



*A journey in the
seaboard slave states*

Frederick Law Olmsted

OUR SLAVE STATES.

A

JOURNEY

IN THE

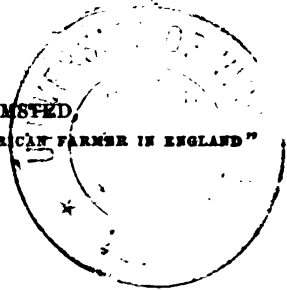
SEABOARD SLAVE STATES,

WITH REMARKS ON THEIR ECONOMY.

BY

FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED,

AUTHOR OF "WALKS AND TALKS OF AN AMERICAN FARMER IN ENGLAND"



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ADVERTISEMENT.

In the year 1853, the author of this work made a journey through the Seaboard Slave States, and gave an account of his observations in the "New York Daily Times," under the signature of "Yeoman." Those letters excited some attention, and their publication in a book was announced; but, before preparing them for the press, the author had occasion to make a second and longer visit to the South. In the light of the experience then gathered, the letters have been revised, and, with much additional matter, are now presented to the public.

The author's observations on Cotton Plantations, and in the frontier and hill-country of the South, may form the subject of a subsequent volume.

CHAPTER VII.

RICE AND ITS CULTURE.

ALTHOUGH nineteen-twentieths of all the rice raised in the United States is grown within a district of narrow limits, on the sea-coast of the Carolinas and Georgia, the crop forms a not unimportant item among the total productions of the country.* The crop of 1849 was supposed to be more than two hundred and fifteen million pounds, and the amount exported was equal, in value, to one-third of all the wheat and flour, and to one-sixth of all the vegetable food, of every kind, sent abroad. The exportation of 1851 was exceeded in value, according to the Patent Office Report, only by that of cotton, flour, and tobacco.

Rice is raised in limited quantity in all of the Southern States, and probably might be in some of the North. Rice has been grown on the Thames in England, and is extensively cultivated in Westphalia, Lombardy, and Hungary, in a climate not differing, materially, from that of Southern Ohio or Pennsylvania. Travelers have found a variety of rice extensively cultivated among the Himalayan mountains, at an

* The number of Rice Plantations is as follows, viz.:

S. Carolina—Plantations raising 20,000 lbs. and over,	-	446
Georgia, " " " "	-	88
N. Carolina, " " " "	-	25
Total,	-	559

elevation but little below the line of constant snow. It is true that a hot climate is necessary for a large production; but these facts contradict the common assertion, that rice can only be grown under such circumstances of climate as must be fatal to any but negro labor.*

In Louisiana and the Mississippi valley, where the rice culture is, at present, very limited, there are millions of acres of now unproductive wilderness, admirably adapted to its requirements, and here, "it is a well known fact," says a writer in De Bow's *Review*, "that the rice plantations, both as regards whites and blacks, are more healthy than the sugar and cotton." The only restriction, therefore, upon the production of rice to a thousand fold greater extent than at present, is the cost of labor in the Southern States.

From the New Orleans Delta, Feb'y 20, 1853.

"It is shown in a petition to the legislature of Louisiana, asking for a grant of State land to the petitioners, as an encouragement to them to undertake extensive rice culture, in the State, that the cultivation of rice, in Louisiana, is not attended with the unusual sickness that it is in the Atlantic States. This is an important fact, and reference is made to the Parish of Plaquemines, where there is a rice-growing district, of some thirty or forty miles, on each side of the river, making forty thousand or more barrels of rough rice, yearly; and where the health of the inhabitants, both white and black, is about the same that it is in other parts of the State, where no rice is grown. The reason assigned is, the Mississippi water, owing to its peculiar character, is not near so liable to stagnate or decompose, and produce miasms, as the fresh, clear waters of the Eastern rivers. It has been the impression of most of the residents of Plaquemines, that that Parish has always been, except when the cholera prevailed, one of the healthiest in the State."

* The rice commonly reported to grow wild, abundantly, in Wisconsin, and lately reproduced from seed in Connecticut, is not, I believe, properly called rice, but is of the family of oats.

From the same, May 28, 1854.

"Another specimen of Creole rice may now be seen at the Reading Room of the Exchange, side by side with the "Gold Seed" we noticed a short time since. It came from the Parish of Plaquemines, and is of the sort very generally cultivated there. J. Blodget Britton, Esq., the founder of the Louisiana Rice Mill Company, selected it as a fair sample of what is now produced in that district. He informs us that it resembles the white husk upland variety of South Carolina, though having, where care is used in its culture, a larger kernel, but is not so highly esteemed in commerce as the "Gold Seed"; it is, however, greatly preferred by the Creoles, on account of its flavor.

