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THE GEORGIA CRACKER IN THE COTTON MILLS.

FLUNG as if by chance beside a red clay road that winds between snake fences, a settlement appears. Rows of loosely built, weather-stained frame houses, all of the same ugly pattern and buttressed by clumsy chimneys, are set close to the highway. No porch, no doorstep even, admits to these barrack-like quarters; only an unhewn log or a convenient stone. To the occupants suspicion, fear, and robbery are unknown, for board shutters stretched swagging back leave the paneless windows great gaping squares. Hospitably widespread doors reveal interiors original and fantastic enough for a Teniers or a Frère to paint. The big, sooty fireplace is decked with an old-time crane and pots and kettles, or with a stove in the last stages of rust and decrepitude. A shackling bed, tricked out in gaudy patchwork, a few defunct "split-bottom" chairs, a rickety table, and a jumble of battered crockery keep company with the collapsed bellows and fat pine knots by the hearth. The unplastered walls are tattooed with broken mirrors, strips of bacon, bunches of turkey feathers, strings of red peppers, and gourds, green, yellow, and brown. The bare floors are begrimed with the tread of animals; and the muddy outline of splayed toes of all shapes and sizes betoken inmates unused to shoes and stockings. The back door looks upon an old-fashioned moss-covered well with its long pole and a bucket at the end hung high in air. Yard there is none, nor plant, nor paling, nor outhouse, in the whole community. On the nearest limbs a few patched garments flap ghostlike in the breeze. Forest trees shade the black-lichened roof, and the dogwood, azalea, and laurel riot on the hillside. Surmounting this crest is a little squat, frame building that only irredeemable ugliness proclaims to be a church. The path that leads to it is almost untrodden.

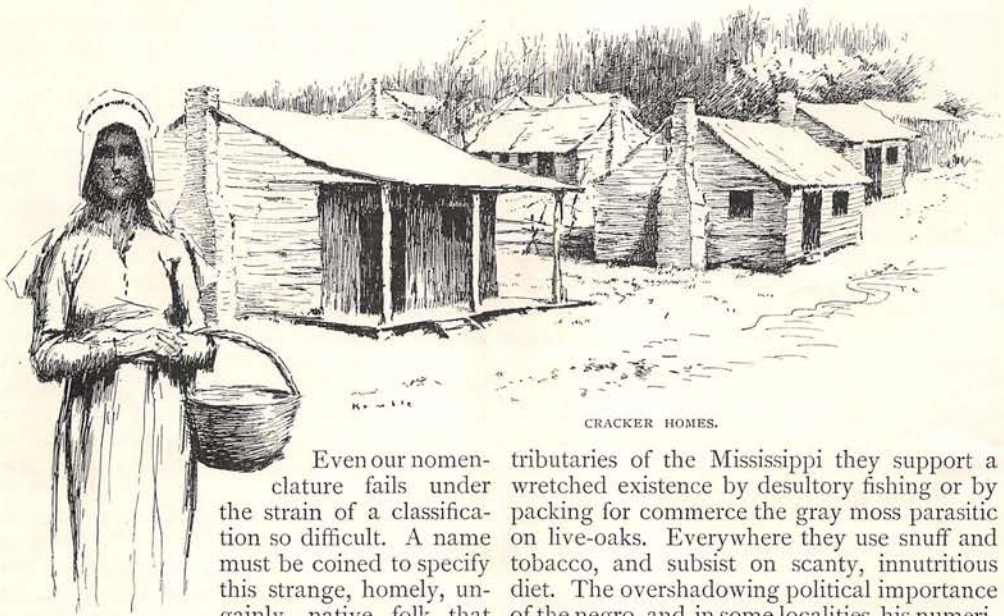
Over the scene broods the stillness of virgin woods. The peacefulness that flees from busy marts inwraps the smokeless chimneys and silent hearths. It is a deserted village. The homes are but the shells of human presence. Not even the ticking of a clock answers the lonely cricket in the mantel. The wood fire is half burned out, the embers dead; a simple breakfast has been partly consumed; great hollows formed by recent occupation punctuate the unmade feather beds. What sprite, what fiend, has snatched up the inmates in the midst of work and hurry? What mysterious power suspended in a moment all the functions of life, and swept away its representatives?

A steady, throbbing pulsation, a singular persistent whir not caused by bird or beast or wind, unnoticed at first, frets the ear at last into consciousness. A turn in the road; the swish, splash of falling waters is accented by a stronger pulse-beat, and around a farther bend comes into view an ancient wheel, wheezy and dilapidated, picturesquely dipping into a turbid stream and scattering rainbows of dazzling yellow drops. A low, straggling brick mill gives forth the sound of flying spindles and the measured jar of many looms.

Herein are gathered the missing denizens of the settlement, of both sexes and of all ages and conditions. Grandsires feebly totter about the cotton-house; grandams, mothers, sons, and daughters tend the whirling machinery; while children too young to work play along the walls under the maternal eye. Of one class only there is lack. Has war in the land claimed all the able-bodied male adults

who should father these little ones? Another turn in the road betrays that the absence of the men is due to no holy patriotic fire. Grouped about the single store of the village, lounging, whittling sticks, and sunning their big, lazy frames, sit a score of stalwart masculine figures, while their offspring and their womankind toil in the dusty mill.

The race that tends the spindles of the cotton-growing States is altogether unique. To describe it, geographical boundaries must be effaced and national peculiarities ignored; for the blood of the followers of Cavaliers in Maryland, noblemen in Virginia, Swiss and palatines in North Carolina, and Huguenots in the Palmetto State blends with that of the impecunious gentlemen brought by Oglethorpe to Georgia, and everywhere crops out in one quaint, baffling, original, unchangeable type.



CRACKER HOMES.

Even our nomenclature fails under the strain of a classification so difficult. A name must be coined to specify this strange, homely, ungainly, native folk that delve in tobacco, cotton, and corn, distil whisky in the mountains, and spin or weave in villages and towns. "Crackers" in every mood and tense past, present, and future they are; "crackers" in dialect, feature, coloring, dress, manner, doings, and characteristics. In their native habitat the term is not a reproach but a scientific distinction, expressing undisguisable, stubborn, ineradicable qualities, which isolate that large portion of the community whom the epithet embraces — hundreds of thousands of non-slaveholding whites in antebellum days and their present descendants. This unpromising element now belongs less to the higher civilization of the South and counts for less in her councils than did their forefathers of a century ago, who, as destitute and perhaps illiterate colonists, marked with helpless uneasiness the gradual growth in the new home of an aristocracy founded on the possession of land, negroes, or education. The crackers of our time are an impressive example of race degeneration caused partly by climate, partly by caste prejudices due to the institution of slavery. Though sprung from the vigorous Scotch-Irish stock so firmly rooted on the Atlantic slope, they have lapsed into laziness, ignorance, and oddity. The Georgians in the wire-grass region choose as dainties chalk, starch, and the gum from the pines whose turpentine they collect for barter; in the mountains of Virginia the natives eat clay; in the Carolinas they are wild, unkempt ginseng hunters; in Tennessee they are often desperadoes, cunning and treacherous, murdering their foe from ambush. Along the Gulf and the tributaries of the Mississippi they support a wretched existence by desultory fishing or by packing for commerce the gray moss parasitic on live-oaks. Everywhere they use snuff and tobacco, and subsist on scanty, innutritious diet. The overshadowing political importance of the negro, and, in some localities, his numerical superiority, help on the deterioration of the poor whites, though they form a large fourth of the white population of each cotton State. Alien to the educated classes because of a thousand subtle discordances that stir ancient yet vital caste prejudice, the crackers are at the same time hated by the colored man. Thus, crushed between the upper and the nether millstones of popular scorn, the victims of reactionary ethics, their condition in the New South is often deplorable.

