against the machine, and died "with his Hammer in His Hand."

Up from this slavery gradually climbed the Free Negro with clearer, modern expression and more definite aim long before the emancipation of 1863. His greatest effort lay in his cooperation with the Abolition movement. He knew he was not free until all Negroes were free. Individual Negroes became exhibits of the possibilities of the Negro race, if once it was raised above the status of slavery. Even when, as so often, the Negro became Court Jester to the ignorant American mob, he made his plea in his songs and antics.

Thus spoke "the noblest slave that ever God set free," Frederick Douglass in 1852, in his 4th of July oration at Rochester, voicing the frank and fearless criticism of the black worker:

"What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass-fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. . . .

"You boast of your love of liberty, your superior civilization, and your pure Christianity, while the whole political power of the nation (as embodied in the two great political parties) is solemnly pledged to support and perpetuate the enslavement of three millions of your countrymen. You hurl your anathemas at the crown-headed tyrants of Russia and Austria and pride yourselves on your democratic institutions, while you yourselves consent to be the mere tools and bodyguards of the tyrants of Virginia and Carolina. You invite to your shores fugitives of oppression from abroad, honor them with banquets, greet them with ovations, cheer them, toast them, salute them, protect them, and pour out your money to them like water; but the fugitives from your own land you advertise, hunt, arrest, shoot, and kill. You glory in your refinement and your universal education; yet you maintain a system as barbarous and dreadful as ever stained the character of a nation—a system begun in avarice, supported in pride, and perpetuated in cruelty. You shed tears over fallen Hungary, and make the sad story of her wrongs the theme of your poets, statesmen, and orators, till your gallant sons are ready to fly to arms to vindicate her cause against the oppressor; but, in regard to the ten thousand wrongs of the American slave, you would enforce the

strictest silence, and would hail him as an enemy of the nation who dares to make those wrongs the subject of public discourse!”⁴

Above all, we must remember the black worker was the ultimate exploited; that he formed that mass of labor which had neither wish nor power to escape from the labor status, in order to directly exploit other laborers, or indirectly, by alliance with capital, to share in their exploitation. To be sure, the black mass, developed again and again, here and there, capitalistic groups in New Orleans, in Charleston and in Philadelphia; groups willing to join white capital in exploiting labor; but they were driven back into the mass by racial prejudice before they had reached a permanent foothold; and thus became all the more bitter against all organization which by means of race prejudice, or the monopoly of wealth, sought to exclude men from making a living.

It was thus the black worker, as founding stone of a new economic system in the nineteenth century and for the modern world, who brought civil war in America. He was its underlying cause, in spite of every effort to base the strife upon union and national power.

That dark and vast sea of human labor in China and India, the South Seas and all Africa; in the West Indies and Central America and in the United States—that great majority of mankind, on whose bent and broken backs rest today the founding stones of modern industry—shares a common destiny; it is despised and rejected by race and color; paid a wage below the level of decent living; driven, beaten, prisoned and enslaved in all but name; spawning the world’s raw material and luxury—cotton, wool, coffee, tea, cocoa, palm oil, fibers, spices, rubber, silks, lumber, copper, gold, diamonds, leather— how shall we end the list and where? All these are gathered up at

prices lowest of the low, manufactured, transformed and transported at fabulous gain; and the resultant wealth is distributed and displayed and made the basis of world power and universal dominion and armed arrogance in London and Paris, Berlin and Rome, New York and Rio de Janeiro.

Here is the real modern labor problem. Here is the kernel of the problem of Religion and Democracy, of Humanity. Words and futile gestures avail nothing. Out of the exploitation of the dark proletariat comes the Surplus Value filched from human beasts which, in cultured lands, the Machine and harnessed Power veil and conceal. The emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor and the emancipation of labor is the freeing of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown and black. Dark, shackled knights of labor, clinging still Amidst a universal wreck of faith To cheerfulness, and foreigners to hate.

These know ye not, these have ye not received, But these shall speak to you Beatitudes.

Around them surge the tides of all your strife, Above them rise the august monuments Of all your outward splendor, but they stand Unenvious in thought, and bide their time.

LESLIE P. HILL

1. Compare A. E. McKinley, *The Suffrage Franchise in the Thirteen English Colonies in America*, p. 137.
2. *A Picture of Slavery Drawn from the Decisions of Southern Courts*, p. 5.
3. Compare Bancroft, *Slave-Trading in the Old South*; Weld, *American Slavery as It Is*.
4. Woodson, *Negro Orators and Their Orations*, pp. 218-19.

II. THE WHITE WORKER

How America became the laborer's Promised Land; and flocking here from all the world the white workers competed with black slaves, with new floods of foreigners, and with growing exploitation, until they fought slavery to save democracy and then lost democracy in a new and vaster slavery

The opportunity for real and new democracy in America was broad. Political power was at first as usual confined to property holders and an aristocracy of birth and learning. But it was never securely based on land. Land was free and both land and property were possible to nearly every thrifty worker. Schools began early to multiply and open their doors even to the poor laborer. Birth began to count for less and less and America became to the world a land of opportunity. So the world came to America, even before the Revolution, and afterward during the nineteenth century, nineteen million immigrants entered the United States.

The new labor that came to the United States, while it was poor, used to oppression and accustomed to a low standard of living, was not willing, after it reached America, to regard itself as a permanent laboring class and it is in the light of this fact that the labor movement among white Americans must be studied. The successful, well-paid American laboring class formed, because of its property and ideals, a petty bourgeoisie ready always to join capital in exploiting common labor, white and black, foreign and native. The more energetic and thrifty among the immigrants caught the prevalent American idea that here labor could become emancipated from the necessity of continuous toil and that an increasing proportion could join the class of exploiters, that is of those who made their income chiefly by profit derived through the hiring of labor.

Abraham Lincoln expressed this idea frankly at Hartford, in March, 1860. He said:

"I am not ashamed to confess that twenty-five years ago I was a hired laborer, mauling rails, at work on a flat boat—just what might happen to any poor man's son." Then followed the characteristic philosophy of the time: "I want every man to have his chance—and I believe a black man is entitled to it—in which he can better his condition—when he may look forward and hope to be a hired laborer this year and the next, work for himself afterward, and finally to hire men to work for him. That is the true system."

He was enunciating the widespread American idea of the son rising to a higher economic level than the father; of the chance for the poor man to accumulate wealth and power, which made the European doctrine of a working class fighting for the elevation of all workers seem not only less desirable but even less possible for average workers than they had formerly considered it.

These workers came to oppose slavery not so much from moral as from the economic fear of being reduced by competition to the level of slaves. They wanted a chance to become capitalists; and they found that chance threatened by the competition of a working class whose status at the bottom of the economic structure seemed permanent and inescapable. At first, black slavery jarred upon them, and as early as the seventeenth century German immigrants to Pennsylvania asked the Quakers innocently if slavery was in accord with the Golden Rule. Then, gradually, as succeeding immigrants were thrown in

difficult and exasperating competition with black workers, their attitude changed. These were the very years when the white worker was beginning to understand the early American doctrine of wealth and property; to escape the liability of imprisonment for debt, and even to gain the right of universal suffrage. He found pouring into cities like New York and Philadelphia emancipated Negroes with low standards of living, competing for the jobs which the lower class of unskilled white laborers wanted.

For the immediate available jobs, the Irish particularly competed and the employers because of race antipathy and sympathy with the South did not wish to increase the number of Negro workers, so long as the foreigners worked just as cheaply. The foreigners in turn blamed blacks for the cheap price of labor. The result was race war; riots took place which were at first simply the flaming hostility of groups of laborers fighting for bread and butter; then they turned into race riots. For three days in Cincinnati in 1829, a mob of whites wounded and killed free Negroes and fugitive slaves and destroyed property. Most of the black population, numbering over two thousand, left the city and trekked to Canada. In Philadelphia, 1828-1840, a series of riots took place which thereafter extended until after the Civil War. The riot of 1834 took the dimensions of a pitched battle and lasted for three days. Thirty-one houses and two churches were destroyed. Other riots took place in 1835 and . 1838 and a two days' riot in 1842 caused the calling out of the militia with artillery.

In the forties came quite a different class, the English and German workers, who had tried by organization to fight the machine and in the end had to some degree envisaged the Marxian reorganization of industry through trade unions and class struggle. The attitude of these people toward the Negro was varied and contradictory. At first they blurted out their disapprobation of slavery on principle. It was a phase of all wage slavery. Then they began to see a way out for the worker in America through the free land of the West. Here was a solution such as was impossible in Europe: plenty of land, rich land, land coming daily nearer its own markets, to which the worker could retreat and restore the industrial balance ruined in Europe by the expropriation of the worker from the soil. Or in other words, the worker in America saw a chance to increase his wage and regulate his conditions of employment much greater than in Europe. The trade unions could have a material backing that they could not have in Germany, France or England. This thought, curiously enough, instead of increasing the sympathy for the slave turned it directly into rivalry and enmity.

The wisest of the leaders could not clearly envisage just how slave labor in conjunction and competition with free labor tended to reduce all labor toward slavery. For this reason, the union and labor leaders gravitated toward the political party which opposed tariff bounties and welcomed immigrants, quite forgetting that this same Democratic party had as its backbone the planter oligarchy of the South with its slave labor.

The new immigrants in their competition with this group reflected not simply the general attitude of America toward colored people, but particularly they felt a threat of slave competition which these Negroes foreshadowed. The Negroes worked cheaply, partly from custom, partly as their only defense against competition. The white laborers realized that Negroes were part of a group of millions of workers who were slaves by law, and whose competition kept white labor out of the work of the South and threatened its wages and stability in the North. When now the labor question moved West, and became a part of the land question, the competition of black men became of increased importance. Foreign laborers saw more clearly than most Americans the tremendous significance of free land in abundance, such as America possessed, in open contrast to the land monopoly of Europe. But here on this free land,

they met not only a few free Negro workers, but the threat of a mass of slaves. The attitude of the West toward Negroes, therefore, became sterner than that of the East. Here was the possibility of direct competition with slaves, and the absorption of Western land into the slave system. This must be resisted at all costs, but beyond this, even free Negroes must be discouraged. On this the Southern poor white immigrants insisted.

In the meantime, the problem of the black worker had not ceased to trouble the conscience and the economic philosophy of America. That the worker should be a bond slave was fundamentally at variance with the American doctrine, and the demand for the abolition of slavery had been continuous since the Revolution. In the North, it had resulted in freeing gradually all of the Negroes. But the comparatively small number of those thus freed was being augmented now by fugitive slaves from the South, and manifestly the ultimate plight of the black worker depended upon the course of Southern slavery. There arose, then, in the thirties, and among thinkers and workers, a demand that slavery in the United States be immediately abolished.

This demand became epitomized in the crusade of William Lloyd Garrison, himself a poor printer, but a man of education, thought and indomitable courage. This movement was not primarily a labor movement or a matter of profit and wage. It simply said that under any condition of life, the reduction of a human being to real estate was a crime against humanity of such enormity that its existence must be immediately ended. After emancipation there would come questions of labor, wage and political power. But now, first, must be demanded that ordinary human freedom and recognition of essential manhood which slavery blasphemously denied. This philosophy of freedom was a logical continuation of the freedom philosophy of the eighteenth century which insisted that Freedom was not an End but an indispensable means to the beginning of human progress and that democracy could function only after the dropping of feudal privileges, monopoly and chains.

The propaganda which made the abolition movement terribly real was the Fugitive Slave—the piece of intelligent humanity who could say: I have been owned like an ox. I stole my own body and now I am hunted by law and lash to be made an ox again. By no conception of justice could such logic be answered. Nevertheless, at the same time white labor, while it attempted no denial but even expressed faint sympathy, saw in this fugitive slave and in the millions of slaves behind him, willing and eager to work for less than current wage, competition for their own jobs. What they failed to comprehend was that the black man enslaved was an even more formidable and fatal competitor than the black man free.

Here, then, were two labor movements: the movement to give the black worker a minimum legal status which would enable him to sell his own labor, and another movement which proposed to increase the wage and better the condition of the working class in America, now largely composed of foreign immigrants, and dispute with the new American capitalism the basis upon which the new wealth was to be divided. Broad philanthropy and a wide knowledge of the elements of human progress would have led these two movements to unite and in their union to become irresistible. It was difficult, almost impossible, for this to be clear to the white labor leaders of the thirties. They had their particularistic grievances and one of these was the competition of free Negro labor. Beyond this they could easily vision a new and tremendous competition of black workers after all the slaves became free. What they did not see nor understand was that this competition was present and would continue and would be

emphasized if the Negro continued as a slave worker. On the other hand, the Abolitionists did not realize the plight of the white laborer, especially the semi-skilled and unskilled worker.

While the Evans brothers, who came as labor agitators in 1825, had among their twelve demands “the abolition of chattel slavery,” nevertheless, George was soon convinced that freedom without land was of no importance. He wrote to Gerrit Smith, who was giving land to Negroes, and said:

“I was formerly, like yourself, sir, a very warm advocate of the abolition of slavery. This was before I saw that there was white slavery. Since I saw this, I have materially changed my views as to the means of abolishing Negro slavery. I now see, clearly, I think, that to give the landless black the privilege of changing masters now possessed by the landless white would hardly be a benefit to him in exchange for his surety of support in sickness and old age, although he is in a favorable climate. If the Southern form of slavery existed at the North, I should say the black would be a great loser by such a change.”¹

At the convention of the New England anti-slavery society in 1845, Robert Owen, the great champion of cooperation, said he was opposed to Negro slavery, but that he had seen worse slavery in England than among the Negroes. Horace Greeley said the same year: “If I am less troubled concerning the slavery prevalent in Charleston or New Orleans, it is because I see so much slavery in New York which appears to claim my first efforts.”

Thus despite all influences, reform and social uplift veered away from the Negro. Brisbane, Channing, Owen and other leaders called a National Reform Association to meet in New York in May, 1845. In October, Owen’s “World Conference” met. But they hardly mentioned slavery. The Abolitionists did join a National Industrial Congress which met around 1845-1846. Other labor leaders were openly hostile toward the abolitionist movement, while the movement for free land increased.

Thus two movements—Labor-Free Soil, and Abolition, exhibited fundamental divergence instead of becoming one great party of free labor and free land. The Free Soilers stressed the difficulties of even the free laborer getting hold of the land and getting work in the great congestion which immigration had brought; and the abolitionists stressed the moral wrong of slavery. These two movements might easily have cooperated and differed only in matters of emphasis; but the trouble was that black and white laborers were competing for the same jobs just of course as all laborers always are. The immediate competition became open and visible because of racial lines and racial philosophy and particularly in Northern states where free Negroes and fugitive slaves had established themselves as workers, while the ultimate and overshadowing competition of free and slave labor was obscured and pushed into the background. This situation, too, made extraordinary reaction, led by the ignorant mob and fomented by authority and privilege; abolitionists were attacked and their meeting places burned; women suffragists were hooted; laws were proposed making the kidnaping of Negroes easier and disfranchising Negro voters in conventions called for purposes of “reform.”

The humanitarian reform movement reached its height in 1847-1849 amid falling prices, and trade unionism was at a low ebb. The strikes from 1849-1852 won the support of Horace Greeley, and increased the labor organizations. Labor in eastern cities refused to touch the slavery controversy, and the control which the Democrats had over the labor vote in New York and elsewhere increased this tendency to ignore the Negro, and increased the division between white and colored labor. In 1850, a

Congress of Trade Unions was held with no delegates. They stressed land reform but said nothing about slavery and the organization eventually was captured by Tammany Hall. After 1850 unions composed of skilled laborers began to separate from common laborers and adopt a policy of closed shops and a minimum wage and excluded farmers and Negroes. Although this movement was killed by the panic of 1857, it eventually became triumphant in the eighties and culminated in the American Federation of Labor which today allows any local or national union to exclude Negroes on any pretext.

Other labor leaders became more explicit and emphasized race rather than class. John Campbell said in 1851: "Will the white race ever agree that blacks shall stand beside us on election day, upon the rostrum, in the ranks of the army, in our places of amusement, in places of public worship, ride in the same coaches, railway cars, or steamships? Never! Never! or is it natural, or just, that this kind of equality should exist? God never intended it; had he so willed it, he would have made all one color."²

New labor leaders arrived in the fifties. Hermann Kriege and Wilhelm Weitling left their work in Germany, and their friends Marx and Engels, and came to America, and at the same time came tens of thousands of revolutionary Germans. The Socialist and Communist papers increased. Trade unions increased in power and numbers and held public meetings. Immediately, the question of slavery injected itself, and that of abolition.

Kriege began to preach land reform and free soil in 1846, and by 1850 six hundred American papers were supporting his program. But Kriege went beyond Evans and former leaders and openly repudiated abolition. He declared in 1846:

"That we see in the slavery question a property question which cannot be settled by itself alone. That we should declare ourselves in favor of the abolitionist movement if it were our intention to throw the Republic into a state of anarchy, to extend the competition of 'free workingmen' beyond all measure, and to depress labor itself to the last extremity. That we could not improve the lot of our 'black brothers' by abolition under the conditions prevailing in modern society, but make infinitely worse the lot of our 'white brothers.' That we believe in the peaceable development of society in the United States and do not, therefore, here at least see our only hope in condition of the extremest degradation. That we feel constrained, therefore, to oppose Abolition with all our might, despite all the importunities of sentimental philistines and despite all the poetical effusions of liberty-intoxicated ladies."³

Wilhelm Weitling, who came to America the following year, 1847, started much agitation but gave little attention to slavery. He did not openly side with the slaveholder, as Kriege did; nevertheless, there was no condemnation of slavery in his paper. In the first German labor conference in Philadelphia, under Weitling in 1850, a series of resolutions were passed which did not mention slavery. Both Kriege and Weitling joined the Democratic party and numbers of other immigrant Germans did the same thing, and these workers, therefore, became practical defenders of slavery. Doubtless, the "Know-Nothing" movement against the foreign-born forced many workers into the Democratic party, despite slavery.

