RELIGION
AND
SLAVERY

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PRESBYTERIAN PASTOR EMERITUS

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A VINDICATION OF THE SOUTHERN CHURCHES

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DEDICATED to the precious memory of Dr. James G. Carson and his wife, Mrs. Katherine Waller Carson, the highest types of the Christian Master and Mistress.

FOREWORD.

THIS essay grew out of a paper read before the Presbyterian Ministers' Association of Nashville, Tenn., in the early part of the year 1905. The members of the Association were mostly young men, who had grown up since the war which abolished slavery in the Southern States. I found that they knew little of the efforts of the Southern Christians to evangelize the slaves, in the years before the war. It seemed to be the impression that the spiritual interests of the negroes were utterly neglected by the Churches in the slave States; and that now these Churches are only just awaking to a sense of their duty to this inferior race, because they have been aroused by the zeal of the Northern people and Churches in this matter.

Inasmuch as in my early ministry preaching to the slaves gave me experience and furnished an opportunity for observation, believing that this false impression should be corrected, I prepared a paper setting forth the history of the religious instruction of the negroes as I gathered it from various sources and from my own knowledge.

The negro problem in the South is to-day the most difficult and dangerous with which we have to deal. I believe that the only solution of it is the application of the gospel to our condition, so I have tried to indicate how the old-time Christian slaveholder tried to bring the gospel to bear on the life of the slave.

If this essay should be read by any at the North, it may help them to understand the difficult position of the South and to abate some of their confidence in their own wisdom in forcing this problem on us and then insisting on settling it for us.

JAMES H. MCNEILLY.

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RELIGION AND SLAVERY

I.

SLAVERY AS A MORAL ISSUE.

It is told of a distinguished and brilliant editor of a Northern Republican newspaper that at a banquet of a press club he was called upon to respond to the toast, "The Freedom of the Press." His response was short and to the point: "There is no such thing." There are large numbers of good and intelligent people in the northern section of the United States who, if asked to tell of the religious privileges and training of the negroes in the South in the days of slavery, would confidently say, "There was no such thing." They believe that the whole race was under a despotism far more crushing than any that ever shackled the press—a despotism that not only bound the body, but that destroyed every high aspiration and noble impulse of the soul.

There seems to be a general impression, or rather a sincere belief, among all classes in that section that the bloody and destructive war of 1861 to 1865, which resulted in the overthrow of the system of domestic slavery in the South, was the execution of heaven's righteous vengeance on a people who tolerated an institution, or upheld a social order, which was "the sum of all villainies." So they feel that the utter ruin and desolation inflicted by their conquering armies on the

South was the sure evidence of God's condemnation of slavery and of his approval of their war for its abolition. And they look upon themselves with vast complacency as God's accredited agents for working out a great moral reform.

The attitude of the present generation of Southerners — which somewhat boastfully calls itself the "New South"—on the moral questions involved is a rather shamefaced apology for their misguided fathers who defended the system of slavery, although it is acknowledged that they were sincere in their convictions, and there is pride in the heroic self-sacrificing courage with which they defended their cause.

There is also with many Southerners a rather noisy and specious profession of joy that the cause was lost and that the South is no longer handicapped by an institution which was a relic of barbarism and a bar to progress. This class claims to be free from the prejudices of a former and darker time and to march in the van of modern civilization. So it comes about that it is confidently and boastfully claimed by the North, and with pretentious magnanimity conceded by the *New* South, that the freeing of the negroes from slavery was the greatest moral victory and the most beneficent achievement wrought by the religious and civilizing forces of the nineteenth century, and that this act of emancipation was the beginning of a new era of economic and political, of social and spiritual progress, bringing unlimited blessings to all classes and conditions of the people in our country.

At the same time, the old-time Southerner is generously excused for his moral blindness as to slavery

by the consideration that he was provincial, ignorant, and behind the age. He was the victim of a narrow conservatism inherited from his fathers.

This condemnation of the people of the Old South and of their social and economic system was the outcome of certain theories of the rights of man, which were held and proclaimed with ever-increasing zeal and bitterness in the North. It was declared that civilization and religion required that these rights must be enforced, and the abolitionist ideal of liberty must be realized at any cost and regardless of conditions. And there were ignorance and misrepresentation of those conditions. Many held that a slaveholder could not be a Christian. Because slavery was morally wrong, therefore Christianity required that it be abolished at once.

It was assumed by these reformers that the slave was regarded and treated by the master, by the law, and by public opinion, as a mere chattel—as a *thing*, and not as a *person*—and that there was no consideration of his personal rights as a human being, nor for his religious nature as an immortal soul. So they could not believe that a slave might be the "Lord's freeman," develop Christian character, and enjoy the blessings of the gospel under the conditions that prevailed in the South.

The terms used to describe the institution by its opposers were "chattel slavery" and "human slavery," intended to suggest the inhumanity of the relation and the dehumanizing of the slave. And it was regarded as brutalizing in its effects both on master and slave, and in pulpit and press it was held up as the crying sin and shame of the age and of the republic.

The celebrated opinion of Chief Justice Taney, of the Supreme Court of the United States, in the noted Dred-Scott Case, which represented Southern opinion as to the law of the land, was made to declare boldly that "under our Constitution a negro had no rights which a white man was bound to respect;" and he was denounced as a monster of cruelty, though he was one of the purest and gentlest of men. He had no idea of denying the natural, moral, and spiritual rights of the negro, but only declared that under our laws he was not entitled to *civil* and political rights and therefore the negro was not a *citizen.*

It is not my purpose to attempt a justification or a defense of the system of domestic slavery as it existed in the South, but I wish to indicate the different sentiments that came to prevail in the two sections on the moral and religious aspects of the institution. I shall try to set forth the attitude of the Southern people as opposed to the abolition propaganda. It will be my endeavor to give some account, from history, official records, and personal observation, of their efforts to meet the spiritual needs of the negroes and to discharge their religious responsibilities for the souls of their slaves. I shall show that there was a sincere and persistent endeavor to remove or mitigate the evils incident to the system, and make it a blessing to the inferior race.

There was a general and strong condemnation of the African slave trade, by which the negro was forcibly taken from his native land and sold into a distant country. It is true that he was taken from a slavery far more brutal and degrading than could be tolerated

among us; but the horrors and barbarities of that cruel traffic made it detestable to the mass of our people. That nefarious trade was carried on for centuries by the Christian nations, without moral scruple, as a legitimate business enterprise, simply for the sake of "gainful pillage," as our Puritan pioneers expressed it. Some attempt was made to salve the conscience and give the trade a kind of moral sanction by pretense of a benevolent interest in the salvation of the heathen thus brought in reach of the gospel. Our own countrymen engaged in this trade, protected by law until 1808, and, strange to say, the most active in it were New England people, who found profit in exchanging rum for slaves. Their descendants became most bitter of all in denouncing slaveholders. Conscientious they were, no doubt, both in the trade and afterwards in their denunciations. But conscience is not always a safe guide where self-interest is involved. Queer are the variations which time brings to conscience. Of old, godly men sent cargoes of rum to Africa to exchange for slaves, and so extend the gospel to the heathen. Now it is godless men who send rum to Africa to trade for ivory and rubber, and their trade is one of the main hindrances of the gospel among the heathen.

The result of the African slave trade was to introduce the system of negro slavery into the colonies of America and ultimately to establish it permanently in the Southern States of the Union. The first cargo of negroes was brought to Virginia by a Dutch man of war in August, 1619. There were only twenty, and they were sold to the Jamestown colonists. The prom-

ise of profits was so inviting that importations from Africa were continued on a larger scale by the government of the mother country and also by private firms. In many cases this was done over the earnest protest of the colonies.

By the year 1808, when the traffic was abolished by the terms of the Constitution of the United States, the total negro population of the country was over one million and a quarter, of whom five-sixths were slaves, and a large proportion practically heathen.

Most of the Northern States had by this time either abolished slavery or provided for its gradual extinction in their borders; but, as an antislavery writer says, "This simply transferred the slaves to the markets of the South." (H. N. Casson, "Encyclopedia of Social Reform," p. 1258.)

There is no doubt that in the early years of our republic many of the leaders of the Southern States—as Washington, Jefferson, Patrick Henry—would have welcomed the passing away of the institution; and, for a considerable time after the firm establishment of our government, many of our Southern statesmen, such as Henry Clay, would have been glad to find some feasible plan of emancipation. That there were grave evils in the actual working of the system, every thoughtful and conscientious Southerner recognized. The sentiment of the social leaders condemned unsparingly the cruel or hard master, and the professional slave trader was very generally ostracized by the best elements of Southern society.

At the same time our people felt that slavery was a condition inherited by them from a time when the

whole of Christendom not only tolerated but practiced the enslavement of the negro; that it was abolished in the North and concentrated in the South, not for moral reasons, but very largely on account of economic and climatic conditions. They therefore believed that, in its moral aspects, they were not solely responsible for its existence or continuance. They recognized that the negro is here to stay, and that the question of his relation to the whites was one of most serious difficulty, even if he were emancipated.

It must be understood, too, that the majority of earnest, sincere, upright Southerners who studied the subject believed that the relation of master and slave was not in itself sinful, but that it was recognized and sanctioned by the Word of God. They thought that it could be so administered as to foster and develop some of the noblest traits of character, such as protecting care and wise direction of the weaker race by the master, such as devoted loyalty and honest service in the slaves. They knew that this relation could and did call into exercise some of the sweetest and tenderest affections of our common humanity. This belief was justified by the actual experience of a large proportion of slaveholders, whose kindness to their slaves was repaid by the warmest love and faithful service of those slaves. So the Christian sentiment of the Southern people might be expressed thus: They believed that, while the relation or system of slavery belonged to an imperfect social order, yet it could be made a benefit to the slave, as well as profitable to the master. They thought that the practical question of dealing with it

must be determined by conditions actually existing and not by theories, however fair and logical.

Our people were convinced that whatever injustice had been done originally in bringing the negroes to this country, the blame was not ours, and that the bringing of them from a state of brutal savagery to the privileges of a Christian civilization was, in some measure, a compensation for the original wrong.

There was a considerable and probably growing number in the South who were wearied with the constant agitation of the subject, and foresaw its dire consequences, who realized that the tendencies of the age were against slavery, and who believed that the system was a hindrance to the economic progress of the South, and who felt deeply their responsibility for the souls of their slaves. This class, while resenting outside interference by those who did not understand the situation, yet hoped that some way might be devised by which the negroes might be freed, without involving the evils which their freedom might bring with it.

So it was that most of the Southern people looked upon the system of slavery as it existed among them as justified by the conditions in which the Providence of God had placed them. And they sought to administer it justly and kindly. All Christian masters tried to treat their slaves in the fear of God, and in the light of his Word.

II.

OBSTACLES TO EMANCIPATION.

For many years the system of slavery was looked at in both North and South only in its economic aspects, without reference to the moral questions involved. In the South it was upheld as the most profitable system of agricultural labor and the best form of domestic service where two races existed together. In the North, especially in the great commercial centers, it was considered in its commercial aspects as furnishing the great staple of our country. So abolitionists were mobbed in Northern cities. Thus it is true that greed of gain and unwillingness to change an established order were difficulties in the way of emancipation.

But there was developed among conscientious people at the North a strong moral sentiment, which demanded the abolition of slavery as the only course consistent with human rights and with the Christian profession. As this feeling grew in bitterness and intensity, some of the leaders of the crusade not only put strained interpretations on the Constitution of the republic and on those Scriptures which seemed to countenance slavery, but demanded "an antislavery Constitution, an antislavery Bible, and an antislavery God." They refused Christian fellowship at the Lord's table with those who held slaves. They denounced the Constitution as "a covenant with death and a league with hell."

Of course the question was a political one which well might tax the wisdom of the ablest statesman. But the politicians saw in it the chance to advance their own political fortunes by exploiting the religious sentiments of the people, and they were not slow to take up the agitation, in which they could count on the help of religious fanaticism to advance their own interests.

It became to the South an intensely practical question which must mean more to her than to the North, where it was largely theoretical. It was not a question only of abandoning an unjust system and giving up the profits of oppression, as was freely charged, but there had to be considered what was best materially and morally for master and slave. It could not be settled by abstract theories of human rights, for it was "a condition, not a theory" with which we had to deal. It involved not only the economic problems of labor and production, of material profit and loss, but also the social problem of the relation of the races and the moral problem of the religious training of the negro.