Rarely intermarrying with the gentry, breeding in for generations, the cracker grows more sharply defined by selection and is less plastic to civilization than any other race in America. What these inhabitants were before the war they remained after the war and are now, the

AROUND THE GROCERY.

butt of ridicule, shiftless and inconsequent, always poor though always working. To bring into relief this marked, interesting, and amusing type no background is so effective as the Southern factory life, in which the native white proletariate figures exclusively.

In country districts, where primitive methods of manufacture prevail, the machinery is heavy and of antiquated fashion and the remuneration poor. Located, however, in the cotton-producing region, and where in the absence of prohibitive legislation the working hours are longer, Southern mills have a distinct advantage. It is nevertheless an open question whether these advantages are not more than neutralized by the inefficiency of the native white operatives. No colored people are employed in textile industries. The labor market of the producer is limited to the cotton fields and farms of the country. Unable to choose whom he would have, the employer takes whom he can get; and the laborer, fully aware of his value, shows an independence that would nowhere else be tolerated. The genial climate enables him to intrench himself in his castle,—some log cabin of a single room in the midst of a corn patch,—and so long as a quart of meal, a slice of bacon, and a plug of tobacco remain, the overseer implores in vain and the whirl of the spindle ceases. Every adult and child available for work being employed in the village factory, the recalcitrant remains master of the situation. The most indispensable members of the industrial corps desert on the slightest pretext; the fitful attendance being aptly characterized by a weaver who had "tuk two or three spells uv comin' to the mill." Even in the Southern cities, where the expansion of manufacturing has been most striking, and where the recently erected mills vie in finish, equipment, and management with the finest establishments at the North, the labor supply is not abundant. The operatives are lodged to some extent in houses belonging to the corporations, and which are conducted less as a source of revenue than to allure workers. In

improved factory settlements all the sanitary and moral advantages of distinct family life are secured, though about the older mills still linger ancient brick or frame tenements wherein the evils of crowding and indiscriminate association are rampant.

To the occupants as a class moral distinctions are unknown, the limits of *meum et tuum* undefined. Whole families huddle together irrespective of sex or relationship. They have land but no gardens, pasturage but no stock. Wasting their earnings on gewgaws, drink, and indigestible foods, they are unhealthy and inefficient. Despite a favorable climate, a bountiful mother earth, the mortality among the poor whites is shockingly high. Enthusiasts sometimes seek to better the environment and so to effect some good, but they soon become disgusted with their beneficiaries and outraged by their utter incorrigibleness. One clever, original manufacturer for five years devoted head, heart, and purse to ameliorate the condition of his operatives — the worst class in the community. They had no homes; he bought and built houses, which fell to pieces through neglect, or were burned up in drunken orgies. When their dwellings were again repaired the crackers felt out of place in a setting of order and neatness, and "jes ter make things sorter homelike," as was afterwards naïvely explained, they kicked out the panels of the doors, smashed the windows, riddled the walls, and cut up the floor for kindling wood. With driftwood for fuel lying almost at their gates, if they have a gate, rather than walk to and from the fence, if they have a fence, the proletarian inhabitants prefer to destroy their landlord's property. An attempt to utilize their horticultural instincts was unavailing. The gardens were fenced, the tenants burned the plank; the plats were plowed, not a seed was planted; and when, undiscouraged, the employer planted the gardens himself, the people turned in the hogs with the comment, "Bacon 's better 'n garden sass any day." Schools were opened; not a child could be enticed therein. Dismayed by the appalling mortality among the race, our reformer engaged his own physician to visit the mill daily for free consultation, but the operatives were suspicious and unapproachable. When cash payments were substituted for the "order system," the usual monthly spree was multiplied into a weekly carouse. The proprietor endeavored to put natives into positions of trust, and spent thousands of dollars in educating for special duties men who proved hopelessly incompetent. He encouraged the churches to open missions among his employees, whereat families earning in the mill from $50 to $100 a month quit work entirely and subsisted on charity. An effort to lessen the fatigue of women and girls standing twelve hours a day at machinery, by introducing stools for them to sit on, occasioned a small insurrection. The seats were broken up and tossed out of the windows, and the women issued a manifesto declaring that "None er 'em thar new-fangled contrapshuns shain't er-come er-knockin' agin our shanks." So bitter an experience extinguished all hope of softening these hard natures, and the manufacturer, though he speaks of them with a mist in his eyes, "lets the poor devils alone."

The irredeemable workers, however, had been newly broken in the factory system. In older manufacturing communities long and persistent experiments have made impression on the habits of the native, and some sense of personal responsibility has been developed. One agent especially has become closely identified with his operatives, and the success of his reforms proves that the poor white is not always incorrigible. Some corporations by paying interest on deposits encourage saving and the ownership of homes; and despite squalor and seeming poverty many factory workers possess a bank account. That but a small proportion own

A TYPE.

their homes is not exclusively due to improvidence; for wherever "company tenements" are so good as to make it to the advantage of the operative to rent them, the individual has no inducement to become a householder. This fact partly explains why few property owners were encountered in the Augusta

TYPES.

mills. In Athens a number of the workers live on their own domain; and in Columbus, of seventy-three employees personally questioned, eleven reported that taxes on a home were paid. Cotton manufacturing being comparatively new in Atlanta, the industrial community is a mosaic of elements from distant parts: diversity of occupations appeals strongly to the fickle disposition of the crackers, so that the mills are a less steady source of revenue.

About country establishments the provision for housing the wage-earners is often inadequate. It is at serious risk to life and health that the operatives in remote settlements are forced to lodge in rotting, neglected habitations, even though they be rent free. The choicest of these rickety abodes was described by a girl whose only home it had been for fourteen years: "I reckin hit 'll set up thar a right smart while yit, but hit 's pow'ful cold en leaky." Even where better quarters are obtainable the cracker prefers some great shackling structure impossible to heat or to humanize, because, forsooth, as one occupant alleged, "here we has a dinin'-hall." Wont to flock to the suburbs of a city, just beyond tax limit, they herd, dirty and disorderly, in filth and semi-idleness in leaky hovels without other furniture than the barest necessaries. If there is ground enough to grow a few vegetables the responsibility of cultivating it becomes a pretext that often deprives a household of the earnings of its head. Men habitually abandon work on pretense of "makin' er gardin." A little girl, who with her sister's help supported a family of six, when asked why her father did not assist, excused him on the plea, "Dad does our gard'nin'"— the garden being a plat ten by twelve.