The year 1853 saw the formation of the Arbeiterbund, under Joseph Weydemeyer, a friend of Karl Marx. This organization advocated Marxian socialism but never got a clear attitude toward slavery. In 1854, it opposed the Kansas-Nebraska bill because "Capitalism and land speculation have again been favored at the expense of the mass of the people," and "This bill withdraws from or makes unavailable

in a future homestead bill vast tracts of territory,” and “authorizes the further extension of slavery; but we have, do now, and shall continue to protest most emphatically against both white and black slavery.”

Nevertheless, when the Arbeiterbund was reorganized in December, 1857, slavery was not mentioned. When its new organ appeared in April, 1858, it said that the question of the present moment was not the abolition of slavery, but the prevention of its further extension and that Negro slavery was firmly rooted in America. One small division of this organization in 1857 called for abolition of the slave trade and colonization of Negroes, but defended the Southern slaveholders.

In 1859, however, a conference of the Arbeiterbund condemned all slavery in whatever form it might appear, and demanded the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law. The Democratic and pro-slavery New York Staats-Zeitung counseled the people to abstain from agitation against the extension of slavery, but all of the German population did not agree.

As the Chartist movement increased in England, the press was filled with attacks against the United States and its institutions, and the Chartists were clear on the matter of slavery. Their chief organ in 1844 said: “That damning stain upon the American escutcheon is one that has caused the Republicans of Europe to weep for very shame and mortification; and the people of the United States have much to answer for at the bar of humanity for this indecent, cruel, revolting and fiendish violation of their boasted principle—that ‘All men are born free and equal.’ ”

The labor movement in England continued to emphasize the importance of attacking slavery; and the agitation, started by the work of Frederick Douglass and others, increased in importance and activity. In 1857, George I. Holyoake sent an anti-slavery address to America, signed by 1,800 English workingmen, whom Karl Marx himself was guiding in England, and this made the black American worker a central text. They pointed out the fact that the black worker was furnishing the raw material which the English capitalist was exploiting together with the English worker. This same year, the United States Supreme Court sent down the Dred Scott decision that Negroes were not citizens.

This English initiative had at first but limited influence in America. The trade unions were willing to admit that the Negroes ought to be free sometime; but at the present, self-preservation called for their slavery; and after all, whites were a different grade of workers from blacks. Even when the Marxian ideas arrived, there was a split; the earlier representatives of the Marxian philosophy in America agreed with the older Union movement in deprecating any entanglement with the abolition controversy. After all, abolition represented capital. The whole movement was based on mawkish sentimentality, and not on the demands of the workers, at least of the white workers. And so the early American Marxists simply gave up the idea of intruding the black worker into the socialist commonwealth at that time.

To this logic the abolitionists were increasingly opposed. It seemed to them that the crucial point was the matter of freedom; that a free laborer in America had an even chance to make his fortune as a worker or a farmer; but, on the other hand, if the laborer was not free, as in the case of the Negro, he had no opportunity, and he inevitably degraded white labor. The abolitionist did not sense the new subordination into which the worker was being forced by organized capital, while the laborers did not realize that the exclusion of four million workers from the labor program was a fatal omission. Wendell Phillips alone suggested a boycott on Southern goods, and said that the great cause of labor was

paramount and included mill operatives in New England, peasants in Ireland, and laborers in South America who ought not to be lost sight of in sympathy for the Southern slave.

In the United States shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War there were twenty-six trades with national organizations, including the iron and steel workers, machinists, blacksmiths, etc. The employers formed a national league and planned to import more workmen from foreign countries. The iron molders started a national strike July 5, 1859, and said: "Wealth is power, and practical experience teaches us that it is a power but too often used to oppress and degrade the daily laborer. Year after year the capital of the country becomes more and more concentrated in the hands of a few, and, in proportion as the wealth of the country becomes centralized, its power increases, and the laboring classes are impoverished. It therefore becomes us, as men who have to battle with the stern realities of life, to look this matter fair in the face; there is no dodging the question; let every man give it a fair, full and candid consideration, and then act according to his honest convictions. What position are we, the mechanics of America, to hold in Society?"

There was not a word in this address about slavery and one would not dream that the United States was on the verge of the greatest labor revolution it had seen. Other conferences of the molders, machinists and blacksmiths and others were held in the sixties, and a labor mass meeting at Faneuil Hall in Boston in 1861 said: "The truth is that the workingmen care little for the strife of political parties and the intrigues of office-seekers. We regard them with the contempt they deserve. We are weary of this question of slavery; it is a matter which does not concern us; and we wish only to attend to our business and leave the South to attend to their own affairs, without any interference from the North." ⁴

In all this consideration, we have so far ignored the white workers of the South and we have done this because the labor movement ignored them and the abolitionists ignored them; and above all, they were ignored by Northern capitalists and Southern planters. They were in many respects almost a forgotten mass of men. Cairnes describes the slave South, the period just before the war:

"It resolves itself into three classes, broadly distinguished from each other, and connected by no common interest—the slaves on whom devolves all the regular industry, the slaveholders who reap all its fruits, and an idle and lawless rabble who live dispersed over vast plains in a condition little removed from absolute barbarism."

From all that has been written and said about the ante-bellum South, one almost loses sight of about 5,000,000 white people in 1860 who lived in the South and held no slaves. Even among the two million slaveholders, an oligarchy of 8,000 really ruled the South, while as an observer said: "For twenty years, I do not recollect ever to have seen or heard these non-slaveholding whites referred to by the Southern gentleman as constituting any part of what they called the South." ⁵ They were largely ignorant and degraded; only 25% could read and write. The condition of the poor whites has been many times described: "A wretched log hut or two are the only habitations in sight. Here reside, or rather take shelter, the miserable cultivators of the ground, or a still more destitute class who make a precarious living by peddling 'lightwood' in the city. . . .

"These cabins . . . are dens of filth. The bed if there be a bed is a layer of something in the corner that defies scenting. If the bed is nasty, what of the floor? What of the whole enclosed space? What of the creatures themselves? Pough! Water in use as a purifier is unknown. Their faces are bedaubed with

the muddy accumulation of weeks. They just give them a wipe when they see a stranger to take off the blackest dirt. . . . The poor wretches seem startled when you address them, and answer your questions cowering like culprits.”⁶ Olmsted said: “I saw as much close packing, filth and squalor, in certain blocks inhabited by laboring whites in Charleston, as I have witnessed in any Northern town of its size; and greater evidences of brutality and ruffianly character, than I have ever happened to see, among an equal population of this class, before.”⁷ Two classes of poor whites have been differentiated: the mountain whites and the poor whites of the lowlands. “Below a dirty and ill-favored house, down under the bank on the shingle near the river, sits a family of five people, all ill-clothed and unclean; a blear-eyed old woman, a younger woman with a mass of tangled red hair hanging about her shoulders, indubitably suckling a baby; a little girl with the same auburn evidence of Scotch ancestry; a boy, and a younger child all gathered about a fire made among some bricks, surrounding a couple of iron saucepans, in which is a dirty mixture looking like mud, but probably warmed-up sorghum syrup, which with a few pieces of corn pone, makes their breakfast.

“Most of them are illiterate and more than correspondingly ignorant. Some of them had Indian ancestors and a few bear evidences of Negro blood. The so-called ‘mountain boomer,’ says an observer, ‘has little self-respect and no self-reliance. . . . So long as his corn pile lasts the “cracker” lives in contentment, feasting on a sort of hoe cake made of grated corn meal mixed with salt and water and baked before the hot coals, with addition of what game the forest furnishes him when he can get up the energy to go out and shoot or trap it. . . . The irregularities of their moral lives cause them no sense of shame. . . . But, notwithstanding these low moral conceptions, they are of an intense religious excitability.’ ”⁸

Above this lowest mass rose a middle class of poor whites in the making. There were some small farmers who had more than a mere sustenance and yet were not large planters. There were overseers. There was a growing class of merchants who traded with the slaves and free Negroes and became in many cases larger traders, dealing with the planters for the staple crops. Some poor whites rose to the professional class, so that the rift between the planters and the mass of the whites was partially bridged by this smaller intermediate class.

While revolt against the domination of the planters over the poor whites was voiced by men like Helper, who called for a class struggle to destroy the planters, this was nullified by deep-rooted antagonism to the Negro, whether slave or free. If black labor could be expelled from the United States or eventually exterminated, then the fight against the planter could take place. But the poor whites and their leaders could not for a moment contemplate a fight of united white and black labor against the exploiters. Indeed, the natural leaders of the poor whites, the small farmer, the merchant, the professional man, the white mechanic and slave overseer, were bound to the planters and repelled from the slaves and even from the mass of the white laborers in two ways: first, they constituted the police patrol who could ride with planters and now and then exercise unlimited force upon recalcitrant or runaway slaves; and then, too, there was always a chance that they themselves might also become planters by saving money, by investment, by the power of good luck; and the only heaven that attracted them was the life of the great Southern planter.

There were a few weak associations of white mechanics, such as printers and shipwrights and iron molders, in 1850-1860, but practically no labor movement in the South.

Charles Nordhoff states that he was told by a wealthy Alabaman, in 1860, that the planters in his region were determined to discontinue altogether the employment of free mechanics. "On my own place," he said, "I have slave carpenters, slave blacksmiths, and slave wheelwrights, and thus I am independent of free mechanics." And a certain Alfred E. Mathews remarks: "I have seen free white mechanics obliged to stand aside while their families were suffering for the necessaries of life, when the slave mechanics, owned by rich and influential men, could get plenty of work; and I have heard these same white mechanics breathe the most bitter curses against the institution of slavery and the slave aristocracy."

The resultant revolt of the poor whites, just as the revolt of the slaves, came through migration. And their migration, instead of being restricted, was freely encouraged. As a result, the poor whites left the South in large numbers. In 1860, 399,700 Virginians were living out of their native state. From Tennessee, 344,765 emigrated; from North Carolina, 272,606, and from South Carolina, 256,868. The majority of these had come to the Middle West and it is quite possible that the Southern states sent as many settlers to the West as the Northeastern states, and while the Northeast demanded free soil, the Southerners demanded not only free soil but the exclusion of Negroes from work and the franchise. They had a very vivid fear of the Negro as a competitor in labor, whether slave or free.

It was thus the presence of the poor white Southerner in the West that complicated the whole Free Soil movement in its relation to the labor movement. While the Western pioneer was an advocate of extreme democracy and equalitarianism in his political and economic philosophy, his vote and influence did not go to strengthen the abolition-democracy, before, during, or even after the war. On the contrary, it was stopped and inhibited by the doctrine of race, and the West, therefore, long stood against that democracy in industry which might have emancipated labor in the United States, because it did not admit to that democracy the American citizen of Negro descent.

Thus Northern workers were organizing and fighting industrial integration in order to gain higher wage and shorter hours, and more and more they saw economic salvation in the rich land of the West. A Western movement of white workers and pioneers began and was paralleled by a Western movement of planters and black workers in the South. Land and more land became the cry of the Southern political leader, with finally a growing demand for reopening of the African slave trade. Land, more land, became the cry of the peasant farmer in the North. The two forces met in Kansas, and in Kansas civil war began.

The South was fighting for the protection and expansion of its agrarian feudalism. For the sheer existence of slavery, there must be a continual supply of fertile land, cheaper slaves, and such political power as would give the slave status full legal recognition and protection, and annihilate the free Negro. The Louisiana Purchase had furnished slaves and land, but most of the land was in the Northwest. The foray into Mexico had opened an empire, but the availability of this land was partly spoiled by the loss of California to free labor. This suggested a proposed expansion of slavery toward Kansas, where it involved the South in competition with white labor: a competition which endangered the slave status, encouraged slave revolt, and increased the possibility of fugitive slaves.

It was a war to determine how far industry in the United States should be carried on under a system where the capitalist owns not only the nation's raw material, not only the land, but also the laborer

himself; or whether the laborer was going to maintain his personal freedom, and enforce it by growing political and economic independence based on widespread ownership of land.

This brings us down to the period of the Civil War. Up to the time that the war actually broke out, American labor simply refused, in the main, to envisage black labor as a part of its problem. Right up to the edge of the war, it was talking about the emancipation of white labor and the organization of stronger unions without saying a word, or apparently giving a thought, to four million black slaves. During the war, labor was resentful. Workers were forced to fight in a strife between capitalists in which they had no interest and they showed their resentment in the peculiarly human way of beating and murdering the innocent victims of it all, the black free Negroes of New York and other Northern cities; while in the South, five million non-slaveholding poor white farmers and laborers sent their manhood by the thousands to fight and die for a system that had degraded them equally with the black slave. Could one imagine anything more paradoxical than this whole situation?

America thus stepped forward in the first blossoming of the modern age and added to the Art of Beauty, gift of the Renaissance, and to Freedom of Belief, gift of Martin Luther and Leo X, a vision of democratic self-government: the domination of political life by the intelligent decision of free and self-sustaining men. What an idea and what an area for its realization—endless land of richest fertility, natural resources such as Earth seldom exhibited before, a population infinite in variety, of universal gift, burned in the fires of poverty and caste, yearning toward the Unknown God; and self-reliant pioneers, unafraid of man or devil. It was the Supreme Adventure, in the last Great Battle of the West, for that human freedom which would release the human spirit from lower lust for mere meat, and set it free to dream and sing.

And then some unjust God leaned, laughing, over the ramparts of heaven and dropped a black man in the midst.

It transformed the world. It turned democracy back to Roman Imperialism and Fascism; it restored caste and oligarchy; it replaced freedom with slavery and withdrew the name of humanity from the vast majority of human beings.

But not without struggle. Not without writhing and rending of spirit and pitiable wail of lost souls. They said: Slavery was wrong but not all wrong; slavery must perish and not simply move; God made black men; God made slavery; the will of God be done; slavery to the glory of God and black men as his servants and ours; slavery as a way to freedom—the freedom of blacks, the freedom of whites; white freedom as the goal of the world and black slavery as the path thereto. Up with the white world, down with the black!

Then came this battle called Civil War, beginning in Kansas in 1854, and ending in the presidential election of 1876—twenty awful years. The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery. The whole weight of America was thrown to color caste. The colored world went down before England, France, Germany, Russia, Italy and America. A new slavery arose. The upward moving of white labor was betrayed into wars for profit based on color caste. Democracy died save in the hearts of black folk.

Indeed, the plight of the white working class throughout the world today is directly traceable to Negro slavery in America, on which modern commerce and industry was founded, and which persisted to threaten free labor until it was partially overthrown in 1863. The resulting color caste founded and retained by capitalism was adopted, forwarded and approved by white labor, and resulted in subordination of colored labor to white profits the world over. Thus the majority of the world's laborers, by the insistence of white labor, became the basis of a system of industry which ruined democracy and showed its perfect fruit in World War and Depression. And this book seeks to tell that story.

Have ye leisure, comfort, calm, Shelter, food, love's gentle balm?

Or what is it ye buy so dear With your pain and with your fear?
The seed ye sow, another reaps;
The wealth ye find, another keeps; The robes ye weave, another wears;
The arms ye forge, another bears.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

1. Schliiter, Lincoln, Labor and Slavery, p. 66.
2. Campbell, Negromania, p. 545.
3. Schliiter, Lincoln, Labor and Slavery, pp. 72, 73.
4. Schliiter, Lincoln, Labor and Slavery, p. 135.
5. Schliiter, Lincoln, Labor and Slavery, p. 86.
6. Simkins and Woody, South Carolina During Reconstruction, p. 326.
7. Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, p. 404.
8. Hart, The Southern South, pp. 34, 35.

III. THE PLANTER

How seven per cent of a section within a nation ruled five million white people and owned four million black people and sought to make agriculture equal to industry through the rule of property without yielding political power or education to labor

Seven per cent of the total population of the South in 1860 owned nearly 3 million of the 3,953,696 slaves. There was nearly as great a concentration of ownership in the best agricultural land. This meant that in a country predominantly agricultural, the ownership of labor, land and capital was extraordinarily concentrated. Such peculiar organization of industry would have to be carefully reconciled with the new industrial and political democracy of the nineteenth century if it were to survive.

Of the five million whites who owned no slaves some were united in interest with the slave owners. These were overseers, drivers and dealers in slaves. Others were hirers of white and black labor, and still others were merchants and professional men, forming a petty bourgeois class, and climbing up to the planter class or falling down from it. The mass of the poor whites, as we have shown, were economic outcasts.

Colonial Virginia declared its belief in natural and inalienable rights, popular sovereignty, and government for the common good, even before the Declaration of Independence. But it soon became the belief of doctrinaires, and not a single other Southern state enacted these doctrines of equality until after the Civil War. The Reconstruction constitutions incorporated them; but quite logically, South Carolina repudiated its declaration in 1895.

The domination of property was shown in the qualifications for office and voting in the South. Southerners and others in the Constitutional Convention asked for property qualifications for the President of the United States, the federal judges, and Senators. Most Southern state governments required a property qualification for the Governor, and in South Carolina, he must be worth ten thousand pounds. Members of the legislature must usually be landholders.

Plural voting was allowed as late as 1832. The requirement of the ownership of freehold land for officeholders operated to the disadvantage of merchants and mechanics. In North Carolina, a man must

THE PLANTER

33

own 50 acres to vote for Senator, and in 1828, out of 250 voters at Wilmington, only 48 had the qualifications to vote for Senator. Toward the time of the Civil War many of these property qualifications disappeared.

