

THE SOUTH SINCE THE WAR.

BY A. W. WRIGHT.

In the preface of a book written in Virginia thirty-six years ago I find the assertion "The unrestricted exploitation of so-called free society is more oppressive to the laborer than domestic slavery." The book to which I refer was a defence of the institution of slavery, and the writer sought, by comparing the condition of the negro slaves of the South with that of the wage workers and factory operatives of the North, to demonstrate that the physical and moral welfare of the former was the better cared for. He quoted Carlyle, Fanny Wright, and other authors to show that in England and other countries the changes from vassalage and villanage to free labor had really tended to the physical and moral injury of the laboring class. To a Canadian, used to looking upon human slavery as an abhorrent thing, destructive of all the nobler virtues, both moral and intellectual, such a book does not appeal sympathetically, yet what I have seen in the South compels me to doubt whether after all it is not true that both morally and physically the negroes have lost by emancipation. To the question, may man rightfully hold property in man? I would still give an emphatic negative, but a dispassionate observer will be forced to admit that the system which in the South has succeeded to chattel slavery has not really bettered the condition of the negroes. It is true they no longer dread having their children torn from them to be sold at the block, and they no longer change masters under the hammer of the auctioneer, but now they are not certain of

employment and of wages sufficient to support life, and it may well be doubted if hard necessity does not part as many families as did the auction block. The whip of the overseer does not now spur them to greater exertion, but the goad of hunger and dreaded want is a sharper spur, and their daily "tale of bricks" is greater than before.

During the past few years I have had occasion to visit various sections of the South, and what I have seen and heard there causes me to write in this way. I have seen Northern writers and heard Northern speakers blame the poverty of the negroes on their indolence and improvidence, but I have seen enough of them and their ways to convince me that the charge of laziness and improvidence is, to say the least, an exaggerated one. I recall a conversation I had with one negro, a man of fifty-five years of age. He was in a cotton field where a number of negroes of both sexes were picking cotton. I asked him how he found his farm pay him? In reply he told me that last year he fell in debt seventeen dollars, though he had had his two boys hired out a part of the time. The year before he had just managed to clear himself, and this year he was afraid he would be behind again as the cotton did not promise very well. This man had been a slave before the war, and I asked him whether he was better off now than then. He told me that he had had a good master, and always had good victuals and plenty of them, and good clothes. Now his victuals were neither so good nor so plentiful, and he often had to "go half