Wages in the Georgia mills seem low when judged by Northern standards; yet when the cost of living and the surroundings and the efficiency of the operatives are taken into account, pay is relatively as high as where a more complex civilization has created artificial wants. The interdependence in the South between corporation and employees is rare in New England factory villages. The names, residence, circumstances, needs, failings, or virtues are here well known to the officials; in time of trouble or suspension of work money is freely advanced, and by an unwritten code of human feeling long illness or other disability often brings the regular weekly pay. Not only are relations more friendly and intimate than at the North, but there is conspicuous freedom from the spirit of drive and despotism. Even New England superintendents and overseers in these Southern mills soon glide into the prevailing *laissez-faire* or else leave in despair, though admitting that the cracker might be trained to the highest efficiency.

The country mills are archaic in their management, and in the habits of the operatives. Not a clock or watch is owned in the settlement. Life is regulated by the sun and the factory bell, which rings for rising, breakfast, and work. The hours of labor vary from seventy to seventy-two a week. The workers were "borned in the country," and seldom visit even the neighboring town. In complete isolation, dead monotony, and dense, undisturbed ignorance, their

toilsome lives run out. Now and then a strolling minister enlivens the little barnlike church on the hilltop, where also an intermittent Sunday-school furnishes the only religious instruction; of secular there is none. All purchases are made on the order system at the "company's store"; and though it is not compulsory for the operatives to deal there, distance from market constitutes compulsion, and the buyer is at a disadvantage from the absence of competition and the loss of the educational comparison of values and management of his own funds. The wages of each member of the household swell the common gains, and women upon his own efforts, and do not fall mannalike from the heaven of the proprietor's generosity.

The genius for evading labor is most marked in the men. Like Indians in their disdain of household work, they refuse to chop wood or bring water, and often subsist entirely upon the earnings of meek wives or fond daughters, whose excuses for this shameless vagabondism are both pathetic and exasperating. One young wife claims that her stalwart husband has "been er-cuttin' wood"; yet when closely questioned she is obliged to admit his worthlessness: "Fur mos' two years now he hain't er-binner." The

COOKING IN THE YARD.

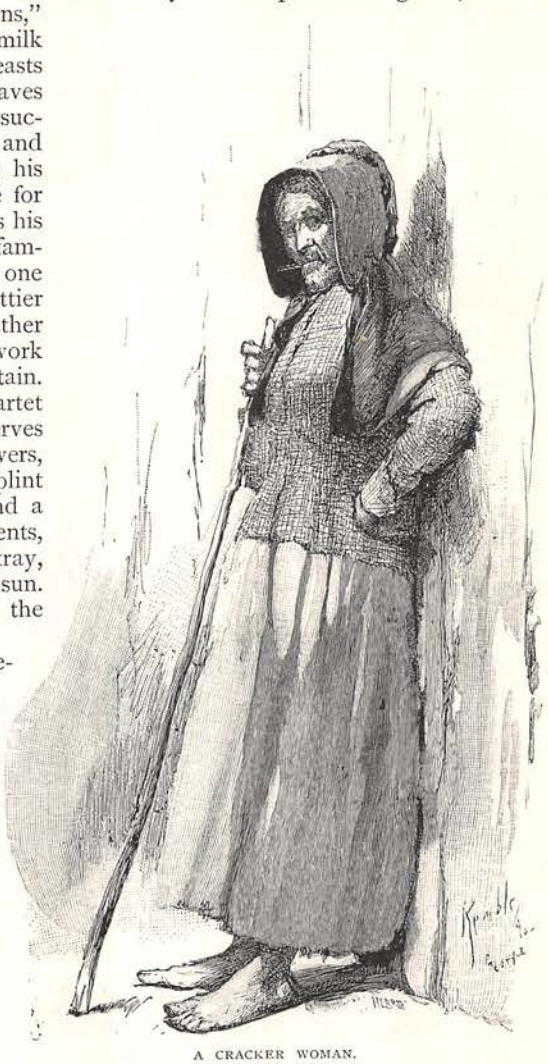
often work a lifetime without touching a cent of their pay. One forlorn old maid lamented: "I hain't seed er dollar sence Confed money gave out. Hit 'u'd be good fur sore eyes ter see er genewine dollar." Like so many machines the unsophisticated creatures drudge on, never questioning the prices paid. Such security or indifference is possible but in two conditions of industrial society — entire ignorance, or unshaken trust in the rectitude of employers: both of these conditions obtain here. As the cracker neither adds nor multiplies, it is only by being refused further credit he is made to realize that his supplies depend father of two little children in the mill does no work at all "'cep'in' hit 's haulin' light wood." A straggling potato row, a scant corn patch on the hillside, an attenuated cow, a few chickens, one pig, and woods full of pine knots for fires bound the Georgia countryman's earthly aspirations except as to clothing, tobacco, and whisky, which his spouse's wages supply. She it is who must feed the poultry and milk the cow. His lordship descends to no duties so menial.

The daily life being so simple, the expenditures of the cracker are proportionally small. A weaver by ten months' work earned $140,

supported herself and an invalid sister, and laid by $40 in a year. Transplanted to the city, the mode of life of the poor white is not more sumptuous. Bacon, corn-pone, "greens," molasses, and coffee are the regimen, with milk occasionally, and, in "hog-killin'" time, feasts of spare-rib and sausage. The corn that waves over Georgia fields furnishes in various succulent forms the staple diet of the native, and transmitted into other elements supplies his bacon and whisky, while the stalks serve for fuel. At corn-shuckings the cracker courts his sweetheart. Of these identical shucks the family bed is made; and shake it or knead it as one will, the hard stalks only bristle in knottier ridges. Or he reposes on three or four feather beds piled one upon another, a patchwork quilt being spread over the squshy mountain. Into another like suffocating heap a quartet of bairns is tumbled. The kitchen often serves as bedroom for the family. A chest of drawers, a bald, decrepit hair trunk, a mirror and splint chairs, a table, a few cracked dishes, and a gourd complete the household equipments, while outside the cabin hangs the biscuit tray, and a few peaches or apples dry in the sun. Not uncommonly the cooking is done in the yard in a big pot or over glowing coals.