Into the hands of the slaveholders the political power of the South was concentrated, by their social prestige, by property ownership and also by their extraordinary rule of the counting of all or at least three-fifths of the Negroes as part of the basis of representation in the legislature. It is singular how this "three-fifths" compromise was used, not only to degrade Negroes in theory, but in practice to disfranchise the white South. Nearly all of the Southern states began with recognizing the white population as a basis of representation; they afterward favored the black belt by direct legislation or by counting three-fifths of the slave population, and then finally by counting the whole black population; or they established, as in Virginia and South Carolina, a "mixed" basis of representation, based on white population and on property; that is, on land and slaves.

In the distribution of seats in the legislature, this manipulation of political power appears. In the older states representatives were assigned arbitrarily to counties, districts and towns, with little regard to population. This was for the purpose of putting the control in the hands of wealthy planters. Variations from this were the basing of representation on the white population in one House, and taxation in the other, or the use of the Federal proportion; that is, free persons and three-fifths of the slaves, or Federal proportion and taxation combined. These were all manipulated so as to favor the wealthy planters. The commercial class secured scant representation as compared with agriculture.

"It is a fact that the political working of the state [of South Carolina] is in the hands of one hundred and fifty to one hundred and eighty men. It has taken me six months to appreciate the entireness of the fact, though of course I had heard it stated." *

In all cases, the slaveholder practically voted both for himself and his slaves and it was not until 1850 and particularly after the war that there were signs of self-assertion on the part of the poor whites to break this monopoly of power. Alabama, for instance, in 1850, based representation in the general assembly upon the white inhabitants, after thirty years of counting the whole white and black population. Thus the Southern planters had in their hands from 1820 to the Civil War political power equivalent to one or two million freemen in the North.

They fought bitterly during the early stages of Reconstruction to retain this power for the whites, while at the same time granting no political power to the blacks. Finally and up to this day, by mak-

BLACK RECONSTRUCTION

34

ing good their efforts to disfranchise the blacks, the political heirs of the planters still retain for themselves this added political representation as a legacy from slavery, and a power to frustrate all third party movements.

Thus, the planters who owned from fifty to one thousand slaves and from one thousand to ten thousand acres of land came to fill the ¹ whole picture in the South, and literature and the propaganda which is usually called history have since exaggerated that picture. The planter certainly dominated politics and social life—he boasted of his education, but on the whole, these Southern leaders were men singularly ignorant of modern conditions and trends and of their historical background. All their ideas of gentility and education went back to , the days of European privilege and caste. They cultivated a surface acquaintance with literature and they threw Latin quotations even ! into Congress. Some few had a cultural education at Princeton and at Yale, and to this day Princeton refuses to receive Negro students, and Yale has admitted a few with reluctance, as a curious legacy from slavery.

Many Southerners traveled abroad and the fashionable European world met almost exclusively Americans from the South and were favorably impressed by their manners which contrasted with the gaucherie of the average Northerner. A Southerner of the upper class could enter a drawing room and carry on a light conversation and eat ; according to the rules, on tables covered with silver and fine linen. They were “gentlemen” according to the older and more meager connotation of the word.

Southern women of the planter class had little formal education; they were trained in dependence, with a smattering of French and music; they affected the latest European styles; were always described as “beautiful” and of course must do no work for a living except in the organization of their households. In this latter work, they were assisted and even impeded by more servants than they needed. The temptations of this sheltered exotic position called the finer possibilities of womanhood into exercise only in exceptional cases. It was the woman on the edge of the inner circles and those of the struggling poor whites who sought to enter the ranks of the privileged who showed superior character.

Most of the planters, like most Americans, were of humble descent, two or three generations removed. Jefferson Davis was a grandson of a poor Welsh immigrant. Yet the Southerner’s assumptions impressed . the North and although most of them were descended from the ; same social classes as the Yankees, yet the Yankees had more recently been reenforced by immigration and were strenuous, hard-working

THE PLANTER

35

men, ruthlessly pushing themselves into the leadership of the new industry. Such folk not only “love a lord,” but even the fair imitation of one.

The leaders of the South had leisure for good breeding and high living, and before them Northern society abased itself and flattered and fawned over them. Perhaps this, more than ethical reasons, or even economic advantage, made the way of the abolitionist hard. In New York, Saratoga, Philadelphia and Cincinnati, a slave baron, with his fine raiment, gorgeous and doll-like women and black flunkies, quite turned the heads of Northern society. Their habits of extravagance impressed the nation for a long period. Much of the waste charged against Reconstruction arose from the attempt of the post-war population, white and black, to imitate the manners of a slave-nurtured gentility, and this brought furious protest from former planters; because while planters spent money filched from the labor of black slaves, the poor white and black leaders of Reconstruction spent taxes drawn from recently impoverished planters.

From an economic point of view, this planter class had interest in consumption rather than production. They exploited labor in order that they themselves should live more grandly and not mainly for increasing production. Their taste went to elaborate households, well-furnished and hospitable; they had much to eat and drink; they consumed large quantities of liquor; they gambled and caroused and kept up the habit of dueling well down into the nineteenth century. Sexually they were lawless, protecting elaborately and flattering the virginity of a small class of women of their social clan, and keeping at command millions of poor women of the two laboring groups of the South.

Sexual chaos was always the possibility of slavery, not always realized but always possible: polygamy through the concubinage of black women to white men; polyandry between black women and selected men on plantations in order to improve the human stock of strong and able workers. The census of 1860 counted 588,352 persons obviously of mixed blood—a figure admittedly below the truth.

“Every man who resides on his plantation may have his harem, and has every inducement of custom, and of pecuniary gain [The law declares that the children of slaves are to follow the fortunes of the mother. Hence the practice of planters selling and bequeathing their own children.], to tempt him to the common practice. Those who, notwithstanding, keep their homes undefiled may be considered as of incorruptible purity.”¹

Mrs. Trollope speaks of the situation of New Orleans’ mulattoes:

“Of all the prejudices I have ever witnessed, this appears to us the

most violent, and the most inveterate. Quadroon girls, the acknowledged daughters of wealthy American or Creole fathers, educated with all the style and accomplishments which money can procure at New Orleans, and with all the decorum that care and affection can give—exquisitely beautiful, graceful, gentle, and amiable, are not admitted, nay, are not on any terms admissible, into the society of the Creole families of Louisiana. They cannot marry; that is to say, no ceremony can render any union with them legal or binding.”²

“It is known by almost everybody who has heard of the man, Richard M. Johnson, a Democratic Vice-President of the United States, that he had colored daughters of whom he was proud; and his was not an exceptional case.”³ Several Presidents of the United States have been accused of racial catholicity in sex.

And finally, one cannot forget that bitter word attributed to a sister of a President of the United States: “We Southern ladies are complimented with names of wives; but we are only mistresses of seraglios.”⁴

What the planters wanted was income large enough to maintain the level of living which was their ideal. Naturally, only a few of them had enough for this, and the rest, striving toward it, were perpetually in debt and querulously seeking a reason for this indebtedness outside themselves. Since it was beneath the dignity of a “gentleman” to encumber himself with the details of his finances, this lordly excuse enabled the planter to place between himself and the black slave a series of intermediaries through whom bitter pressure and exploitation could be exercised and large crops raised. For the very reason that the planters did not give attention to details, there was wide tendency to commercialize their growing business of supplying raw materials for an expanding modern industry. They were the last to comprehend the revolution through which that industry was passing and their efforts to increase income succeeded only at the cost of raping the land and degrading the laborers.

Theoretically there were many ways of increasing the income of the planter; practically there was but one. The planter might sell his crops at higher prices; he might increase his crop by intensive farming, or he might reduce the cost of handling and transporting his crops; he might increase his crops by making his laborers work harder and giving them smaller wages. In practice, the planter, so far as prices were concerned, was at the mercy of the market. Merchants and manufacturers by intelligence and close combination set the current prices of raw material. Their power thus exercised over agriculture was not unlimited but it was so large, so continuous and so steadily and intelligently exerted that it gradually reduced agriculture to a subsidiary industry whose returns scarcely supported the farmer and his labor.

THE PLANTER

37

The Southern planter in the fifties was in a key position to attempt to break and arrest the growth of this domination of all industry by trade and manufacture. But he was too lazy and self-indulgent to do this and he would not apply his intelligence to the problem. His capitalistic rivals of the North were hard-working, simple-living zealots devoting their whole energy and intelligence to building up an industrial system. They quickly monopolized transport and mines and factories and they were more than willing to include the big plantations. But the planter wanted results without effort. He wanted large income without corresponding investment and he insisted furiously upon a system of production which excluded intelligent labor, machinery, and modern methods. He toyed with the idea of local manufactures and ships and railroads. But this entailed too much work and sacrifice.

The result was that Northern and European industry set prices for Southern cotton, tobacco and sugar which left a narrow margin of profit for the planter. He could retaliate only by more ruthlessly exploiting his slave labor so as to get the largest crops at the least expense. He was therefore not deliberately cruel to his slaves, but he had to raise cotton enough to satisfy his pretensions and self-indulgence, even if it brutalized and commercialized his slave labor.

Thus slavery was the economic lag of the 16th century carried over into the 19th century and bringing by contrast and by friction moral lapses and political difficulties. It has been estimated that the Southern states had in 1860 three billion dollars invested in slaves, which meant that slaves and land represented the mass of their capital. Being generally convinced that Negroes could only labor as slaves, it was easy for them to become further persuaded that slaves were better off than white workers and that the South had a better labor system than the North, with extraordinary possibilities in industrial and social development.

The argument went like this: raw material like cotton, tobacco, sugar, rice, together with other foodstuffs formed the real wealth of the United States, and were produced by the Southern states. These crops were sold all over the world and were in such demand that the industry of Europe depended upon them. The trade with Europe must be kept open so that the South might buy at the lowest prices such manufactured goods as she wanted, and she must, oppose all Northern attempts to exalt industry at the expense of agriculture.

The North might argue cogently that industry and manufacture could build up in the United States a national economy. Writers on economics began in Germany and America to elaborate and insist upon the advantages of such a system; but the South would have none of it. It meant not only giving the North a new industrial prosperity, but doing this at the expense of England and France; and the Southern planters preferred Europe to Northern America. They not only preferred Europe for social reasons and for economic advantages, but they sensed that the new power of monopolizing and distributing capital through a national banking system, if permitted in the North in an expanding industry, would make the North an even greater financial dictator of the South than it was at the time.

The South voiced for the Southern farmer, in 1850, words almost identical with those of the Western farmer, seventy-five years later. "All industry," declared one Southerner, "is getting legislative

support against agriculture, and thus the profits are going to manufacture and trade, and these concentrated in the North stand against the interests of the South.”

It could not, perhaps, be proven that the Southern planter, had he been educated in economics and history, and had he known the essential trends of the modern world, could have kept the Industrial Revolution from subordinating agriculture and reducing it to its present vassalage to manufacturing. But it is certain that an enlightened and far-seeing agrarianism under the peculiar economic circumstances of the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century could have essentially modified the economic trend of the world.

The South with free rich land and cheap labor had the monopoly of cotton, a material in universal demand. If the leaders of the South, while keeping the consumer in mind, had turned more thoughtfully to the problem of the American producer, and had guided the production of cotton and food so as to take every advantage of new machinery and modern methods in agriculture, they might have moved forward with manufacture and been able to secure an approximately large amount of profit. But this would have involved yielding to the demands of modern labor: opportunity for education, legal protection of women and children, regulation of the hours of work, steadily increasing wages and the right to some voice in the administration of the state if not in the conduct of industry.

The South had but one argument 'against following modern civilization in this yielding to the demand of laboring humanity: it insisted on the efficiency of Negro labor for ordinary toil and on its essential equality in physical condition with the average labor of Europe and America. But in order to maintain its income without sacrifice or exertion, the South fell back on a doctrine of racial differences which it asserted made higher intelligence and increased efficiency impos-sible for Negro labor. Wishing such an excuse for lazy indulgence, the planter easily found, invented and proved it. His subservient religious leaders reverted to the “Curse of Canaan”; his pseudo-scientists gathered and supplemented all available doctrines of race inferiority; his scattered schools and pedantic periodicals repeated these legends, until for the average planter born after 1840 it was impossible not to believe that all valid laws in psychology, economics and politics stopped with the Negro race.

The espousal of the doctrine of Negro inferiority by the South was primarily because of economic motives and the inter-connected political urge necessary to support slave industry; but to the watching world it sounded like the carefully thought out result of

experience and reason; and because of this it was singularly disastrous for modern civilization in science and religion, in art and government, as well as in industry. The South could say that the Negro, even when brought into modern civilization, could not be civilized, and that, therefore, he and the other colored peoples of the world were so far inferior to the whites that the white world had a right to rule mankind for their own selfish interests.

Never in modern times has a large section of a nation so used its combined energies to the degradation of mankind. The hurt to the Negro in this era was not only his treatment in slavery; it was the wound dealt to his reputation as a human being. Nothing was left; nothing was sacred; and while the best and more cultivated and more humane of the planters did not themselves always repeat the calumny, they stood by, consenting by silence, while blatherskites said things about Negroes too cruelly

untrue to be the word of civilized men. Not only then in the forties and fifties did the word Negro lose its capital letter, but African history became the tale of degraded animals and sub-human savages, where no vestige of human culture found foothold.

Thus a basis in reason, philanthropy and science was built up for Negro slavery. Judges on the bench declared that Negro servitude was to last, “if the apocalypse be not in error, until the end of time.” The Atlanta Daily Intelligencer of January 9, 1860, said, “We can’t see for the life of us how anyone understanding fully the great principle that underlies our system of involuntary servitude, can discover any monstrosity in subjecting a Negro to slavery of a white man. We contend on the contrary that the monstrosity, or, at least, the unnaturalness in this matter, consists in finding Negroes anywhere in white communities not under the control of the whites. Whenever we see a Negro, we presuppose a master, and if we see him in what is commonly called a ‘free state,’ we consider him out of his place.

This matter of manumission, or emancipation now, thank heaven, less practiced than formerly,’ is a species of false philanthropy, which we look upon as a cousin-German to Abolitionism—bad for the master, worse for the slave.”

Beneath this educational and social propaganda lay the undoubted evidence of the planter’s own expenses. He saw ignorant and sullen labor deliberately reducing his profits. In fact, he always faced the negative attitude of the general strike. Open revolt of slaves—refusal to work—could be met by beating and selling to the harsher methods of the deep South and Southwest as punishment. Running away could be curbed by law and police. But nothing could stop the dogged slave from doing just as little and as poor work as possible. All observers spoke of the fact that the slaves were slow and churlish; that they wasted material and lingered at their work. Of course, they did. This was not racial but economic. It was the answer of any group of laborers forced down to the last ditch. They might be made to work continuously but no power could make them work well.

If the European or Northern laborer did not do his work properly and fast enough, he would lose the job. The black slave could not lose his job. If the Northern laborer got sick or injured, he was discharged, usually without compensation; the black slave could not be discharged and had to be given some care in sicknesses, particularly if he represented a valuable investment. The Northern and English employer could select workers in the prime of life and did not have to pay children too young to work or adults too old. The slave owner had to take care of children and old folk, and while this did not cost much on a farm or entail any great care, it did seriously cut down the proportion of his effective laborers, which could only be balanced by the systematic labor of women and children. The children ran loose with only the most general control, getting their food with the other slaves. The old folk foraged for themselves. Now and then they were found dead of neglect, but usually there was no trouble in their getting at least food enough to live and some rude shelter.

The economic difficulties that thus faced the planter in exploiting the black slave were curious. Contrary to the trend of his age, he could not use higher wage to induce better work or a larger supply of labor. He could not allow his labor to become intelligent, although intelligent labor would greatly increase the production of wealth. He could not depend on voluntary immigration unless the immigrants be slaves, and he must bear the burden of the old and sick and could only balance this by child labor and the labor of women.

The use of slave women as day workers naturally broke up or made] impossible the normal Negro home and this and the slave code led to a development of which the South was really ashamed and which it often denied, and yet perfectly evident: the raising of slaves in the Border slave states for systematic sale on the commercialized cotton plantations.

The ability of the slaveholder and landlord to sequester a large share of the profits of slave labor depended upon his exploitation of that labor, rather than upon high prices for his product in the market. In the world market, the merchants and manufacturers had all the advantage of unity, knowledge and purpose, and could hammer down the price of raw material. The slaveholder, therefore, saw Northern merchants and manufacturers enrich themselves from the results of Southern agriculture. He was angry and used all of his great political power to circumvent it. His only effective economic movement, however, could take place against the slave. He was forced, unless willing to take lower profits, continually to beat down, the cost of his slave labor.

But there was another motive which more and more strongly as time went on compelled the planter to cling to slavery. His political power was based on slavery. With four million slaves he could balance the votes of 2,400,000 Northern voters, while in the inconceivable event of their becoming free, their votes would outnumber those of his Northern opponents, which was precisely what happened in 1868.

As the economic power of the planter waned, his political power became more and more indispensable to the maintenance of his income and profits. Holding his industrial system secure by this political domination, the planter turned to the more systematic exploitation of his black labor. One method called for more land and the other for more slaves. Both meant not only increased crops but increased political power. It was a temptation that swept greed, religion, military pride and dreams of empire to its defense. There were two possibilities. He might follow the old method of the early West Indian sugar plantations: work his slaves without regard to their physical condition, until they died of over-work or exposure, and then buy new ones. The difficulty of this, however, was that the price of slaves, since the attempt to abolish the slave trade, was gradually rising. This in the deep South led to a strong and gradually increasing demand for the reopening of the African slave trade, just as modern industry demands cheaper and cheaper coolie labor in Asia and half-slave labor in African mines.

