

SOUTHERN LITERARY MESSENGER.

PUBLISHED MONTHLY AT THREE DOLLARS PER ANNUM—JNO. R. THOMPSON, EDITOR.

VOL. XXI.

RICHMOND, NOVEMBER, 1855.

NO. 11.

The Black Race in North America; Why was their Introduction permitted?

[The following argument on a subject whose importance at the present crisis can hardly be over-estimated, was commenced more than two years since; but, owing to causes which it is unnecessary here to mention, it was thrown aside by the author when the MS. was not more than half completed. Very recently, at the urgent instance of a number of gentlemen to whom the leading view was orally but fully explained, and who thought that it should no longer be withheld from public scrutiny, the task has been resumed and finished. It is hoped that the reader will not be deterred from a thorough perusal of it by its length, as nothing has been introduced which was not deemed essential to the proper illustration of the main position. It has been supposed that the subject was already exhausted, but if the reader will persevere, he may chance to find in this paper something novel and not the less worthy of his consideration on that account, while the elegance of the style and the clearness of the demonstration can not fail to interest and delight him.]

ED. SOUTHERN LIT. MESSENGER.]

This is a question which has been often asked, and to which as yet no full and satisfactory answer has been given; none such at least has fallen under the observation of the present writer. And this is not a little to be wondered at when we consider that they have been here for more than two centuries: that the motives of those who brought and of those who received them were patent and obvious; that their occupation during that time has been the same with but little variation, and that some of the immediate results of their presence and relation to the dominant race have all along lain open to view.

Our ancestors did not solicit their introduction, but could not have been ignorant of the state of society and government on the western coast of Africa, and knowing that none could be worse, they may have regarded the change as in every aspect the better for the negro. A short trial must have convinced them that many traits of the savage were ineradicable until after the lapse of generations; that as a race they were incapable of freedom, and that subsistence and protection in a Christian country were therefore the only equivalents that could be rendered for their labour.

While the blacks were but few and tilling a rich and virgin soil, with a boundless territory in reserve, the reciprocal duties of this relation were

of easy performance and the benefits mutual. Such being the case, it was hardly to be expected that the leaders of society at that early day would trouble themselves about the future of slavery, leaving posterity to meet its own difficulties as they had theirs. But when the blacks had greatly multiplied, and certain effects of their presence both on the soil and its owners had begun to be developed, the subject generally must have become one of more frequent and grave consideration.

We do not learn that they ever questioned the *legality* of the relation in the abstract, whether viewed from a political or religious standpoint. The previous history of the world had not been such as to make this a pressing case of conscience. They may have and did deprecate the needless inhumanity which often attended the traffic, and no doubt thought it hard that its subjects should be separated from their natal soil, their family and friends. But this was an evil not peculiar to slavery, but common in some measure to all states of society; and the suffering thus occasioned was more than compensated by the happier lot which awaited them here.

In a country so new and so sparsely populated, as was natural, the best lands, or those most easily cultivated, were first brought into requisition. And yet the task of preparing for culture the surface demanded by our increasing numbers was toilsome and vast beyond the conception of Europeans. The preliminary toils once over, the means of subsistence were more easily won and this surplus labour could be expended in rearing the products of a profitable trade. And because land was abundant while labour was scarce, a system of husbandry was devised whose object was to exact the largest tribute from the soil, rather than to preserve or improve it,—for which last indeed the kind of labour employed was then thought to be ill adapted. The inevitable effect of this system pursued too far became ere long apparent in the district first settled, much of whose soil was reduced below the point of profitable culture, and the settlers in consequence were led to seek new fields for their efforts in the reserved territory. The slaves also at first were few, but their natural increase, which under humane treatment had been rapid, was further hastened by fresh importations from Africa.

