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POOR WHITE LABORERS IN SOUTHERN COTTON FACTORIES  
1789-1865\*

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The Southern States, despite climatic and soil conditions favoring an exclusively agrarian economy, entered the competition for factory manufacture of textiles nearly as early as the New England States. The domestic manufacture of cotton and woolen goods, long carried on in the South, provided a sound basis and experience for the gradual transition of labor from home to mill. When cotton mill promotion attracted greater interest in the 1830's and '40's, the observation was made that a girl who could make thread on a country spinning wheel could easily learn to do so on a throstle-frame, and this was equally true of the power loom.<sup>1</sup>

The manufacture of cotton in the South, originated in South Carolina in the winter of 1789, was begun by an English artisan who, with the support of local planters, opened a small factory near Stateburg, in the high hills of Santee. Here he built the necessary machinery, including throstle-frames of eighty-four spindles each. This small beginning led a contemporary to predict great advantages for South Carolina; he assured interested persons that "the high price of labor . . . will not operate as an obstruction, as these machines, with the labor of two hands, can do the work of fifty or sixty, and to as great perfection."<sup>2</sup>

In the years from 1789 to 1793 similar efforts were made in other Southern States. A group of Danville, Kentucky, residents established a mill in 1790. John Hague built and put into operation a two-hundred spindle mill near Nashville, Southwest Territory in 1791<sup>3</sup>, despite the fact that hostile Indians in this region provided an unusual occupational hazard for the frontier mill worker—the threat of scalping.<sup>4</sup> In 1794 Tench Coxe, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, reported that groups of

\* Research for this paper was sponsored by a grant-in-aid of the Social Science Research Council.

<sup>1</sup> *DeBow's Review*, VIII (February 1850), 134.

<sup>2</sup> *The (Annapolis) Maryland Gazette*, July 22, 1790. *The Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine* (Philadelphia, July 1790), V, 61.

For a reference to an earlier experiment in cotton manufacturing in South Carolina, see this *Magazine*, VIII (1907), 220.

<sup>3</sup> *The Knoxville (Tenn.) Gazette*, December 17, 1791.

<sup>4</sup> *The Maryland Gazette*, April 5, 1792.

either. I am afraid that we are fighting, as you say, with one hand tied behind our backs. We adjourn Saturday. I expect to leave tomorrow night for home. Do write me at Bennettsville.

Make my compliments acceptable to Mrs. Hammond and Miss Kate. I hope you got home well and continue so. How did you like the Springs? I do not think the Army will move soon.

I am, Dear Genl  
yours

L. M. Keitt

Gov Hammond  
Augusta Geo[rgia]

planters in South Carolina and Virginia were engaged in building cotton mills.<sup>5</sup>

One of the problems of these early entrepreneurs was securing labor which could be trained to operate these primitive factories. The Sateburg Mill in South Carolina solved this problem by giving employment to skilled artisans who had fled from England.<sup>6</sup> The few mills established in the eighteenth century were small and, at first, had no influence on the Southern economy. The growth of the cotton textile industry was slow, and the limited production of cotton was a deterrent. It was the crisis in American commerce during the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, and the war of 1812, which caused the more extensive growth of the industry. From 1802 until 1815 every state south of the Mason and Dixon Line became the site of small cotton textile mills.

In 1807 and 1808 there were attempts to establish cotton factories in Charleston, and in the latter year The South Carolina Homespun Company was successfully launched with a state charter. It was, however, destined to operate under most difficult conditions—conditions which the management blamed on imported Northern laborers who took advantage of the inexperience of the promoters to perform their tasks indifferently and inefficiently, and which resulted in the bankruptcy of the concern.<sup>7</sup> In 1812 the South Carolina legislature extended a loan of \$10,000 to Messrs. Caruth and Thompson, who attempted the establishment of a cotton mill in Greenville District.<sup>8</sup>

The War of 1812 and the depression afterwards in New England led to an extensive influx of unemployed cotton manufacturers to the South. South Carolina profited from the largest addition of such experienced workers. In 1816 and 1817 almost a dozen Providence, Rhode Island, residents settled in various parts of the South Carolina back country, and by 1825 had placed in operation six separate cotton factories.<sup>9</sup>

A Kentucky promoter, seeking to arouse similar immigration to that state, urged the legislature to prohibit the importation of foreign-made goods, predicting that this action would encourage skilled workers to settle in Kentucky and build mills which would give employment to

<sup>5</sup> Tench Coxe, *A View of the United States of America* (Philadelphia, 1794), p. 298.