When money flows in steadily the wage-earners buy the best cuts of meat and are liberal consumers of expensive early vegetables and fruit. The dispensers of charity for a church, more trustful than prudent, gave a mill family professing to be in dire need orders on a grocer for a certain amount weekly, and were astounded to find that for the meat and meal indicated the tradesman was persuaded to substitute fruit, nuts, and raisins. At every door children squat around a tin plate of syrup, dipping in it big hunks of corn-pone and smearing their yellow faces more widely with each mouthful. The sweet "pertatur" roasted in the ashes is always ready — a great advantage where the housewife "bees tired" from her birth. In the cracker's kitchen lard is the universal solvent. The tyrant of his home, the key to his habits, the blazon of his civilization, is the frying-pan.

A niggard as to eatables, a spendthrift as to furniture, in personal habiliments the poor white strikes a golden mean. The usual attire of the women is all unbleached cotton or a neat check or gingham, the serviceable product of their own looms. The style of dress has not altered a seam in thirty years. A peculiar lankiness characterizes the plain, round skirts, accented by the spare, angular form. Overskirts are rare innovations, regarded with envious heart-burnings, the cause of many grotesque adaptations of costume, and indulged in chiefly by the young and giddy. These additions to the toilet are usually of cheap worsted goods, intense



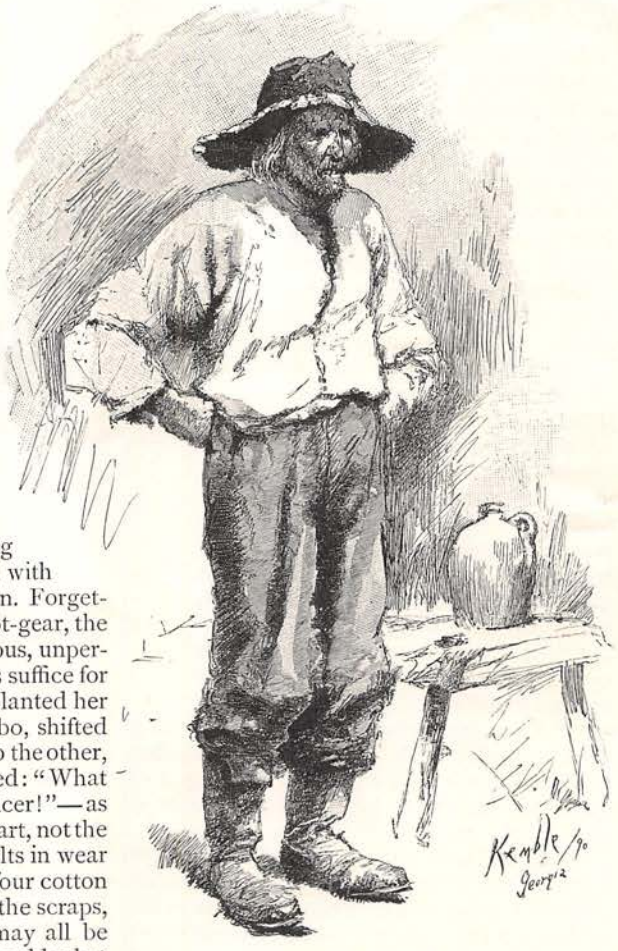
A CRACKER WOMAN.

green, or brilliant saffron, surmounting a cotton gown, the whole array made more incongruous by that homeliest head-gear, the slat sun-bonnet, universal badge of the female cracker. From the end of the tunnel formed by the uncompromising pasteboard slats a shrewd, hard, yellow, cadaverous face peers out. When the covering is removed, the scant hair is revealed caught straight back from the brow and skewered into an untidy knot. Occasionally one of the plainest old souls, seized with desire for modern finery, after protracted "tradin'" and haggling becomes possessed of a fashionable bonnet, gay with yellow or pink flowers and cheap lace, which is donned with her best cotton robe and brogans. The inborn taste for

color breaks out in flaring ribbons, variegated handkerchiefs, and startling vivid raiment visible miles away, ill-made, ill-fitting, of cheap texture, and loaded with tawdry trimmings, from which the eye turns with relief to the antiquated, unassuming, lanky figures innocent of corset or bustle, swathed in straight skirts and bodice bulging at the shoulders.

The men wear baggy jeans trousers, often home-made, strapped up almost under the armpits, or else without suspenders and dragging about the hips. The shirt is of unbleached homespun without collar or cuffs. A low battered, soft felt hat, or a third-hand beaver, completes the costume, except when for grandeur a vest is added. The favorite occupation of the men is to spit, stare, and whittle sticks. In the mills the boys are dressed in trousers a world too big, father's or grandfather's lopped off at the knees and all in tatters. Girls are clad in cotton gowns through whose rifts the skin is visible, and few have ever disported even a cast-off hat or an outgrown wool dress. Shoes and stockings, though a luxury, are possessed by all except the most miserable and abandoned of the women. They are, however, put away "for Sunday," and so carefully economized that the simple owners walk barefooted four or five miles to church or camp-meeting with the precious articles wrapped in a handkerchief. Within sight of their goal they sit down in a bend of the snake fence, dust off their tired feet, and, donning the prized hosiery and shoes, march with pride into the assembled congregation. Forgetting the infrequency of the use of foot-gear, the writer expressed surprise to a vigorous, unperverted cracker that one pair of shoes suffice for a year. The tawny giantess firmly planted her big bare feet, stuck her arms akimbo, shifted the quid of tobacco from one cheek to the other, and with dramatic indignation retorted: "What does yer take me fur? I hain't no daincer!"—as if only devotion to the terpsichorean art, not the ordinary process of locomotion, results in wear and tear of shoe leather. Three or four cotton gowns, as many "bunnits" made of the scraps, a little homespun for underwear, may all be bought for six dollars, and with a blanket shawl for winter the wardrobe is complete. Sewing and laundering are more costly. The traditional prejudice against the washtub ruled the mind of a limp, tattered creature who earned scarcely enough to keep soul and body together. "You do your own washing?" was innocently demanded. "Is I a nigger?" quoth she, witheringly.

Dressy young girls devote $20 to $100 a year to their attire, selected without judgment and rarely useful or presentable. The hard-earned funds are wasted on trumpery, pinchbeck jewelry, cotton lace, coarse high-tinted flowers, satin shoes for the dusty highways, and costumes of indescribable hues. It is pathetic to see this ignorant groping for beauty in their hard and colorless lives. In lieu of pretty homes and bright possessions the women make themselves a walking rainbow. Lacking in the crude, impulsive cracker nature is that sense of proportion, that fine instinct for harmony, which dominates the European peas-



A RACE PROBLEM.

ant dress, subordinating color and ornament both to the individual wearer and to the fitness of things. In the South an unsuitable or grotesque fashion rules the hour; and these half-developed creatures being imitative, not

HEADS OF MILL WOMEN.

artistic, and constantly reaching out for warmth, glow, richness, their tropic fire bursts forth in chromatic symphonies which stand them instead of music, poetry, and art.