Here then were two phenomena of ominous

quire the highest qualities of human nature. The mighty plan, though now dimly seen by the wisest, will be developed in time. A great though unknown work lies before our posterity whom we must train for the duty as our fathers trained us. Meantime we know surely that yonder forest is first to be subdued and the soil reclaimed for the use of man. In this you might participate: for this you may have been sent to us by the Great Being who rules and guides us all. But again we say, you come not here on terms of equality. You may not mingle your blood with ours: you may not participate in our counsels: this is not to be your abiding place. Sojourn awhile you may,—how long we know not—but when your task is done, return you either to your fatherland, or whithersoever Providence may lead you. But aspire you need not, for you may not be permitted to thwart by your incompetence the great scheme in which we are engaged and on which so much depends."

And what the response of the strangers? "Sons of Japhet and children of the white man, you know why we are here. We came not willingly, but we charge not our captivity to you. Yet here we are and we submit to our lot. It may have been for our sins or those of our fathers that we are torn from our native land; but better is it thus than that our race should have been cut off as cumberers of the earth. A long and fearful penance may be before us, but bitterer it cannot be than the oppression we have left behind, and we trust to your pledges, to your honour and justice, to lighten our bonds and shun the atrocities which have darkened the Spanish name. A great mission you say, awaits you. In our hearts we can believe it true. And something whispers us that we also, all fallen as we are, have a duty to perform in connexion therewith. We ask not to be admitted to your higher sphere. Would that we were worthy. But the gods who denied us wisdom gave us strength, and that strength we offer to your cause. If souls are ripened in your Northern sky, the burning sun of Africa may have strung our nerves and sinews for the ruder toils to which yours are less fitted. We never have been governed aright: we cannot govern ourselves. Take us then and mould us to your will. Think for us: guide us; teach us our duty to the God whom we have forgotten and who has made you what you are. Take care of us and our little ones. Grant us subsistence and protection and we yield you obedience. Fill our hands with proper tools: assign us some simple work not above our capacity; bear with our perverseness and correct us when needful, and we will serve you until the curse is removed from our race. When called to war, as you surely will be, we will till your fields and provide you sustenance and wealth.

Nay, we will be the soldiers of peace under your command. THE FOREST SHALL BE OUR ENEMY, and there will we win the victories which may help you to fulfil your high vocation whatever that may be. And when the black man shall have done his work, a happier lot may be in store for his children. Then may he be led back to Africa another man,—or to a yet ruder soil under a more genial clime which shall be reserved for his conquest, his home and his reward."

Something of this remains to be accomplished, but the rest is history. We say not that there was ever a formal treaty between the parties or a distinct annunciation of principles, any more than there has been a literal social compact such as is assumed by writers on Government. But the view of the relation here presented has been tacitly implied and acted on from the first and on both sides. The more intelligent and moderate slaveholders have never regarded the institution as permanent, but as a *provisional arrangement*; to continue so long as it was needed, to cease when a better substitute could be provided. They have never contemplated this as the fixed home of the negro. They have looked upon him as a *sojourner* in the land, and as such not entitled to the rights of a citizen. That successive generations of his race have here been born and reared no more makes it their country than was Egypt that of the sons of Israel for the same reason. A natural corollary from this, was, that owing to the inferiority of his race, the negro was ever to remain in a subordinate position, the bond servant of the white man and subject to his direction.

The policy of Virginia on this subject as has been already hinted, was sufficiently indicated by the conduct of her Assembly. From an early date they watched the growth of this population with anxious vigilance. Under humane treatment their natural increase has always been great. For, as every one knows, negroes are prevented by no moral or prudential consideration from incurring the responsibilities of a family. Frequent importations swelled their numbers in an accelerated ratio. When the rapid influx from this source threatened to disturb the balance of the two races, repeated memorials were sent to the authorities in England. As these did not avail to exclude the stream which menaced a deluge, the assembly again and again laid a duty on such imports which served in a measure to check the tide or to divert it to other shores. Then, of the whites themselves there have always been two classes; the wealthier planters who were the principal owners of the slaves, and others who held few or none. These last being also reinforced continually by direct emigration, served to