

WASHINGTON, D. C.

THE POOR WHITES OF THE SOUTH.

BY GEORGE M. WESTON.

Be the sin, the dangers, the evils of Slavery, all our own. We compel, we ask, none to slave them with us.—*Letter of Geo. Hemming, of S. C., to Thomas Clarkson.*

The number of slaveholders in the slave States of this Union, as ascertained by the census returns of 1850, was three hundred and forty-seven thousand five hundred and twenty-five. An average of five persons and seven tenths to a family, as assumed by the Superintendent of the Census, would give 1,680,894 as the number of persons interested as slaveholders in their own right, or by family relation. The whole number of whites in the slaveholding States being 6,222,418, the slaveholding proportion is a fraction short of 32 per cent.

The Superintendent of the Census, Professor De Bow, says of the number, 347,525, returned as slaveholders:

"The number includes slave-hirers, but is exclusive of those who are interested conjointly with others in slave property. The two will about balance each other, for the whole South, and leave the slave-owners as stated.

"When the party owns slaves in different Counties, or in different States, he will be entered more than once. This will disturb the calculation very little, being only the case among the larger properties."

The addition of those who are "slave-hirers" merely, to the category of slave-owners, must, I think, swell their number much more than it is diminished by the exclusion of "those who are interested conjointly with others in slave property." Such instances of conjoint interest will occur most frequently in the family relations, already taken into the account, when we multiplied the number of slaveholders returned by five and seven tenths. A comparison of the returns from Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Virginia, where slave-hiring is much practiced, with Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, where it is less practiced, shows the following results:

Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, with 566,583 slaves, return 72,584 slave-owners. Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, with 897,631 slaves, return 73,081 slave-owners. The relative excess of slave-owners returned in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia, must be attributed, in part, to the inclusion of a relatively larger number of "slave-hirers." Upon the whole, it may safely be concluded that at least seven tenths of the whites in the slave States, are not slave-owners, either in their own right or by family relation. The number of white males in the slave States, aged twenty-one years and upward, in 1850, was 1,490,872.

Considering that the number of 347,525, returned as slave-owners, is subject to some deductions, and considering that of the slave-owners many are females and minors, it is

The italicizing in these extracts is Mr. Taylor's, and not mine.

Mr. Taylor expresses himself in a very confused and artificial way, but it is not difficult to understand what he means. He is addressing himself to the slaveholding aristocracy, and he describes these poor whites very much as a French philosopher would describe the *blouses* of the Faubourg St. Antoine to polite ears in the Faubourg St. Germain. The collection into towns of the poor and unemployed white population of South Carolina had evidently given rise to some visions of social outbreak and anarchy, which Mr. Taylor feels called upon to dispel. These poor people, who were willing to be industrious if they had the opportunity to be so, but to whom no labor was offered except in degrading connection with plantation negroes, had been content to struggle on, enduring life in its most discouraging forms, contending with absolute want, and often faring worse than the negro, but yet soothed by the satisfaction that they were above the negro in some respects. But at length light was beginning to penetrate even into South Carolina, and these unhappy beings were catching a glimpse of the truth, that even they, in their depths of poverty and humiliation, had some rights, and were entitled to some of the sympathy which falls upon the suffering. They were fast learning that there existed, in happier communities, modes of industry, which, if opened to them, would elevate them and their families from wretchedness and ignorance to competence and intelligence. This knowledge might occasion an upheaving of the masses, seriously threatening the social and domestic institutions of South Carolina, unless properly directed. If, on the contrary, these poor whites could be furnished with remunerating labor, they would place themselves in a position of comfort, and even become slaveholders themselves; thus increasing the demand for that sort of property, and enhancing its security.

From an address upon the subject of manufactures in South Carolina, delivered in 1851, before the South Carolina Institute, by William Gregg, Esq., I make the following extracts:

"In all other countries, and particularly manufacturing States, labor and capital are assuming an anticonvulsive position. Here I cannot be the case; capital will be able to control labor, even in manufactures with whites, for blacks can always be resorted to in case of need. * * * From the best estimates that I have been able to make, I put down the white people who ought to work, and who do not, or who are so employed as to be wholly unproductive to the State, at one hundred and twenty-five thousand. * * * By this it appears that but one-fifth of the present poor whites of our State would be necessary to operate 1,000,000 spindles. * * * This appropriation annually made by our Legislature for our School Fund, every one must be aware, so far as the country is concerned, has been little better than a waste of money. * * * While we are aware that the Northern and Eastern States find no difficulty in educating their poor, we are ready to despair of success in the matter, for every penal law against the neglect of education would fall to bring many of our country people to send their children to school. * * * I have long been under the impression, and every day's experience has strengthened my

themselves of individual efforts to procure a comfortable livelihood in any employment deemed respectable for white persons. They make application to cotton mills, where such persons are wanted in numbers much beyond the demand for labor; when admitted there, they soon assume the industrious habits, and decency in dress and manner the operatives in Northern factories. A demand for labor in such establishments is all that is needed to raise this class from want and beggary, and frequently moral degradation, to a state of comparative independence, and moral and respectability. Besides this, thousands of such white persons naturally come together as residents in manufacturing villages, where, with very little trouble and expense, they might receive a common school education, instead of growing up in profound ignorance.

These remarks of Mr. James are quoted and endorsed in an article upon the *Establishment of Manufactures in New Orleans*, which I find in *De Bow's Review* for January, 1850. The writer, whose name is not given, but who appears to be a citizen of New Orleans, says:

"At present, the sources of employment opportunities (save in menial offices) are very limited and an inability to procure suitable occupations is much to be regretted, being in its consequences to produce demoralization.

"The superior grades of female labor may be considered such as imply a necessity for education; the part of the *employées*, while the menial class is generally regarded as of the lowest; and in a State, this standard is 'in the lowest depths, deep.' From the fact, that, by association, it is a fraction of the white servant to the level of their color-fellow-menials."

The complaint of low wages and want of employment comes from every part of South.

Mr. Steadman, of Tennessee, in a paper on the *Extension of Cotton and Wool Factories in the South*, says:

"In Lowell, labor is paid the fair compensation of 50 cents a day for men, and \$2 a week for women beside board, while in Tennessee the average compensation for labor does not exceed 50 cents per day for men, and \$1.25 per week for women. Such wisdom of a wise division of labor."

In a speech made in Congress five or six years since, Mr. T. L. Clingman, of North Carolina, said:

"Our manufacturing establishments cost on the raw material (cotton) at nearly two cents the pound cheaper than the New England establishments. Labor is likewise one hundred per cent cheaper. In the upper parts of the State, the cost of either a free man or a slave, including boarding, &c., can be obtained for from \$110 to \$120 annually. It will cost at least twice that sum in England. The difference in the cost of female labor, whether free or slave, is even greater. As we now a population of nearly one million, we can advance to a great extent in manufacturing, but we materially increased the wages of labor."

A Richmond (Va.) newspaper, the *Dispatch*, says:

"We will only suppose that the ready-made made imported into this city from the North, and sold here were manufactured in Richmond. What a great boon it would be to the means of employment! many boys and females would find the means of earning their bread, who are now suffering for a regular supply of the necessities of life."

The following statistics from the Census of 1850 show the number of whites (exclusive of foreign-born) in certain States, and the num-