The inevitable hardships everywhere so disastrous to the workers in textile fabrics fail to account for the feeble constitutions and wrecked health of so many of these Southern toilers. Other causes are manifestly active. The malaria lurking about water-courses ravages the mills on the streams and invades the houses of the employees, usually close to the bank. Drainage is neglected and epidemics stalk relentless. The use of snuff is a withering curse. Hardened *habitués* smoke and chew tobacco, and dip snuff and "lip" the powder. The weed is applied with a softened twig dipped into the snuff and rubbed on the teeth. All down the alleys of the factories are women and little girls with the inevitable stick in their mouth; it is their companion also in the street and at social gatherings, and scarcely laid aside for meals or sleep. The invariable signs, a carrot-like cuticle, livid lips, black-rimmed eyes, flabby, morbid flesh, proclaim the victim of the poison. Excessive indulgence in this stimulant often creates the desire for a stronger, and among the older women drunkenness is not uncommon. Indeed snuff-dippers might be mistaken for inebriates, having the ashy, rickety, depraved aspect that follows a long debauch.

The weak constitutions and frightful appearance as well as the various maladies of the factory operatives are further confirmed by the early age at which work in the mills is begun. For want of legal interference the child is sacrificed either to the dire need or to the avarice, selfishness, and lazy neglect of its parents, and is harnessed to the treadmill as soon as misrepresentations to the overseer will effect that end. When five and six years old the juveniles follow the mothers to the mills, where they are incarcerated till premature old age and helplessness bring about their dismissal. This early decay, this sudden failure of the powers, descends like a devastating stroke. Unmarried women of thirty are wrinkled, bent, and haggard. Mothers who, despite maternal cares, ought to look as fresh as their daughters, seem to carry the weight of a century on their bowed backs. Twenty years of vitality sapped by summer heat, eaten out by ague, stolen by dyspeptic miseries! Sickly faces, stooping shoulders, shriveled flesh, suggest that normal girlhood never existed, that youth had never rounded out the lanky figure, nor glowed the sallow cheek. A slouching gait; a drooping chest, lacking muscular power to expand; a dull, heavy eye; yellow, blotched complexion; dead-looking hair; stained lips, destitute of color and revealing broken teeth — these are the dower of girlhood in the mills. Take a little maid whose face is buried in her sunbonnet, and who, when asked her age, responds, "I 'm er-gwine on ten." Push back her bonnet, hoping to find the personification of that grace, vigor, and joy which some demon has stamped out of the saturnine faces of the elders. A sad spectacle reveals itself. Out of a shock of unkempt hair look glassy eyes ringed with black circles reaching far down her yellow cheeks. Her nose is pinched, the features aborted, the yellow lips furrowed with snuff stains. The skin is ghastly, cadaverous, the flesh flabby, the frame weak and loose-jointed. The dirty legs and feet are bare. A tattered cotton slip clings to the formless limbs.

"When do you go to school, my child?"

"Hain't never been thar," the waif responds when shyness has yielded to cajoleries.

"Never at school! Can't you read?"

"No, 'm; but Lizy kin."

"Who is Lizy?"

"Me 'n' Lizy 's sisters."

"Where is your father?"

"Him done dade."

"And your mother?"

A backward motion of the thumb to the mill is the only response.

"What is your name?"

A jumble of mysterious sounds, which, after many repetitions, are understood to signify "Georgy Alybamy Missippy Kicklighter."

"What do you do all day, Georgy?"

"Wuks." The same backward turn of the thumb.

"How long have you been working?"

"Ev'ry sence I was mighty nigh er kitten."

Importuned to state at what age the delights of kittenhood ceased and toil began, she vouchsafes:

"Seven year."

"What do you do in the mill?"

"Pieces ainds." Then, with sudden recollection, "But I hain't been nowhar 'cep'n' in mill he'pen' maw sence I was five year ole."

"And were you never put at school?"

"Teacher done sont fur us, but me 'n' Lizy nary one did n't git thar, fur hit broke."

"You look sallow. Does anything ail you?"

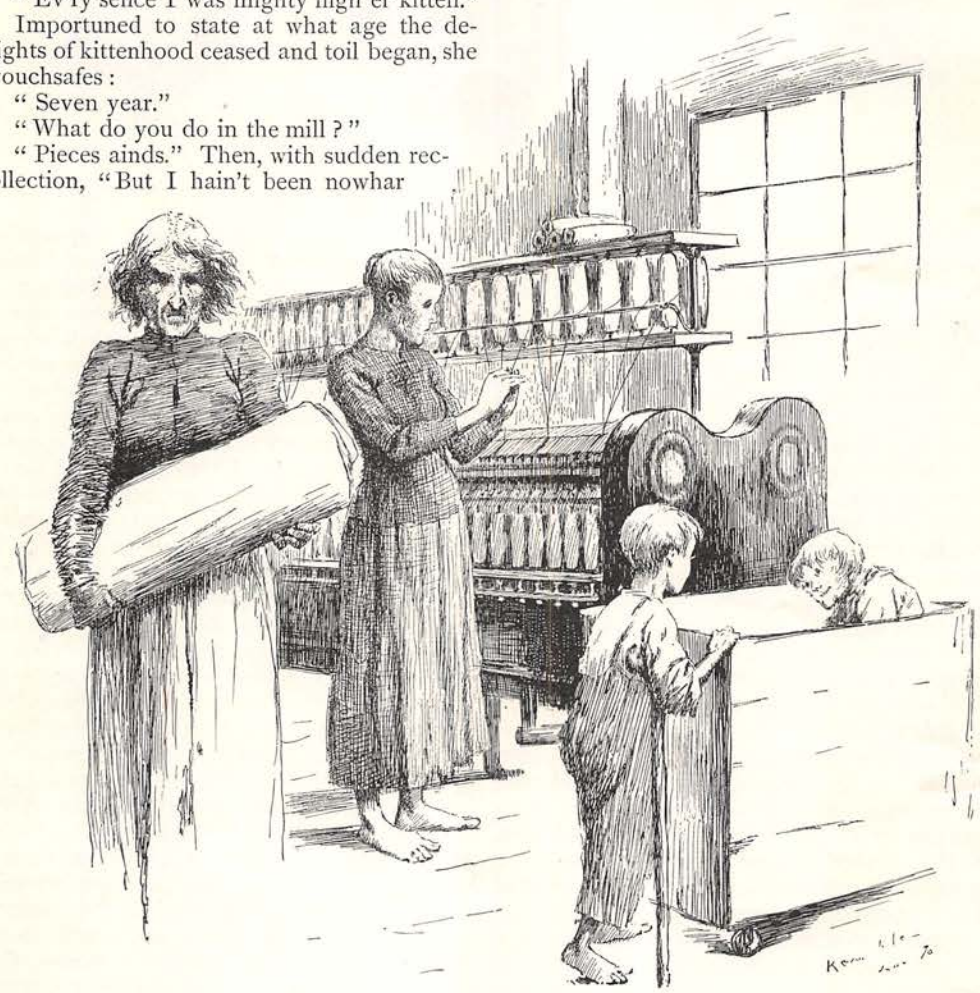
"I be pow'ful weak."