The other possibility was to find continual increments of new, rich land upon which ordinary slave labor would bring adequate return. This land the South sought in the Southeast; then beyond the Mississippi in Louisiana and Texas, then in Mexico, and finally, it turned its face in two directions: toward the Northwestern territories of the United States and toward the West Indian islands and South America. The South was drawn toward the West by two motives: first the possibility that slavery in Kansas, Colorado, Utah and Nevada would be at least as profitable as in Missouri, and secondly to prevent the expansion of free labor there and its threat to slavery. This challenge was a counsel of despair in the face of modern industrial development and probably the radical South expected defeat in the West and hoped the consequent resentment among the slaveholders would set the South toward a great slave empire in the Caribbean. Jefferson Davis was ready to reopen the African slave trade to any future acquisition south of the Rio Grande.

This brought the South to war with the farmers and laborers in the North and West, who wanted free soil but did not want to compete with slave labor. The fugitive slave law of 1850 vastly extended Federal power so as to nullify state rights in the North. The Compromise of 1850 permitted the

extension of slavery into the territories, and the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, 1854, deprived Congress of the right to prohibit slavery anywhere. This opened the entire West to slavery. War followed in Kansas. Slaveholders went boldly into Kansas, armed and organized:

“The invaders went in such force that the scattered and unorganized citizens could make no resistance and in many places they did not attempt to vote, seeing the polls surrounded by crowds of armed men who they knew came from Missouri to control the election and the leaders of the invaders kept their men under control, being anxious to prevent needless violence, as any serious outbreak would attract the attention of the country. In some districts the actual citizens protested against the election and petitioned the governor to set it aside and order another.

“We can tell the impertinent scoundrels of the Tribune that we will continue to lynch and hang, to tar and feather and drown every white-livered Abolitionist who dares to pollute our soil.”⁵ Shut out from the United States territories by the Free Soil movement, the South determined upon secession with the distinct idea of eventually expanding into the Caribbean.

There was, however, the opposition in the Border States. The employers of labor in the Border States had found a new source of revenue. They did not like to admit it. They surrounded it with a certain secrecy, and it was exceedingly bad taste for any Virginia planter to have it indicated that he was deliberately raising slaves for sale; and yet that was a fact.

In no respect are the peculiar psychological difficulties of the planters better illustrated than with regard to the interstate slave trade. The theory was clear and lofty; slaves were a part of the family—“my people,” George Washington called them. Under ordinary circumstances they were never to be alienated, but supported during good behavior and bad, punished and corrected for crime and misdemeanor, rewarded for good conduct. It was the patriarchal clan translated into modern life, with social, religious, economic and even blood ties.

This was the theory; but as a matter of fact, the cotton planters were supplied with laborers by the Border States. A laboring stock was deliberately bred for legal sale. A large number of persons followed the profession of promoting this sale of slaves. There were markets and quotations, and the stream of black labor, moving continuously into the South, reached yearly into the thousands.

Notwithstanding these perfectly clear and authenticated facts, the planter persistently denied them. He denied that there was any considerable interstate sale of slaves; he denied that families were broken up; he insisted that slave auctions were due to death or mischance, and particularly did he insist that the slave traders were the least of human beings and most despised.

This deliberate contradiction of plain facts constitutes itself a major charge against slavery and shows how the system often so affronted the moral sense of the planters themselves that they tried to hide from it. They could not face the fact of Negro women as brood mares and of black children as puppies

Indeed, while we speak of the planters as one essentially unvarying group, there is evidence that the necessities of their economic organization were continually changing and deteriorating their morale and pushing forward ruder, noisier, less cultivated elements than characterized the Southern gentleman of

earlier days. Certainly, the cursing, brawling, whoring gamblers who largely represented the South in the late fifties, evidenced the inevitable deterioration that overtakes men when their desire for income and extravagance overwhelms their respect for human beings. Thus the interstate slave

trade grew and flourished and the demand for the African slave trade was rapidly becoming irresistible in the late fifties.

From fifty to eighty thousand slaves went from the Border States to the lower South in the last decade of slavery. One planter frankly said that he “calculated that the moment a colored baby was born, it was worth to him \$300.” So far as possible, the planters in selling off their slaves avoided the breaking up of families. But they were facing flat economic facts. The persons who were buying slaves in the cotton belt were not buying families, they were buying workers, and thus by economic demand families were continually and regularly broken

up; the father was sold away; the mother and the half-grown children separated, and sometimes smaller children were sold. One of the subsequent tragedies of the system was the frantic efforts, before and after emancipation, of Negroes hunting for their relatives throughout the United States.

A Southerner wrote to Olmsted: “In the states of Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri, as much attention is paid to the breeding and growth of Negroes as to that of horses and mules. Further south, we raise them both for use and for market. Planters command their girls and women (married or unmarried) to have children; and I have known a great many Negro girls to be sold off because they did not have children. A breeding woman is worth from one-sixth to one-fourth more than one that does not breed.”

Sexual chaos arose from economic motives. The deliberate breeding of a strong, big field-hand stock could be carried out by selecting proper males, and giving them the run of the likeliest females. This in many Border States became a regular policy and fed the slave trade. Child-bearing was a profitable occupation, which received every possible encouragement, and there was not only no bar to illegitimacy, but an actual premium put upon it. Indeed, the word was impossible of meaning under the slave system.

Moncure D. Conway, whose father was a slaveholder near Fredericksburg, Virginia, wrote: “As a general thing, the chief pecuniary resource in the Border States is the breeding of slaves; and I grieve to say that there is too much ground for the charges that general licentiousness among the slaves, for the purpose of a large increase, is compelled by some masters and encouraged by many. The period of maternity is hastened, the average youth of Negro mothers being nearly three years earlier than that of any free race, and an old maid is utterly unknown among the women.”

J. E. Cairnes, the English economist, in his passage with Mr. McHenry on this subject, computed from reliable data that Virginia, had bred and exported to the cotton states between the years of 1840 and 1850 no less than 100,000 slaves, which at \$500 per head would have yielded her \$50,000,000.

The law sometimes forbade the breaking up of slave families but:

“Not one of these prohibitions, save those of Louisiana, and they but slightly, in any way referred to or hampered the owner of unencumbered slave property: he might sell or pawn or mortgage or give it away according to profit or whim, regardless of age or kinship.

“Elsewhere in the typical South—in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas and Texas—there seems to have been no restriction of any sort against separating mothers and children or husbands and wives or selling children of any age. Slavery was, indeed, a ‘peculiar institution.’ ”⁶

The slave-trading Border States, therefore, in their own economic interest, frantically defended slavery, yet opposed the reopening of the African slave trade to which the Southern South was becoming more and more attracted. This slave trade had curious psychological effects upon the planter. When George Washington sold a slave to the West Indies for one hogshead “of best rum” and molasses and sweetmeats, it was because “this fellow is both a rogue and a run-away.

Thus tradition grew up that the sale of a slave from a gentleman’s plantation was for special cause. As time went on and slavery became systematized and commercialized under the Cotton Kingdom, this was absolutely untrue. The “buying or selling of slaves was not viewed as having any taint of ‘hated’ slave-trading; yet it early became a fully credited tradition, implicitly accepted generation after generation, that ‘all traders were hated.’ ”⁸

The sacrifices necessary for economic advance, Southern planters were on the whole too selfish and too provincial to make. They would not in any degree curtail consumption in order to furnish at least part of the necessary increase of capital and make dependence upon debt to the North and to Europe less necessary. They did not socialize the ownership of the slave on any large scale or educate him in technique; they did not encourage local and auxiliary industry or manufacture, and thus make it possible for their own profit to exploit white labor and give it an economic foothold. This would have involved, to be sure, increased recognition of democracy, and far from yielding to any such inevitable development, the South threw itself into the arms of a reaction at least two centuries out of date. Governor McDuffie of South Carolina called the laboring class, bleached or unbleached, a “dangerous” element in the population.

A curious argument appeared in the Charleston Mercury of 1861:

“Within ten years past as many as ten thousand slaves have been drawn away from Charleston by the attractive prices of the West, and [white] laborers from abroad have come to take their places. These laborers have every disposition to work above the slave, and if there were opportunity, would be glad to do so; but without such

opportunity they come into competition with him; they are necessarily restive to the contact. Already there is disposition to exclude him from the trades, from public works,

from drays, and the tables of the hotels; he is even now excluded to a great extent, and . . . when more laborers . . . shall come in greater numbers to the South,

they will still more increase the tendency to exclusion; they will question the right of masters to employ their slaves in any work that they may wish for; they will invoke the aid of legislation; they will use the elective franchise to that end; they will acquire the power to determine municipal elections; they will inexorably use it; and thus the town of Charleston, at the very heart of slavery, may become a fortress of democratic power against it.”

The planters entirely misconceived the extent to which democracy was spreading in the North. They thought it meant that the laboring class was going to rule the North for labor’s own economic interests. Even those who saw the seamy side of slavery were convinced of the rightness of the system because they believed that there were seeds of disaster in the North against which slavery would be their protection; “indications that these are already beginning to be felt or anticipated by prophetic minds, they think they see in the demands for ‘Land Limitation,’ in the anti-rent troubles, in strikes of workmen, in the distress of emigrants at the eddies of their current, in diseased philanthropy, in radical democracy, and in the progress of socialistic ideas in general. ‘The North,’ say they, ‘has progressed under the high pressure of unlimited competition; as the population grows denser, there will be terrific explosions, disaster, and ruin, while they will ride quietly and safely at the anchor of slavery.’ ”⁹

Thus the planters of the South walked straight into the face of modern economic progress. The North had yielded to democracy, but only because democracy was curbed by a dictatorship of property and investment which left in the hands of the leaders of industry such economic power as insured their mastery and their profits. Less than this they knew perfectly well they could not yield, and more than this they would not. They remained masters of the economic destiny of America.

In the South, on the other hand, the planters walked in quite the opposite direction, excluding the poor whites from nearly every economic foothold with apparently no conception of the danger of these five million workers who, in time, overthrew the planters and utterly submerged them after the Civil War; and the South was equally determined to regard its four million slaves as a class of submerged workers and to this ideal they and their successors still cling.

Calhoun once said with perfect truth: There has never yet existed “a wealthy and civilized society in which one portion of the community did not, in point of fact, live on the labor of the other.” Governor McDuffie of South Carolina said: “God forbid that my descendants, in the remotest generations, should live in any other than a community having the institution of domestic slavery.”¹⁰

The South elected to make its fight through the political power which it possessed because of slavery and the disfranchisement of the poor whites. It had in American history chosen eleven out of sixteen Presidents, seventeen out of twenty-eight Judges of the Supreme Court, fourteen out of nineteen Attorneys-General, twenty-one out of thirty-three Speakers of the House, eighty out of one hundred thirty-four Foreign Ministers. It demanded a fugitive slave law as strong as words could make it and it was offered constitutional guarantees which would have made it impossible for the North to meddle *with the organization of the slave empire.

The South was assured of all the territory southwest of Missouri and as far as California. It might even have extended its imperialistic sway toward the Caribbean without effective opposition from the North or Europe. The South had conquered Mexico without help and beyond lay the rest of Mexico, the West Indies and South America, open to Southern imperialistic enterprise. The South dominated the Army and Navy. It argued that a much larger proportion of the population could go to war in the South than in the North. There might, of course, be danger of slave insurrection in a long war with actual invasion, but the possibility of a long war or any war at all Southerners discounted, and they looked confidently forward to being either an independent section of the United States or an independent country with a stable economic foundation which could dictate its terms to the modern world on the basis of a monopoly of cotton, and a large production of other essential raw materials.

The South was too ignorant to know that their only chance to establish such economic dictatorship and place themselves in a key economic position was through a national economy, in a large nation where a home market would absorb a large proportion of the production, and where agriculture, led by men of vision, could demand a fair share of profit from industry.

When, therefore, the planters surrendered this chance and went to war with the machine to establish agricultural independence, they lost because of their internal weakness. Their whole labor class, black and white, went into economic revolt. The breach could only have been healed by making the same concessions to labor that France, England, Germany and the North had made. There was no time for such change in the midst of war. Northern industry must, therefore, after the war, make the adjustment with labor which Southern agriculture refused to make. But the loss which agriculture sustained through the stubbornness of the planters led to the degradation of agriculture throughout the modern world.

Due to the stubbornness of the South and the capitalism of the West, we have had built up in the world an agriculture with a minimum of machines and new methods, conducted by ignorant labor and producing raw materials used by industry equipped with machines and intelligent labor, and conducted by shrewd business men. The result has been that a disproportionate part of the profit of organized work has gone to

industry, while the agricultural laborer has descended toward slavery. The West, instead of becoming a country of peasant proprietors who might have counteracted this result, surrendered itself hand and foot to capitalism and speculation in land.

The abolition of American slavery started the transportation of capital from white to black countries where slavery prevailed, with the same tremendous and awful consequences upon the laboring classes of the world which we see about us today. When raw material, could not be raised in a country like the United States, it could be raised in the tropics and semi-tropics under a dictatorship of industry, commerce and manufacture and with no free farming class.

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The competition of a slave-directed agriculture in the West Indies and South America, in Africa and Asia, eventually ruined the economic efficiency of agriculture in the United States and in Europe, and precipitated the modern economic degradation of the white farmer, while it put into the hands of the owners of the machine such a monopoly of raw material that their domination of white labor was more and more complete.

The crisis came in 1860, not so much because Abraham Lincoln was elected President on a platform which refused further land for the expansion of slavery, but because the cotton crop of 1859 reached the phenomenal height of five million bales as compared with three million in 1850. To this was added the threat of radical abolition as represented by John Brown. The South feared these social upheavals but it was spurred to immediate action by the great cotton crop. Starting with South Carolina, the Southern cotton-raising and slave-consuming states were forced out of the Union.

Their reason for doing this was clearly stated and reiterated. For a generation, belief in slavery was the Southern shibboleth:

“A suspicion of heresy on the subject of the ‘peculiar institution’ was sufficient to declare the ineligibility of any candidate for office; nay, more, orthodoxy began to depend upon the correct attitude toward the doctrine of ‘Squatter Sovereignty’ and the extreme view held as to Federal protection of slavery in the territories.”¹¹ Jefferson Davis said that the North was “impairing the security of property and slaves and reducing those states which held slaves to a condition of inferiority.”

Senator Toombs said that property and slaves must be entitled to the same protection from the government as any other property. The South Carolina convention arraigned the North for increasing hostility “to the institution of slavery,” and declared for secession because the North had assumed the right of deciding upon the propriety of Southern domestic institutions.

Governor R. C. Wickliffe in his message at the extra session of the legislature of Louisiana expressed his belief that the election was “a deliberate design to pervert the powers of the Government to the immediate injury and ultimate destruction of the peculiar institution of the South.”¹²

Slidel’s farewell speech in the Congressional Globe of February 5, 1861:

“We separate,” he said, “because of the hostility of Lincoln to our institutions. ... If he were inaugurated without our consent there would be slave insurrections in the South.”¹³

The Alabama Commissioner to Maryland arraigned the Lincoln government as proposing not “to recognize the right of the Southern citizens to property in the labor of African slaves.” The Governor of Alabama arraigned the Republicans for desiring “the destruction of the institution of slavery.”

In the Southern Congress, at Montgomery on the 2d of February, 1861, Senator Wigfall, from Texas, said that he was fighting for slavery, and for nothing else. The patent of nobility is in the color of the skin. He wanted to live in no country in which a man who blacked his boots and curried his horse was his equal. Give Negroes muskets and make them soldiers, and the next subject introduced for discussion will be miscegenation.¹⁴ And finally, Alexander H. Stephens, Vice President of the Confederacy, stated fully the philosophy of the new Confederate government: “The new Constitution has put at rest forever all the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institutions—African slavery as it exists among us—the proper status of the Negro in our form of civilization. This was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution. Jefferson, in his forecast, had anticipated this as the ‘rock upon which the old union would split! He was right. What was conjecture with him is now a realized fact. But whether he fully comprehended the great truth upon which that rock stood and stands may be doubted. The prevailing ideas entertained by him and most of the leading statesmen at the time of the formation of the old Constitution, were that the enslavement of the African was in violation of the laws of nature; that it was wrong in principle, socially, morally and politically. It was an evil they knew not well how to deal with, but the general opinion of the men of that day was that, somehow or other, in the order of Providence, the institution would be

evanescent and pass away. . . . Those ideas, however, were fundamentally wrong. They rested upon the assumption of the equality of races. This was an error. It was a sandy foundation, and the idea of a government built upon it; when the ‘storm came and the winds blew, it fell.’

“Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea, its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man.

That slavery—subordination to the superior race—is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first in the history of the world, based upon this great physical and moral truth. This truth has been slow in the process of its development, like all other truths in the various departments of science. It has been so even amongst us. Many who hear me, perhaps, can recollect well, that this truth was not generally admitted, even within their day. . . .

“Now they are universally acknowledged. May we not, therefore, look with confidence to the ultimate universal acknowledgment of the truths upon which our system rests. It is the first government ever instituted upon principles of strict conformity to nature, and the ordination of Providence, in furnishing the materials of human society. Many governments have been founded upon the principle of certain classes; but the classes thus enslaved, were of the same race, and in violation of the laws of nature. Our system commits no such violation of nature’s laws. The Negro, by nature, or by the curse against Canaan, is fitted for that condition which he occupies in our system. The architect, in the construction of buildings, lays the foundation with the proper materials, the granite; then comes the brick or the marble. The substratum of our society is made of the material fitted by nature for it, and by experience we know that it is best, not only for the superior, but for the inferior race that it should be so.