Mr. Britton has been traveling much through the Atlantic States, from Georgia to Massachusetts, in quest of information upon the subject of rice culture and milling, and recently has visited the principal rice districts of this State, collecting and imparting all the information in his power. He says there are few, very few persons in Louisiana who are at all aware of the great capability of our batture lands for the production of rice, and of a quality, too, he thinks, that will equal any in the world. All that is wanted is, good seed and proper culture. Some of the grain he has found is even larger than the large Ward rice of the Georgetown District, S. C., and some equally tough and hard, indeed, tougher and harder, he thinks, and possessing all the requisites for fine milling. But a fact, by no means the least important, he has ascertained. He is thoroughly satisfied, after hundreds of inquiries, that the cultivation of rice on the Mississippi bottoms does not cause unusual sickness, as is the case to the eastward. This he attributes to the purifying qualities of the sediment of the river water. Dr. Wilkinson, of the Parish of Plaquemines, whom we regard as high authority, has also given his assurance of this."

Rice continues to be cultivated extensively on the coast of Georgia and the Carolinas, notwithstanding the high price of labor which Slavery and the demand for cotton has occasioned, only because there are unusual facilities there for forming plantations, in which, while the soil is exceedingly rich and easily tilled, and the climate favorable, the ground may be covered at will with water, until nearly all other

plants are killed, so as to save much of the labor which would otherwise be necessary in the cultivation of the crop; and may as readily be drained, when the requirements of the rice itself make it desirable.

Some of the economical advantages thus obtained, might certainly be made available, under other circumstances, for other crops. Luxuriant crops of grain and leguminous plants are sometimes grown upon the rice fields, and I have little doubt that there are many swamps, bordering upon our Northern rivers, which might be converted into fields of irrigation, with great profit. On this account, I shall describe the rice plantation somewhat elaborately.

THE ATLANTIC RICE DISTRICT.

A large part of all the country next the coast, fifty miles or more in width, in North and South Carolina and Georgia, is occupied by flat cypress swamps and reedy marshes. That which is not so is sandy, sterile, and overgrown with pines, and only of any value for agriculture where, at depressions of the surface, vegetable mould has been collected by the flow of rain water. The nearer we approach the sea, the more does water predominate, till at length land appears only in islands or capes; this is the so-called Sea Island region. Below all, however, there stretches along the whole coast a low and narrow sand bar—a kind of defensive outwork of the land, seldom inhabited except by lost Indians and runaway negroes, who subsist by hunting and fishing. There are, upon it, several government relief stations and light-houses, far less frequent, alas! than skeleton hulks of old ships, which, half buried—like victims of war—in the sand,

give sad evidence of the fury of the sea, and of the firmness with which its onsets are received.

At distant intervals there are shallow breaches, through which the quiet tide twice a day steals in, swelling the neutral lagoons, and damming the outlet of the fresh water streams, till their current is destroyed or turned back, and their flood dispersed far and wide over the debatable land of the cypress swamps.

Then when heavy rains in the interior have swollen the rivers, their eddying currents deposit, all along the edges of the sandy islands and capes of the swamp, the rich freight they have brought from the calcareous or granitic mountains in which they rise, with the organic waste of the great forests through which they flow. With all is mingled the silicious wash of the nearest shore and the rich silt of the salt lagoons, aroused from their bottoms in extraordinary assaults of the ocean.

This is the soil of the rice plantations, which are always formed in such parts of the tidal swamps, adjoining the mainland or the sandy islands, as are left nearly dry at the ebb of the water. The surface must be level, or with only slight inclinations towards the natural drains in which the retiring tide withdraws; and it must be at such a distance from the sea, that there is no taste of salt in the water by which it is flooded, at the rise of tide.

MAKING A RICE FIELD.

In such a situation, the rice fields are first constructed as follows: Their outline being determined upon, the trees are cut upon it for a space of fifty feet in width; a ditch is then dug at the ebb of the water, the earth thrown out from which soon suffices to prevent the return of ordinary tides, and the laborers

are thus permitted to work uninterruptedly. An embankment is then formed, upon the site of the first made ditch, sufficiently thick and high to resist the heaviest floods which can be anticipated. It is usually five feet in high, and fifteen in breadth at the base, and all stumps and roots are removed from the earth of which it is formed, as, in digging the first ditch, they have been from its base. The earth for it is obtained by digging a great ditch fifteen or twenty feet inside of it; and if more is afterwards needed, it is brought from a distance, rather than lessen its security by loosening the ground near its base.

While this embanking has been going on, the trees may have been felled over all the ground within, and, with the underbrush, drawn into piles or rows. At a dry time in the spring, fire is set to the windward side of these, and they are more or less successfully consumed. Often the logs remain, as do always the stumps, encumbering the rice field for many years. Usually, too, the larger trees are only girdled, and their charred or rotting trunks stand for years, rueful corpses of the old forests.