"What does the doctor give you?"

"Don' give me nothin'. Maw, she gimme groun' pease. She 'low them 's better 'n doctor's truck fur agy."

This is the product of three generations of mill workers, the grandmother, mother, and child drudging side by side. None of them could read or write, none had ever been four miles from their shanty and the factory. "Lizy" was the freak of nature, the meteoric genius of the family, having learned her letters at Sunday-school.

With increasing years came increasing woes. A widow of fifty-three who has spun since she was seven scorns the medical gentry. "I bees hardened ter dust. Ef I bees sick, I jes trots ter mill an' wuks it offen me. Hain't no time ter be foolin' 'long er doctors. Got my little business ter ten' ter. But I hain't so kinder peart as I uster was."



IN THE MILL.

The crackers are a "whining set," and valetudinarianism is popular. To be robust and hearty savors of bucolic vulgarity; to be "alers gruntin'" approaches the languid delicacy so admired in "rich folks," and occult maladies are a gage of respectability. Allowing for these idiosyncrasies, however, twenty-eight per cent. of the cotton operatives are seriously out of

health. Not invalids are they to be called, convalescents, supernumeraries, or elegant idlers, but women and children baptized in suffering and sacrifice, who stand eleven and twelve hours six days in the week tending complex machinery, or walking miles up and down long frames in a steaming atmosphere where ordinary unsodden human flesh becomes limp and helpless. For the sake of dear dependents the will forces the weary muscles to act and knits the relaxed nerves. Surely, fatally, the joy dies out of the eyes of childhood, girlhood is but a flickering shadow, and maturity an enforced decrepitude, a lingering old age, a quenching of the fires of life before they half burn.

Though the public are indifferent, mill officials as a rule oppose child labor as utilized in the South, and often a wholesale dismissal takes place, quickened by protests of labor unions; but under various pretexts the gnome-like toilers creep back, especially into the country and suburban mills because of the scarcity of hands. A most potent factor in this abuse is that the fathers will not work and the little ones must. Year after year bills to prevent the employment of children under ten and twelve are defeated in the legislature, less from objection to the measure than from criminal indifference and because a time clause has been added reducing the hours of labor; and this curtailment, the manufacturers feel, would be disastrous to their interests. Meanwhile, without palliation or excuse, the murder of the innocents goes on. "Mary Belle Surrelle Jones," a wizened midget of eight, whose father is dead, began work in the factory at five years old. She went to school a little, but does not know her letters, and uses unlimited quantities of snuff. Let a loquacious scrap of nine years tell her own story.

"I wur eight yur ole come er Chewsdy when maw drawed my fus pay. Don' have money much offen; maw she gimme er quarter laist buthday. Maw 's hur in er mill, en paw 's hur, en Sailly she he'ps maw spool 'ca'se she hain't big 'nough ter piece ainds. Sailly she 's six, en maw hain't got nary one ter leave her wid, so she bring her ter mill. No, 'm, I hain't got no book-learnin'. Yais, 'm, I dips. Overseer t' other mill he says, 'Calline, dip snuff,' says he; 'ca'se, ef yer don't, blue dye 'll pizen yer.'"

The adult operatives in the older manufactories cannot assign a date at which their apprenticeship began, remembering only that they were "pow'ful young." Girls from fifteen to twenty-five recollect no other playground than the country factories, having been brought there in their mothers' arms in the early dawn and taken home again under the stars; they have been reared amid machinery, their cradle often a box of bobbins, their coverlet the hanks of yarn. Here, robbed of sunlight and air, smothered in dust and poisonous exhalations, babies from one to five years are entombed; and the precious hours of infancy, passed without love or care, merge into weary drudgery as soon as the young limbs can be bound to the wheels of toil.

Demoralized by a lifetime of travail amid insanitary conditions, underfed, and badly housed, without education, incentives, or ideals, the limited mental development of the cracker is scarcely a reproach to him. Though ignorant, he is rarely stupid. His native shrewdness and sturdy common sense save him from imposition, make him quick to see an advantage. Reading character with intelligent intuition, if circumlocution fails he surprises by direct attack; baffled here, wheedling, or sheer persistence, or the "poor mouth" he puts up, makes his plea quite irresistible. His isolation from current events is absolute, his want of general information fathomless. Few of the older operatives know how old they are. Their age is referred to as a tangible or inflammable possession. "Maw tuk hit away," or "Hit burned up when the house was set afire." Many poor souls being unable to count or add, the confusion of statement is often startling. In 1887 a haggard sexagenarian persisted that she was "jes thirty en nary day over," when she has a son twenty-two and her husband was killed in the war. "How old are you?" usually elicited a comical look of uncertainty. "Now yer got me," was the constant rejoinder. Of three hundred and twenty-eight women and girls fifty-six were unable to state even approximately where they or their parents first saw the light. A variety of leading questions gained no decisive clue, though all presumably were native Georgians. Twenty-seven more were so doubtful that accurate data were unobtainable, and others "reckined" and "disremembered" too much for statistical purposes. "In the country," meaning not in a city, might signify any State; and answers recorded as definite were really only partial, affording hints interpreted by the statistician. Concerning localities, dates, and lapse of time the same untrustworthiness is universal. The only seasons in the vocabulary are "cotton-hoein'," "horg-killin'," or "'tween craps." Such homely phrases indicate an intimacy with the processes of nature neither critical nor poetic. Imagining every stranger a "Yankee," they are offish and suspicious till reassured, for sectional animosities still smolder. The President, according to their befuddled creed, is at the focus of all roads, and to enter that august presence is regarded as beatification. Despite this awe, the crackers feel quite neighborly towards the distant magnate of the White House, and at parting often graciously remark, "Tell the President howdy fur me."

Impoverished by the civil war, oppressed by a relatively enormous burden of taxation, Georgia has yet made since 1872 prodigious strides in her common schools. However progressive the educational system in certain cities, in the villages and country the public school organization is defective and appallingly inadequate to the needs of future mothers and citizens. The "ambulatory schools," holding but two months' session, have only lately been abolished. Appropriations have recently sufficed for a school term of ninety days in the year, and since 1888 a larger fund has been voted. In each subdistrict, if the population warrants, one or more teachers, often incompetent, are certified; but in sparsely settled localities no schools exist. In the absence of compulsion pupils are frequently not forthcoming, and attendance at the best is phenomenally uncertain, lasting one week or one month as home conditions or untoward dispositions dictate. Large numbers of poor, illiterate white children never enter a schoolroom. Parents, insensible to the advantages of education, make no attempt to have their children attend school, and generation after generation remains untaught. In proximity to cities where good public schools are maintained nine months of the year the outlook is more favorable, but even here the privileges of enlightenment are unavailable for the poor crackers, whose wretched little cabins being built beyond suburban limits and the tax collector's arm, their offspring are debarred municipal tuition.