It meant the freeing of four millions of slaves of an inferior race, who were not only unprepared for freedom, but who had never as a race shown capacity for freedom. It meant the breaking up of a system of labor on which both races were dependent for food and clothing and in which the master's direction made the negro's labor effective. It meant the overthrow of a domestic, patriarchal, social order which was rooted in the kindliest affections of whites and blacks alike, which had been strengthened by personal and local attachments for generations, and which gave

both protection and elevation to the weaker race. But, above all else, to the mind of the earnest Christian master abolitionism meant the destruction of those religious and spiritual ties which should bind together "Greek and Jew, barbarian and Scythian, bond and free," and which in this case bound the master with a sense of his responsibility to God for the soul of his slave, and bound the soul of the slave with a sense of his dependence on the master for a knowledge of the gospel of a common salvation.

It was felt that the overthrow of the old order would bring conflicts of race. When two races so radically different have dwelt in the same land, claiming equal privileges, these conflicts have ever arisen. The only settlement of such antagonism has been amalgamation or extermination of the weaker race. In this case amalgamation was utterly repulsive to the whites and not to be thought of.

It was believed that the triumph of abolitionism would within a generation turn loose upon us a horde of heathen over whom the whites could have small moral influence. It may be said that these fears have been proved unfounded by the actual results of emancipation, but I am only trying to show that opposition to emancipation had other reasons than the mere mercenary greed of gain. Thoughtful men of the South, judging from history and a knowledge of negro character, were fearful of the future. And who shall say, even now, that their apprehensions were foolish? The negro question to-day is the most difficult we have.

There was a large number of slaveholders who were intelligent and conscientious who deplored the fact

that the negroes were ever brought to our country, and who were sensible of the abuses of the system of slavery. They would have accepted any reasonable and just plan of emancipation which recognized the radical difference of the races and secured to the white race the supremacy for which it was fitted and to which it was entitled. Thus they would have preserved the civilization and its fruits, which were the heritage of the race, won by past centuries of strenuous endeavor. But they were unwilling to imperil that civilization and incur the danger of mongrelizing it by a political or social mingling of the races.

Some thought that if the negroes could be established in a separate land or State of their own, where they could work out their own destiny with such help and supervision as the whites could give them, and where questions of civil, political, and social relations could not cause friction, such a condition would solve the problem. The African Colonization Society, with its negro republic of Liberia, was an experiment in that direction. It was hoped that if that experiment succeeded there would be opened a way for the gradual emancipation and removal of the negroes, but the scheme was a failure.

It was my fortune to know of two efforts of Christian masters to colonize their slaves outside of the South. In both cases my father, an Elder in the Presbyterian Church, was the agent of the experiments. He was executor of the estate of one of his Co-Elders who owned thirty or forty slaves. By the will of the master they were given the option of freedom and going to Liberia or of choosing their own masters and remaining

in this country. More than three-fourths of them chose to go to Liberia. They were provided with means to secure homes and give them a living until they could be well settled. They sailed from New Orleans in 1851 or 1852, I think. In about three years my father was receiving most pitiful appeals to bring them back home. Two or three of the most intelligent had managed to appropriate the whole outfit for themselves, and several had died. The majority were on the verge of starvation. Of course it was impossible to bring them back, but he sent them occasional help. Before the Civil War letters from them ceased, and we understood that the little colony was extinct.

The other effort to colonize emancipated slaves was tried in the North. My father, as executor of another large estate, was required to secure homes for quite a number of the slaves who were freed. He bought a place for them in Ohio, and they were provided with means to begin their new life comfortably. By the laws of Tennessee they could not reside in that State unless some responsible white man would be security for them. I do not know how they got on before the war, but after the war most of their descendants came back to Tennessee. One old man of them, for whom no home was provided, determined to try it in the North with the others. They soon got tired of him and sent him out of their colony. His story was that he tried to get work and, failing, he was exhausted by his wanderings and nearly starved. Finally he got to Cincinnati, where he found a steamboat going to Nashville. The captain knew my father, and he gave "Uncle Jim" passage on the boat. By little serv-

ices for the passengers he got enough in tips to pay his stage fare home. My father became security for him, and he spent the rest of his days with us, doing "odd jobs" and bossing five boys of us with gentle tyranny.

I do not know the success of Liberia since the war, but it was a failure as a plan to help forward emancipation. And the example of the negro republics of the West Indies, with the conditions in Jamaica, does not encourage the idea that the negro can advance in civilization or that he is capable of self-government if he is left to himself

It was a stubborn condition and not a theory with which those who favored emancipation had to deal, and the complaint of the South against the abolitionists was that they misunderstood or willfully misrepresented these conditions.

There came to the minds of earnest and thoughtful men of the South a strong conviction that if two races as widely different as the Anglo-Saxon and the negro are to live together under the same social system, then some form of slavery—the subjection of the inferior race—is essential to the peace and welfare of both. The idea of miscegenation or amalgamation was looked upon not only as a disgrace to the white race, but as a sin against God's order. It was believed that race distinctions are of God's appointment and that the instinct of race purity is a God-given instinct. The truth, as it appears to me, is that each race has its own divinely appointed mission and that the providence of God prepares it for its mission. So that slavery was a part of the preparation of the negro race for its

special place in the world's progress. Among all sincere Southern Christians it was deeply felt, and with growing intensity, that the system of slavery should be stripped of acknowledged evils, which were believed to be incidental and not essential to the relation. The principle of *noblesse oblige* was more and more acknowledged as requiring the stronger race to be just, kind, and patient with the weaker. Cruelty or oppression of a slave was considered ignoble and mean.

That there were serious evils in the system as it actually existed none will deny. There were cruel masters; there was greed in exploiting the negroes' services; there were sad evils in the treatment of the slaves in their family relations, separating husbands and wives, parents and children; there was serious neglect of the religious training of the negroes—these things conscientious men saw and deeply deplored, but the same faults can be charged in greater or less degree on any institution administered by frail, sinful men. And it can be said with truth that the religious sentiment of our people was gradually correcting these evils and was striving to make the most of good out of our circumstances and to bring the largest possible material and spiritual comfort to the slaves.

If the Southern Christians had been let alone to work out their own problems, I believe that they would, by the grace of God, have been able to eliminate the evils and to establish a social order in which every right and privilege to which the negro was justly entitled by his nature and capacity would have been freely given him. Thus we would have escaped the most threatening and difficult problem of the age—

that of adjusting the relations of two utterly dissimilar and antagonistic races occupying the same territory and in constant contact and conflict with each other. I believe that the increasing influence of the gospel on master and slave would have secured justice without antagonism, giving to each race the position for which it was fitted according to God's order.

The Southern Presbyterian Church, voicing the sentiment of her sister Churches in the South, declared that *as a Church* she was not called to intermeddle with the civil or political status of the negro, but that her mission as to slavery was only to urge upon master and slave their respective duties according to the Word of God and so make the relation a blessing to both.

It will appear in the history of the work of the Southern Churches for the conversion of the slaves that no missionary efforts in the foreign fields were more successful in the evangelizing of a heathen people than were the ministries of Southern preachers among the negro population—a population which came to us with the heathenism of centuries wrought into the very fiber of their souls.

III.

MISUNDERSTANDING AND MISREPRESENTATIONS.

THE theory of the rights of man which began to prevail in New England blinded the eyes of that people to any possible modifications of those theoretic rights by circumstances, to the mitigations of slavery as it actually existed in the South, and to the difficulties of carrying out their theories. There was a quiet assumption that the enlightened conscience of the country was centralized in that section. The tendency of that enterprising people to repent of other people's sins and to force their theories on others would not allow them to rest quiet in their own freedom from the hated institution while the providence and the grace of God were working out a solution of the problem. But they began an agitation for abolition, which was carried on with increasing bitterness of denunciation of slaveholders, and which naturally aroused the resentment of the latter and drove them to the opposite extreme. This crusade was no doubt honest and sincere, but none the less unjust. It hindered the growth of that religious sentiment which might have finally cured all the evils of slavery.

The intense devotion of these agitators to their theory caused them to misunderstand the relation of master and slave as it actually existed in the South, and also caused them to misrepresent the facts. Nothing could be accepted as a fact that contravened their

theory. So the most gruesome tales of plantation horrors told by runaway negroes were accepted eagerly rather than the denials of Southern whites, or even the corrections of respectable Northern visitors to the South. The dreadful war that resulted from this agitation freed the negroes, but it put them for more than a generation outside of all religious influences from their former masters. Instead of securing to the negro his rights according to the theory, the war has left over the South the dark and ominous shadow of the race question, with the negro free; and over the North the equally dark and portentous shadow of the labor question, with the white man practically a slave. These threatening conditions tend at least to discredit that doctrine of human rights which underlay the abolition agitation—that theory of human relations which denounced slavery of the negroes as necessarily a sin.

When men take the direction of events in their own hands and rashly anticipate God's plans and impatiently disown his methods, they may in the long run accomplish His purposes, for He can "make the wrath of man to praise him," but their presumption and impatience are sure to bring about other evils maybe as great as those they would cure. There is to-day a danger confronting our republic more terrible than our old system of domestic slavery could possibly be—that is, the enslavement of the masses, both white and black, by a conscienceless, cruel tyranny of wealth which seeks for itself all the fruits of labor and returns to the laborer only enough to keep him at work and casts him off in his helplessness when he can no longer work. There is a greed which sacrifices not only honor and

truth and justice, but men and women and children to its insatiable appetite for dividends. Mammon is the hardest of taskmasters and recognizes no obligation to his slaves.

The misrepresentation of Southern conditions in the days of slavery still continues. In much of the writings and speeches of Northern authors and speakers, in magazines, in the pulpit, on the platform, there are constant references to the sad lot of the slave whose unrequited toil supported the master in idleness and luxury, although he was best paid of day laborers.

Two or three years ago one of the most influential magazines in the North, whose editor was intensely antislavery, had an editorial article suggesting that slavery had its providential mission and had in two centuries elevated the negro from the most degraded barbarian to his present place as a civilized Christian. To this a prominent literary man of Boston replied at once, with some asperity, denying the facts. He quoted from the deliverances of Southern religious bodies, made seventy-five years ago, which declared that the slaves on the large plantations were in a state of practical heathenism, and that their spiritual interests were neglected by the whites. The writer failed to note that these deliverances indicate the interest of Southern Churches in the matter and were intended to arouse our Christian people to a sense of their responsibility for the souls of their slaves. As I shall show, they succeeded in their purpose; but we might truthfully reply that at that time there were sections of the West and of the North where the white people were as utterly irreligious, though not as ignorant as the slaves.

During a visit to Scotland and the Northern part of Ireland in 1880 I met many earnest Christians who plied me with questions and criticisms about the treatment of our negroes in slavery. They seemed astonished to hear that there was any care for their spiritual interests by their masters. There were a few so bitterly prejudiced that they would not believe any statement contrary to their prejudices. Most of those with whom I talked were candid inquirers sincerely interested in the spiritual progress of the colored people. They had heard and read the statements of abolition writers and speakers depicting in lurid colors the horrors of slavery. I became convinced that they had been misled by the most deliberate, stupendous, and malignant system of falsehood ever devised by fanaticism. They were led to believe that the prevailing sound heard on a Southern plantation was the fierce crack of the slave driver's whip, accompanied by the agonized groans of his tortured victims. To them Legree in "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was the type of the Southern master, and the gentler characters in that book were exceptions to the general condition.

I was dining with a very intelligent gentleman in Belfast who was bitterly antislavery. He asked me to tell him about the food and clothing and general care for the slave. I told him what I knew by experience and observation on the farms in Kentucky and Tennessee and on the large plantations in Louisiana. He said that was better living than the peasantry in his own country enjoyed. He said that to have sufficiency of food, comfortable clothing, skilled medical attention in sickness, and provision for old age was

a larger wage than the majority of working people in his country received. But he added: "I can't understand how that was possible when every planter had to keep a pack of bloodhounds to catch his slaves when they ran away." I asked him where he got such an idea. He replied that he heard it from the platform by a very distinguished minister of the gospel who was from the United States and was lecturing in Great Britain.

When I gave to my friends there some of the facts as to the religious training of the slaves and its results —facts of my own personal knowledge—they could not wonder at my indignation against the traducers of my people.