It is, indeed, in conformity with the ordinance of the Creator. It is not for us to inquire into the wisdom of His ordinances, or to question them. For His own purposes He has made one race to differ from another, as He has had ‘one star to differ from another star in glory.

The rift between the Southern South and the Border States was bridged by omission of all reference to the reopening of the slave trade and stressing the reality of the Northern attack upon the institution of slavery itself.

The movement against the slave trade laws in the Southern South . was strong and growing. In 1854, a grand jury in the Williamsburg | district of South Carolina declared: “As our unanimous opinion, that , the Federal law abolishing the African Slave Trade is a public grievance. We hold this trade has been and would be, if reestablished, a blessing to the American people and a benefit to the African himself.”

Two years later, the Governor of the state in his annual message argued for a reopening of the trade and declared: “If we cannot supply the demand for slave labor, then we must expect to be supplied with a species of labor we do not want” (i.e., free white labor). The movement was forwarded by the commercial conventions. In 1855, at New Orleans, a resolution for the repeal of the slave trade laws was introduced but not reported by committee. In 1856, at Savannah, the convention refused to debate the matter of the repeal of the slave trade laws but appointed a committee. At the convention at Knoxville, in 1857, a resolution declaring it inexpedient to reopen the trade was voted down. At Montgomery, in 1858, a committee presented an elaborate majority

THE PLANTER

51

report declaring it “expedient and proper that the foreign slave trade should be reopened.” After debate, it was decided that it was inexpedient for any single state to attempt to reopen the African slave trade while that state is one of the United States of America. Finally, at Vicksburg in 1859, it was voted 40-19, “that all laws, state or Federal, prohibiting the African slave trade, ought to be repealed.”

Both the provisional and permanent constitutions of the Confederate states forbade the importation of Negroes from foreign countries, except the “slave-holding states or territories of the United States of America.” Nevertheless, the foreign ministers of the Confederate states were assured that while the Confederate government had no power to reopen the slave trade, the states could, if they wanted to, and that the ministers were not to discuss any treaties to prohibit the trade.¹⁶

Thus the planters led the South into war, carrying the five million poor whites blindly with them and standing upon a creed which opposed the free distribution of government land; which asked for the expansion of slave territory, for restricted functions of the national government, and for the perpetuity of Negro slavery.

What irritated the planter and made him charge the North and liberal Europe with hypocrisy, was the ethical implications of slavery. He was kept explaining a system of work which he insisted was no different in essence from that in vogue in Europe and the North. They and he were all exploiting labor. He did it by individual right; they by state law. They called their labor free, but after all, the laborer was only free to starve, if he did not work on their terms. They called his laborer a slave when his master was responsible for him from birth to death.

The Southern argument had strong backing in the commercial North. Lawyer O’Conner of New York expressed amid applause that calm reasoned estimate of the Negro in 1859, which pervaded the North:

“Now, Gentlemen, nature itself has assigned his condition of servitude to the Negro. He has the strength and is fit to work; but nature, which gave him this strength, denied him both the intelligence to rule and the will to work. Both are denied to him. And the same nature which denied him the will to work, gave him a master, who should enforce this will, and make a useful servant of him in a climate to which he is well adapted for his own benefit and that of the master who rules him. I assert that it is no injustice to leave the Negro in the position into which nature placed him; to put a master over him; and he is not robbed of any right, if he is compelled to labor in return for this, and to supply a just compensation for his master in return for the labor and the talents devoted to ruling him and to making him useful to himself and to society.”

What the planter and his Northern apologist did not readily admit was that this exploitation of labor reduced it to a wage so low and a standard of living so pitiable that no modern industry in agriculture or trade or manufacture could build upon it; that it made ignorance compulsory and had to do so in self-defense; and that it automatically was keeping the South from entering the great stream of modern industry where growing intelligence among workers, a rising standard of living among the masses, increased personal freedom and political power, were recognized as absolutely necessary.

The ethical problem here presented was less important than the political and far less than the economic. The Southerners were as little conscious of the hurt they were inflicting on human beings as the Northerners were of their treatment of the insane. It is easy for men to discount and misunderstand the suffering or harm done others. Once accustomed to poverty, to the sight of toil and degradation, it easily seems normal and natural; once it is hidden beneath a different color of skin, a different stature or a different habit of action and speech, and all consciousness of inflicting ill disappears.

The Southern planter suffered, not simply for his economic mistakes—the psychological effect of slavery upon him was fatal. The mere fact that a man could be, under the law, the actual master of the mind and body of human beings had to have disastrous effects. It tended to inflate the ego of most planters beyond all reason; they became arrogant, strutting, quarrelsome kinglets; they issued commands; they made laws; they shouted their orders; they expected deference and self-abasement; they were choleric and easily insulted. Their “honor” became a vast and awful thing, requiring wide and insistent deference. Such of them as were inherently weak and inefficient were all the more easily angered, jealous and resentful; while the few who were superior, physically or mentally, conceived no bounds to their power and personal prestige. As the world had long learned, nothing is so calculated to ruin human nature as absolute power over human beings.

On the other hand, the possession of such power did not and could not lead to its continued tyrannical exercise. The tyrant could be kind and congenial. He could care for his chattels like a father; he could grant indulgence and largess; he could play with power and find tremendous satisfaction in its benevolent use.

Thus, economically and morally, the situation of the planter became intolerable. What was needed was the force of great public opinion to make him see his economic mistakes and the moral debauchery that threatened him. But here again in the planter class no room was made for the reformer, the recalcitrant. The men who dared such thought and act were driven out or suppressed with a virulent tyranny reminiscent of the Inquisition and the Reformation. For these there was the same peculiar way of escape that lay before the slave. The planter who could not stand slavery followed the poor whites who could not stand Negroes, they followed the Negro who also could not stand slavery, into the North; and there, removed from immediate contact with the evils of slavery, the planter often became the “copperhead,” and theoretical champion of a system which he could not himself endure.

THE PLANTER

53

Frederick Douglass thus summed up the objects of the white planter:

“I understand this policy to comprehend five cardinal objects. They are these: 1st, The complete suppression of all anti-slavery discussion. 2d, The expatriation of the entire free people of color from the United States. 3d, The unending perpetuation of slavery in this republic. 4th, The nationalization of slavery to the extent of making slavery respected in every state of the Union. 5th, The extension of slavery over Mexico and the entire South American states.”¹⁷

This whole system and plan of development failed, and failed of its own weakness. Unending effort has gone into painting the claims of the Old South, its idyllic beauty and social charm. But the truth is inexorable. With all its fine men and sacrificing women, its hospitable homes and graceful manners, the South turned the most beautiful section of the nation into a center of poverty and suffering, of drinking, gambling and brawling; an abode of ignorance among black and white more abysmal than in any modern land; and a system of industry so humanly unjust and economically inefficient that if it had not committed suicide in civil war, it would have disintegrated of its own weight.

With the Civil War, the planters died as a class. We still talk as though the dominant social class in the South persisted after the war. But it did not. It disappeared. Just how quickly and in what manner the transformation was made, we do not know. No scientific study of the submergence of the remainder of the planter class into the ranks of the poor whites, and the corresponding rise of a portion of the poor whites into the dominant portion of landholders and capitalists, has been made. Of the names of prominent Southern families in Congress in 1860, only two appear in 1870, five in 1880. Of 90 prominent names in 1870, only four survived in 1880. Men talk today as though the upper class in the white South is descended from the slaveholders; yet we know by plain mathematics that the ancestors of most of the present Southerners never owned a slave nor had any real economic part in slavery. The disaster of war decimated the planters; the bitter disappointment and frustration led to a tremendous mortality after the war, and from 1870 on the planter class merged their blood so completely with the rising poor whites that they disappeared as a separate aristocracy. It is this that explains so many characteristics of the post-war South: its lynching and mob law, its murders and cruelty, its insensibility to the finer things of civilization.

Not spring; from us no agony of birth
Is asked or needed; in a crimson tide
Upon the down-slope of the world
We, the elect, are hurled
In fearful power and brief pride
Burning at last to silence and dark
earth.

BLACK RECONSTRUCTION

Not Spring.

JAMES RORTY

* Quoted in speech of Charles Sumner, in the United States Senate, December 20, 1865, from "a private letter which I have received from a government officer." Congressional Globe, 39th Congress, 1st Session, p. 93, Column 2.

1. Nevin, American Social History as Recorded by British Travellers, p. 209.
2. Trollope, Frances, Domestic Manners of the Americans, p. 10.
3. An Appeal of a Colored Man to His Fellow-Citizens of a Fairer Hue, in the United States, 1877, pp. 33, 34.
4. Goodell, American Slave Code, p. in.
5. Brewster, Sketches of Southern Mystery, Treason and Murder, pp. 48, 51.
6. Bancroft, Slave-Trading in the Old South, p. 199.
7. Mazyck, George Washington and the Negro, p. 13.
8. Bancroft, Slave-Trading in the Old South, p. 381.
9. Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, pp. 183-184.
10. Studies in Southern History and Politics, footnote, pp. 329, 346.
11. Ficklen, History of Reconstruction in Louisiana, p. 12.
12. Ficklen, Reconstruction in Louisiana, p. 15.
13. Ficklen, Reconstruction in Louisiana, p. 27.
14. New Orleans Tribune, February 15, 1865.
15. Stewart, The Reward of Patriotism, pp. 41-43.
16. Compare Du Bois, Suppression of Slave-Trade, Chapter XI.
17. Woodson, Negro Orators and Their Orations, p. 224.

IV. THE GENERAL STRIKE

How the Civil War meant emancipation and how the black worker won the war by a general strike which transferred his labor from the Confederate planter to the Northern invader, in whose army lines workers began to be organized as a new labor force

When Edwin Ruffin, white-haired and mad, fired the first gun at Fort Sumter, he freed the slaves. It was the last thing he meant to do but that was because he was so typically a Southern oligarch. He did not know the real world about him. He was provincial and lived apart on his plantation with his servants, his books and his thoughts. Outside of agriculture, he jumped at conclusions instead of testing them by careful research. He knew, for instance, that the North would not fight. He knew that Negroes would never revolt.

And so war came. War is murder, force, anarchy and debt. Its end is evil, despite all incidental good. Neither North nor South had before 1861 the slightest intention of going to war. The thought was in many respects ridiculous. They were not prepared for war. The national army was small, poorly equipped and without experience. There was no file from which someone might draw plans of subjugation.

When Northern armies entered the South they became armies of emancipation. It was the last thing they planned to be. The North did not propose to attack property. It did not propose to free slaves. This was to be a white man's war to preserve the Union, and the Union must be preserved.

Nothing that concerned the amelioration of the Negro touched the heart of the mass of Americans nor could the common run of men realize the political and economic cost of Negro slavery. When, therefore, the Southern radicals, backed by political oligarchy and economic dictatorship in the most extreme form in which the world had seen it for five hundred years, precipitated secession, that part of the North that opposed the plan had to hunt for a rallying slogan to unite the majority in the North and in the West, and if possible, bring the Border States into an opposing phalanx.

Freedom for slaves furnished no such slogan. Not one-tenth of the Northern white population would have fought for any such purpose. Free soil was a much stronger motive, but it had no cogency in this

contest because the Free Soilers did not dream of asking free soil in the South, since that involved the competition of slaves, or what seemed worse than that, of free Negroes. On the other hand, the tremendous economic ideal of keeping this great market for goods, the United States, together with all its possibilities of agriculture, manufacture, trade and profit, appealed to both the West and the North; and what was then much more significant, it appealed to the Border States.

**“To the flag we are pledged, all its foes we abhor,
And we ain't for the nigger, but we are for the war.”**

The Border States wanted the cotton belt in the Union so that they could sell it their surplus slaves; but they also wanted to be in the same union with the North and West, where the profit of trade was large and increasing. The duty then of saving the Union became the great rallying cry of a war which for a long time made the Border States hesitate and confine secession to the far South. And yet they all knew that the only thing that really threatened the Union was slavery and the only remedy was Abolition.

If, now, the far South had had trained and astute leadership, a compromise could have been made which, so far as slavery was concerned, would have held the abnormal political power of the South intact, made the slave system impregnable for generations, and even given slavery practical rights throughout the nation.

Both North and South ignored in differing degrees the interests of the laboring classes. The North expected patriotism and union to make white labor fight; the South expected all white men to defend the slaveholders' property. Both North and South expected at most a sharp, quick fight and victory; more probably the South expected to secede peaceably, and then outside the Union, to impose terms which would include national recognition of slavery, new slave territory and new cheap slaves. The North expected that after a threat and demonstration to appease its "honor," the South would return with the right of slave property recognized and protected but geographically limited.

Both sections ignored the Negro. To the Northern masses the Negro was a curiosity, a sub-human minstrel, willingly and naturally a slave, and treated as well as he deserved to be. He had not sense enough to revolt and help Northern armies, even if Northern armies were trying to emancipate him, which they were not. The North shrank at the very thought of encouraging servile insurrection against the whites. Above all it did not propose to interfere with property. Negroes on the whole were considered cowards and inferior beings whose very presence in America was unfortunate. The abolitionists, it was true, expected action on the part of the Negro, but how much, they could not say. Only John Brown knew just how revolt had come and would come and he was dead.

Thus the Negro himself was not seriously considered by the majority of men, North or South. And yet from the very beginning, the Negro occupied the center of the stage because of very simple physical reasons: the war was in the South and in the South were 3,953,740 black slaves and 261,918 free Negroes. What was to be the relation of this mass of workers to the war? What did the war mean to the Negroes, and what did the Negroes mean to the war? There are two theories, both rather over-elaborated: the one that the Negro did nothing but faithfully serve his master until emancipation was thrust upon him; the other that the Negro immediately, just as quickly as the presence of Northern soldiers made it possible, left serfdom and took his stand with the army of freedom.

It must be borne in mind that nine-tenths of the four million black slaves could neither read nor write, and that the overwhelming majority of them were isolated on country plantations. Any mass movement under such circumstances must materialize slowly and painfully. What the Negro did was to wait, look and listen and try to see where his interest lay. There was no use in seeking refuge in an army which was not an army of freedom; and there was no sense in revolting against armed masters who were conquering the world. As soon, however, as it became clear that the Union armies would not or could not return fugitive slaves, and that the masters with all their fume and fury were uncertain of victory, the slave entered upon a general strike against slavery by the same methods that he had used

during the period of the fugitive slave. He ran away to the first place of safety and offered his services to the Federal Army. So that in this way it was really true that he served his former master and served the emancipating army; and it was also true that this withdrawal and bestowal of his labor decided the war.

The South counted on Negroes as laborers to raise food and money crops for civilians and for the army, and even in a crisis, to be used for military purposes. Slave revolt was an ever-present risk, but there was no reason to think that a short war with the North would greatly increase this danger. Publicly, the South repudiated the thought of its slaves even wanting to be rescued. The New Orleans Crescent showed “the absurdity of the assertion of a general stampede of our Negroes.” The London Dispatch was convinced that Negroes did not want to be free. “As for the slaves themselves, crushed with the wrongs of Dred Scott and Uncle Tom—most provoking—they cannot be brought to ‘burn with revenge.’ They are spies for their masters. They obstinately refuse to run away to liberty, outrage and starvation. They work in the fields as usual when the planter and overseer are away and only the white women are left at home.”

Early in the war, the South had made careful calculation of the military value of slaves. The Alabama Advertiser in 1861 discussed the slaves as a “Military Element in the South.” It said that “The total white population of the eleven states now comprising the Confederacy is 5,000,000, and, therefore, to fill up the ranks of the proposed army, 600,000, about ten per cent of the entire white population, will be required. In any other country than our own such a draft could not be met, but the Southern states can furnish that number of men, and still not leave the material interest of the country in a suffering condition.” The editor, with fatuous faith, did not for a moment contemplate; any mass movement against this program on the part of the slaves. “Those who are incapacitated for bearing arms can oversee the plantations, and the Negroes can go on undisturbed in their usual labors.

In the North, the case is different; the men who join the army of subjugation are the laborers, the producers and the factory operatives. ¹ Nearly every man from that section, especially those from the rural districts, leaves some branch of industry to suffer during his absence. The institution of slavery in the South alone enables her to place in the field a force much larger in proportion to her white population than the North, or indeed any country which is dependent entirely on free labor. The institution is a tower of strength to the South, particularly at the present crisis, and our enemies will be likely to find that the ‘Moral Cancer’ about which their orators are so fond of prating, is really one of the most effective weapons employed against the Union by the South.”¹

Soon the South of necessity was moving out beyond this plan. It was no longer simply a question of using the Negroes at home on the plantation to raise food. They could be of even more immediate use, as military labor, to throw up breastworks, transport and prepare food and act as servants in camp. In the Charleston Courier of November 22, able-bodied hands were asked to be sent by their masters to work upon the defenses. “They would be fed and properly cared for.”

In 1862, in Charleston, after a proclamation of martial law, the governor and counsel authorized the procuring of Negro slaves either by the planter’s consent or by impressment “to work on the fortifications and defenses of Charleston harbor.”

In Mississippi in 1862, permission was granted the Governor to impress slaves to work in New

Iberia for salt, which was becoming the \ Confederacy's most pressing necessity. In Texas, a thousand Negroes were offered by planters for work on the public defenses.