To an utter indifference to letters as much as to these preventable obstacles is due the woful intellectual starvation of the present generation of Anglo-Saxons in the South. The heading, "Working Women in Cities," printed in big capitals, was submitted as a test to a brawny lass of twenty-four. Her mind ran on a recent religious revival, for in good faith she spelt out the words, "Work now for Jesus." A spinster of thirty-three apologized for breaking down on a more difficult test line offered. "Kin pernounce almos' ary word; but some, cain't speak 'em plain," she averred deprecatingly. An emaciated shadow of nineteen cannot read, and knows nothing but the factory routine. When questioned as to the occupation of her father, an able-bodied vagrant, who spends the earnings of his daughters, filial affection inciting her to invent some authentic employment, she drawled out: "My paw?

A CRACKER FIREPLACE.

Waal, paw — paw does our traidin'." Hear the ring of honest independence, admire the pluck of this girl of twenty who manages words of one syllable: "Tuk up readin' uv my own haid uv er night. Maw 's had two husbins, both on 'em killed. 'Pears like Godlemighty did n't want nary one uv us ter have none. Maw she sets an' knits. Sis an' me was both down at onct six weeks. Man we traides wid he trusted us, an' we paid ev'ry dog-gone red cent — ef we did n't, yer may eat me."

Of 330 white women and children tested, from eight to seventy years old, 56, or 17 per cent., read words of four or five syllables, some fluently, some hesitatingly; these could also write. Seventy, or 21 per cent., read headings of two syllables with varied degrees of ease from readiness to slow spelling, and all this class could at least write their names. One hundred and four, or 31½ per cent., read monosyllabic sentences, but in most cases stumblingly and with infinite pains. None of this group could write at all, or even spell their own name unless the appellation was very simple. Practically they were wholly illiterate, their knowledge of letters being inferior to that of primary pupils. The remaining 100, or 30 per cent., embracing children, girls, and adults, did not know the alphabet and were in benighted ignorance. Applying the Massachusetts grading, 61½ per cent. of the Georgia cotton operatives neither read nor write. Had other country mills been investigated the percentage of illiterates would have been far higher. Some years ago in a newly opened Atlanta factory, with a large contingent of rural workers, occasion arose for the eighty women in the spinning room to sign their names. Only two could do so; these were two colored girls employed as sweepers.

WASHING.

Peculiarly interesting, as disproving even a suspicion of racial limitations of intellect, are the fifty-six females who compassed five-syllabled words and who are fair scribes. Such information as they have acquired was wrested at excessive personal cost under adverse circumstances. By the light of pine knots and sputtering tallow candles the mill workers have conned the primer after standing twelve hours in the factory and straining over machinery till every muscle ached. With no help they picked out the letters of their own name or of Bible words as the minister read, and then with a hint or two have mastered the hieroglyphics. Sunday-school teachers have instructed others. Some have spent their tired evenings at the mill school, supported in their weariness by hopes and aspirations the hardest destiny could not quell.

Though the second group of seventy-six might interpret easy portions of Holy Writ or of newspapers, such severe intellectual athletics are seldom attempted. Save a rare copy of the Scriptures, neither books nor journals are found in the cracker's possession. Free libraries being, so to speak, non-existent in the South, a priggish sort of Sunday-school narrative is the chief literature of the industrial population. Their imagination is captivated by sensuous pictures of a future state, and the Bible powerfully appeals to their emotional and susceptible minds by its inexhaustible stories of war and heroism, its stirring appeals, fiery denunciations, and magnificent promises. Both entertainment and spiritual comfort distil from its well-thumbed pages, and its principles sometimes inspire a piety almost saintly.

The nearly and the quite illiterate comprise all grades of character and manners. Even among confirmed snuff devotees, however, illiteracy is not always synonymous with unworthiness or vulgarity. Rather is it often a misfortune, sealing a beautiful nature from higher possibilities. The normal Georgia cracker under all her nicotine stains overflows in simplicity and unperverted goodness. The dust of the mill makes a halo about lovely, unselfish lives.

Roughness of speech and manners covers a gentle, loyal heart and unswerving integrity. Even the depraved hide their swagger and debauchery from the gaze of innocence, and smite wrong-doing in the young with instinctive wrath and prophetic abhorrence. Dissoluteness of life and speech are rather an excrescence than a vital disease.

Early marriages are more frequent than among populations less mercurial, more conservative, and slower to mature. As a corollary of hasty and ill-advised unions, desertion often ensues. The instability of the conjugal bond and the indifference with which marriage is often regarded are evidenced by the boasting of many matrons as to the ease with which they have rid themselves of objectionable partners and taken others more to their fancy. Divorce is deemed a disgrace; but the legality of a second so-called marriage is rarely questioned, nor are the contractors ostracized.

Religious feeling is usually fervid, and in these untaught natures is tinged with superstitious fears; church-going is to their barren life a consecrated service. To thousands of children the mission Sunday-schools afford the only instruction, religious or secular, often neutralized by irregular attendance. Too abjectly poor to mingle with pew-holding congregations, the cracker drifts to the chapels and country meeting-houses where pulpits are filled by itinerants or local preachers. The piety of these peripatetic ministers is in some cases extremely questionable. Exhorting on Sunday, "peddling about" during the week, they live in flagrant idleness among their flocks, to whom denial of hospitality to a pastor is a cardinal sin. The shrewd poor whites are quick

A STROLLING PREACHER.

to miss the odor of sanctity; but being impenetrable to the idea that intellectual labor can have the same value as manual, or indeed be considered work at all, they regard even industrious, pious clergymen as idlers in the vineyard, with whom their hard-got gains must not be shared. The inimical spirit towards the local minister originates less in irreverence than in instinctive sense of justice. Mingled with contrition for neglect of religious duty is a righteous revolt against imposition. One delicious specimen of the cracker genus was outspoken in her ire.

"What church I goes ter? I be Baptis', Methody, an' Pres'teun. But I never drapped a nickel in meetin' sence I was borned. Preachers is ez able fur ter wuk ez I is, en they mus' scuffle roun' fur theyse'ves en they ladies ez I does. I loves ter see 'em wuk. All ary preacher gits outen this chile he kin put in his eye."

The denomination specially favored by the natives cannot be named, because, in a truly catholic spirit, they "goes ter all churches, fust one, then t' other." A Baptist declines water except unpolluted, for "the mud" quenches her pious inclinations. The single lady who was scandalized at the inference that she was a "daincer" lives with her sister and brother-in-law, and thus describes her home: "Sis she goes 'head in ther fambly. I cain't read nary bit. Wages hain't er sukkumstaince—like eatin' soup with er knittin'-needle. But I kin wash ez well ez any nigger—my maw learnt me ter love ter wuk. I 'm er shoutin' Methody, but hain't got nary rig fitten ter w'ar ter meetin'. Afeerd I 'll be grinned at. I 'm putty tol'bly homely, but I hates ter be grinned at."