These misrepresentations of the sentiments and the practices of the Southern people toward their slaves and the general ignorance of this generation of our own people, as well as loyalty to the truth of history, lead me to believe that it will be profitable for my younger brethren if one who lived among and preached to the slaves before the war should give, from experience and investigation, some account of what was done by the Southern people for the spiritual welfare and religious instruction of the negroes. Thus it will be seen that our present efforts, small as they are, to evangelize the race are in line with our traditions and are not a tardy concession to Northern sentiment which has at last succeeded in arousing us to a sense of our duty.

IV.

SOUTHERN SENTIMENT AND EFFORT.

THE Southern people in the days of slavery recognized the slave as far above a mere chattel, and treated him as a person, not only in personal intercourse, but also before the law. True, he was regarded as belonging to an inferior race, but he had certain well-defined rights in which he was protected by the laws. One of the ablest legal works written before the war was published in 1858. It was entitled "The Law of Slavery," by Thomas R. R. Cobb, of Georgia. He was a man of the most intense religious convictions, a Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church, a lawyer of extensive and profound learning. (He was killed in the battle of Fredericksburg in December, 1862.) Two chapters of his elaborate work are devoted to the "Personal Rights of the Slave." He writes, "While in Roman law a slave was not recognized as a person, the negro slave in America occupies a double character of person and property," which he amply supports by reference to statute laws and court decisions in the slaveholding States. I may also note that this work contains a history of slavery in all nations and ages, and also a clear and candid statement of the evils of the institution—evils which the laws were intended to remedy or mitigate. Another fact may set forth the attitude of our people to the moral and spiritual rights of their slaves and how that attitude affected their political action.

In Claiborne's "History of Mississippi" it is stated that Hon. George Poindexter, who was the ablest statesman of that commonwealth, the peer of Clay, Webster, and Calhoun, who had been Governor of the State, and who codified her laws, was defeated for Congress in 1822 because of a provision which he inserted in the code of 1820-21, supposed to be unfavorable to the religious training of the slaves. Claiborne writes: "These provisions were intended as police matters and as safeguards against insurrection, but a majority of our citizens regarded them as substantially excluding the colored people from religious privileges. *He was defeated by a sentiment of religious duty and compassion for the blacks.* With no extraneous influences acting upon them, the citizens of Mississippi, *feeling that all mankind are equal in the sight of God, and that all are equally entitled to hear His Word,* indignantly rejected the law proposed by Mr. Poindexter and consigned him to private life. *The colored people had the same religious privileges as the whites.*"

One of the strongest testimonies to the kindliness of the relation, and a sufficient answer to the charge of cruelty and oppression was the loyalty and devotion of the slaves to the family and interests of their masters during the war. In spite of strong temptations and urgent solicitations to desert their homes or to desolate them, they, as a rule, stood firm and faithful. This loyalty was largely the result of the spiritual training, the religious influences, the biblical instruction which they received from the whites. It was the negro's response to the white family's care for his soul as well

as his body. It was proof that he was identified as a person with the family and felt his personal responsibility for the family interests. This loyalty shows the capacity of the negro for high moral ideals, and it calls for the undying gratitude of the Southern people. It should make them tolerant and patient with the descendants of these old and true servants and hopeful for their future under gospel training. The present and coming generations of negroes should not be ashamed of, but rather proud of, an ancestry so loyal, true, and faithful to their trust.

No man can understand the old-time relation of the master and the slave who does not take into account that it was a personal, moral relation, a patriarchal institution in which affection on both sides was a large element. In the case of Christian masters it was sanctified by loving care for the spiritual welfare of their slaves and by the loving, faithful service of Christian slaves in return. To many and many a Southern boy and girl heaven would have been an empty and lonesome place if the colored companions of their lives had been left out. It was not only the "mammy," but a whole troop of her race that they expected to meet in the happy world beyond. So there was large opportunity for missionary work in the religious development of a backward race—an opportunity embraced by many families with great results. It is not claimed by any means that all was done for evangelizing the slaves that should or might have been done. It is a sad fact that there were many masters who were bitterly prejudiced against any effort for the spiritual enlightenment of their slaves. There were sections

where nothing was done. There were those also who felt no sense of responsibility in the matter and were utterly indifferent, and there were some who felt no interest in the negro personally and looked on him only in the light of how much money they could make out of him and his labor. But in view of the facts I shall present, these were exceptions.

The efforts of the Church to reach the ignorant and destitute whites with the gospel in our own land meet to-day with the same obstacles of prejudice, indifference, and greed. We are all familiar with the objections which even some professed Christians make against sending missionaries to heathen lands. The East India Company was the bitterest opposer of the introduction of Christianity in India, and the greed and lust of traders seek constantly to hinder the work of the missionaries. These exhibitions of opposition to religious work for the spiritually destitute were not peculiar to slaveholders, but rather sprang from the depravity of the human heart.

In the South, when the war began in 1861, there was a growing and a deepening sense of responsibility for the souls of the slaves, and there were increasing organized efforts in the Churches for their evangelization. Even masters who were not members of any Church contributed of their means to the work, and Christian masters, also, gave their personal aid to the ministers.

In giving the account of what was done outside of my own personal knowledge, I shall use the investigations and the statistics gathered and compiled with great care by writers thoroughly competent and trust-

worthy. These facts are taken from official reports and records and from personal narratives.

In 1842 Rev. Charles Colcock Jones, D.D., a Presbyterian minister, published in Savannah, Ga., a book entitled "The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States." In this book he gave account of the efforts of the various evangelical Churches and societies to evangelize the negroes from 1673 to the date of his publication. It is largely a summary of official records, reports of committees, etc. In 1893 Rev. William P. Harrison, D.D., of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, published a volume entitled "The Gospel among the Slaves," which he edited from materials furnished by Miss Annie M. Barnes and avouched by Judge Richard H. Clark, of Atlanta, Ga. This volume makes large use of Dr. Jones's "History" and carries the narrative forward to 1865, giving special account of the work of his denomination. It contains statistics gathered from official reports, and also personal memoirs and sketches of the prominent white workers and of some of the more remarkable negro converts and preachers. These carefully prepared histories will show that all of our Churches recognized their obligation to preach the gospel to the slaves. It was felt that in the providence of God a heathen race was brought to us and that our foreign mission work lay at our doors, so that we were especially responsible to God for the salvation of this people. Though conditions have changed, that responsibility still rests in large measure on Southern Christians, for they know the negro character better than others do. If we felt the same interest now and put

forth as earnest efforts for the negro's spiritual welfare as were common before emancipation, there would be a higher type of religion among them than now prevails.

HISTORY.

From the middle of the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century the efforts for the evangelizing of the negroes met with very considerable success. The Baptist and the Methodist Churches especially gathered large numbers of them into their congregations both in the North and in the South.

In 1800 the total negro population of the United States—slaves and free—was over one million. Over thirteen thousand of them were members of the Methodist Church. This was about one-fourth of the total membership of that Church at that time. Nearly nine-tenths of the negro population were slaves. The Churches confined their ministrations to the slaves strictly to their religious needs and had the confidence and coöperation of the masters. It is to be noted that there was then a growing sentiment in the South in favor of gradual emancipation of the slaves. In 1800 the Methodist Church began to agitate for legislation by the States that should "give a blow to the root of this enormous evil," as the address to the General Conference expressed it. The Annual Conferences were "directed to draw up addresses for the gradual emancipation of the slaves to the legislatures of the States in which no general laws have been passed for that purpose . . . and that the presiding elders and deacons and traveling preach-

ers . . . give all assistance in their power . . . to further this blessed undertaking." As a result of this action and of the continued agitation in the free States against the institution of slavery, attention was turned from the religious needs of the slaves to the question of their civil and political rights. For a considerable time the Methodist preachers were looked upon with suspicion as abolition emissaries. Indeed, the work of all the Churches for the conversion of the slaves was seriously hindered by the attempt to mingle the religious and political questions involved in their condition, but gradually the good sense, sincerity, and zeal of the Southern preachers overcame the opposition and won back the confidence of the Southern people.

In 1829 there was started a movement that was to result in reaching with the gospel the large negro population of the Southern plantations. There were two kinds of farming or planting interests. There were the farmers of the border States, who owned from four or five slaves up to fifty or sixty, according to the size of the farms. These servants were generally sharers with their masters of the ministrations of the gospel. But the large tobacco, cotton, rice, and sugar plantations of Virginia and the farther Southern States were cultivated by great communities of slaves, numbering hundreds and forming quarters equal to villages. These masses of slaves were ignorant, superstitious, practically heathen, until the organized effort to reach them which began in 1829.

The movement for plantation missions probably originated in the South Carolina Conference of the

Methodist Church. While, like all great enterprises, it was taking shape in many minds, yet two people are especially entitled to credit for putting it into actual effect. These are Mrs. Bearfield, a pious Methodist lady, and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, a prominent statesman of South Carolina and a devout member of the Episcopal Church.

The peculiar organization of the Methodist Church was especially fitted to carry on the work of supplying the great plantations with a regular ministry. The other denominations were also active as opportunity offered, and the Baptist Churches gathered in large numbers of negroes into their membership, but the work was most carefully and thoroughly organized by the Methodist Church. The success of the movement was due in large measure to the zeal, wisdom, and piety of Rev. William Capers, D.D., afterwards a bishop in the Methodist Church, and the father of the present Bishop Ellison Capers, of the Episcopal Church. Bishop William Capers, by his gracious manner, evident sincerity, glowing zeal, and sanctified common sense, exercised a strong influence over the planters and was able to interest men of all denominations in the work. Among his most liberal contributors in South Carolina were the Hamptons, Rhetts, Pinckneys, and other owners of great numbers of slaves.

It is rather a suggestive fact that the one who, after Bishop Capers, was the most efficient of the Methodist ministry in promoting this work was Bishop James O. Andrew, whose suspension from his functions by the General Conference in 1844 because he was a slaveholder occasioned the disruption of the

Methodist Church in the United States. In 1844, in spite of the prejudice caused by the abolition agitation, the Methodist Church had sixty-eight plantation missions, with seventy-one missionaries and twenty-one thousand and sixty-three members. In that year the Southern Conferences collected $168,458 for the work.

After the division, the Southern Methodist Church continued the system, sending to the plantations some of their ablest men and securing the deepest interest and liberal gifts of prominent and wealthy citizens of all the Churches and of no Church connection. In the thirty-five years preceding 1865 this Church had expended over $2,000.000 in this work, and many of the planters had erected comfortable and neat chapels for their slaves. The enrolled membership of negroes in the Methodist Church, South, was over two hundred thousand. served by white ministers of recognized ability and also by negro ministers of tested character. But other denominations were active in the same great and blessed enterprise. The Baptist Churches, because of their looser organization and consequent lack of statistical reports, have not presented the aggregate of their colored membership before the war; but. taking the reports of the Sunbury and the Liberty County Associations. of Georgia, as representative of the whole Church, this denomination had gathered into the Churches almost as many as the Methodists. And their ministers were equally zealous. In 1841 the Sunbury Association reported 5,664 colored members. In the Episcopal and Presbyterian Churches the slaves who were communicants were generally members of the

same Church with their masters, and the statistical reports do not generally discriminate white and colored members.

The Episcopal Church had its missionaries to the slaves, and many of their clergy devoted time and care to their religious training The matter was discussed in conventions, and the bishops of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia were very earnest in exhorting their clergy and in their efforts to arouse and direct the interest of all their parishes in behalf of the religious instruction of the slaves. The Presbyterian Church, from a very early day, recognized its responsibility in this matter, pressing upon masters their duties to their slaves. In 1747 Dr. Samuel Davies, one of the greatest of American preachers, began to preach to the negroes in Virginia. He kept it up for twenty-five years, having generally some three hundred in attendance at each preaching place and probably an aggregate of one thousand at his various points. Dr. Archibald Alexander and Dr. John Holt Rice, founders of the Princeton and Union Virginia Seminaries, were diligent in preaching to and catechizing the negroes. Again and again did Southern synods and presbyteries urge upon their members and ministers their duties to the race. In 1841 the General Assembly gave judgment recommending Christian masters to present the infant children of their slaves for baptism.