The cleared land is next divided into fields of convenient size, by embankments similar to, but not as large as, the main river embankment, the object of them being only to keep the water that is to be let into one field out of the next, which may not be prepared for it; commonly they are seven or eight feet wide at base and three feet high, with ditches of proportionate size adjoining them; a margin of eight or ten feet being left between the ditches and the embankments. Each field must be provided with a separate trunk and gate, to let in or exclude the water of the river; and if it is a back field, a canal, embanked on either side, is sometimes necessary to be made for this purpose. Such

a canal is generally made wide enough to admit of the passage of a scow for the transportation of the crop.

These operations being concluded, the cultivation of the land is commenced ; but, owing to the withdrawal of shade, the decay of roots and recent vegetable deposit, and the drainage of the water with which the earth has hitherto been saturated, there continues for several years to be a gradual subsidence of the surface, making it necessary to provide more ditches to remove the water, after a flooding of the field, with sufficient rapidity and completeness. These ditches, which are, perhaps, but two feet wide and deep, are dug between the crops, from time to time, until all the fields are divided into rectangular beds of a half or a quarter-acre each. Now, when the gates are open, at the fall of tide, any water that is on the beds flows rapidly into these minor drains (or "quarter ditches"), from these into the outside ditches of each field, and from these through the field trunks into the canal, or the main embankment ditch, and from this through the main trunk into the river. The gates in the trunk are made with valves, that are closed by the rise of water in the river, so as not to again admit it. Another set of gates, provided with valves opening the other way, are shut down, and the former are drawn up, when it is wished to admit the water, and to prevent its outflow.

The fields can each be flooded to any height, and the water retained upon them to any length of time desired. The only exceptions to this sometimes occur on those plantations nearest the sea, and those furthest removed from it. On the lower plantations, the tide does not always fall low enough, for a few days at a time, to draw off the water completely ; and on the upper ones, it may not always rise high enough to sufficiently

flood the fields. The planter must then wait for spring-tides, or for a wind from seaward, that shall "set up" the water in the river.

"FRESHES" AND "SALTS."

In times of freshet of the river, too, it will be impossible to drain a greater or less number of the plantations upon it. These circumstances occurring at critical periods of the growth of the rice-plant, always have a great effect upon the crop, and are referred to in factors' and brokers' reports, and are often noticed in the commercial newspapers.

There is another circumstance, however, connected with the character of the season for rain, that still more essentially concerns the interests of the rice-planters, especially those nearest the ocean. In a very dry season, the rivers being low, the ocean water, impregnated with salt, is carried further up than usual. Salt is poisonous to the rice-plant; while, on the other hand, unless it is flooded from the river, no crop can be made. The longer the drought continues, the greater this difficulty becomes, and the higher up it extends.

An expanse of old rice ground, a nearly perfect plain surface, with its waving, clean, bright verdure, stretching unbroken, except by the straight and parallel lines of ditch and wall, to the horizon's edge before you, bounded on one side by the silver thread of the river, on the other by the dark curtain of the pine forest, is said to be a very beautiful sight. But the new plantation, as I saw it in February, the ground covered thickly with small stumps, and strown with brands and cinders, and half-burnt logs, with here and there an old trunk still standing.

seared and burned, and denuded of foliage, with a company of clumsy and uncouth black women, armed with axes, shovels and hoes, and directed by a stalwart black man, armed with a whip, all slopping about in the black, unctuous mire at the bottom of the ditches, is a very dreary scene.

CHOPPING, MASHING, TRENCHING, AND SOWING.

In preparing the ground for the crop, it is first thoroughly "chopped," as the operation with the thick, clumsy, heavy hoe is appropriately termed. This rudely turns, mixes, and levels the surface, two or three inches in depth. It is repeated as near as possible to the planting time, the soil being made as fine and friable, by crushing the clods, as possible—whence this second hoeing is termed the "mash." From the middle of March to the first of April planting commences, the first operation in which is opening drills, or, as it is termed on the plantation, "trenching." This is done with narrow hoes, the drills or trenches being chopped out about four inches wide, two inches deep, and thirteen inches apart. To guide the trenchers, a few drills are first opened by expert hands, four feet four inches apart, stakes being set to direct them; the common hands then open two between each of these guide rows, measuring the distance only by the eye. The accuracy with which the lines are made straight is said to be astonishing; and this, as well as the plowing, and many other operations performed by negroes, as I have had occasion to notice with colored laborers at the North, no less than among the slaves, indicates that the race generally has a good "mathematical eye," much more so at least than the Irish.

As fast as the trenches are made, light hands follow, strewing

the seed in them. It is sowed very thickly through the breadth of the trenches, so that from two to three bushels of rice are used upon an acre. The seed is lightly covered with hoes as rapidly as possible after it is sowed.

FLOWING, AND CULTIVATION OF THE CROP.