<sup>6</sup> *The Maryland Gazette*, July 22, 1790.

<sup>7</sup> *City Gazette* (Charleston, S. C.), August 18, 1810.

<sup>8</sup> *Laws of South Carolina, 1812*, p. 30.

<sup>9</sup> J. B. O. Landrum, *History of Spartanburg County* (Atlanta, 1900), pp. 158-165.

"idle youth, and such as are not able or disposed to encounter the heats, and colds and toils of husbandry."<sup>10</sup> Cotton factories were also beginning to flourish in Maryland, mills in the vicinity of Baltimore were running 20,000 spindles, and the Warren Factory alone employed nine hundred men, women and children at its spindles and looms.<sup>11</sup>

The tariff of 1816, supported by John C. Calhoun, and that of 1828, which he opposed, did much to aid infant Southern cotton factories, while the growing agricultural depression forced many cotton planters to turn to manufactures in order to invest their money profitably. This depression was felt especially in the upper South in the states not entirely suited to wholesale production of cotton. However, the opportunities for cotton manufacture were practically unlimited throughout the South, and it had been often pointed out that unless the seaboard states took some action to encourage a diversified economy and offer remunerative employment to the poor whites and profitable investments to wealthy planters, they would suffer a growing loss of population, wealth, and power.<sup>12</sup>

The realization of the problem led North Carolina and Georgia to follow South Carolina's lead in extending legislative assistance to the promotion of industry. The legislatures of those two states established special committees to investigate the industrial opportunities offered within their bounds. With Charles Fisher as chairman, the North Carolina committee produced the most exhaustive study of this subject in the South before the time of William Gregg. Well authenticated by testimony on every aspect of the manufacture of cotton, this Fisher Report was so well prepared and so widely circulated throughout the South that it had an immediate effect on the increase of manufactures in this section. Its appeal had a dual value in that it proved the utility of employing either poor whites or slaves as factory laborers, and thus was calculated to appeal to planters with surplus slaves as well as those interested in diversified activities to halt the emigration of the poor.<sup>13</sup>

In the years after 1828 the number of cotton mills in the South grew steadily. Mills from all over the section reported that their em-

<sup>10</sup> *National Intelligencer* (Washington, D. C.), September 22, 1819, citing Matthew Lyon, "On Encouraging Manufactures," from *Kentucky Register*.

<sup>11</sup> *Commercial Directory* (Philadelphia, 1823), pp. 76-77; *Niles' Register*, XXIII (September 7, 1822), 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Niles' Register*, XXXV (October 11, 1828), 96.

<sup>13</sup> "A Report on the Establishment of Cotton and Woollen Manufactures and on the Growing of Wool, 1827-1828, MSS., Legislative Papers of North Carolina, 1800-1860, Archives Department, Raleigh.

ployees had proved efficient and were well satisfied with their occupations.<sup>14</sup> Hezekiah Niles, a well-known promoter of economic independence for the United States, pointed out that North Carolinians and Southerners in general were "as well suited for manufacturing as . . . any others." He expressed the hope and conviction that the spread of manufactures into the South would make the people of that section staunch supporters of the American System.<sup>15</sup>

By the middle thirties each of the states of the South was showing increased activity in cotton manufactures. Factories were permanently located even in the deep South. Many editors evaluated highly the advantages that such mills offered to the poor white population in providing steady and remunerative employment for those willing to earn an honest living.<sup>16</sup> It was constantly pointed out to the public that this type of work was light and especially suited for widows and orphans who could not compete in the fields with slave labor.<sup>17</sup>

However, there was a notable reluctance among many of the lower middle-class to accept employment in cotton mills. This attitude was more pronounced in regions where cotton cultivation was most prevalent. The small farmer was actuated by the hope of someday elevating himself to the rank of the planter aristocracy—a dream, however illusionary, that would have to be abandoned once cotton mill employment was accepted. Various editors lamented the feeling that such employment was lacking in social position and dignity, and one editor stated that "ideas and prejudices of this character are injurious to the program of any community—they are behind the intelligence, the age, and hostile to all the principles of a democratic government."<sup>18</sup>

Despite such prejudices, daughters of local farmers were frequently employed by the cotton factories. In North Carolina girls from sturdy Quaker stock lived at home, or boarded with friends or relatives, and walked to and from the mill. They usually remained only long enough to earn sufficient money to buy their trousseaux and fill their hope chests, and in this way provided for their own needs and aided their families.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Niles' Register*, XL (June 18, 1831), 282.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, XLI (December 3, 1831), 250-251.