By 1864, the matter had passed beyond the demand for slaves as military laborers and had come to the place where the South was seriously considering and openly demanding the use of Negroes as soldiers. Distinctly and inevitably, the rigor of the slave system in the South softened as war proceeded. Slavery showed in many if not all respects its best side. The harshness and the cruelty, in part, had to disappear, since there were left on the plantations mainly women and children, with only a few men, and there was a certain feeling and apprehension in the air on the part of the whites which led them to capitalize all the friendship and kindness which had existed between them and the slaves. No race could have responded to this so quickly and thoroughly as the Negroes. They felt pity and responsibility and also a certain new undercurrent of independence. Negroes were still being sold rather ostentatiously in Charleston and New Orleans, but the long lines of Virginia Negroes were not marching to the Southwest. In a certain sense, after the first few months everybody knew that slavery was done with; that no matter who won, the condition of the slave could never be the same after this disaster of war. And it was, perhaps, these considerations, more than anything else, that held the poised arm of the black man; for no one knew better than the South what a Negro crazed with cruelty and oppression and beaten back to the last stand could do to his oppressor.

The Southerners, therefore, were careful. Those who had been kind to their slaves assured them of the bad character of the Yankee and of their own good intentions.

Thus while the Negroes knew there were Abolitionists in the North, they did not know their growth, their power or their intentions and they did hear on every side that the South was overwhelmingly victorious on the battlefield. On the other hand, some of the Negroes sensed what was beginning to happen. The Negroes of the cities, the Negroes who were being hired out, the Negroes of intelligence who could read and write, all began carefully to watch the unfolding of the situation. At the first gun of Sumter, the black mass began not to move but to heave with nervous tension and watchful waiting. Even before war was declared, a movement began across the border. Just before the war large numbers of fugitive slaves and free Negroes rushed into the North. It was estimated that two thousand left North Carolina alone because of rumors of war.

When W. T. Sherman occupied Port Royal in October, 1861, he had no idea that he was beginning emancipation at one of its strategic points. On the contrary, he was very polite and said that he had no idea of interfering with slaves. In the same way, Major General Dix, on seizing two counties of Virginia, was careful to order that slavery

was not to be interfered with or slaves to be received into the line. Burnside went further, and as he brought his Rhode Island regiment through Baltimore in June, he courteously returned two Negroes who tried to run away with him. They were "supposed to be slaves," although they may have been free Negroes. On the 4th of July, Colonel Pryor of Ohio delivered an address to the people of Virginia in which he repudiated the accusation that the Northern army were Abolitionists.

"I desire to assure you that the relation of master and servant as recognized in your state shall be respected. Your authority over that species of property shall not in the least be interfered with. To this end, I assure you that those under my command have peremptory orders to take up and hold any Negroes found running about the camp without passes from their masters."^s

Halleck in Missouri in 1862 refused to let fugitive slaves enter his lines. Burnside, Buell, Hooker, Thomas Williams and McClellan himself, all warned their soldiers against receiving slaves and most of them permitted masters to come and remove slaves found within the lines.

The constant charge of Southern newspapers, Southern politicians and their Northern sympathizers, that the war was an abolition war, met with constant and indignant denial. Loyal newspapers, orators and preachers, with few exceptions, while advocating stringent measures for putting down the Rebellion, carefully disclaimed any intention of disturbing the “peculiar institution” of the South. The Secretary of State informed foreign governments, through our ministers abroad, that this was not our purpose. President Lincoln, in his earlier messages, substantially reiterated the statement. Leading generals, on entering Southern territory, issued proclamations to the same effect. One even promised to put down any slave insurrection “with an iron hand,” while others took vigorous measures to send back the fugitives who sought refuge within their lines.

“In the early years of the war, if accounts do not err, during the entire period McClellan commanded the Army of the Potomac, ‘John Brown’s Body’ was a forbidden air among the regimental bands. The Hutchinsons were driven from Union camps for singing abolition songs, and in so far as the Northern army interested itself at all in the slavery question, it was by the use of force to return to their Southern masters fugitives seeking shelter in the Union lines. While the information they possessed, especially respecting the roads and means of communication, should have been of inestimable service to the Federals, they were not to be employed as laborers or armed as soldiers. The North avoided the appearance of a desire to raise the Negroes from the plane of chattels to the rank of human beings.”³

Here was no bid for the cooperation of either slaves or free Negroes. In the North, Negroes were not allowed to enlist and often refused with indignation. “Thus the weakness of the South temporarily became her strength. Her servile population, repulsed by Northern proslavery sentiment, remained at home engaged in agriculture, thus releasing her entire white population for active service in the field; while, on the other hand, the military resources of the North were necessarily diminished by the demands of labor.”⁴

It was as Frederick Douglass said in Boston in 1865, that the Civil War was begun “in the interests of slavery on both sides. The South was fighting to take slavery out of the Union, and the North fighting to keep it in the Union; the South fighting to get it beyond the limits of the United States Constitution, and the North fighting for the old guarantees;—both despising the Negro, both insulting the Negro.”

It was, therefore, at first by no means clear to most of the four million Negroes in slavery what this war might mean to them. They crouched consciously and moved silently, listening, hoping and hesitating. The watchfulness of the South was redoubled. They spread propaganda: the Yankees were not only not thinking of setting them free, but if they did anything, they would sell them into worse slavery in the West Indies. They would drive them from even the scant comfort of the plantations into the highways and purlieus. Moreover, if they tried to emancipate the slaves, they would fail because they could not do this without conquest of the South. The South was unconquerable.

The South was not slow to spread propaganda and point to the wretched condition of fugitive Negroes in order to keep the loyalty of its indispensable labor force. The Charleston Daily Courier said February 18, 1863: “A company of volunteers having left Fayette County for the field of action, Mr. Nance sent two Negro boys along to aid the company. Their imaginations became dazzled with the visions of Elysian fields in Yankeedom and they went to find them. But Paradise was nowhere there, and they again sighed for home. The Yanks, however, detained them and cut off their ears close to their heads. These Negroes finally made their escape and are now at home with Mr. Nance in Pickens. They

are violent haters of Yankees and their adventures and experiences are a terror to Negroes of the region, who learned a lesson from their brethren whose ears are left in Lincolnland!”

The Charleston Mercury, May 8, 1862, said: “The Yankees are fortifying Fernandina (Florida) and have a large number of Negroes engaged on their works. Whenever the Negroes have an opportunity, they escape from their oppressors. They report that they are worked hard, get little rest and food and no pay.”

The Savannah Daily News reports in 1862 that many stolen Negroes had been recaptured: “The Yankees had married a number of the women and were taking them home with them. I have seen some who refused to go and others who had been forced off at other times who had returned.”

It was a lovely dress parade of Alphonse and Gaston until the Negro spoiled it and in a perfectly logical way. So long as the Union stood still and talked, the Negro kept quiet and worked. The moment the Union army moved into slave territory, the Negro joined it. Despite all argument and calculation and in the face of refusals and commands, wherever the Union armies marched, appeared the fugitive slaves. It made no difference what the obstacles were, or the attitudes of the commanders. It was “like thrusting a walking stick into an anthill,” says one writer. And yet the army chiefs at first tried to regard it as an exceptional and temporary matter, a thing which they could control, when as a matter of fact it was the meat and kernel of the war.

Thus as the war went on and the invading armies came on, the way suddenly cleared for the onlooking Negro, for his spokesmen in the North, and for his silent listeners in the South. Each step, thereafter, came with curious, logical and inevitable fate. First there were the fugitive slaves. Slaves had always been running away to the North, and when the North grew hostile, on to Canada. It was the safety valve that kept down the chance of insurrection in the South to the lowest point. Suddenly, now, the chance to run away not only increased, but after preliminary repulse and hesitation, there was actual encouragement.

Not that the government planned or foresaw this eventuality; on the contrary, having repeatedly declared the object of the war as the preservation of the Union and that it did not propose to fight for slaves or touch slavery, it faced a stampede of fugitive slaves.

Every step the Northern armies took then meant fugitive slaves. They crossed the Potomac, and the slaves of northern Virginia began to pour into the army and into Washington. They captured Fortress Monroe, and slaves from Virginia and even North Carolina poured into the army. They captured Port Royal, and the masters ran away, leaving droves of black fugitives in the hands of the Northern army. They moved down the Mississippi Valley, and if the slaves did not rush to the army, the army marched to the slaves. They captured New Orleans, and captured a great black city and a state full of slaves.

What was to be done? They tried to send the slaves back, and even used the soldiers for recapturing them. This was all well enough as long as the war was a dress parade. But when it became real war, and slaves were captured or received, they could be used as much-needed laborers and servants by the Northern army.

This but emphasized and made clearer a truth which ought, to have been recognized from the very beginning: The Southern worker, black and white, held the key to the war; and of the two groups, the black worker raising food and raw materials held an even more strategic place than the white. This was

so clear a fact that both sides should have known it. Fremont in Missouri took the logical action of freeing slaves of the enemy round about him by proclamation, and President Lincoln just as promptly repudiated what he had done. Even before that, General Butler in Virginia, commander of the Union forces at Fortress Monroe, met three slaves walking into his camp from the Confederate fortifications where they had been at work. Butler immediately declared these men “contraband of war” and put them to work in his own camp. More slaves followed, accompanied by their wives and children. The situation here was not quite so logical. Nevertheless, Butler kept the fugitives and freed them and let them do what work they could; and his action was approved by the Secretary of War.

“On May twenty-sixth, only two days after the one slave appeared before Butler, eight Negroes appeared; on the next day, forty-seven, of all ages and both sexes. Each day they continued to come by twenties, thirties and forties until by July 30th the number had reached nine hundred. In a very short while the number ran up into the thousands. The renowned Fortress took the name of the ‘freedom fort’ to which the blacks came by means of a ‘mysterious spiritual telegraph.’ ”⁵

In December, 1861, the Secretary of the Treasury, Simon Cameron, had written, printed and put into the mails his first report as Secretary of War without consultation with the President. Possibly he knew that his recommendations would not be approved, but “he recommended the general arming of Negroes, declaring that the Federals had as clear a right to employ slaves taken from the enemy as to use captured gunpowder.” This report was recalled by the President by telegraph and the statements of the Secretary were modified. The incident aroused some unpleasantness in the cabinet.

The published report finally said:

“Persons held by rebels, under such laws, to service as slaves, may, however, be justly liberated from their constraint, and made more valuable in various employments, through voluntary and compensated service, than if confiscated as subjects of property.”

Transforming itself suddenly from a problem of abandoned plantations and slaves captured while being used by the enemy for military purposes, the movement became a general strike against the slave system on the part of all who could find opportunity. The trickling streams of fugitives swelled to a flood. Once begun, the general strike of black and white went madly and relentlessly on like some great saga.

“Imagine, if you will, a slave population, springing from antecedent barbarism, rising up and leaving its ancient bondage, forsaking its local traditions and all the associations and attractions of the old plantation life, coming garbed in rags or in silks, with feet shod or bleeding, individually or in families and larger groups,—an army of slaves and fugitives, pushing its way irresistibly toward an army of fighting men, perpetually on the defensive and perpetually ready to attack. The arrival among us of these hordes was like the oncoming of cities. There was no plan in this exodus, no Moses to lead it. Unlettered reason or the mere inarticulate decision of instinct brought them to us. Often the slaves met prejudices against their color more bitter than any they had left behind. But their own interests were identical, they felt, with the objects of our armies; a blind terror stung them, an equally blind hope allured them, and to us they come.”⁶

“Even before the close of 1862, many thousands of blacks of all ages, ragged, with no possessions, except the bundles which they carried, had assembled at Norfolk, Hampton, Alexandria and

Washington. Others, landless, homeless, helpless, in families and in multitudes, including a considerable number of wretched white people, flocked North from Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas and Missouri. All these were relieved in part by army rations, irregularly issued, and by volunteer societies of the North, which gained their money from churches and individuals in this country and abroad. In the spring of 1863, there were swarming crowds of Negroes and white refugees along the line of defense made between the armies of the North and South and reaching from Maryland to Virginia, along the coast from Norfolk to New Orleans. Soldiers and missionaries told of their virtues and vices, their joy and extreme suffering. The North was moved to an extraordinary degree, and endless bodies of workers and missionaries were organized and collected funds for materials.

“Rude barracks were erected at different points for the temporary shelter of the freedmen; but as soon as possible the colonies thus formed were broken up and the people encouraged to make individual contracts for labor upon neighboring plantations. In connection with the colonies, farms were cultivated which aided to meet the expenses. Hospitals were established at various points for the sick, of whom there were great numbers. The separation of families by the war, and illegitimate birth in consequence of slavery, left a great number of children practically in a state of orphanage.”⁷ This was the beginning of the swarming of the slaves, of the quiet but unswerving determination of increasing numbers no longer to work on Confederate plantations, and to seek the freedom of the Northern armies. Wherever the army marched and in spite of all obstacles came the rising tide of slaves seeking freedom. For a long time, their treatment was left largely to the discretion of the department managers; some welcomed them, some drove them away, some organized them for work. Gradually, the fugitives became organized and formed a great labor force for the army. Several thousand were employed as laborers, servants, and spies.

A special war correspondent of the New York Tribune writes: “ ‘God bless the Negroes,’ say I, with earnest lips. During our entire captivity, and after our escape, they were ever our firm, brave, unflinching friends. We never made an appeal to them they did not answer. They never hesitated to do us a service at the risk even of life, and under the most trying circumstances revealed a devotion and a spirit of self-sacrifice that was heroic. The magic word ‘Yankee’ opened all their hearts, and elicited the loftiest virtues. They were ignorant, oppressed, enslaved; but they always cherished a simple and a beautiful faith in the cause of the Union and its ultimate triumph, and never abandoned or turned aside from a man who sought food or shelter on his way to Freedom.”⁸ This whole move was not dramatic or hysterical, rather it was like the great unbroken swell of the ocean before it dashes on the reefs. The Negroes showed no disposition to strike the one terrible blow which brought black men freedom in Haiti and which in all history has been used by all slaves and justified. There were some plans for insurrection made by Union officers:

“The plan is to induce the blacks to make a simultaneous movement of rising, on the night of the 1st of August next, over the entire States in rebellion, to arm themselves with any and every kind of weapon that may come to hand, and commence operations by burning all the railroad and country bridges, and tear up railroad tracks, and to destroy telegraph lines, etc., and then take to the woods, swamps, or the mountains, where they may emerge as occasion may offer for provisions and for further depredations. No blood is to be shed except in self-defense. The corn will be ripe about the 1st of August and with this and hogs running in the woods, and by foraging upon the plantations by night, they can subsist. This is the plan in substance, and if we can obtain a concerted movement at the time named it will doubtless be successful.”⁹

Such plans came to naught for the simple reason that there was an easier way involving freedom with less risk.

The South preened itself on the absence of slave violence. Governor Walker of Florida said in his inaugural in 1865: "Where, in all the records of the past, does history present such an instance of steadfast devotion, unwavering attachment and constancy as was exhibited by the slaves of the South throughout the fearful contest that has just ended? The country invaded, homes desolated, the master absent in the army or forced to seek safety in flight and leave the mistress and her helpless infants unprotected, with every incitement to insubordination and instigation, to rapine and murder, no instance of insurrection, and scarcely one of voluntary desertion has been recorded."

The changes upon this theme have been rung by Southern orators many times since. The statement, of course, is not quite true. Hundreds of thousands of slaves were very evidently leaving their masters' homes and plantations. They did not wreak vengeance on unprotected women. They found an easier, more effective and more decent way to freedom. Men go wild and fight for freedom with bestial ferocity when they must—where there is no other way; but human nature does not deliberately choose blood—at least not black human nature. On the other hand, for every slave that escaped to the Union army, there were ten left on the untouched and inaccessible plantations.

Another step was logical and inevitable. The men who handled a spade for the Northern armies, the men who fed them, and as spies brought in information, could also handle a gun and shoot. Without legal authority and in spite of it, suddenly the Negro became a soldier. Later his services as soldier were not only permitted but were demanded to replace the tired and rebellious white men of the North. But as a soldier, the Negro must be free.

The North started out with the idea of fighting the war without touching slavery. They faced the fact, after severe fighting, that Negroes seemed a valuable asset as laborers, and they therefore declared them "contraband of war." It was but a step from that to attract and induce Negro labor to help the Northern armies. Slaves were urged and invited into the Northern armies; they became military laborers and spies; not simply military laborers, but laborers on the plantations, where the crops went to help the Federal army or were sold North. Thus wherever Northern armies appeared, Negro laborers came, and the North found itself actually freeing slaves before it had the slightest intention of doing so, indeed when it had every intention not to.

The experience of the army with the refugees and the rise of the departments of Negro affairs were a most interesting, but unfortunately little studied, phase of Reconstruction. Yet it contained in a sense the key to the understanding of the whole situation. At first, the rush of the Negroes from the plantations came as a surprise and was variously interpreted. The easiest thing to say was that Negroes were tired of work and wanted to live at the expense of the government; wanted to travel and see things and places. But in contradiction to this was the extent of the movement and the terrible suffering of the refugees. If they were seeking peace and quiet, they were much better off on the plantations than trailing in the footsteps of the army or squatting miserably in the camps. They were mistreated by the soldiers; ridiculed; driven away, and yet they came. They increased with every campaign, and as a final gesture, they marched with Sherman from Atlanta to the sea, and met the refugees and abandoned

human property on the Sea Islands and the Carolina Coast.