The force employed must always be large enough to complete the sowing of each field on the day it is begun. The outer gate in the trunk is opened as soon as the sowing is finished; and on the next rise of tide the water flows in, fills the ditches, and gradually rises until the whole ground is covered.

This is termed the "sprout flow," and the water is left on the field until the seed sprouts—from a week to a fortnight, according to the warmth of the season. It is then drawn off, and the field is left until the points of the shoots of the young plants appear above ground, when the second flooding is given it, called the "point flow." At this time, the water remains on till all the grass and weeds that have come up with the rice are killed, and until the rice itself is three or four inches in height, and so strong that the birds cannot pull it up. As soon as the ground is sufficiently dry, after the "point flow," the rice is hoed, and a fortnight or three weeks later it is hoed again, remaining dry in the mean time. As soon, after the second hoeing, as the weeds are killed by the sun (or, if rainy weather, immediately, so as to float them off), the field is again flooded, the water being allowed to rise at first well above all the plants, that the weeds and rubbish which will float may drift to the sides of the field, where they are raked out, dried and burned: the water is then lowered, so that the points of the rice may be seen above it. The rice will be from six inches to one foot in

hight at this time, and the water remains on at the same hight for two or three weeks. The exact time for drawing it off is determined by the appearance of the rice, and is a point requiring an experienced and discreet judgment to decide. This is called the "long flow."

The field is again left to dry, after which it receives a third and a fourth hoeing, and, when it is judged to need it, the water is again let on to a depth that will not quite cover the rice, and now remains on till harvest.

The negroes are employed, until the rice is headed, in wading through it, and collecting and bringing out in baskets any aquatic grasses or volunteer rice that have grown in the trenches. "Volunteer rice" is such as is produced by seed that has remained on the ground during the winter, and is of such inferior quality that, if it is left to be threshed with the crop, it injures its salable value much more than the addition it makes to its quantity is worth.

When the rice has headed, the water is raised still higher, for the purpose of supporting the heavy crop, and to prevent the straw from being tangled or "laid" by the wind, until it is ripe for the sickle.

The system of culture and irrigation which I have described is that most extensively practiced; but there are several modifications of it, used to a greater or less extent. One of these is called "planting in the open trench;" in which the seed is prepared by washing it with muddy water, and drying it, so that a slight coating of clay remains upon it, which, after it is sown, is sufficient to prevent its rising out of the trench when the field is flooded. This saves the labor of covering it, and the water being let on at once after the sowing, it is protected from birds.

The water remains until the plant has attained a certain size and color (commonly from two to three weeks), when it is withdrawn, and the subsequent culture is the same as I have described, after the second or "point" flow, in the first plan. The "long flow" and the "lay-by flow" are sometimes united, the water being gradually raised, as the plant increases in height, and only drawn off temporarily and partially, to supply its place with fresh, to prevent stagnation, or to admit the negroes to go over the field to collect weeds, etc. When this follows the open trench planting, the rice is flooded during all but perhaps two weeks of its growth, and receives but two instead of four hoeings. Some keep the water on as much as possible, only drawing off for barely the time required for the negroes to hoe it, when necessary to free the crop from weeds. Good planters use these and other modifications of the usual plan, according to the season, each having occasional advantages.

It will be obvious that in each method, the irrigation, by protecting the seed and plants, destroying weeds and vermin, and mechanically sustaining the crop, allows a great deal of labor to be dispensed with, which, with an unirrigated crop, would be desirable. This economy of labor is probably of greater consequence than the excessive moisture afforded the plant. Crops of rice have been grown on ordinarily dry upland, in the interior of the State, quite as large as the average of those of the tidal-swamps, but, of course, with an immensely greater expense in tillage.

I should remark, also, that as moisture can be commanded at pleasure, it is of much less consequence to be particular as to the time of seeding, than it would otherwise be. One field is

sowed after another, during a period of two months. The flowings, tillage and harvest of one may follow that of another, in almost equally prolonged succession. A large plantation of rice may therefore be taken proper care of with a much smaller force of hands than would otherwise be necessary. Many of these advantages, the Northern farmer should not neglect to consider, would be possessed by grass meadows, similarly subject to irrigation.

HARVEST.

The rice-harvest commences early in September. The water having been all drawn off the field the previous ebb tide, the negroes reap the rice with sickles, taking three or four rows of it at a cut. The stubble is left about a foot in high, and the rice is laid across the top of it, so that it will dry rapidly. One or two days afterwards it is tied in small sheaves, and then immediately carried to the barn or stack-yard. This is often some miles distant; yet the whole crop of many plantations is transported to it on the heads of the laborers. This work, at the hottest season of the year, in the midst of the recently-exposed mire of the rice-fields, is acknowledged to be exceedingly severe, and must be very hazardous to the health, even of negroes. Overseers, who consider themselves acclimated, and who, perhaps, only spend the day on the plantation, often at this time contract intermittent fever, which, though not in itself immediately dangerous, shatters the constitution, and renders them peculiarly liable to pneumonia, or other complaints which are fatal. When there is a canal running in the rear of the plantation, a part of the transportation of the crop is made by scows; and very recently, a low, broad-wheeled cart or truck, which can

be drawn by negroes on the embankments, has been introduced, first at the suggestion of a Northerner, to relieve the labor.