During the war between the sections the Southern Assembly, in 1863, testified that "more was then doing for the religious instruction of the colored race than ever before." And in 1865, at the close of the war,

the Assembly took action which, I think, would truly represent the attitude of all her sister Southern Churches:

> Whereas the colored people never stood in any other relation to the Church than that of human beings, lost with us in the fall of Adam and redeemed with us by the infinitely meritorious death and sacrifice of Christ and participants with us in all the blessings and benefits of the gospel; and whereas our Churches, pastors, and people have always recognized this claim to Christian equality and brotherhood and have rejoiced to have them associated in Christian union and communion in the public services and precious sacraments of the sanctuary;
>
> *Resolved,* That the abolition of slavery by the civil and military power has not altered the relations above defined, in which our Church stands to the colored people, nor in any degree lessened the debt of love and service which we owe them.

The ablest ministers of the Protestant Churches prepared the catechisms specially adapted to the instruction of the negroes, and the publication boards of some of the Churches issued volumes of "Plantation Sermons" to be used by Christian masters in reading to their servants.

It was estimated by Bishop Haygood, of the Methodist Church, South, that at the close of the war there were half a million slaves in the membership of the Protestant Churches of the South. These were mostly in charge of white ministers, were received after careful examination, and were subject to strict discipline—that is, one-eighth of the slave population were communicants. Now there are three million, or one-third of the colored people, in the negro Churches. In the South the membership is about two and a quarter

millions or one-fourth of the whole race. If quality rather than quantity be considered, then the one-eighth of the old time would fully equal the one-fourth of the present.

The books to which I have referred give sketches of some of the more notable converts and preachers among the slaves. Their experiences were wonderful illustrations of the reality and power of God's grace. The account of the labors of the ministers of all the Churches, men of commanding ability, shows that the apostolic zeal and self-sacrifice of the early Church have been duplicated in these later days.

Personal Experiences.

Having given as briefly as I could the history of this work as gathered by others from various records, official and personal, I shall also give my own experience and observation as my memory recalls the early days of my ministry among the negroes nearly fifty years ago. I have mentioned that some of the obstacles in the way of gaining access to the slaves with religious instruction, forming a hindrance to gathering them together for worship, were the jealousy and suspicion aroused in the South by the abolition propaganda and the bitterness with which slaveholders were denounced by many ministers, Churches, and religious publications in the North. The more fanatical of the abolitionists counseled insurrection and sought opportunity to disseminate incendiary literature wherever a slave was found who could read to his fellow servants, and to inflame their minds against their masters.

In one case a colporteur of the Presbyterian Board of Publication spent several weeks, in 1858, in my father's house, and we were glad to have him as our guest. He won the confidence of all our friends by his seeming earnest piety and pleasant manners, and he sold a great many excellent books in our community. He also sold to me a number of books from the library of our old pastor (recently deceased), saying that he sold them for the benefit of the widow. After he left, our servants and those of other families in which he was entertained reported that he professed great interest in their salvation and talked to them of the hardness of their lot and tried to influence their minds against their masters. After the war, I found out from the widow of our old minister that this man never turned over to her a cent of the money I had paid him, leaving on her mind the impression that I had bought the books on credit and had never paid for them. Such things as this would, of course, arouse suspicion in the minds of the masters when any one, not well known, urged the duty of caring for the souls of the slaves.

It is true that we were told that these were exceptional cases and by no means represented Northern sentiment, but they had the effect in many cases of causing slaveholders to distrust the efforts of the Churches to reach the negroes with the gospel. Such efforts were regarded as a political scheme of abolitionism to accomplish its purpose under the veil of religious interest in the slaves. In view of the fact that during and since the war John Brown, the arch conspirator against the South, has been exalted as the hero-

martyr of freedom; that his home has been made by a great State a shrine of patriotism and the President of the United States assisted at the dedication; that another State dedicated a park in his honor and an ex-President assisted, and glorified him as a hero; that his followers who were hanged for treason in Virginia were buried with the honors of war by order of the United States Secretary of War; in view of the fact, too, that on the day of his execution the Churches of New England were draped in mourning and many ministers compared his death to that of Christ on the cross; in view of the fact that the song that most inspired the soldiers of the North as they devastated the South was "John Brown's body lies mold'ring in the ground, but his soul is marching on"—I say in view of all these facts indicating the real sentiments of the Northern people as to slavery, the Southern people were not mistaken in their judgment that religion was to be invoked and the Churches used to destroy their domestic institutions and to carry out a theory of social and political equality which would be ruinous to both whites and blacks.

The result of the bitter abolition agitation was that a great many Church people lost interest in the spiritual welfare of the slaves. To salve their consciences, they took to abusing abolitionism as justifying their neglect, or began to accept theories that the negro had no soul, or that the curse of Noah on the son of Ham enjoined slavery of the black race as a duty.

As a rule, however, the efforts of these fanatics failed to influence the large mass of Southern Chris-

tians; and the ministers of the Southern Churches, by their piety and prudence, by their zeal and common sense, and by their evident beneficial influence on the negroes to whom they preached, succeeded in large measure in counteracting the prejudices of the white people against preaching to negroes and secured the hearty coöperation of all classes, especially of the large slave owners, in giving the gospel to their servants.

In many places separate houses of worship were provided for them, and in a great many Churches large galleries with comfortable seats were assigned to them. Often the planters on large plantations built neat and commodious chapels for them, and in these chapels the planter and his family frequently worshiped with their servants. In the cities and towns the white people gave up their churches to the negroes for afternoon service. It was a matter of honor with the colored people to wear their best clothes and their best manners when they attended service in the white folks' church.

I remember that in 1855 the Presbyterian General Assembly met in the First Presbyterian Church at Nashville, Tenn. Dr. Edgar, the pastor, gave some of the Northern commissioners opportunity to see and to preach to some of the negro congregations. These ministers were surprised to see the fine dressing, the happy faces, the apparent devotion of these people, and were much gratified to find the evidence of the interest of the Churches in the spiritual welfare of the slaves.

Rev. Dr. Howell, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Nashville, a contemporary of Dr. Edgar, was also deeply interested in this work. In his congregation

was a negro man who showed remarkable gifts as a preacher or "exhorter" and as a leader of his fellow-servants to the Saviour. The Baptist Church bought him and placed him as pastor over a congregation of his own people. I think he was held as a slave under the direction of the Church.

Nelson Merry became a most efficient minister of the gospel and gathered a very large Church, which he served until his death, long after the war. I had occasion to call on him for advice and assistance in organizing some extensive relief work at a time when large portions of the city were under water from a great overflow of the river. I found him a man of such sound judgment, integrity, and piety that our Relief Committee entrusted to him the distribution of the funds needed by the negroes of the city who had been driven from their homes by the flood. The work was well and honestly done. There was no graft in his part of the service. He won the confidence and respect of all good citizens and exercised a wide influence for good among his own people as pastor, adviser, and friend.

When the Freedmen's Bank, of unsavory memory, established a branch in Nashville and two white men came from Washington to urge the colored people to deposit their savings in it, Merry opposed them. I think he published a card, saying to his people: "You ought to be careful of your savings. You don't know the men who are in charge of this new bank. You know Mr. Dempsey Weaver and Mr. John Kirkman and Mr. Edgar Jones and Mr. John Porterfield, who have charge of our home banks. If you put your money with them, you know it is safe." He was denounced

by the Freedmen's Bureau and many of his own people; but when his warnings were justified, his popularity returned. His funeral was largely attended by prominent white people of the city, who thus testified their respect for him.

My personal interest in the work of preaching to the negroes began during my student days in the Theological Seminary at Danville, Ky., and I determined to devote at least one-third of my work in the ministry to them. And, indeed, nearly every student from the South expected to give part of his time to this work. Many of the students were sons of slaveholders, while there was a considerable contingent from the North who, though opposed to slavery, yet had their views modified by actual contact with the institution. My interest was deepened by an incident which occurred at the meeting of the General Assembly at Lexington, Ky., in 1858, as related to me by some of our students who went over from Danville to see the Assembly. During the sessions there was held a meeting in behalf of foreign missions when Rev. Dr. John B. Adger, of South Carolina, gave a generous contribution as a thank offering to God for the recent conversion of a number of his slaves. He was a large slave owner, and was faithful in his efforts for their salvation. Some of the Northern brethren were surprised and gratified at this revelation of a new phase to them of the relationship of master and slave.

Another influence which affected our student plans was the annual visit of Rev. Dr. J. Leighton Wilson to the seminary. He was Secretary of Foreign Mis-

sions in the undivided Church, and afterwards held the same office in the Southern Church. He was a South Carolina slaveholder who gave the first eighteen years of his ministry to mission work in Africa. He was deeply interested in the race and its future.

One of the most successful ministers in the work among the negroes was Rev. Dr. John L. Girardeau, of the Presbyterian Church, who was, after the war, Professor of Theology in the Columbia Theological Seminary, of South Carolina. He was one of the most eloquent preachers I ever heard, and a profound theologian, yet he gave all of his time and talent to a large negro congregation in Charleston, declining flattering calls to white congregations that he might do something for the "brother in black." He prepared a catechism for the use of his charge. I was for a while intimately associated with him during the war, as we were chaplains in adjoining divisions in the line. I had much conversation with him on the subject that had engaged so much of his best effort. I found that one of the matters of deepest concern to him was what the effect of the war would be on the religious condition of the negroes. He felt that the triumph of the North, with emancipation of the slaves, would be disastrous to them spiritually.

By the way, it may relieve this discussion to mention an incident of Dr. Girardeau's ministry, which illustrates his power as a preacher. It occurred during the sessions of the celebrated Charleston Convention of the Democratic party in 1860. It was told to me by a member of the convention, Col. Alfred Robb, who commanded the regiment in which I served. He was

an Elder in the Presbyterian Church at Clarksville, Tenn. During the convention he occupied a room in the hotel near to Gen. Ben Butler, who became notorious during the war. One Sabbath Butler was invited by Colonel Robb to go with him to hear Dr. Girardeau preach to the negroes. Butler had never heard of such a thing, and at once agreed to go. The negroes occupied the main floor of the church, and the white visitors occupied the gallery. The two strangers were given good seats, facing the preacher, where they could see and hear. The preacher was at his best. The sermon was tender, spiritual, and profound, but plain and simple, delivered with fire and unction. The singing was such as the old-time negro could sing. At the close of the service the usual collection was taken. Colonel Robb said that he was deeply affected, thinking only of the sermon. Hearing something like a sob by his side, he looked around and saw Butler's face bathed in tears. As the basket passed Butler he drew from his pockets both hands full of silver coin which he cast into the collection with the audible remark: "Well, I never heard the like of that before." In less than two years from that day Colonel Robb fell mortally wounded on the fatal field of Fort Donelson; and General Butler had become, beyond any one else in the North, *persona non grata* to the Southern people, while the most terrible war of modern times was raging over the question of slavery.

In the spring of 1860 I was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Nashville and spent nearly six months in preaching in two counties of Middle Tennessee. The members of my congregations owned a consider-

able number of slaves, to whom I preached regularly every Sabbath afternoon, although most of them were members of Methodist and Baptist Churches.

After my graduation in 1861, I spent the summer in the same field and in the same kind of work, devoting every Sabbath afternoon to preaching to the negroes. It was the first year of the Civil War, and all men's minds realized, with a sense of solemnity, that a great crisis was upon us. Beneath much apparent levity and rash enthusiasm there was a deep feeling of our need for God's help. I was engaged during the week in assisting to raise troops for the Confederate army, in which I was to enlist.

During that summer my work was very successful in winning souls for Christ, and, although the older negroes knew the issues involved in the war, my influence among them all was not diminished. A great many of them had known me from my childhood, and they took a special interest in my sermons. In one of my churches I was much helped by "Uncle John," a slave belonging to one of my Elders. He had the confidence and respect of everybody, white and black. He was what they called an "exhorter." Often after the sermon I asked him to speak. We frequently took counsel together as to the best way to reach the negroes. From his earnest exhortations and quaint way of presenting his ideas I got some valuable lessons in homiletics.