This was not merely the desire to stop work. It was a strike on a wide basis against the conditions of work. It was a general strike that involved directly in the end perhaps a half million people. They wanted to stop the economy of the plantation system, and to do that they left the plantations. At first, the commanders were disposed to drive them away, or to give them quasi-freedom and let them do as they pleased with the nothing that they possessed. This did not work. Then the commanders organized relief and afterward, work. This came to the attention of the country first in Pierce's "Ten Thousand Clients." Pierce of Boston had worked with the refugees in Virginia under Butler, provided them with food and places to live, and given them jobs and land to cultivate. He was successful. He came from there, and, in conjunction with the Treasury Department, began the work on a vaster scale at Port Royal. Here he found the key to the situation. The Negroes were willing to work and did work, but they wanted land to work, and they wanted to see and own the results of their toil. It was here and in the West and the South that a new vista opened. Here was a chance to establish an agrarian democracy in the South: peasant holders of small properties, eager to work and raise crops, amenable to suggestion and general direction. All they needed was honesty in treatment, and education. Wherever these conditions were fulfilled, the result was little less than phenomenal. This was testified to by Pierce in the Carolinas, by Butler's agents in North Carolina, by the experiment of the Sea Islands, by Grant's department of Negro affairs under Eaton, and by Banks' direction of Negro labor in Louisiana. It is astonishing how this army of striking labor furnished in time 200,000 Federal soldiers whose evident ability to fight decided the war.

General Butler went from Virginia to New Orleans to take charge of the city newly captured in April, 1862. Here was a whole city half-filled with blacks and mulattoes, some of them wealthy free Negroes and soldiers who came over from the Confederate side and joined the Federals.

Perhaps the greatest and most systematic organizing of fugitives took place in New Orleans. At first, Butler had issued orders that no slaves would be received in New Orleans. Many planters were unable to make slaves work or to support them, and sent them back of the Federal lines, planning to reclaim them after the war was over. Butler emancipated these slaves in spite of the fact that he knew this was against Lincoln's policy. As the flood kept coming, he seized abandoned sugar plantations and began to work them with Negro labor for the benefit of the government.

By permission of the War Department, and under the authority of the Confiscation Act, Butler organized colonies of fugitives, and regulated employment. His brother, Colonel Butler, and others worked plantations, hiring the Negro labor. The Negroes stood at Butler's right hand during the trying time of his administration, and particularly the well-to-do free Negro group were his strongest allies. He was entertained at their tables and brought down on himself the wrath and contempt, not simply of the South, but even of the North. He received the black regiment, and kept their black officers, who never forgot him. Whatever else he might have been before the war, or proved to be afterwards, "the colored people of Louisiana under the proper sense of the good you have done to the African race in the United States, beg leave to express to you their gratitude."

From 1862 to 1865, many different systems of caring for the escaped slaves and their families in this area were tried. Butler and his successor, Banks, each sought to provide for the thousands of destitute

freedmen with medicine, rations and clothing. When General Banks took command, there was suffering, disease and death among the 150,000 Negroes. On January 30, 1863, he issued a general order making labor on public works and elsewhere compulsory for Negroes who had no means of support.

Just as soon, however, as Banks tried to drive the freedmen back to the plantations and have them work under a half-military slave regime, the plan failed. It failed, not because the Negroes did not want to work, but because they were striking against these particular conditions of work. When, because of wide protest, he began to look into the matter, he saw a clear way. He selected Negroes to go out and look into conditions and to report on what was needed, and they made a faithful survey. He set up a little state with its department of education, with its landholding and organized work, and after experiment it ran itself. More and more here and up the Mississippi Valley under other commanders and agents, experiments extended and were successful.

Further up the Mississippi, a different system was begun under General Grant. Grant's army in the West occupied Grand Junction, Mississippi, by November, 1862. The usual irregular host of slaves then swarmed in from the surrounding country. They begged for protection against recapture, and they, of course, needed food, clothing and shelter. They could not now be reenslaved through army aid, yet no provision had been made by anybody for their sustenance. A few were employed as teamsters, servants, cooks and scouts, yet it seemed as though the vast majority must be left to freeze and starve, for when the storms came with the winter months, the weather was of great severity.

Grant determined that Negroes should perform many of the camp duties ordinarily done by soldiers; that they should serve as fatigue men in the departments of the surgeon general, quartermaster, and commissary, and that they should help in building roads and earthworks. The women worked in the camp kitchens and as nurses in the hospitals. Grant said, "It was at this point where the first idea of the Freedmen's Bureau took its origin."

Grant selected as head of his Department of Negro Affairs, John Eaton, chaplain of the Twenty-Seventh Ohio Volunteers, who was soon promoted to the colonelcy of a colored regiment, and later for many years was a Commissioner of the United States Bureau of Education. He was then constituted Chief of Negro Affairs for the entire district under Grant's jurisdiction.

"I hope I may never be called on again to witness the horrible scenes I saw in those first days of the history of the freedmen in the Mississippi Valley. Assistants were hard to get, especially the kind that would do any good in our camps. A detailed soldier in each camp of a thousand people was the best that could be done. His duties were so onerous that he ended by doing nothing. ... In reviewing the condition of the people at that time, I am not surprised at the marvelous stories told by visitors who caught an occasional glimpse of the misery and wretchedness in these camps. . . . Our efforts to do anything for these people, as they herded together in masses, when founded on any expectation that they would help themselves, often failed; they had become so completely broken down in spirit, through suffering, that it was almost impossible to arouse them.

"Their condition was appalling. There were men, women and children in every stage of disease or decrepitude, often nearly naked, with flesh torn by the terrible experiences of their escapes. Sometimes they were intelligent and eager to help themselves; often they were bewildered or stupid or possessed by the wildest notions of what liberty might mean—expecting to exchange labor, and obedience to the will of another, for idleness and freedom from restraint. Such ignorance and perverted notions produced a veritable moral chaos. Cringing deceit, theft, licentiousness—all the vices which slavery inevitably fosters—were hideous companions of nakedness, famine, and disease. A few had profited by

the misfortunes of the master and were jubilant in their unwonted ease and luxury, but these stood in lurid contrast to the grimmer aspects of the tragedy—the women in travail, the helplessness of childhood and of old age, the horrors of sickness and of frequent death. Small wonder that men paused in bewilderment and panic, foreseeing the demoralization and infection of the Union soldier and the downfall of the Union cause.”¹⁰ There were new and strange problems of social contact. The white soldiers, for the most part, were opposed to serving Negroes in any manner, and were even unwilling to guard the camps where they were segregated or protect them against violence. “To undertake any form of work for the contrabands, at that time, was to be forsaken by one’s friends and to pass under a cloud.”¹¹

There was, however, a clear economic basis upon which the whole work of relief and order and subsistence could be placed. All around Grand Junction were large crops of ungathered corn and cotton. These were harvested and sold North and the receipts were placed to the credit of the government. The army of fugitives were soon willing to go to work; men, women and children. Wood was needed by the river steamers and woodcutters were set at work. Eaton fixed the wages for this industry and kept accounts with the workers. He saw to it that all of them had sufficient food and clothing, and rough shelter was built for them. Citizens round about who had not abandoned their plantations were allowed to hire labor on the same terms as the government was using it. Very soon the freedmen became self-sustaining and gave little trouble. They began to build themselves comfortable cabins, and the government constructed hospitals for the sick. In the case of the sick and dependent, a tax was laid on the wages of workers. At first it was thought the laborers would object, but, on the contrary, they were perfectly willing and the imposition of the tax compelled the government to see that wages were promptly paid. The freedmen freely acknowledged that they ought to assist in helping bear the burden of the poor, and were flattered by having the government ask their help. It was the reaction of a new labor group, who, for the first time in their lives, were receiving money in payment for their work. Five thousand dollars was raised by this tax for hospitals, and with this money tools and property were bought. By wholesale purchase, clothes, household goods and other articles were secured by the freedmen at a cost of one-third of what they might have paid the stores. There was a rigid system of accounts and monthly reports through army officials.

In 1864, July 5, Eaton reports: “These freedmen are now disposed of as follows: In military service as soldiers, laundresses, cooks, officers’ servants, and laborers in the various staff departments, 41,150; in cities on plantations and in freedmen’s villages and cared for, 72,500. Of these 62,300 are entirely self-supporting—the same as any industrial class anywhere else—as planters, mechanics, barbers, hack-men, draymen, etc., conducting enterprises on their own responsibility or working as hired laborers. The remaining 10,200 receive subsistence from the government. 3,000 of them are members of families whose heads are carrying on plantations and have under cultivation 4,000 acres of cotton. They, are to pay the government for their sustenance from the first income of the crop. The other 7,200 include the paupers—that is to say, all Negroes over and under the self-supporting age, the crippled and sick in hospital, of the 113,650 and those engaged in their care. Instead of being unproductive, this class has now under cultivation 500 acres of corn, 790 acres of vegetables and 1,500 acres of cotton, besides working at wood-chopping and other industries. There are reported in the aggregate over 100,000 acres of cotton under cultivation. Of these about 7,000 acres are leased and cultivated by blacks. Some Negroes are managing as high as 300 or 400 acres.”

The experiment at Davis Bend, Mississippi, was of especial interest. The place was occupied in November and December, 1864, and private interests were displaced and an interesting socialistic effort made with all the property under the control of the government. The Bend was divided into districts with Negro sheriffs and judges who were allowed to exercise authority under the general control of the military officers. Petty theft and idleness were soon reduced to a minimum and “the community distinctly demonstrated the capacity of the Negro to take care of himself and exercise under honest and competent direction the functions of self-government.”¹²

When General Butler returned from Louisiana and resumed command in Virginia and North Carolina, he established there a Department of Negro Affairs, with the territory divided into districts under superintendents and assistants. Negroes were encouraged to buy land, build cabins and form settlements, and a system of education was established. In North Carolina, under Chaplain Horace James, the poor, both black and white, were helped; the refugees were grouped in small villages and their work systematized, and enlisted men taught in the schools, followed by women teachers from the North. Outside of New Bern, North Carolina, about two thousand freedmen were settled and 800 houses erected. The department at Port Royal continued. The Negroes showed their capacity to organize labor and even to save and employ a little capital. The government built 21 houses for the people on Edisto Island. The carpenters were Negroes under a Negro foreman. There was another village of improved houses near Hilton Head.

“Next as to the development of manhood: this has been shown in the first place in the prevalent disposition to acquire land. It did not appear upon our first introduction to these people, and they did not seem to understand us when we used to tell them that we wanted them to own land. But it is now an active desire. At the recent tax sales, six out of forty-seven plantations sold were bought by them, comprising two thousand five hundred and ninety-five acres, sold for twenty-one hundred and forty-five dollars. In other cases, the Negroes had authorized the superintendent to bid for them, but the land was reserved by the United States. One of the purchases was that made by Harry, noted above. The other five were made by the Negroes on the plantations, combining the funds they had saved from the sale of their pigs, chickens and eggs, and from the payments made to them for work,—they then dividing off the tract peaceably among themselves. On one of these, where Kit, before mentioned, is the leading spirit, there are twenty-three fieldhands. They have planted and are cultivating sixty-three acres of cotton, fifty of corn, six of potatoes, with as many more to be planted, four and a half of cowpeas, three of peanuts, and one and a half of rice. These facts are most significant.”¹³

Under General Saxton in South Carolina, the Negroes began to buy land which was sold for non-payment of taxes. Saxton established regulations for the cultivation of several abandoned Sea Islands and appointed local superintendents.

“By the payment of moderate wages, and just and fair dealing with them, I produced for the government over a half million dollars’ worth of cotton, besides a large amount of food beyond the needs of the laborers. These island lands were cultivated in this way for two years, 1862 and 1863, under my supervision, and during that time I had about 15,000 colored freedmen of all ages in my charge. About 9,000 of these were engaged on productive labor which relieved the government of the support of all except newly-arrived refugees from the enemy’s lines and the old and infirm who had no relations to depend upon. The increase of industry and thrift of the freedmen was illustrated by their conduct in South Carolina before the organization of the Freedmen’s Bureau by the decreasing government expenditure for their support. The expense in the department of the South in 1863 was

\$41,544, but the monthly expense of that year was steadily reduced, until in December it was less than \$1,000.”¹⁴

Into this fairly successful land and labor control was precipitated a vast and unexpected flood of refugees from previously untouched strongholds of slavery. Sherman made his march to the sea from Atlanta, cutting the cotton kingdom in two as Grant had invaded it along the Mississippi.

“The first intimation given me that many of the freedmen would be brought hither from Savannah came in the form of a request from the General that I would ‘call at once to plan the reception of seven hundred who would be at the wharf in an hour.’ This was Christmas day, and at 4 P.M., we had seven hundred—mainly women, old men and children before us. A canvass since made shows that half of them had traveled from Macon, Atlanta and even Chattanooga. They were all utterly destitute of blankets, stockings or shoes; and among the seven hundred there were not fifty articles in the shape of pots or kettles, or other utensils for cooking, no axes, very few coverings for many heads, and children wrapped in the only article not worn in some form by the parents.” Frantic appeals went out for the mass of Negro refugees who followed him.

A few days after Sherman entered Savannah, Secretary of War Stanton came in person from Washington. He examined the condition of the liberated Negroes found in that city. He assembled twenty of those who were deemed their leaders. Among them were barbers, pilots and sailors, some ministers, and others who had been overseers on cotton and rice plantations. Mr. Stanton and General Sherman gave them a hearing.

As a result of this investigation into the perplexing problems as to what to do with the growing masses of unemployed Negroes and their families, General Sherman issued his epoch-making Sea Island Circular, January 18, 1865. In this paper, the islands from Charleston south, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea and the country bordering the St. John’s River, Florida, were reserved for the settlement of the Negroes made free by the acts of war and the proclamation of the President.

General Rufus Saxton was appointed Inspector of Settlements and Plantations and was required to make proper allotments and give possessory titles and defend them until Congress should confirm his actions. It was a bold move. Thousands of Negro families were distributed under this circular, and the freed people regarded themselves for more than six months as in permanent possession of these abandoned lands. Taxes on the freedmen furnished most of the funds to run these first experiments. On all plantations, whether owned or leased, where freedmen were employed, a tax of one cent per pound on cotton and a proportional amount on all other products was to be collected as a contribution in support of the helpless among the freed people. A similar tax, varying with the value of the property, was levied by the government upon all leased plantations in lieu of rent.

Saxton testified: “General Sherman’s Special Field Order No. 15 ordered their colonization on forty-acre tracts, and in accordance with which it is estimated some forty thousand were provided with homes. Public meetings were held, and every exertion used by those whose duty it was to execute this order to encourage emigration to the Sea Islands, and the faith of the government was solemnly pledged to maintain them in possession. The greatest success attended the experiment, and although the planting season was very far advanced before the transportation to carry the colonists to the Sea Islands could be obtained, and the people were destitute of animals and had but few agricultural implements

and the greatest difficulty in procuring seeds, yet they went out, worked with energy and diligence to clear up the ground run to waste by three years' neglect; and thousands of acres were planted and provisions enough were raised for those who were located in season to plant, besides a large amount of sea island cotton for market. The seizure of some 549,000 acres of abandoned land, in accordance with the act of Congress and orders from the head of the bureau for the freedman and refugees, still further strengthened these ignorant people in the conviction that they were to have the lands of their late masters; and, with the other reasons before stated, caused a great unwillingness on the part of the freedmen to make any contracts whatever. But this refusal arises from no desire on their part to avoid labor, but from the causes above stated. . . .

“To test the question of their forethought and prove that some of the race at least thought of the future, I established in October, 1864, a savings bank for the freedmen of Beaufort district and vicinity. More than \$240,000 had been deposited in this bank by freedmen since its establishment. I consider that the industrial problem has been satisfactorily solved at Port Royal, and that, in common with other races, the Negro has industry, prudence, forethought, and ability to calculate results. Many of them have managed plantations for themselves, and show an industry and sagacity that will compare favorably in their results—making due allowances—with those of white men.”

Eventually, General Saxton settled nearly 30,000 Negroes on the Sea Islands and adjacent plantations and 17,000 were self-supporting within a year. While 12,000 or 13,000 were still receiving rations, it was distinctly understood that they and their farms would be held responsible for the payment. In other such cases, the government had found that such a debt was a “safe and short one.”

Negroes worked fewer hours and had more time for self-expression. Exports were less than during slavery. At that time the Negroes were mere machines run with as little loss as possible to the single end of making money for their masters. Now, as it was in the West Indies, emancipation had enlarged the Negro's purchasing power, but instead of producing solely for export, he was producing to consume. His standard of living was rising.

Along with this work of the army, the Treasury Department of the United States Government was bestirring itself. The Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase, early in 1862, had his attention called to the accumulation of cotton on the abandoned Sea Islands and plantations, and was sure there was an opportunity to raise more. He, therefore, began the organization of freedmen for cotton raising, and his successor, William Pitt Fessenden, inaugurated more extensive plans for the freedmen in all parts of the South, appointing agents and organizing freedmen's home colonies.

On June 7, 1862, Congress held portions of the states in rebellion responsible for a direct tax upon the lands of the nation, and in addition Congress passed an act authorizing the Secretary of the Treasury to appoint special agents to take charge of captured and abandoned property. Military officers turned over to the Treasury Department such property, and the plantations around Port Royal and Beaufort were disposed of at tax sales. Some were purchased by Negroes, but the greater number went to Northerners. In the same way in North Carolina, some turpentine farms were let to Negroes, who managed them, or to whites who employed Negroes. In 1863, September 11, the whole Southern region was divided by the Treasury Department into five special agencies, each with a supervising agent for the supervision of abandoned property and labor.

Early in 1863, General Lorenzo Thomas, the adjutant general of the army, was organizing colored troops along the Mississippi River. After consulting various treasury agents and department commanders, including General Grant, and having also the approval of Mr. Lincoln, he issued from Milliken's Bend, Louisiana, April 15th, a lengthy series of instruction covering the territory bordering the Mississippi and including all the inhabitants.