The rice is neatly stacked, much as wheat is in Scotland, in round, thatched stacks. Threshing commences immediately after harvest, and on many plantations proceeds very tediously, in the old way of threshing wheat, with flails, by hand, occupying the best of the plantation force for the most of the winter. It is done on an earthen floor, in the open air, and the rice is cleaned by carrying it on the heads of the negroes, by a ladder, up on to a platform, twenty feet from the ground, and pouring it slowly down, so that the wind will drive off the chaff, and leave the grain in a heap, under the platform. But on most large plantations, threshing-machines, much the same as are used with us, driven either by horse-power or by steam-power, have been lately adopted, of course, with great economy. Where horse-power is used for threshing, the wind is still often relied upon for removing the chaff, as of old; but where steam-engines are employed, there are often connected with the threshing-mill, very complete separators and fanners, together with elevators and other labor-saving machinery, some of it the best for such purposes that I have ever seen.

HULLING.

After the ordinary threshing and cleaning from chaff, the rice still remains covered with a close, rough husk, which can only be removed by a peculiar machine, that lightly pounds it, so as to crack the husk without breaking the rice. Many of the largest plantations are provided with these mills, but it is now found more profitable (where the expense of procuring them has not been already incurred), to sell the rice "in the rough," as it

is termed, before the husk is removed. There are very extensive rice-hulling mills in most large towns in Europe and America. In most of the European States a discriminating duty in favor of rough rice is laid on its importation, to protect these establishments. The real economy of the system is probably to be found in the fact, that rice in the rough bears transportation better than that which is cleaned on the plantation; also, that when fresh cleaned it is brighter and more salable. Rice in the rough is also termed "paddy," an East Indian word, having originally this signification.

The usual crop of rice is from thirty to sixty bushels from an acre, but even as high as one hundred bushels is sometimes obtained. Its weight (in the rough) is from forty-one to forty-nine pounds per bushel. The usual price paid for it (in the rough), in Charleston and Savannah, is from eighty cents to one dollar a bushel.

Planters usually employ their factors—merchants residing in Charleston, Savannah, or Wilmington, the three rice ports—to sell their crop by sample. The purchasers are merchants, or mill-owners, or the agents of foreign rice-mills. These factors are also employed by the planters as their general business agents, making the necessary purchase of stores and stock for their plantation and family supply. Their commission is 2½ per cent.

Rice is used in the rice-district as a constant article of food, never being absent from the breakfast and dinner-table of many families. On the rice-plantations, particularly those furnished with a hulling-mill, it is given a good deal to the negroes, more especially during the seasons of their harvest labor, and at the holidays. From this circumstance, I judge that it is thought

better food than maize, although the cracked and inferior rice, that would be unmerchantable, is alone given them. Some planters, however, say that the cracked rice (broken in the process of removing the hull) is better than the prime, and they prefer it for their own table. Rice is screened after the hull is removed, so as to produce several different classes, the difference in which is mainly in size, the lower denominations including only chips and powder of the grain. The classes are indicated as follows, at the mills of Mr. Bilby, of New York, where one thousand bushels of paddy, or rough rice, produced :

16,078 lbs. of "best head" rice.	3,243 lbs. of "broken" rice.
596 " of "best prime" rice.	570 " of "chits" or "small."
9,190 " of "good to fair."	5,210 " of "flour" or "douse."

In the Carolina mills the product is divided into "prime," "middling" (broken), "small" or "chits," and "flour" or "douse."

Prime rice, at the best mills, is not only separated from all of inferior quality, and from all sand and impurities, but each grain is actually polished; the last operation at the mill being, to force it through a rapidly revolving cylinder, of woven wire, between which and a sheep-skin flap it is obliged to rub its way to the shoot, which lets it out into the sack or barrel in which it is transferred to the grocer.

Having thus described its progress, from the dark mire of its amphibious birth till it has become, at length, the clean, lustrous, translucent, pearly, and most beautiful of grains, I will add directions for preparing it for the table, according to the most esteemed plantation method.

Rice is increased in bulk, by boiling, 150 per cent., and in weight, 100 per cent. Wash it thoroughly in cold water; have

your pot of water (two quarts for every half-pint of rice) boiling—add salt at discretion; put the rice in, and stir it while boiling; let it boil four minutes (some say ten, and some say fifteen); then pour off the water as close as you can without stirring the rice; set the pot on some coals, and cover it; let it remain twenty minutes, and then dish up. Each grain, by this method, will be swollen and soft, without having lost its individuality, and the dish will be light, palatable, and nutritious. Those who prefer a sodden, starchy, porridge-like mess, may boil it longer, and neglect to steam it. A very delicate breakfast-roll is made in Georgia, by mixing hominy or rice, boiled soft, with rice-flour, and milk, in a stiff batter, to which an egg and salt may be added. It is kept over night in a cool place, and baked, so as to brought hot to the breakfast-table.