It may not be out of place here to give an example or two to show how vividly he realized the importance of personal responsibility. At one of our meetings he was much disturbed because he had heard

some of the negroes in the field during the day ridiculing those who were interested as to their souls' salvation and trying to laugh away the convictions of the mourners. At the service that night he cried out with intense earnestness: "Some of you won't go to heaven yo'selves and you try to keep others from goin'. Now, if you done made up yo' mind to go to hell, go on yo' own 'sponsibility; it's much as you can do to answer for yo'selves, let alone totin' somebody else on yo' back down to death." At another time he was urging immediate acceptance of Christ, quoting again and again, "Now is the accepted time." He said: "Thar's a p'int you git to on yo' road to hell whar yo *can't* stop and turn back. When you git thar, all you can do is to holler like the jaybird, *'T-o-o l-a-t-e, t-o-o l-a-t-e, t-o-o l-a-t-e.'* " The lingering cadence of those last long-drawn words had a weird effect on his hearers, with most of whom the jaybird had an uncanny reputation.

The negroes were grateful for my service; and when I left them to go to Fort Donelson, they made up among themselves quite a liberal sum of money to help to pay my salary. Among them were some as sincere and consistent Christians as you could find anywhere. There were others who, as they put it, were "sometimes up and sometimes down." Some of them just *would* shout, often to the spoiling of the sermon. They said that they couldn't help it. I compromised with them by giving them full liberty to shout as soon as the sermon was finished and the last hymn was announced; so, with great effort, they restrained themselves, only now and then nodding ap-

proval with a "Bless God!" But when the last hymn was announced, they gave rein to their emotions, and sometimes the exuberance of their joy threatened bodily harm to those around.

In December, 1861, while I was at Fort Donelson, a call came to me from a Church in North Louisiana. It was on the Mississippi River, some twenty or thirty miles above Vicksburg. It shows how confident we of the South were of the speedy success of our cause that the invitation proposed I should visit the Church and look over the field, and, if we were mutually pleased, I was to return to my place in the army and in six months or at the close of the war I was to take charge of the work. We thought that the war would be over in six months, with our independence won. Alas for the folly of human judgment!

The Church offered me a handsome salary, and the commander on whose staff I served thought I ought to visit the field and examine it for myself. One of the main inducements to me was the large slave population to whom I could preach. I reached the Church in January, 1862. Before I could complete my arrangements Fort Donelson fell. As those with whom I was associated were captured, I remained with the Church in Louisiana until the following September. At that time the prisoners were exchanged and I became permanently identified with a Tennessee regiment of infantry.

In the bounds of my congregation there were several planters owning large cotton plantations and several thousand slaves. My Church had a membership of forty or fifty whites and several hundred negroes.

There was also a Methodist Church near by with a like proportion of white and negro membership. The only Ruling Elder of my Church (Presbyterian) was Dr. James G. Carson. He owned and cultivated a very large plantation with several hundred slaves. He was a gentleman of broad and refined culture, having studied at the University of Virginia, and also having graduated from a noted medical college in Philadelphia. He was a most earnest, active Christian, exceedingly liberal in his gifts for the promotion of the cause of Christ. He was held in such esteem for his sound judgment, strict integrity, and sense of justice that he was frequently chosen to settle differences between neighboring planters. He was a peacemaker who prevented many a lawsuit and much hard feeling. His decisions were usually accepted as final by both parties to a dispute. Dr. Carson was deeply interested in the spiritual welfare of the negroes in the neighboring plantations, and he took great pains in the religious instruction of his own slaves. He and his sons taught them on the Sabbath, and, if no minister could be had, he read to them some plain, practical sermon. I remember the title of one book he used was "Dickson's Plantation Sermons." The Church members among his slaves he divided into classes, over each of which he set one of the steady older men, whom he called a watchman and who looked after the conduct of his fellow members and reported on the spiritual conditions on the plantation.

Dr. Carson was the executor of his uncle's estate, which consisted of two or three large plantations near his own and many hundreds of slaves. For these he

employed a minister to devote all his time to them, to whom he paid a liberal salary out of his own pocket. He also conferred with the other planters around him and got them to arrange for me to hold week night services for their negroes in their quarters. Two or three nights in each week he went with me to these services, and we were heartily welcomed by the white families. It was somewhat remarkable that the only hesitation in arranging for these services was by one or two New England men, who came South as overseers and acquired plantations of their own. But their opposition was slight and based on doubt as to the good to be accomplished, and it was easily overcome by the prevailing sentiment.

In receiving members into the Church Dr. Carson was very strict and careful in his examinations as to their real apprehension of Christ as a personal Saviour. He was disposed, as I thought, too readily to reject where he saw evidences of superstition. He thoroughly undertood the negro character, its tendency to be swayed by mere emotion, and its love for the marvelous. We noted two tendencies in their account of their religious experience.

One tendency was to lay great stress on visions and dreams. Their ideas of religion were very realistic, not to say materialistic. Spiritual things must be certified to them by audible voices or by definite appearances. As examples of this tendency I may mention what occurred in our examination of candidates for Church membership. One woman said that she had seen God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son, and that they had spoken to her, telling her that her sins were forgiven. When

asked how the persons looked, she said: "Well, Marse Jesus looked like a younger man than God." So their conceptions of the work of the Holy Spirit were crude and sensuous, described as a fermentation in them like yeast, which made them restless and uneasy. I could but believe that in this rude way they told of a great reality—that is, the hidden working of the Spirit, arousing new desires and purposes, casting out the old ideas, and introducing the leaven of a new life into the soul, and so illustrating our Saviour's parable. And who shall say that their voices and visions were all mere sham and superstition? With the negro's impressionable nature, just as with the child, any vividly conceived idea comes with such power that it seems to him to take voice and form. When his emotions are deeply stirred and some word or promise of God is suggested to his mind by the Holy Spirit, although there is no real audible voice, yet it impresses him as real. So, instead of entirely discounting their visions, we sought to see if they really accepted Christ as a Saviour.

The other tendency to which I referred in the negroes' account of their religious experience was manifested by the men. Very often the visions and voices were mentioned, not to vouch for a genuine religious experience, but to certify a call to preach the gospel. Many of the men would assure us that they had no doubt of their call, for they had heard a voice distinctly urging them to this work. That kind of vision Dr. Carson very positively declined to consider. He refused to allow any of his men to preach, and, in receiving men of other plantations to membership in

the Church, he would not give countenance of the Church to their preaching. He was very kind, but very firm in giving reasons for this. He said that by the providence of God the slaves were in such a position that they could not be prepared to preach the gospel, and that even if they could be properly educated they could not preach to the others to edification. He told them that he would provide regular preaching for them by a competent white man. He told them that it was the duty of every Christian to witness for Christ and urge others to accept him as a Saviour, but they could best do this by godly lives and by their daily conversation with their fellow-servants. Some of the more gifted of the men, who were consistent in their lives, he allowed to "exhort"—that is, to speak publicly for Christ—but he discouraged the desire to preach as springing generally from vanity and tending to cultivate conceit. And, indeed, the character of the negro preachers in the days of slavery justified Dr. Carson's caution.

I frequently preached in an adjoining parish where we had a Presbyterian Church with two Ruling Elders. Wherever I preached they took pains to arrange the rooms and seats for the convenience and comfort of the hearers as well as for the preacher's need. I never lacked for an appreciative, not to say a demonstrative, audience. To give an instance, one night I was preaching on the plantation of our Elder, Samuel Anderson (by the way, a nephew of the great Virginia elder and lawyer of the same name who so ably argued the case of the Old School party in the schism of 1837-38). The seats were arranged in amphitheater

style, reaching nearly to the ceiling of a large room, thus giving me an easy view of all my congregation. On the top seat sat Uncle Jake, the foreman of the plantation—a big man in the Church, pompous, consequential, keeping a sharp eye on the others to see that they kept awake and behaved themselves, and rather disposed to be patronizing to the young preacher. Below him on the seats were seventy-five to a hundred men and women, boys and girls.

I had selected as my text for the sermon Belshazzar's vision of the handwriting on the wall, "Weighed in the balance and found wanting." I described various characters that would be found wanting at the last day, such as the liar, the thief, the tale-bearer, the meddler, the shirk, etc., adapting the sermon to the various forms of evil prevalent among the negroes. As I would finish the description of each character with the words "weighed and found wanting," Uncle Jake would make the personal application with refreshing but startling frankness: "Dat's Bill," or "Dat's Sally," or "Dat's Aunt Tempie (whose temper was fiery), or "Dat's done been dat low-down nigger Tom." This lofty candor grew to be monotonous as well as somewhat ridiculous; but the other negroes seemed to take it as a matter of course, while Mr. Anderson was highly amused but did not interfere. Jake was a privileged character. At last I described a character who assumed to be superior to everybody else, thought himself a pattern of excellence and found fault with the rest of the world; who could see the mote in a brother's eye, but not the beam in his own eye; who used the pitchfork to scatter the preacher's admoni-

tions to others, but never the rake to take them to himself. I noticed that Uncle Jake was becoming uneasy and restless in his seat; and when I finished with "weighed and found wanting," every one turned, and a dozen pointed to him and cried out in a chorus: "Dat done been ole Jake, sho'!"

It was only for a few months that I had opportunity to preach to the large number of negroes on the plantations. In the fall of 1862, on the exchange of prisoners, I rejoined the army, and continued with it until the final surrender. After that a Southern white minister had little chance to reach or influence the former slaves.

There were a great many negroes who followed our army as cooks, body servants, teamsters, etc. Some of them were sincere Christians and attended the religious services in the camp, and some were converted in the great revival that brought such numbers of our soldiers to confess the Lord Jesus Christ. But most of these negroes were greatly demoralized by camp life, and there was not that systematic effort to reach them with the gospel which had prevailed at home. They were generally very profane; yet if, by chance, they were exposed to real danger, it had a remarkably sobering effect. For several days afterwards, instead of oaths, pious songs were heard, and they would attend preaching with interest. It suggested that the proclamation of the terrors of judgment would be the most effective way to move them. Their own preachers go largely on that idea and elaborate the doom of the lost.

One pathetic incident which had its ridiculous side

illustrates the power of fear to quicken the negro's religious sensibilities. On the night of March 14, 1863, the Confederate works at Port Hudson were heavily bombarded by the Federal fleet under Admiral Farragut. It was then that the ship on which the future Admiral George Dewey was an officer was burned by our fire. While we were standing in line of battle expecting an attack by land and were watching the magnificent spectacle of the flying, bursting shells and listening to the roar and din of more than two hundred cannons, one of the negro cooks came rushing by in terrible fright, seeking a place of safety. Some one called to him: "Charles, it is time for you to be praying." He accepted the suggestion at once, dropped on his knees, and began the only prayer he knew, "Now I lay me down to sleep." Just then a three-hundred-pound shell exploded over us, scattering fragments in every direction. Charles sprang up with "Good Lord, I done forgot de res'," and started on the run again. In his blind terror the poor fellow struck his forehead against the projecting pole of one of the cabins—his neck was broken, and he fell dead.

Lest this incident should give a wrong impression of the negro character, let me give another which shows his devotion to his master and his heroic sense of duty to those who trusted him. During the sessions of the Presbyterian General Assembly in Mobile, Ala., in 1904, one of the commissioners was a negro, an Elder from one of the negro presbyteries. He was a thorough specimen of the old-time Southern negro, polite, cheerful, faithful. On an excursion down the bay we passed over the very course of Admiral Farra-

gut's flagship in the great battle of Mobile Bay in 1864. Several members of the Assembly were discussing the severest battle of the war in proportion to forces engaged. In answer to an inquiry of some one, I was describing the charge of the Confederates at the battle of Franklin, Tenn., on November 30, 1864. The colored Elder drew near and seemed deeply interested. After a while he asked with great earnestness: "Why, was you dar?" I said: "Yes, I was there." He said: "I was dar too." I asked him if he meant that he was actually in that dreadful charge at the old gin house, and he answered: "I was in it with my master till he was killed, and then I took him off the field and took him home." He was the body servant of a Texas colonel and had promised the "folks at home" that he would take care of his master. Thus he had followed him into that awful carnival of death in fulfillment of his promise.

The day after our excursion this man had occasion to make a talk to the Assembly on the spiritual interests of his race, and he received the most sympathetic attention from all the white members, who respected his royal manhood, although his language was not polished in the schools.

During the war I had opportunity to observe the religious training of the negroes in South Carolina. In the spring of 1864 I was sent to that State to gather underclothing for my regiment. The government could not supply our need, and we were cut off from our home in Tennessee; so I went to certain portions of South Carolina from which many of our families had originally come. I was there for about a month

and was treated with great kindness. I preached to two old Churches in Sumter District several times. In one of these Churches there was a large negro membership, and I was deeply impressed by the thoroughness and faithfulness with which they were instructed in the Scriptures. It seemed to me a model of oral teaching from which one could learn how to get the Word of God into the minds of children.