The nomenclature of this uncanny folk is curious and significant. Nancy and Polly are not scorned or transformed as in finical circles. Masculine baptismal titles are numerous, Johnny Smith being not a tow-headed, freckle-faced urchin, but a spinster of uncertain age. Infantile nicknames cling to adults, and old hags are still Babe and Honey. The goddesses are represented by Juno and Vesta, the fruits by Orange and Piny; Savannah and Atlanta, Georgia and Alabama, sleep side by side, and occasionally one puny offshoot is crushed beneath the names of several States. Arcenia Calcedonia is not a heroine of romance or the incarnation of patriotism. She is a squat, ashy-faced, sandy-haired body whose forebears for four generations have "grubbed fur er livin'" in the red hills and gullies of Georgia. Though hard living, dyspepsia, and toil have blotted out almost all beauty among the women, the ugly brown chrysalis of girlhood sometimes frees a glorious being: a refined face and a queenly carriage suggest the strayed aristocrat or the princess in disguise until plebeian lineage is betrayed by the cracker drawl.

That the poor whites may appropriate Coleridge's beatitude, "Blessed is he who has found his work," their stanchest defender does not claim. Said a candid wife of her better half:

"Why, bless yer heart, honey, my ole man 'll let a purp eat the grub offen his plate 'ca'se he 's too darned lazy ter holler 'Git!'"

The women are moody and capricious, alternating between spasms of exertion and long collapses. The utmost ingenuity is practised in dispensing with articles to save the trouble of getting new ones or mending the old, all utensils that frugal people repair vanishing into the limbo of a shed reserved for "plunder." The mothers being immured in the factories, family life is a travesty. The faculty for adornment, for beautifying their belongings, is a missing sense. The bareness of their unlovely abodes is more abject than the direst poverty can excuse. One artistic susceptibility is paramount — music is both a passion and a spell. Their dirge-like funeral wails, religious songs, and ecstatic camp-meeting choruses are maintained at a white heat of exaltation.

The mill operatives display a propensity for roving that has trickled down in some hereditary channel from their restless Anglo-Saxon forefathers. Their cohesiveness being proverbial, one vagrant nature keeps a whole family moving. Improvident and imperturbable, the easy-going philosophy of the lazy is, "Cain't wuk fur two days' victuals in one"; or the rather skulking faith of the pious, "The Lord will provide." The rapid advance of the South in material prosperity has shaken the proletariate out of serene complacence in ancestral poverty and personal indolence. They bestir themselves and save until they are domiciled beneath their own roof. The forces that turn the cracker to economy and money-getting were subtly analyzed by a wise old weaver.

"'Fo' the war, honey, them 'ristocrats had all the plaintations, en houses, en fine doin's. Po' white folks was n't nowhar. We was glaid ter run er loom, en buy er pint uv 'lasses en live offen rich man's corn. Now, ev'ry cuss with er yaller steer is er-gittin' rich. Even them niggers, bless yer soul, is er-buyin' uv er house. White folks cain't let them niggers be er lead mule. We 's 'bleeged ter git up en git."

Unrefined often in thought as in life, their similes offensive to ears polite, their manners unpolished, a strain of the barbaric pervades their uncouth ethics. Women sometimes curse and brawl. Ribaldry, however, is not the outcome of depraved instincts, but of a silly sensationalism, a bravado to win notoriety, an affectation more than a trait. Neither in countenance nor in demeanor is there brutality or

degradation. Among their guileless rustic castes, under the vulgarity of the worst natures abide a gracious cordiality, an originality, and a freshness, that lift them above the smirch of ordinary disreputable vice. Their figures, drawn from life itself, are apt, although not over-delicate. Their very coarseness of expression is picturesque, and even their immorality is so incongruous that it is not without humor. In bearing the crackers are not surly and forbidding, but friendly and naïve; not brazen or dogmatic, but shy and deprecating; not dull and hidebound, but alert and responsive; not subtle or introversive; not overreaching and selfish, but full of sympathy and gentle tact. Their shrewdness, loyalty, quaint simplicity, frank, open-mouthed wonder, their transparent mentality and unexpected moral obliquities, make a fascinating study.

The vernacular, while possessing similarities to the negro dialect, has qualities that never merge into the African lingo. Widely different from the rich, loud, sonorous tones of the darky is the nasal twang of the thin, piping voices. Even laughter is an attenuated cackle, not a vigorous expiration. Peculiarities of diction succumb to education or association, but sometimes the vicious idioms and emphasis survive through generations, or reappear in the midst of culture to betray ancestry that could not spell. The dialect has interesting analogies with Anglo-Saxon roots, as though by lingual atavism the tongue leaped back to the ancient forms of speech.

Along the trend of the Alleghanies and following the rivers of their water-shed this race, certainly of colonial origin, has persisted and yet remains distinct in pronunciation and characteristics. Into Tennessee, Kentucky, Louisiana, and Missouri the type has been transplanted, and reigns clear-cut and rigid, borrowing few traits from environment, yet marking every other nationality with its unmistakable brand. Not the shallowest optimist, the most ardent apologist for the present social order, can be content with the benighted and unprogressive attitude of the poor whites, when out of this seemingly unpromising material education, mental, moral, and physical, might evolve the highest order of humanity. Even elementary teaching would produce the most dexterous operatives the world has ever seen, fitted by their light, airy physique, their deftness, and their intelligence for nice and complex industrial evolutions. An educated conscience and judgment, together with moral, mental, and manual training, must first be wedded to natural aptitudes. Until wise factory legislation is enforced, and the spiritual needs of man are also considered, until the lever of the common school is applied directly to the individual and the mass, all remedial agencies will find the human stratum stubbornly impervious and resistant.

Neither the strongest in outline nor the raciest in humor is the embodiment of native character here depicted. The mountaineers remain more unperverted by conventions and less pliable to civilization. A higher ethical interest, however, attaches to the mill workers because of their value as an element in the industrial problem; because their social conditions are fast rooted with the existing economic system, and their future is bound up with our industrial development. The cracker of the factories is the twin-sister of the heroine of fiction, clothed with flesh and blood; the pathos and tragedy of her life are real.

Clare de Graffenried.

A DEAD WORLD.

OFT when I gaze on the clear moon's full round,
Reveries amid my spirit form and float
Of how unaltering in her orb remote
One icy annihilation broods profound.
Yet radiant life may there have thriven renowned,
With intellectual aims of noblest note,
With patriots, heroes, men who ruled or wrote,
With progress widening to thought's utmost bound.

But now, poor moon, wan shadow of your past pride,
You bear a look like some pale, glorious flower's
When treacherous autumn wakes with poignant breath,
Forever lifting, while slow centuries glide,
Above this live and populous earth of ours,
Your silence, pallor and apathy of death!

Edgar Fawcett.