SLAVE LABOR AS APPLIED ON THE RICE PLANTATIONS.

The system of working slaves by tasks, common on the large cotton plantations of the Atlantic States, as well as the rice plantations, has certainly great advantages. The slave works more rapidly, energetically, and, within narrow limits, with much greater use of discretion, or skill, than he is often found to do elsewhere. Could the hope of reward for faithfulness be added to the fear of punishment for negligence, and some encouragement be offered to the laborer, to apply his mind to a more distant and elevated result than release from his day's toil—as, it seems to me, there easily might be—it would, inevitably, have not only an improving effect upon his character, but would make way for a vastly more economical application of his labor.

On the contrary, however, the tasked laborer is always watched as closely as possible—a driver standing by, often with a whip

in his hand, that he may be afraid to do his work slightly. Under the most favorable circumstances, by the most liberal and intelligent proprietors, he is trusted as little as possible to use his own discretion, and it is taken for granted that he will never do anything desired of him that he dares avoid.

Take men of any original character of mind, and use them as mere animal machines, to be operated only by the motive-power of fear; provide for the necessities of their animal life in such a way that the cravings of their body shall afford no stimulus to contrivance, labor, and providence; work them mechanically, under a task-master, so that they shall have no occasion to use discretion, except to avoid the imposition of additional labor, or other punishment; deny them, as much as possible, the means of enlarged information, and high mental culture—and what can be expected of them, but continued, if not continually increasing stupidity, indolence, wastefulness, and treachery?

Put the best race of men under heaven into a land where all industry is obliged to bear the weight of such a system, and inevitably their ingenuity, enterprise, and skill will be paralyzed, the land will be impoverished, its resources of wealth will remain undeveloped, or will be wasted; and only by the favor of some extraordinary advantage can it compare, in prosperity, with countries adjoining, in which a more simple, natural, and healthy system of labor prevails.

Such is the case with the Slave States. On what does their wealth and prosperity, such as it is, depend? On certain circumstances of topography, climate, and soil, that give them almost a monopoly of supplying to the world the most important article of its commerce.

Conventions of planters, met to consider preposterous propo-

sitions for "regulating the Cotton Market," annually confess that if the price of this staple should be very greatly reduced, by its extended culture in other parts of the world, or by any cause greatly diminishing its consumption, every proprietor at the South would be ruined. . If this humiliating state of things, extending over so large a region, and yet so distinctly defined by the identical lines that separate the Slave from the Free States, is not caused by the peculiar system of labor which distinguishes the former, there is, at least, an appearance of reason in the fanaticism that votes, on that supposition, not to extend the area devoted to the experiment.

On the rice plantation which I have particularly described, the slaves were, I judge, treated with at least as much discretion and judicious consideration of economy, consistently with humane regard to their health, comfort, and morals, as on any other in all the Slave States; yet I could not avoid observing—and I certainly took no pains to do so, nor were any special facilities offered me for it—repeated instances of that waste and misapplication of labor which it can never be possible to guard against, when the agents of industry are slaves. Many such evidences of waste it would not be easy to specify; and others, which remain in my memory after some weeks, do not adequately account for the general impression that all I saw gave me; but there were, for instance, under my observation, gates left open and bars left down, against standing orders; rails removed from fences by the negroes, as was conjectured, to kindle their fires with; mules lamed, and implements broken, by careless usage; a flat-boat, carelessly secured, going adrift on the river; men ordered to cart rails for a new fence, depositing them so that a double expense of labor would be required to lay them, more than

would have been needed if they had been placed, as they might almost as easily have been, by a slight exercise of forethought; men, ordered to fill up holes made by alligators or craw-fish in an important embankment, discovered to have merely patched over the outside, having taken pains only to make it *appear* that they had executed their task—not having been overlooked while doing it, by a driver; men, not having performed duties that were entrusted to them, making statements which their owner was obliged to receive as sufficient excuse, though, he told me, he felt assured they were false—all going to show habitual carelessness, indolence, and mere eye-service.