I can best set it forth by describing as best I can from memory one of the services in which I took part. In the morning about nine o'clock the Sunday school opened for the whites in the church and for the blacks in a large shed with comfortable seats near by. The negro school had a very large membership, for the white members of the Church were extensive planters and slaveholders. It was superintended by one of the Elders. The classes had leaders, generally negro men of intelligence and approved piety. The textbook was a catechism prepared, I think, by Dr. Charles Colcock Jones, in which, as I remember it, the answers were given in the exact words of the Bible. Only a few of the negroes could read. The lesson given was three or four questions. The superintendent read the question and the answer slowly and clearly, all repeating after him. Then he would explain it carefully. Then the question and answer were repeated over and over until the leaders at least had mastered and memorized the answers. They then went over it with the classes until the Bible verses were well drilled into their minds. They were then recited by the whole school to the superintendent as he asked the questions. All were expected to go over the answers—that is, the

Bible verses—during the coming week so as to keep them in mind, for the superintendent would review them on the next Sabbath before beginning another lesson. The superintendent told me that, after making all allowances for stupidity and indifference, in the course of a year a great amount of Scripture truth, in the very words of the Scriptures, was stored in the minds of the negroes, in many cases more than the white child learned. After the Sunday school I preached a short sermon to them, then I preached in the church to the white people. There were spacious galleries in the church, which were occupied by such of the negroes as could stay to this service.

Soon after the war (in 1867 or 1868) I was very much interested and surprised by an article in a Presbyterian paper published in the North. It was written by a missionary of the Freedman's Board of the Northern Presbyterian Church. It gave a glowing account of his work among the negroes in the bounds of that same South Carolina Church. The devoted missionary told how he was welcomed by the poor, benighted victims of slavery and how he had gathered great numbers of them into the Churches which he had organized. He described the pathetic eagerness with which the poor creatures drank in the gospel message as if they had never heard it before. He made the impression that the story of the cross was new to them, and that they had been brought up in utter ignorance of the way of salvation. With earnestness he appealed to his brethren in the North to help in the work of evangelizing this neglected and long oppressed race. The missionary was no doubt honest, but he was evi-

dently ignorant of the readiness with which the negro responds to sympathy and can tell the pitiful story which will call forth still larger compassion. When this compassion takes the form of pecuniary help, there is no limit to the urgency of his needs. Indeed, the same trait is seen in the white man who is willing to receive aid. He makes out a terrible condition to appeal to the charity of the benevolent. He also exaggerates his sufferings. But the white man is more independent in spirit than the negro.

I thought that I ought to write to the Northern editor and give him the facts as to the religious training of those colored people; but the passions of war were still hot, and I was advised that it would be useless, for my statement would not be accepted inasmuch as I was a rebel and presumably could not tell the truth on the negro question. Several years after this article appeared I met a member of that South Carolina Church, a resident in the neighborhood, and asked him as to the outcome of this philanthropic effort to build on other men's foundations without giving them any credit for their foundation work. He told me that the three or four Churches organized among the colored people in that territory had, after the first enthusiasm, dwindled to small proportions. Some of them were extinct. The missionary, not being supported by the members, and not making a satisfactory showing to the Board, went into business and kept a store for a living, depending for trade upon his black friends and occasionally preaching for them, although they preferred preachers of their own color.

The care and efforts of the masters manifested in

this Church for the religious culture of the slaves were not exceptional. Not only did planters who owned a great number of slaves (such as Senator Hammond. of South Carolina) build chapels on their plantations and often worship with their servants, but communities where each family owned only a few would build houses of worship for them. The servants were freed from service on Sunday after the middle of the day that they might go to church.

During the Civil War I was associated with ministers of all denominations, chaplains, missionaries to the army, and officers in command of troops; for many of our generals were ministers of the gospel, from Lieut. Gen. Bishop Polk to brigadier generals, and there were very many preachers who were captains and colonels. In almost all cases they were consistent in conduct. The most wonderful revival of religion in the history of our country was continuous in the Southern army for a period probably half as long as the war lasted.

No body of men more truly reflected the sentiments of our people on all moral and religious questions than did these preachers of the gospel. Their office was held in the highest respect by the Southern people, and it gave them social standing and influence. The great revival of which I have spoken gave them a still stronger hold on the minds and hearts of the people. I knew the sentiments of many of them, and so of the people whom they represented, as to our relations to the slave population, and as to how we should meet the spiritual needs of the negroes. All recognized that slavery was an issue of the war; and

while we did not believe that the institution was sinful, yet we realized that the war should stir us to greater faithfulness in caring for the souls of the slaves. There was a general feeling that if we should gain our independence we ought to remove all of the abuses of the institution and be more diligent in seeking to elevate the negroes spiritually, recognizing their rights as children of God and heirs together with us of the kingdom of God.

I am confident that the general sentiment of the South on the subject of our duty to our slaves was stirred to greater earnestness by the war, which forced us to consider the question in the light of God's providential dealings with us as a people; and also that the sentiment was deepened by the noble conduct of the great mass of slaves to their masters' families during the conflict. So, if we had succeeded in our endeavor, there would have been far greater and more effective efforts to bring them into the kingdom of God. I believe that these efforts would have resulted in so modifying the institution that the two races, white and black, would have lived together in perfect harmony, with the white man occupying the dominant position and the negro willingly subject. And even after the defeat of the Southern arms and the overthrow of her cause, if the South had been left to deal with the question of the relation of the races, she would have settled it for the highest spiritual interest of the negroes; and she would have been able to accomplish the mightiest missionary work of the ages, the conversion to Christ of millions of this race, to become the most effective agents for evangelizing the Dark

Continent. Instead of this, the interference of those who did not know the real nature of the problem, however good their intentions, has sown the seeds of distrust and of strife between the races that make it more difficult for our white Churches to reach and influence the negro, and he is largely left to the ignorant and superstitious ministrations of the preachers of his own race. It is also true that the Southern people were disposed after the war to wash their hands of all responsibility in this matter and to leave the spiritual interests of the colored people to themselves and those who had freed them from slavery.

During the winter of 1863-64 I was stationed with my regiment in Mobile, Ala. While there I received much kindness from two Methodist ministers who were deeply interested in the religious training of the negroes and had a large experience in that work. Dr. Jefferson Hamilton, pastor of St. Francis Street Church, was noted for his ability, his piety, and his zeal in every good cause. He had among the members of his Church men of wealth who were large owners of slaves. Dr. Dorman was also a man of commanding ability who was pastor of a Church of negroes, having a thousand to fifteen hundred members. He was supported in his work largely by Dr. Hamilton's Church. He gave all his time and energy to the work among the colored people. These two ministers had together a large and valuable library, to which they gave me free access, and I had frequent talks with them on the subject of evangelizing the race. They both realized the great responsibility that rested upon the South to justify her effort to perpetuate the insti-

tution of slavery by making it a real spiritual blessing to the slaves.

SUMMARY.

The main purpose I have had in this essay has been to set forth the sentiments of the Southern people as to the moral questions involved in their institution of domestic slavery and to tell of some of the efforts of the slaveholders for the salvation of the black race held in servitude. It is true that but a small proportion of the people were actual slaveholders; but the majority did not have any scruple as to owning slaves, if they were financially able to do so. The fact that a man did not own them was not a bar to social standing or political preferment, which has so often been stated by those who have written of the arrogance of the Southern planter and of the degradation of the poor white. It was a frequent occurrence for the overseer to marry the daughter of the planter. Social intermingling was determined by character and culture rather than by wealth. To-day throughout the society of the North wealth has far more influence in giving social prominence than it ever had in the South, though it is true that there has never been a society exempt from "snobs."

As a rule the relations of the races to each other were so kindly and so well understood by both that there was no friction. The affection was so genuine that when the master or mistress was soundly converted to God interest would be aroused for the conversion of those nearest and dearest to them, and the slaves who had been brought up with them from

infancy were objects of that interest. The affection of the white owner was reënforced as a motive by a sense of personal responsibility, and it was answered by affectionate trust and respect on the part of the black people. These efforts for the religious welfare of the slaves went far to mitigate the evils of slavery. Indeed, they made the institution a means of benefiting and blessing a race that was brought to our shores brutalized heathen savages.

I was brought up a son of a slaveholder amid the farming population of Tennessee, where very few families owned more than a few slaves. I was educated in Central Kentucky, where similar conditions prevailed. I have lived and visited among the cotton planters of the South, where sometimes one man owned hundreds of slaves. While there were instances of cruelty and oppression in their treatment and of opposition or indifference to their religious instruction, yet I do not believe that these instances were so numerous nor so heartless as the injustice and tyranny now exercised frequently by exacting employers on helpless laborers. I can testify that the majority of slaveholders were kind to their dependents and gladly aided the Churches in their efforts to lead them to a Christian life. In no State was this interest greater and its results more notable than in South Carolina, where large numbers of negroes were gathered into the Churches of their masters, besides those who were included in the plantation missions of the Southern Methodist Church. It was a frequent occurrence that some pious negro was the means of leading some of his "white folks" to the Saviour.

The splendid abilities of Bishops Capers and Andrew, of the Methodist Church, of Drs. Jones and Girardeau, of the Presbyterian Church, of Bishops Meade and Gadsden, of the Episcopal Church, and of the ministers of the Liberty County and Sunbury Baptist Associations, of Georgia, were given to this great cause without stint. These are only examples of a class of men, numbered by hundreds, who were active in preaching the gospel to the slaves. The results of these efforts cannot be fully tabulated, but they will bear comparison with the work of the Churches in the foreign missionary field during the same period.

The amount expended by the Southern Churches from 1829 to 1864, a period of thirty-five years, for evangelizing the negroes was approximately $4,000,000. In the latter year there were half a million negro communicants connected with our organizations.

In the thirty-five years from 1845 to 1880 the Churches of the United States, according to Dr. Dorchester's Tables, gave $50,000,000 for evangelizing the heathen in the foreign field. In 1880 they had two hundred and five thousand communicants. Of course the enormous difficulties of the foreign mission work did not exist with us in our work with the negroes. We had no difficulties of language, of national prejudice, of government opposition; yet these figures indicate a degree of faithfulness on the part of our ministers in preaching the gospel to both master and slave, which was owned of God in the salvation of a vast multitude. With all proper discount on the piety of the Christian slaves—discounts because of their peculiar temperament and their condition of bond-

age—yet it remains true that an immense throng of them were rescued from the bondage of sin and delivered into the glorious liberty of the children of God. It is a reasonable estimate, made by Rev. Dr. C. K. Marshall, of Vicksburg, Miss., that from 1829 to 1864, the period of plantation missions, one million negroes were brought into the fold of Christ by that agency.

Here it will be proper to correct an impression that once prevailed extensively that the preaching of Southern ministers, when they spoke of the spiritual interests of the slave, was largely a defense of the institution of slavery as of divine origin; that they thus exhorted the slaves to be content with their condition; and that they thus pandered to the master's greed.

In 1876, the centennial year of our independence, a Northern magazine of wide circulation and extensive influence and ably edited published a series of articles on the progress of the country during the century. One of the articles was on the progress of literature. Part of it discussed religious literature. After a sneer at the backwardness of the South in literary work, it was said that the preachers and writers of the South, when they spoke or wrote on moral or religious subjects, were so taken up with the defense of slavery as a divine institution that they had no time for any other subject. This in substance was the charge. In one of the books by Dr. J. G. Holland, once editor of the *Century Magazine,* in the course of a very interesting essay he remarks that the Southern ministers almost tore up their Bibles in the search for texts in defense of slavery. I was surprised at the statement,

especially as coming from a section where so much of the literature, poems, essays, and sermons consisted in bitter attacks on slavery. It would have been natural to expect some reply, but I could not remember that I had ever heard a sermon upholding or defending the "peculiar institution." I had never read but one book on the subject, Bledsoe's "Liberty and Slavery," and I had seen, but not read, the letters of the great Baptist divine, Dr. Richard Fuller, in reply to the strictures of Dr. Francis Wayland. So little were our people concerned to defend the institution that Wayland's "Moral Science" was a textbook in some of the Southern colleges.

