

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

THERE is a remarkable chapter in Henry George's "Social Problems" in which he contrasts the condition of the Black man under slavery and his status since "emancipation." We shall be pardoned if we elaborate further on this picture.

THE Black man under slavery enjoyed many advantages of which he is now deprived. It is no defense of slavery to list these advantages for comparison. But briefly they may be indicated. The Southern slave was to all intents a member of the family. When the family was kindly disposed and when the slave was loyal he was more often than not, a beloved member. He was the recipient of many favors. If sick he had the care of the family physician; when death overtook him the ministration of the beloved pastor of the family flock.

UNLESS compelled to do so no Southern gentleman would sell a slave. The slave trader was looked upon with contempt and was unwelcome in the best Southern society. The love of the slave for his master was often as greatly reciprocated. Instances were common where the slave would name in his will the beloved master to inherit the simple belongings he had accumulated in a life time of servitude.

WE have heard much of the "overseer" made familiar to us in Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Simon Legree." It is significant that the overseer was often selected from the colored members of the household. Such was the custom in North Carolina, the most liberal of the Southern states in its treatment of the slave. It is significant, too, that the more reactionary of the Southern States, fearing the lax discipline that might be imposed by overseers who had grown up with their Negro neighbors provided that overseers should be secured from adjoining states.

THERE seems every reason to believe that where no racial conflict was involved the Black man was accorded even-handed justice. Before the minor law courts he stood in a rather better position than the poor white. The spirit of noblesse oblige would influence the court's decision.

SO much for the ante-bellum days. Today the worker, Black or White, has no such advantage. He never sees the family physician of the boss of the factory that employs him, or that of the plantation owner for whom he works. If he offends or is derelict he faces discharge with no bed to return to and no chance of a square meal, of which under the slave regime he was assured. Or if a depression occurs, one of those mysterious visitations which nobody in authority seems to understand, he wanders forth in search of a new job. There is no personal appeal possible now. With the best of intentions and the kindest feelings the employer finds it impossible to do anything—the problem is now so impersonal. His employees are no longer members of his household—they are just "hands" now. In what way, let us ask, does the *new slavery* compare favorably with the old?

IT was a frequent reproach made by the defenders of slavery in ante-bellum days that the condition of the free Negro in the North was distinctly inferior to that of the slave Negro in the South. In the North he was the victim of poverty and unemployment and suffered acutely in times of depression. In the South the Negro under slavery was assured against these calamities, was well cared for and free from all anxious thought for the morrow. That extraordinary character, Parson Brownlow, made much of this contrast in his debates with Northern abolitionists. And the comparison carried its sting.

HERE is a speech which might have been delivered to any audience of the unenlightened by one impatient with the slow mental processes of the average hearer; as follows: "Fellow morons:—When I look upon your vacuous faces I realize how difficult it is going to be to make you understand such a simple proposition as ours. I know how well educated you are, and therefore how much you have to unlearn. If what we have to tell you were more profound and complicated you would swallow and believe it. It would not be true to say you would understand it, for understanding is something different again. Who can understand Stuart Chase, or Professor Tugwell, or Professor Fairchild, or the lesser groups of misinterpreters?"