The constant misapplication and waste of labor on many of the rice plantations, is inconceivably great. Owing to the proverbial stupidity and dogged prejudice of the negro (but peculiar to him only as he is more carefully poisoned with ignorance than the laborer of other countries), it is exceedingly difficult to introduce new and improved methods of applying his labor. He always strongly objects to all new-fashioned implements; and, if they are forced into his hands, will do his best to break them, or to make them only do such work as shall compare unfavorably with what he has been accustomed to do without them. It is a common thing, I am told, to see a large gang of negroes, each carrying about four shovelful of earth upon a board balanced on his head, walking slowly along on the embankment, so as to travel around two sides of a large field, perhaps for a mile, to fill a breach—a job which an equal number of Irishmen would accomplish, by laying planks across the field and running wheelbarrows upon them, in a tenth of the time. The clumsy iron hoe is, almost everywhere, made to do the work of pick, spade, shovel, and plow. I have seen it used to dig a grave. On many plantations, a plow

has never been used; the land being entirely prepared for the crop by *chopping* with the hoe, as I have described. There is reason, perhaps, for this, on the newly-cleared rice-ground, encumbered, as it is, with the close-standing stumps and strong roots and protuberances of the late cypress swamp; though, I should suppose, it would be more economical to grub these by hand, sufficiently to admit of the use of a strong plow. On old plantations, where the stumps have been removed, the surface is like a garden-bed—the soil a dark, rich, mellow, and exceedingly fine loam, the proportion of sand varying very much in different districts; but always considerable, and sufficient, I must think, to prevent an injurious glazing from the plow, unless the land is very poorly drained. Yet, even on these, the plow is not in general use.

Trials have been made on some of the South Carolina plantations of English horse-drills, I understood, without satisfactory success; but I can hardly doubt that with as good laborers as the common English clod-hoppers, some modification of them might be substituted advantageously for the very laborious hoe and hand-process of planting. I should think, too, the horse-hoe, now much used in England for cleaning wheat (which is drilled nearly one-half closer than rice usually is), might be adapted to rice-culture, with much saving of labor over the present method of hand-hoeing. Half an acre a day is the usual task of a negro at this operation. Garrett's horse-hoe, on light land, will easily go over ten acres, employing one horse, and one man and a boy. The Judges of the Royal Agricultural Society, at a trial in 1851, reported that the work done by it was far superior to any hand-hoeing. It requires to be guided, of course, with great carefulness,

and, perhaps, could not be entrusted to ordinary slave field-hands.

I am not aware that any application of the reaping-machines, now in use on every large grain farm at the North, has been made in the rice harvest. By the use of a portable tram-way for them to run upon, I should think they might be substituted for the present exceedingly slow and toilsome method of reaping with the sickle, with economy and great relief to the laborers. Such portable tram-ways are in use in England for removing the turnip crop from miry fields in winter; and men earn sixty cents a day by contracting to remove heavy crops at the rate of \$1 50 an acre, shifting the trams themselves. It is probable, therefore, that the rice crop might be taken out of the wet ground, and carried much more rapidly, and at less expense, to the stack-yard, in this way, than by the slow and cruel method now employed.

Could these, and other labor-saving appliances, in general use elsewhere, be introduced, and competition of labor be obtained, the cost of raising rice might probably be reduced one-half.

That free labor, even of whites, can be used in rice culture, if not in Carolina, certainly in Louisiana, the poor Creoles of that State have proved. But even for Carolina, free laborers might be procured by thousands, within a year, from the rice-region of China, if good treatment and moderate wages, dependent on hard work and good behavior, could be sufficiently assured to them. That they would suffer no more from malaria than do the negroes, there can be little doubt. And why, except for the sake of consistency, or for the purpose of bullying the moral sense of the rest of mankind, South Carolina should propose to reëstablish the African slave-trade, while this resource is left, I cannot see. If the British and Spanish treat the Chinese

laborers, which they have imported to the West Indies, worse than if they were negroes, as is said, no evidence is offered that such cruelty is necessary. The Chinese have heathen vices enough, certainly; but the want of docility and pains-taking industry are not among them. And, looking from the purely economical point of view, if orderly industry can be bought of them cheaply, nothing more is required. And as regards the other main consideration on which the re-opening of the slave-trade is advocated—the saving of sinners—the souls of the Chinese are probably as precious in the eyes of weeping angels, as those of the questionably-human races of Africa.

TREATMENT OF NEGROES ON THE RICE PLANTATIONS.

That the slaves on Mr. X.'s plantation were treated with all the kindness which a reasonable desire to make their labor profitable, and a loyal regard for the laws of the State for the preservation of Slavery would allow, was evident. A little more than that in fact, for privileges were sometimes openly allowed them, contrary to the laws. I was also satisfied, by the representations made to me, that many of the published reports as to the suffering of the slaves on the rice-plantations—like that in "Porter's Tropical Agriculture," for instance—are greatly exaggerated, or, at least, have but very limited application. That the slaves are sometimes liable, however, to be treated with excessive cruelty, and that often their situation must be very unpleasant, will be apparent from a very few considerations.