I interviewed a number of ministers of all denominations, among them the late Bishop McTyeire, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Their experience was like mine. Several had preached to masters on their duties to their slaves and to slaves on their duty as servants. It is true that there were other books written on the subject, but they were more in the nature of political arguments with references to the Scripture and made no pretense to literature.

The bitter attacks that were made on slaveholders were generally regarded with silent contempt, as not worthy of reply. The mere word "slave" called up to the mind of the abolitionist suggestions of cruelty and oppression, and he could not see anything good in a slaveholder, however kind and gentle. It is a sad pity that the word should arouse such bitter feelings as to prevent a clear conception of actual conditions. It is a word which Paul used to express his relation to Christ and also that of every true Christian. He gloried in

the fact that we are not our own, but are bought with a price, and hence we are slaves of Jesus Christ. Yet it is a word that is considered as expressing degradation, a shameful condition. Our English Bibles translate it "servant" or "bond servant." There is nothing disgraceful in the word nor in the fact. A slave may have the noblest spirit, be a freeman in Christ Jesus. The word may express the devotion of deepest love. One of the wisest colored leaders of this time has truly said that "the negroes have no reason to be ashamed, but should rather be proud of ancestors who manifested such faithful loyalty to their masters and their families in the days of slavery." We are all servants, if our lives are of any value; and loyalty in service is only another name for duty, one of the noblest words in the language.

New Conditions.

The result of the war in the abolition of slavery brought, of course, new problems of every sort to the people of the South—problems economic, social, and religious. In the chaos of reconstruction men's minds were unsettled. One of the most difficult problems was concerning the best way of evangelizing the negroes under the new conditions. The difficulty was increased by the horde of adventurers who wished to make the negro's religion a political asset. So Churches were organized as mere centers of political scheming and were mere partisan clubs.

The Southern white ministers who had preached to the negroes lost their congregations and were looked upon with suspicion, if not with hatred, by many of

the colored people, who were taught that the main object of their former owners was to bring them back into slavery. The preachers were regarded as emissaries of the white masters, therefore the negro should on no account listen to them. This prejudice was industriously sown and cultivated in the minds of the freedmen by certain politicians from the North.

Under those circumstances it is not strange that for a considerable time the Southern white people became indifferent to the religious needs of their former servants, accused them of ingratitude, and doubted that they had any capacity for real Christianity; while others, who felt real interest in them and had faith in the genuineness of their religion, said that the North had taken the whole matter out of our hands and made it impossible for us to do any further good, and so henceforth the North must be responsible for the black man's soul.

As time goes on the prejudices of both whites and blacks are passing away. In view of the failure of many well-intended schemes of visionary philanthropists there is a growing feeling that the solution of the negro problem should be committed to the Southern people, while at the same time the North, which forced the problem on us. is by no means absolved of responsibility to help us. May God show us the way!

In the period of confusion and uncertainty immediately succeeding the war various methods of dealing with the religious needs of the newly enfranchised race were suggested to the Churches. The idea was discussed earnestly in the Southern Presbyterian Church of endeavoring to continue the *status quo* of

the old days—that is, for the negroes to remain in connection with the white Churches—and when any one of them was qualified to preach, he should be ordained and be placed over any congregation that should call him; also that in these mixed congregations negro Elders should be ordained especially to look after negro members. It was also thought that in time the negroes would gradually gravitate together and form congregations of their own people, and that these Churches and ministers would be under the same Presbyteries with their white brethren. There were ministers and Elders of the Southern Church who felt that if a negro with proper qualifications should apply for ordination in our Church we could not refuse to receive and ordain him.

On the question of ordaining negroes to rule through the Presbytery over white congregations, Dr. Dabney, in the Synod of Virginia, made one of the ablest speeches of his life in opposition, and carried the Synod with him.

In the Methodist Church the same question came up as to the ecclesiastical status of negroes and the continuance of the old order. I was told that many negroes in various parts of the Church applied to the Quarterly Conferences to be licensed. They seemed to think that preaching came by nature, so that it wasn't needful to have any special training. If one had the gift of ready speech and was endowed with "brass," he seemed to think that he was qualified to preach.

The late Dr. W. G. E. Cunnyngham, for a long time Editor of Sunday School Literature of the Methodist Church, South, once told me of a ludicrous examina-

tion of a candidate for licensure at a Quarterly Conference very soon after the war. He was a young negro man who had been flattered by the women of his Church when he had "spoke in meetin'." He was rather flashily dressed for the occasion and seemed quite confident. His education was very limited, and he could barely read. What he knew or thought he knew he had picked up from sermons he had heard. Dr. Cunnyngham said that the wish of the Conference was to get worthy colored men for work among their own people, therefore they were willing to make allowance for many defects. So the candidate was asked as to his knowledge of the Bible. He said that he was well posted in that. He was asked to give some historic event or tell of some historic character in the Bible. With a pompous air he told of Jezebel. "Gentlemen, I'll tell you 'bout Jezebel. Jezebel was the king's mother. She was a mighty bad old woman, and she made her son bad as she was. When the Lord couldn't stan' her and de king's doin's no longer, he sent word to General Jehu that he must be king hisself and kill Jezebel and her son. So General Jehu got in his buggy and driv as hard as he could to find the king. When he found him, he shot an arrow clean through him. Then he driv right on into town. And while he was passin' Jezebel's house she stuck her head out'n the window and hollered at him and give him some sass. He looked up, and dar he seed two men standing at de window by her side. He hollered to 'em to fling her down, and dey flung her down. Den he said fling her down ag'in, and dey flung her down again, till dey fling her down seven times, and

dey took up twelve baskets full of de *fragments.* In de resurrection whose wife shall she be?" It became evident that there was then no material to make preachers from among the few that were willing to remain in connection with the Southern Churches, and it seemed equally plain that the negroes could only be reached by ministry of their own race.

It also became evident that the mass of the Southern white people were opposed to being united in the same organization with negroes, lest it should lead to the demand for social intermingling of the races. We may call it prejudice if we will; but it exists, and to such an extent that the Church which would make no distinction between white and black would forfeit all influence with the whites. I believe also that it would lose the respect of the blacks. It seems to be a deeply implanted race instinct that would keep the races separate in their social relations.

So the way that seems to commend itself to the Southern Churches as best for the edification and for the highest interest of all is to organize the colored people into separate Churches of their own, with their own men as preachers and leaders, and the white Churches to give such assistance as is needed, especially in training the men who are to be leaders of the race.

The Methodist Church, South, set off such of their colored membership as remained with them in a separate organization called the "Colored Methodist Episcopal Church," which has prospered and has never lacked for sympathy and help from the mother Church.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church also organized

a colored Church of that faith and order which now numbers over forty thousand members in more than five hundred Churches.

The Southern Presbyterian Church has in its connection some colored ministers and Churches under the care of colored Presbyteries in connection with the white General Assembly. But the ultimate aim is to organize them into a separate Church with its own autonomy. To this end the Assembly has established a training school for colored ministers to prepare them for the work before them as leaders in a sister Church.

The constitution of the Baptist Church is independent, which makes it easy for the separation of the races to be accomplished without friction.

In the Episcopal Church, while there is earnest effort for the development spiritually of the race, and while they have separate negro parishes, yet they could hardly set up a separate negro Protestant Episcopal general organization.

In all this matter the Southern Churches are seeking to follow the lead of God's providence for the good of all. These movements for separation of the races into distinct though correlated Churches has been sharply criticized as the outgrowth of race prejudice, of social and caste pride, as an attempt to set up class distinctions in the kingdom of God as directly contrary to the apostle's word, that in Christ Jesus there is "neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free, male nor female." The basis of this action is the conviction that God has created each race, with its distinctive peculiarities, with its race characteristics,

and that these providential differences of faculty and temperament are to be utilized and not ignored.

Just as it is impossible to develop a Chinaman along Anglo-Saxon lines and make an Englishman of him—and therefore we propose ultimately a Chinese Church and expect it to manifest new aspects and applications of the one gospel—so do we expect the negro under the power of the gospel to go forth and do a special and distinct work in building up the kingdom of God.

Then also each race is ultimately to be elevated and brought to its highest efficiency by its own members as leaders and teachers. Moses, the Hebrew, was the one chosen of God to lead the Hebrews. So, if the negro in this land is thrown upon his own resources, we may expect that there will arise men of light and leading to lead in forming a strong Church in the sisterhood of Churches. To this end we are to help as we are able.

Characteristics.

In the days of slavery there were many negro preachers in the Methodist and Baptist Churches who exercised their gifts in the limited sphere of their own neighborhood. But of course they could hardly be said to have regular charges, although, when their character and conduct were good, their masters allowed them considerable liberty in making regular appointments. Some of these men showed remarkable powers of both thought and expression. Under favorable conditions they would have been great orators and leaders. They manifested some of the best characteristics of the race. There are traits of the negro's character and

disposition, as developed under the system of slavery, that made it easy in those days to reach him with the message of salvation. And these, under proper training, will make him a valuable witness for Christ. With the responsibility on him of a separate organization. and in contact with the white man's civilization, there are certain wrong tendencies that may be corrected while his best tendencies are developed.

We are to remember that the negro in this land is at most only three hundred years from the most degrading savagery and the most oppressive slavery to the barbarous chiefs of his own race. It will require long training, in addition to that he received in Southern slavery, to eradicate some of those baser instincts which came to him from generations of savage ancestors.

1. The negro was docile. He was ready to accept the teaching of his superiors in station and knowledge. He appreciated the efforts that were made for his instruction. Indeed, he felt flattered by the fact that he was recognized as an immortal soul, on the same footing spiritually with his master. The white preachers had the same gospel for all classes, and insisted in their sermons on the equality of all souls in the sight of God, and also they urged the personal responsibility of every individual, white or black, for accepting Christ. It was proclaimed that whatever the difference of earthly condition, yet in heaven these distinctions would be abolished, and that the saved would be from every kindred and tongue and people, without distinction of race or color. The extensive efforts that were made by the white people for the salvation of the negroes were the expression of the faith that all mankind are alike lost in

Adam and redeemed by Christ and are equally entitled to the means of grace. The colored people believed in the sincerity of their masters in thus treating them; and they received the preaching which honored their real manhood, their spiritual nature, and made them coheirs of eternal life. They were much like the children in readiness to accept what their "white folks" told them, especially as to the freeness of God's grace and the glorious rewards of heaven.

It is true that often this acceptance was without much understanding of the truth, just as a child learns the shorter catechism, which he may not understand until he has experience of the truths taught. Sometimes there were ludicrous illustrations of this unquestioning response to the preacher's words.

The story is told that in the days of Dr. J. H. Thornwell's professorship of theology in Columbia Seminary his students were generally ambitious to excel in metaphysics, in which science he was a master. On one occasion one of the students went to preach to a congregation of negroes to whom Dr. Thornwell occasionally ministered. The student began his sermon thus: "Primarily we must postulate the existence of a Deity." Then he paused to let his statement have due effect, when one white-haired old patriarch responded fervently: "Yaas, Lord, dat's so. Bless de Lord!"

Indeed, one of the difficulties in preaching to the negroes in the old days was their tendency to take big words instead of ideas. They thought that the man who spoke in simple language didn't know any more than they did. There used to be in Danville, Ky., a large Church for the negroes to which Dr. John C.

Young, President of Center College, preached frequently. He was one of the greatest preachers of his day. I was told that the Church was not very well attended except by white people who were delighted with the simplicity of his sermons. But when some of the theological students noted for grandiloquence filled the pulpit, the negroes filled the house to suffocation. The story is familiar of an old negro near Princeton who was impressed with the preaching of the students, they were so smart that he couldn't understand them. When Dr. Alexander preached one day, the negro was delighted: he had heard a little old man with no more sense than himself, and had understood every word.

2. Closely akin to his docility as giving access to the Word of God was the negro's humility—his sense of inferiority and dependence. While he was taught that his soul was of infinite value in the sight of God, he was also taught that no man was worthy of God's favor because all are sinners. He was taught that no merit of man can purchase God's favor, that all are dependent absolutely on grace. He was not lifted up, as his white brother was often apt to be, by pride of station or culture so as to resist this humbling view of himself. It is true that this sense of sin was often shallow because of his crude views of God and his readiness to excuse himself on the plea of his condition. but his feeling of unworthiness was real. This humility I once heard expressed in a negro's prayer during a revival: "Lord, we ain't fit to come to thee. an' you don't owe us nothin'; but we's just poor niggers. hongry for the bread of life. Just throw down a few crumbs to us and let us scramble for 'em." No doubt

the Syrophenician woman's prayer was in his mind, with its humble acceptance of the lowliest place, even under the Master's table.

