

The "Mountain Whites" of the Southern States.

(Reading suggested for November Auxiliary meetings.)

IN the South there are 5,000,000 whites who can neither read nor write. They are in three classes—"bankers," "crackers," and "mountain whites," often called "Scotch-Irish heathen." There are perhaps 4,000,000 of these in North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky, etc. They are of Scotch-Irish ancestry, utterly illiterate, and their condition, intellectually and morally, it is difficult adequately to describe. Crimes committed by them put to blush the enormities committed in the worst districts of our great cities.

As to the history of these people. About 1740 there was a large influx of Scotch-Irish blood into the States. These people were driven there by persecutions at home; but they would have *no complicity with slavery*, and hence the slavocracy would have nothing to do with them, and consequently they were crowded into the mountains, which became their fastnesses. They had no teachers nor preachers, and sank into dense degradation. Hundreds and perhaps thousands of them fought their way through obstacles, making a path through the *mountain wilds*, and settled in and about Pittsburg and Western Pennsylvania, where their descendants may now be found.

They who were thus stranded in the mountains had a fearful combat for life. With no adequate means of support at command, they were embarrassed by extreme poverty. They had no schools; for of course there were no public schools in those districts, and the public school is a slowly growing institution in the South to-day. The mountains are almost destitute of schools. Occasionally there is a so-called school-house of logs, with the primitive floor of native earth, and the "teacher," with bare feet and calico gown, and the universal "snuff stick" in her mouth, knows little more than those she teaches.

Yet of this stock came *heroes* in the time of the American civil war. Large bodies of volunteers were recruited from these mountain whites, from the first and second districts of East Tennessee, more than from any other two Congressional districts of equal population. And however they have forgotten their Bibles in these one hundred and fifty years of degradation, they seem not to have forgotten Rome and the papacy. A young woman went there to teach them, and sought to make them learn the Creed, but when she came to this, "I believe in the Holy *Catholic* Church," they sent her home; no explanation that the word catholic meant "universal" would be received as an apology.

"Who be that Man, that Mister Jesus, you be a-talkin' to and talkin' about? Is He a-comin' here?" was the question asked by one of them of a religious worker.

WHAT OF THEIR WOMEN?

Woman's condition is fearfully degraded? She has perhaps a sun-bonnet of calico and two calico dresses, one to be worn while the other is done up; a pair of shoes, to be worn in meetin' and on state occasions; a shawl for winter wear. In the field it is the woman who ploughs and hoes, and plants and gathers harvest, as well as cooks at home; and sometimes you may see her not only splitting wood for the fire and carrying water, but hitched to the plough and driven like cattle, while her husband or son loafs, smokes, and indulges himself, caring no more for her than for a dog or a slave.

They marry at from twelve to sixteen, have a dozen children, sometimes twenty, and are old and worn-out at thirty. Consumption commonly carries them off, few living beyond forty or fifty. There is on their faces a hopeless look that cannot be described. It is the hopelessness of despair, more and worse than apathy or lack of intelligence; it is the index of a heart in which is no life or hope. Perhaps that woman you meet has never been off that mountain or known an uplifting thought.

Such women have no "to-morrow." The vitality is all gone out of the blood; and—what most hurts the heart of a true woman—after all this life of burden-bearing there is no hope beyond—no knowledge of a Saviour.

There is, of course, the comical side even to this degraded life. You meet with children, dirty, forlorn, and half naked, but they have wonderful names. In one cabin were two children, "Jim Dandy" and "Stick Candy;" in another, "Ruly Trooly," "Wolfer Ham," "Aristocracy" and "Ayer's Sarsaparilla," "Carrie Lee, Bessie See—who but she?" "Mary Bell, arise and tell the glories of Immanuel," etc.

Dr. W. J. Erdman tells a story from personal knowledge. He says an evangelist in the mountains asked an old woman if there were any "Presbyterians" around there. Her answer was: "Ask my old man. He be a powerful mighty man in huntin', and kills all sorts of varmints. You might go and see them skins a-hanging up yonder, p'raps you'd find some of them Presbyterian critters among 'em."

They have their own code of honor. Their family feuds last for generations, until one or other of the contending families is utterly exterminated. You enter a cabin; and the gun hung on the door is for ordinary hunting, but the burnished *pistol* is kept for murder, it is reserved for killing men. They have a chivalry of their own. One man who had killed twenty-five others in family feud warfare, would yet fight to the death to shield a woman who comes there to teach them, from injury or insult.

LONGING FOR BETTERMENT.

The hopeful sign in these people is a *longing for betterment*. In their very songs is a pathos as if pleading for help. In their degradation, which defies description, they yearn for schools, for some uplifting influence.

They are also singularly responsive to the Gospel. They are sin-hardened, indeed, but not *Gospel-hardened*. An evangelist in a village in these mountains found *one* who seemed to know something about Christ; but every person in the settlement attended the meetings and manifested interest in the Gospel, and many professed to find salvation.

These mountain whites will be met not on the open mountain road, but in secluded places. The moonshiners, or illicit-whiskey distillers, especially hide in the more retired nooks or valleys. One party travelled eight miles along the Blue Ridge and saw not a cabin, yet found three thousand people assembled to hear the annual sermon from an old man, who could not read a word, yet who was so godly in life and character that he was an epistle read and known of them all.

These people have customs quaint and curious, elsewhere obsolete. Their moral looseness is dreadful; but what can be expected where sometimes three generations live, eat and sleep in a small windowless cabin? A bed of boards nailed against the log wall of the hut is almost the only furniture. Everybody uses tobacco, even the babies. Through considerable sections there is practically no law; everybody does what is right in his own eyes. There were