In the first place, if the humane Mr. X. could, with impunity, disregard the laws, for the purpose of increasing the comforts of his negroes, in so important a particular as by allowing them to possess, and keep in their cabins, guns and ammunition, for their

own sport, as he did, what should prevent a heartless and unprincipled man, if such a one could be rich enough to own a rice-plantation, from equally disregarding the laws, in the exercise of his ill humor? Mr. X. told me that he had sold but three slaves off his plantation in twenty years—and these either went willingly, or were banished for exceedingly and persistently bad conduct. But during the very week that I was on his plantation, one of his neighbors sold an excellent man to a trader, without any previous intimation to him that he intended to do so, without having any fault to find with him, and without the slightest regard, apparently, to the strong ties of kindred which were ruptured in the transaction.

This gentleman, too, though spoken of as eccentric, was evidently under no social taboo, and was, I believed, considered a "pious" man.*

Again, Mr. X. had established regulations, to prevent his negroes from being punished by his subordinates, in the heat of sudden anger. Still another of his neighbors at the time of my visit, while in a drunken frolic, not only flogged a number of his negroes, without cause, but attempted to shoot and stab them; and if he did not succeed in killing any of them outright, was only prevented from doing so by what the law would have considered—and often has considered—an act of insubordination to be justifiably punished with death.

During the summer, for from four to six months, at least, not one rice-planter in a hundred resides on his plantation, but leaves it, with all his slaves, in charge of an overseer. The

* Within fifty miles of this plantation, I heard a Presbyterian clergyman urge a man, whom he had never before seen, to purchase some slaves of him, which he had inherited, and had in his possession for many years.

overseers for rice-plantations have to be chosen from among a population of whites comparatively very limited in number: from among those, namely, that have been born and reared in the miasmatic district of the coast; or, if they are taken from elsewhere, they must be very reckless and mercenary men who engage in so dangerous an occupation.

Mr. X.'s overseer was considered an uncommonly valuable one. He had been in his employment for eight years, a longer time than Mr. X. had ever known any other overseer to remain on one plantation; yet I have shown that Mr. X. thought it necessary to restrain his authority within the narrowest possible limits which the law would permit.

He spoke of the character of overseers in general, as planters universally have, whenever I have asked information on the point, as exceedingly bad. It was rare that an overseer remained more than two years in succession on the same plantation; and often they were changed every year. They were almost universally drunken and dissolute, and constantly liable to neglect their duties. Their families, when they had them, were generally unhappy. They were excessively extravagant; and but a few ever saved anything year by year from their wages.

The *Southern Agriculturist*, published at Charleston, South Carolina, says:—

“Overseers are changed every year: a few remain four or five years; but the average length of time they remain on the same plantation will not exceed two years.

—“What are the general characters of overseers? They are taken from the lowest grade of society, and seldom have had the privilege of a religious education, and have no fear of offending God, and consequently no check on their natural propensities; they give way to passion, intemperance, and every sin, and become savages in their conduct.”—*Southern Agriculturist*, Vol. IV., page 351.

A writer in the "*South Carolinian*," published at the capital of the State, says:—

—"Somehow, many persons improperly consider overseeing as a degrading occupation. I do not see why. Probably the notion arises from the impression that everything is done on a plantation by dint of lashing. When this is the case, it is the fault of the overseer. My opinion is, that of all punishments it is the least efficacious, and that fifteen or twenty lashes, lightly inflicted, are as much as should ever be given. For serious offenses, other punishments, such as solitary confinement, should be resorted to. I am happy to think this idea is rapidly gaining ground among planters; and could they entirely control their overseers, or obtain overseers of better education, a most important change in this particular would soon be accomplished."

The writer is speaking of the cotton planters of the interior, who reside on their plantations, and are under no necessity of leaving them during the summer, as are rice-planters.

These extracts, in connection with the well known facts to which I have referred, prove, beyond a question, that the slaves of the most humane rice-planters are exceedingly likely to be subject to the uncontrolled tyranny of men of the most heartless and reckless disposition.

The precariousness of the much-vaunted happiness of the slaves can need but one further reflection to be appreciated. No white man can be condemned for any cruelty or neglect, no matter how fiendish, on slave testimony. The rice-plantations generally are in a region very sparsely occupied by whites: the plantations are nearly all very large—often miles across: many a one of them occupying the whole of an island—and rarely is there more than one white man upon a plantation at a time, during the summer. Upon this one man each slave is dependent, even for the necessities of life.

What laboring man in the free States can truly be told that

the slaves are better off than he is? Nay, in Europe, who desires to change his circumstances for these? Does not Mr. Geo. Sanders rather overdo his part, when he tells the French Democrats that the working-men of France are in far worse circumstances than the American slaves? What Frenchman, about starving to death, is desirous that his wife and children shall be "provided for" during life, in the Carolina method? Disgraceful to mankind as is the Napoleonic usurpation, this is more so. It is not our business to interfere with it, I may admit; but I must expose the sophistry by which we are coaxed to aid and comfort it.