He appointed three commissioners, Messrs. Field, Shickle and Livermore, to lease plantations and care for the employees. He sought to encourage private enterprises instead of government colonies; but he fixed the wages of able-bodied men over fifteen years of age at \$7 per month, for able-bodied women \$5 per month, for children twelve to fifteen years, half price. He laid a tax for revenue of \$2 per 400 pounds of cotton, and five cents per bushel on corn and potatoes.

This plan naturally did not work well, for the lessees of plantations proved to be for the most part adventurers and speculators. Of course such men took advantage of the ignorant people. The commissioners themselves seem to have done more for the lessees than for the laborers; and, in fact, the wages were from the beginning so fixed as to benefit and enrich the employer. Two dollars per month was charged against each of the employed, ostensibly for medical attendance, but to most plantations thus leased no physician or medicine ever came, and there were other attendant cruelties which avarice contrived.

On fifteen plantations leased by the Negroes themselves in this region there was notable success, and also a few other instances in which humanity and good sense reigned; the contracts were generally carried out. Here the Negroes were contented and grateful, and were able to lay by small gains. This plantation arrangement along the Mississippi under the commissioners as well as the management of numerous infirmity camps passed, about the close of 1863, from the War to the Treasury Department. A new commission or agency with Mr. W. P. Mellon of the treasury at the head established more careful and complete regulations than those of General Thomas. This time it was done decidedly in the interest of the laborers.

July 2, 1864, an Act of Congress authorized the treasury agents to seize and lease for one year all captured and abandoned estates and to provide for the welfare of former slaves. Property was declared abandoned when the lawful owner was opposed to paying the revenue. The Secretary of the Treasury, Fessenden, therefore issued a new series of regulations relating to freedmen and abandoned property. The rebellious States were divided into seven districts, with a general agent and special agents. Certain tracts of land in each district were set apart for the exclusive use and working of the freedmen. These reservations were called Freedmen Labor Colonies, and were under the direction of the superintendents. Schools were established, both in the Home Colonies and in the labor colonies. This new system went into operation the winter of 1864-1865, and worked well along the Atlantic Coast and Mississippi Valley. In the Department of the Gulf, however, there was discord between the treasury agents and the military authorities, and among the treasury officials themselves. The treasury agents, in many cases, became corrupt, but these regulations remained in force until the Freedmen's Bureau was organized in 1865.

By 1865, there was strong testimony as to the efficiency of the Negro worker. "The question of the freedmen being self-supporting no longer agitated the minds of careful observers."

Carl Schurz felt warranted in 1865 in asserting: “Many freedmen— not single individuals, but whole ‘plantation gangs’—are working well; others are not. The difference in their efficiency coincides in a great measure with a certain difference in the conditions under which they live. The conclusion lies near, that if the conditions under which they work well become general, their efficiency as free laborers will become general also, aside from individual exceptions. Certain it is, that by far the larger portion of the work done in the South is done by freedmen!”

Whitelaw Reid said in 1865: “Whoever has read what I have written about the cotton fields of St. Helena will need no assurance that another cardinal sin of the slave, his laziness—‘inborn and ineradicable,’ as we were always told by his masters—is likewise disappearing under the stimulus of freedom and necessity. Dishonesty and indolence, then, were the creation of slavery, not the necessary and constitutional faults of the Negro character.”

“Returning from St. Helena in 1865, Doctor Richard Fuller was asked what he thought of the experiment of free labor, as exhibited among his former slaves, and how it contrasted with the old order of things. ‘I never saw St. Helena look so well,’ was his instant reply; ‘never saw as much land there under cultivation—never saw the same general evidences of prosperity, and never saw Negroes themselves appearing so well or so contented.’ Others noticed, however, that the islands about Beaufort were in a better condition than those nearer the encampments of the United States soldiers. Wherever poultry could be profitably peddled in the camps, cotton had not been grown, nor had the Negroes developed, so readily, into industrious and orderly communities.”¹⁵ Similar testimony came from the Mississippi Valley and the West, and from Border States like Virginia and North Carolina.

To the aid of the government, and even before the government took definite organized hold, came religious and benevolent organizations. The first was the American Missionary Association, which grew out of the organization for the defense of the Negroes who rebelled and captured the slave ship *Amistad* and brought it into Connecticut in 1837. When this association heard from Butler and Pierce, it responded promptly and had several representatives at Hampton and South Carolina before the end of the year 1861. They extended their work in 1862-1863, establishing missions down the Atlantic Coast, and in Missouri, and along the Mississippi. By 1864, they had reached the Negroes in nearly all the Southern States. The reports of Pierce, Dupont and Sherman aroused the whole North. Churches and missionary societies responded. The Friends contributed. The work of the Northern benevolent societies began to be felt, and money, clothing and, finally, men and women as helpers and teachers came to the various centers.

“The scope of our work was greatly enlarged by the arrival of white refugees—a movement which later assumed very large proportions. As time went on Cairo (Illinois) became the center of our activities in this direction. It was the most northerly of any of our camps, and served as the portal through which thousands of poor whites and Negroes were sent into the loyal states as fast as opportunities offered for providing them with homes and employment. Many of these became permanent residents; some were sent home by Union soldiers to carry on the work in the shop or on the farm which the war had interrupted. It became necessary to have a superintendent at Cairo and facilities for organizing the bands of refugees who were sent North by the army. There was an increasing demand for work.”¹⁶

New organizations arose, and an educational commission was organized in Boston, suggested by the reports of Pierce, and worked chiefly in South Carolina. Afterward, it became the New England Freedmen's Aid Society and worked in all the Southern States. February 22, 1862, the National Freedmen's Relief Association was formed in New York City. During the first year, it worked on the Atlantic Coast, and then broadened to the whole South. The Port Royal Relief Committee of Philadelphia, later known as the Pennsylvania Freedmen's Relief Association, the National Freedmen's Relief Association of the District of Columbia, the Contraband Relief Association of Cincinnati, afterward called the Western Freedmen's Commission, the Women's Aid Association of Philadelphia and the Friends' Associations, all arose and worked. The number increased and extended into the Northwest. The Christian Commission, organized for the benefit of soldiers, turned its attention to Negroes. In England, at Manchester and London, were Freedmen's Aid Societies which raised funds; and funds were received from France and Ireland.

Naturally, there was much rivalry and duplication of work. A union of effort was suggested in 1862 by the Secretary of the Treasury and accomplished March 22, 1865, when the American Freedmen's Union Commission was incorporated, with branches in the chief cities. Among its officers were Chief Justice Chase and William Lloyd Garrison. In 1861, two large voluntary organizations to reduce suffering and mortality among the freedmen were formed. The Western Sanitary Commission at St. Louis, and the United States Sanitary Commission at Washington, with branches in leading cities, then began to relieve the distress of the freedmen. Hospitals were improved, supplies distributed, and Yeatman's plan for labor devised.

Destitute white refugees were helped to a large extent. But even then, all of these efforts reached but a small portion of the mass of people freed from slavery.

Late in 1863, President Yeatman of the Western Sanitary Commission visited the freedmen in the Mississippi Valley. He saw the abuses of the leasing system and suggested a plan for organizing free labor and leasing plantations. It provided for a bureau established by the government to take charge of leasing land, to secure justice and freedom to the freedmen; hospital farms and homes for the young and aged were to be established; schools with compulsory attendance were to be opened. Yeatman accompanied Mellon, the agent of the department, to Vicksburg in order to inaugurate the plan and carry it into effect. His plan was adopted by Mellon, and was, on the whole, the most satisfactory.

Thus, confusion and lack of system were the natural result of the general strike. Yet, the Negroes had accomplished their first aim in those parts of the South dominated by the Federal army. They had largely escaped from the plantation discipline, were receiving wages as free laborers, and had protection from violence and justice in some sort of court.

About 20,000 of them were in the District of Columbia; 100,000 in Virginia; 50,000 in North Carolina; 50,000 in South Carolina, and as many more each in Georgia and Louisiana. The Valley of the Mississippi was filled with settlers under the Treasury Department and the army. Here were nearly 500,000 former slaves. But there were 3,500,000 more. These Negroes needed only the assurance that they would be freed and the opportunity of joining the Northern army. In larger and larger numbers, they filtered into - the armies of the North. And in just the proportion that the Northern armies became in earnest, and proposed actually to force the South to stay in the Union, and not to make simply a demonstration, in just such proportion the Negroes became valuable as laborers, and doubly valuable as

withdrawing labor from the South. After the first foolish year when the South woke up to the fact that there was going to be a real, long war, and the North realized just what war meant in blood and money, the whole relation of the North to the Negro and the Negro to the North changed.

The position of the Negro was strategic. His was the only appeal which would bring sympathy from Europe, despite strong economic bonds with the South, and prevent recognition of a Southern nation built on slavery. The free Negroes in the North, together with the Abolitionists, were clamoring. To them a war against the South simply had to be a war against slavery. Gradually, Abolitionists no longer need fear the mob. Disgruntled leaders of church and state began to talk of freedom. Slowly but surely an economic dispute and a political test of strength took on the aspects of a great moral crusade.

The Negro became in the first year contraband of war; that is, property belonging to the enemy and valuable to the invader. And in addition to that, he became, as the South quickly saw, the key to Southern resistance. Either these four million laborers remained quietly at work to raise food for the fighters, or the fighter starved. Simultaneously, when the dream of the North for man-power produced riots, the only additional troops that the North could depend on were 200,000 Negroes, for without them, as Lincoln said, the North could not have won the war.

But this slow, stubborn mutiny of the Negro slave was not merely a matter of 200,000 black soldiers and perhaps 300,000 other black laborers, servants, spies and helpers. Back of this half million stood 3 1/2 million more. Without their labor the South would starve. With arms in their hands, Negroes would form a fighting force which could replace every single Northern white soldier fighting listlessly and against his will with a black man fighting for freedom.

This action of the slaves was followed by the disaffection of the poor whites. So long as the planters' war seemed successful, "there was little active opposition by the poorer whites; but the conscription and other burdens to support a slaveowners' war became very severe; the whites not interested in that cause became recalcitrant, some went into active opposition; and at last it was more desertion and disunion than anything else that brought about the final overthrow."¹⁷

Phillips says that white mechanics in 1861 demanded that the permanent Confederate Constitution exclude Negroes from employment "except agricultural domestic service, so as to reserve the trades for white artisans." Beyond this, of course, was a more subtle reason that, as the years went on, very carefully developed and encouraged for a time the racial aspect of slavery. Before the war, there had been intermingling of white and black blood and some white planters openly recognized their colored sons, daughters and cousins and took them under their special protection. As slavery hardened, the racial basis was emphasized; but it was not until war time that it became the fashion to pat the disfranchised poor white man on the back and tell him after all he was white and that he and the planters had a common object in keeping the white man superior. This virus increased bitterness and relentless hatred, and after the war it became a chief ingredient in the division of the working class in the Southern States.

At the same time during the war even the race argument did not keep the Southern fighters from noticing with anger that the big slaveholders were escaping military service; that it was a "rich man's war and the poor man's fight." The exemption of owners of twenty Negroes from military service

especially rankled; and the wholesale withdrawal of the slaveholding class from actual fighting which this rule made possible, gave rise to intense and growing dissatisfaction.

It was necessary during these critical times to insist more than usual that slavery was a fine thing for the poor white. Except for slavery, it was said: “ ‘The poor would occupy the position in society that the slaves do—as the poor in the North and in Europe do,’ for there must be a menial class in society and in ‘every civilized country on the globe, besides the Confederate states, the poor are the inferiors . and menials of the rich.’ Slavery was a greater blessing to the nonslaveholding poor than to the owners of slaves, and since it gave the poor a start in society that it would take them generations to work out, they should thank God for it and fight and die for it as they would for their ‘own liberty and the dearest birthright of freemen.’ ”¹⁸

But the poor whites were losing faith. They saw that poverty was fighting the war, not wealth.

“Those who could stay out of the army under color of the law were likely to be advocates of a more numerous and powerful army. . . . Not so with many of those who were not favored with position and wealth. They grudgingly took up arms and condemned the law which had snatched them from their homes. . . . The only difference was the circumstance of position and wealth, and perhaps these were just ¹ the things that had caused heartburnings in more peaceful times.

“The sentiments of thousands in the upland countries, who had little interest in the war and who were not accustomed to rigid centralized control, was probably well expressed in the following episode addressed to President Davis by a conscript. . . .

“ . . . ‘It is with intense and multifariously proud satisfaction that he [the conscript] gazes for the last time upon our holy flag—that symbol and sign of an adored trinity, cotton, niggers and chivalry.’ ”¹⁹

This attitude of the poor whites had in it as much fear and jealousy of Negroes as disaffection with slave barons. Economic rivalry with blacks became a new and living threat as the blacks became laborers and soldiers in a conquering Northern army. If the Negro was to be free where would the poor white be? Why should he fight against the blacks and his victorious friends? The poor white not only began to desert and run away; but thousands followed the Negro into the Northern camps.

Meantime, with perplexed and laggard steps, the United States Government followed the footsteps of the black slave. It made no difference how much Abraham Lincoln might protest that this was not a war against slavery, or ask General McDowell “if it would not be well to allow the armies to bring back those fugitive slaves which have crossed the Potomac with our troops” (a communication which was marked “secret”). It was in vain that Lincoln rushed entreaties and then commands to Fremont in Missouri, not to emancipate the slaves of rebels, and then had to hasten similar orders to Hunter in South Carolina. The slave, despite every effort, was becoming the center of war. Lincoln, with his uncanny insight, began to see it. He began to talk about compensation for emancipated slaves, and Congress, following almost too quickly, passed the Confiscation Act in August, 1861, freeing slaves which were actually used in war by the enemy. Lincoln then suggested that provision be made for colonization of such slaves. He simply could not envisage free Negroes in the United States. What would become of them? What would they do? Meantime, the slave kept looming. New Orleans was captured and the whole black population of Louisiana began streaming toward it. When Vicksburg fell, the center of perhaps the vastest Negro population in North America was tapped. They rushed into the Union lines. Still Lincoln held off and watched symptoms. Greeley’s “Prayer of Twenty Millions”

received the curt answer, less than a year before Emancipation, that the war was not to abolish slavery, and if Lincoln could hold the country together and keep slavery, he would do it.

But he could not, and he had no sooner said this than he began to realize that he could not. In June, 1862, slavery was abolished in the territories. Compensation with possible colonization was planned for the District of Columbia. Representatives and Senators from the Border States were brought together to talk about extending this plan to their states, but they hesitated.

In August, Lincoln faced the truth, front forward; and that truth was not simply that Negroes ought to be free; it was that thousands of them were already free, and that either the power which slaves put into the hands of the South was to be taken from it, or the North could not win the war. Either the Negro was to be allowed to fight, or the draft itself would not bring enough white men into the army to keep up the war.

More than that, unless the North faced the world with the moral strength of declaring openly that they were fighting for the emancipation of slaves, they would probably find that the world would recognize the South as a separate nation; that ports would be opened; that trade would begin, and that despite all the military advantage of the North, the war would be lost.

In August, 1862, Lincoln discussed Emancipation as a military measure; in September, he issued his preliminary proclamation; on January 1, 1863, he declared that the slaves of all persons in rebellion were “henceforward and forever free.”

The guns at Sumter, the marching armies, the fugitive slaves, the fugitives as “contrabands,” spies, servants and laborers; the Negro as soldier, as citizen, as voter—these steps came from 1861 to 1868 with regular beat that was almost rhythmic. It was the price of the disaster of war, and it was a price that few Americans at first dreamed of paying or wanted to pay. The North was not Abolitionist. It was overwhelmingly in favor of Negro slavery, so long as this did not interfere with Northern moneymaking. But, on the other hand, there was a minority of the North who hated slavery with perfect hatred; who wanted no union with slaveholders; who fought for freedom and treated Negroes as men. As the Abolition-democracy gained in prestige and in power, they appeared as prophets, and led by statesmen, they began to guide the nation out of the morass into which it had fallen. They and their black friends and the new freedmen became gradually the leaders of a Reconstruction of Democracy in the United States, while marching millions sang the noblest war-song of the ages to the tune of “John Brown’s Body”:

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored,
He hath loosed the fateful
lightning of his terrible swift sword,
His Truth is marching on!*

1. Public Opinion Before and After the Civil War, p. 4.
2. Williams, History of the Negro Race in America, II, p. 244.

3. Oberholtzer, Abraham Lincoln, p. 263. -
4. Results of Emancipation in the United States of America by a Committee of the American Freedman's Union Commission in 1867, p. 6.
5. Journal of Negro History, X, p. 134.
6. Eaton, Grant, Lincoln and the Freedmen, p. 2.
7. Results of Emancipation in the United States of America by a Committee of the American Freedman's Union Commission in 1867, p. 21.
8. Brown, Four Years in Secession, p. 368.
9. Ashe and Tyler, Secession, Insurrection of the Negroes, and Northern Incendiarism, p. 12.
10. Eaton, Grant, Lincoln and the Freedmen, pp. 2, 3, 19, 22, 134.
11. Eaton, Grant, Lincoln and the Freedmen, p. 22.
12. Eaton, Grant, Lincoln and the Freedmen, p. 166.
13. Pierce, "Freedmen at Port Royal," Atlantic Monthly, XII, p. 310.
14. Testimony Before Reconstruction Committee, February 21, 1866, Part II, p. 221.
15. Taylor, Reconstruction in South Carolina, pp. 29, 30.
16. Eaton, Grant, Lincoln and the Freedmen, pp. 37, 38.
- 17* Campbell, Black and White in the Southern States, p. 165.
18. Moore, Conscription and Conflict in the Confederacy, p. 145.
19. Moore, Conscription and Conflict in the Confederacy, pp. 18-20.