<sup>16</sup> *Raleigh (N. C.) Register*, April 23, 1838.

<sup>17</sup> *Western Carolinian* (Salisbury, N. C.), February 21, 1839.

<sup>18</sup> *The North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), January 26, 1842.

<sup>19</sup> Holland Thompson, *From the Cotton Field to the Cotton Mill* (New York, 1906), pp. 51-52.

Those to whom mill work most appealed were the large class of whites whose poverty was so abject that any opportunity for improvement was welcome; although the men were reluctant to take employment, they had no objection to their wives and children doing so. The erection of a cotton mill always drew more applicants for positions than were available. The cotton mill and village, provided by capitalists as benefactors of the community, were heralded as an answer to many varied problems. It was thought that they would be a greater charity than an orphan asylum, would serve to civilize and Christianize those who lacked opportunities to attend church or school, and become a haven for families ruined by drunken fathers. For the large numbers drawn from the piney woods and sand barrens, the cotton mill and its cash wage meant decent food, clothing, and shelter for the first time in their lives. The neat villages of workers' homes must have appeared almost as palaces to those who owned nothing and had long lived in neglect and dreary solitude.<sup>20</sup>

For many it opened undreamed-of horizons. William Gregg reported that the mill girls of Graniteville were rivaling the belles of Charleston in dress; some bought pianos and studied singing, while others patronized the itinerant teachers and lecturers who visited the town. For those whose ambitions demanded more than mere routine mill work, there were opportunities for work in the company bank, stores, schools, and churches. One employee of the Graniteville Company served as the village librarian,<sup>21</sup> while at Prattville, Alabama, a village newspaper was started which provided an outlet for any literary pretensions of the workers. A Northerner traveling through the South praised the cotton manufacturers for offering employment and other activities for their workers, venturing the hope that other such enterprises would increase the usefulness of the poor as well as add materially to the prosperity of the section.<sup>22</sup>

The editor of the *Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel* was pleased by the number of Georgians and South Carolinians seeking factory employment in that community. This, he said, was not only an advantage to the worker and owner, but also to the city. One girl employed in the Augusta factory received five dollars a week, while her son brought the family income to a total of thirty-four dollars a month, helping

<sup>20</sup> The *Charlotte (N. C.) Journal*, August 29, 1845, citing the *Charleston (S. C.) Courier*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, September 5, 1845.

<sup>22</sup> Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution*, 2 vols. (New York, 1860), II, p. 388.



support a widowed grandmother. "We ask, is it no advantage to a community that its most needy families—and no one is above the possibility of want—be furnished with the means and situation to earn, without discredit or severe toil, each \$400 a year?"<sup>23</sup>

Throughout the ante-bellum period the question of workers' wages received much attention. The wages varied from state to state. In North Carolina children in some of the early mills were paid as little as twelve and a half cents a week,<sup>24</sup> in a period when children under twelve were being paid one dollar a week in New England. Factory wages were not only low, but the hours of work were long: the average worker was in the mill from eleven to thirteen hours a day, five and three-quarters day a week. In 1840 conditions had improved to the extent that girls and boys in Georgia were being paid seven dollars a month. In 1828 the Belleville Factory near Augusta paid its hands wages much over the average of other Georgia mill workers, and nearly equal to those paid in Massachusetts. Men were paid a dollar a day, women from two to four dollars a week, and children twenty-five cents a day.<sup>25</sup> By 1850 the mills of Columbus, Georgia, paid wages which ranged from twelve to seventy-five cents a day for common laborers, to two dollars and a half a day for foremen. Olmsted found that the average wages of girls in Georgia were \$7.39 a month in 1850, while similar workers in Massachusetts received \$14.57.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, even though wages were low, many workers were able to save money from their incomes. The workers at Graniteville, South Carolina, had deposits of almost \$9,000 in the company-operated bank; and there were some so affluent that they had purchased shares of the company's stock selling for \$500.<sup>27</sup>

James S. Buckingham, noted English lecturer, reported these mill occupations a "great relief" for the poor. Many of them, indeed, had no other opportunity for earning a livelihood. The importance of such employment grew rapidly, and when it was cut off in any manner, it caused great distress. When the Eatonton Factory, Georgia, burned, an eyewitness described the effect on the employees. "The shrieks of the

<sup>23</sup> *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine*, XX (January, 1849), 114.