Yet the negro who was a real Christian was often tempted to spiritual pride, especially if he were put forward, and if called on for his religious experience, he was apt to manufacture rather startling stories of how the Lord had dealt with him. He dearly loved a sensation. But, after making all proper allowances, his piety, when genuine, was of a lowly and humble type. While the colored preachers were often vain and conceited, the body of Christian negroes were modest and unassuming.

3. The negro was largely influenced by the example of his white master. He was apt to imitate the ways and language of those who were above him. This was a valuable auxiliary in reaching him with the gospel. Those slaves who were under Christian masters considered it respectable to belong to the Church. It is true that often this spirit of imitation led them to ape the vices of the "quality." Yet throughout the South there was among all classes of whites reverence for the religion of Christ, and the godly example of many Christian masters and mistresses exercised a deep and lasting influence for good on their servants.

In those days the minister of the gospel was respected and welcomed by almost every family. Such families as the Hamptons, Chestnuts, Hammonds, Pinckneys, of South Carolina, received the plantation missionary into their homes and attended his services to their slaves in chapels which they had built for them. This fact, observed by the servants, gave to

the ministers whom "ole Marster" or "ole Miss" honored ready access to the hearts of the slaves, who were encouraged to follow in their steps.

Now, since freedom has come to the colored people, this tendency to imitate white people is still very marked, even in the colored "lady" or "gentleman" who works for some white "woman" or "man." It is a difficulty in the way of developing the negro along the lines of his own race characteristics. We do not want a negro religion that is only a copy of the white man's religion.

4. One of the most marked traits of the negro was his emotional nature. He was quick to respond to the appeal to his feelings. He was readily moved by the story of the cross and its awful tragedy. The vivid presentation of God's love in that great sacrifice touched his sensibilities. The pictures of the heavenly world with its glorious rewards or of the world of woe with its awful doom for the sinner stirred his sensuous imagination and thrilled him with hope or terrified him with fear. He was demonstrative and expressed his emotions in shouts of joy or groans of apprehension. He wished to have a startling experience, to spend days in the depths of anguish, and then to "come through" with triumphant gladness. Here lay one of the difficulties of training him in the religious life. It was hard to restrain undue excitement and to direct his emotions aright. There was the constant tendency to put feeling in place of principle in religion, to put some surprising sensation as an evidence of his acceptance with God rather than faithful service.

There was too often a divorce between religion and

morality. Small value was placed on quiet, steady, consistent conduct as compared with getting "shoutin' happy." To illustrate this let me refer to some of Dr. Dorman's experiences in his large negro Church in Mobile. He said that he never lacked for an appreciative and demonstrative audience that seemed to take in and enjoy his preaching, punctuating his appeals with a chorus of "Amens." But every week he had cases of discipline because of the loose lives of many of these very demonstrative members. They were ever ready with excuses, and would retail some vision or tell of some voice or relate some marvelous experience to justify their conduct or to give assurance that they had been forgiven of God for it. They seemed to think that if they felt some peculiar sensation of joy or got happy now and then they were sure of heaven; that free grace exempted them from the law of God; and that transgressions of the law were trivial matters which were permitted to them on account of their superior experiences.

Their sexual immoralities and petty thieveries were their most frequent offenses. Generally they seemed to regard the gratification of sexual appetites as a necessity and as innocent as the satisfying of hunger and thirst. It seemed almost impossible for them to distinguish in small things between *meum* and *tuum*, especially when *tuum* was "ole marster's" property.

While undoubtedly the abuses of the system of slavery were accountable for some of this laxity, yet Dr. Dorman believed that it was a survival from original barbarism; that it was a hereditary taint in the blood which could only be eradicated by generations

of the strictest moral training. It must be confessed that the looseness of the marriage tie between the slaves and the feeling that "marster's nigger and marster's chicken" could become mixed together without any great wrong did not tend to cultivate the highest moral ideals.

5. The negro was inclined to be a literalist and to take the Word of God at its face value. This enabled the preacher to use the very language of the Bible very effectively in his preaching. The orientalisms of the Scripture appealed to the black man's tropical nature, and sometimes the figures and parables were interpreted by him with wonderful aptness.

To him heaven was a place of sensuous enjoyment and hell a literal lake of fire and brimstone, while the devil was a terrible beast with horns and claws. Here was a danger to be guarded against. Literalism was too much like materialism. As an example: A minister describing the day of judgment used our Lord's figure of the shepherd separating the sheep from the goats, with the sheep on the right hand and the goats on the left. He was startled by an old darky in the "amen corner" responding heartily: "Ya-a-s, bless de Lord, dat's so. Sheep on de right, goats on de lef'. We knows who wears de wool." According to that interpretation a white man would have no chance while every kinky head would have been safe. It was often hard for the negroes to understand comparisons and make needed distinctions. To illustrate: At the close of the war I was in Mobile, Ala., and was told of a noted sermon by a Northern preacher connected with the Freedmen's Bureau. He said to the negroes, "As

Christ was the religious Saviour of all men, so Mr. Lincoln was the political saviour of the black people," but they got it, "As Christ was the Saviour of white men, so Lincoln was the savior of negroes."

6. Another great help in preaching to negroes was the reënforcement of the sermon by their powers of song. This part of worship they enjoyed intensely, and they entered into it most enthusiastically. It was a beautiful expression of their religious emotions. The unction and abandon of their singing deepened the impression of the truth. They sang not only in the Church at the public meetings for worship, but they sang in the road, in the field, in the cabin, and in the kitchen. In the days of slavery the land echoed with the songs of the negroes, and many of these songs were the hymns taught to them by their "white folks." Freed of anxiety for food and raiment, which so often disturbed the master, the servant could give full swing to his joy in the fullness and freeness of salvation.

When I was a boy, I attended a yearly camp meeting held by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church near my home. This meeting was held about the last of September or the first of October and lasted four or five days, including Sunday. The camp consisted of a number of rude cabins around a cluster of bold springs at the head of a long valley. The preaching was done under a great shed, roofed with boards, which had seats for fifteen hundred people. At every service the negroes were present in large numbers in a special section reserved for them, and many of them made profession of religion. Their singing was inspiring and was encouraged and enjoyed by the white congrega-

tion, who would sometimes remain silent to listen. I remember particularly one man, Emanuel, almost a patriarch, whose voice of wonderful power, sweetness, and compass rose over all others in song. He was in demand on these occasions, and he would frequently, at the request of the minister, sing a solo, the other negroes joining in the chorus. In the clear stillness of an autumn night I have heard that voice a mile down the valley ringing through the dim aisles of the woods and filling all the forest with melody as he sang with jubilant notes, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul."

I am sorry to say that the old man's life was not equal in quality to his singing, but it may be that the very emotion which lent such witchery to his song made him the more susceptible to temptation. Let us not judge too harshly. The old-time Southerner was accustomed to make allowance for the negro's weakness of the flesh. It would add interest to this discussion if I should record an account of the labors of some of the pioneers in this mission work, stories of noble heroism and devotion; and the sketches of some of the more notable of the negro Christians and preachers would show a type of piety, simple, earnest, and deeply spiritual; but it would unduly prolong this essay. Numbers of the reports of ministers and accounts of the experiences of their converts are given in Dr. Harrison's "Gospel among the Slaves."

In all the Southern Churches there were negro members whose humble godliness was a constant, living witness to the power of the gospel. These held the respect and love of their masters as brethren in Christ. Those ministers who preached and labored regularly

for the negroes found it a blessed work, and they became deeply attached to their colored congregations.

As an illustration of this fact I may give an incident that occurred in the Virginia Conference of the Southern Methodist Church. It was near Lynchburg that a preacher of great size, of very dark complexion (almost brown), of intensely emotional temperament, and voluble of speech had charge of a congregation of black people. On the occasion of a revival in his Church he had Bishop Early to preach for him. After the sermon, he delivered an exhortation. There was a warm time singing, shouting, weeping, shaking hands, and hugging. The gigantic preacher could not restrain himself. Leaping over the pulpit, he went in among the crowd, now talking to mourners, now singing a verse of a hymn, then shaking hands with some happy brother or sister until he was completely exhausted. At last, returning to the pulpit bathed in perspiration, he sat down by the old bishop, who had silently gazed on the scene, rather disgusted with the whole performance. With his dark face aglow and the tears streaming from his eyes, he broke forth: "O, Bishop! these people have so much more religion than we have and they enjoy it so much more that I just wish I was a nigger myself." The little old man rather impatiently blurted out: "O, well, don't make such a to-do over it. The difference between you and a nigger isn't enough to be crying over it."

But really these devoted missionaries did feel that the difference between bond and free was not existent in Christ.

Conclusion.

The purpose of this essay is to set forth some facts that appear to me important in view of present conditions and responsibilities.

1. To vindicate the Southern people of the old order from the misunderstandings and misrepresentations of prejudice and malice. The present generation is largely ignorant of the facts as to the religious instruction of the slaves. In this age of hurry these facts must be set forth in brief compass if they are to get a hearing.

2. The whole country is now confronted with one of the most serious and dangerous conditions which has ever menaced a people—that is, two races as widely different as possible, living under the same government, with equal civil and political rights, and also with the tendency to race antagonisms and conflict of rights. The question is how to adjust the relations of these races so that they may live together in peace and mutual helpfulness.

3. This question must affect the South more vitally than any other section of the Union. After years of experiment by the Northern people, having failed to settle it, they now are beginning to turn the whole question over to the South for solution. They have created a condition and started a problem of the utmost danger to civilization itself, and, after complicating it with political, economic, and social theories and experiments, they are, with ostentatious magnanimity saying that it must at last be settled by the South.

4. It is a matter that can only be properly settled by

the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so it comes with especial urgency upon the Churches. They are called now with all earnestness to evangelize both races. Of course a return to any form of slavery is impossible and undesirable. No amount of education, nor of legislation, nor accumulation of wealth by the colored race can ever efface those radical differences which must ever prevent amalgamation in our country. It is only the thorough application of the gospel of love and of common sense that can place each race in its proper attitude to the other.

5. I believe that separate Church organization is the only way to make the gospel effective in overcoming race antagonisms in this country. The whites must give all help and encouragement to their colored brethren in the establishment and development of these Churches under the administration of the negroes themselves. Thus will the black man be cultivated along the lines of his own peculiar race characteristics and become an efficient and distinctive witness for Christ. And he will live in peace and harmony with his white neighbors.

6. I have mentioned and tried to illustrate certain traits of negro character which came under my own observation, that, in helping him to *come to himself*. these traits may be utilized and corrected by the Church organized to meet his needs. The white people, in aiding the negro in his religious life, should take into consideration his peculiarities of temperament, capacity, powers, and faculties. And the effort ought to be not to make a white man of him, but, on the other hand, to develop his excellences as a race.

7. I am free to confess that I do not believe that emancipation was a blessing to master and slave, as is so often asserted by good men of both North and South. The negro is here to stay. The two races must live in the same land, under the same government; and whatever rights the weaker race may have in theory, it can only exercise them by sufferance of the stronger. When those rights conflict with the interests or prejudices of the white man, the negro is helpless to enforce them. Now, these conflicts are becoming more and more frequent. The only hope is the acceptance of the gospel by both races.

There were abuses in the institution of slavery. cruelties and injustices; but they were exceptional, and the question comes to me, "Is the mere nominal liberty of the black man a sufficient compensation for the greater wrongs he is now subject to?"

But I also recognized that the institution of slavery was bound to go. The sentiment of Christendom was against it. It was misjudged because it was counted the same as Greek and Roman slavery. While the prejudice was unjust, yet it was industriously fostered and cultivated by our enemies, and it was impossible to resist the tendencies of the ages which claimed to be the spirit of progress. Emancipation is an accomplished fact, and it is ours to deal with the fact. As we recognized the spiritual claims of the slave we are bound to do the best we can for the evangelizing of the freedman; and it may be through him God will reach the millions of the "dark continent" with the gospel of his Son.