<sup>24</sup> G. G. Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 1937), p. 255.

<sup>25</sup> James S. Buckingham, *The Slave States of America*, 2 vols. (London, 1840), II, 111-114.

<sup>26</sup> Frederick L. Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 2 vols. (Reprint, New York, 1904), II, 184.

<sup>27</sup> William Gregg, "Practical Results of Southern Manufactures," *DeBow's Review*, XVIII (June, 1845), 789.

women and children, when they witnessed the destruction of the property, from which they derived their daily sustenance were distressing in the extreme." <sup>28</sup>

The poor white was often faced with the competition of the slave in cotton factories. This was a social, as well as an economic, factor that led to conflicting opinions among newspaper editors and others interested in promoting the growth of the textile industry. In every state there were mills being operated by Negro labor. In Athens, Georgia, and in Richmond, Virginia, white and black labor were employed indiscriminately in the cotton mills. In Athens it was said that "there is no difficulty among them on account of colour, the white girls working in the same room and at the same loom with the black girls; and boys of each colour, as well as men and women, working together without apparent repugnance or objection." <sup>29</sup>

The question of white versus slave labor caused much thought among contemporaries. As the industry became more stabilized, factories in Columbus, Georgia, and those in other cities excluded slave labor in hope that mill work would appeal to the whites as more genteel.<sup>30</sup> William Gregg, South Carolina's most famous manufacturer, was especially interested in the exclusion of Negroes from cotton factories. He pointed out that the poor whites owned little or poor land; that the slave was employed to work the best land, and therefore the mills should be reserved exclusively for the white population.<sup>31</sup>

The editor of the *Southern Cultivator*, however, expressed the opinion that until society eliminated ignorance and crime, by the encouragement of education for both black and white, prosperity was unobtainable. The planter was warned that neither he nor the community could escape the evils of the time if the poor continued to be neglected. He added that "the peaceful arts and a diversified industry cannot be dispensed with in any State with impunity." <sup>32</sup>

James H. Hammond, once governor of South Carolina, spoke before the South Carolina Institute in favor of the spread of cotton manufacture. He said that 35,000 factory laborers could be drawn from the poor white population of that state. This, he predicted, would take them out

<sup>28</sup> *Georgia Journal* (Milledgeville), March 17, 1840.

<sup>29</sup> Buckingham, *op. cit.*, I, 169; II, 111-112, 426.

<sup>30</sup> Sir Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to the United States*, 2 vols. (New York, 1849), II, 34.

<sup>31</sup> William Gregg, "The Graniteville (S. C.) Cotton Manufactory," *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine*, XXI (December, 1849), 671-72.

<sup>32</sup> *Southern Cultivator*, III (November, 1849), 168.

of competition with slaves in agriculture, and give them more settled occupations than odd jobs, hunting, and fishing. Even more important, it would keep them from "plundering the fields and folds, . . . [and] . . . far worse—trading with slaves, and seducing them to plunder for their benefit." Hammond warned that European and Northern abolitionists by inflammatory appeals were trying to enlist the support of the poor whites, who were still attached to the wealthier classes and would not join the attack on Southern institutions; however, he cautioned, remunerative employment in cotton factories would help attach them more firmly to such institutions.<sup>33</sup>

In the decade before the Civil War the vocal elements of the South became increasingly concerned about the possible subversion of the poor whites. Another South Carolinian took a very serious view of the danger:

In a word, it is, whether the plow, the loom, and anvil, shall be brought together in harmony and success. This is the great point to determine at this moment in South Carolina. There is, in some quarters, a natural jealousy of the slightest innovation upon established habits; and, because an effort has been made to collect the poor and unemployed white population into our new factories, fears have arisen, that some evil would grow out of the introduction of such establishments among us.

Let us, however, look at this matter with candor and calmness, and examine all its bearings before we determine that the general introduction of a profitable industry, will endanger our institutions. I take the ground that our institutions are safe if we are *true to ourselves*; and, *that truthfulness* must not only be manifest in our statesmen and politicians, but be an abiding *principle* in the *masses* of our people. The poor man has a vote, as well as the rich man; and in our State the *number* of the first will largely overbalance the last. So long as these poor but industrious people, could see no mode of living, except by a degrading operation of work with the negro upon the plantation, they were content to endure life in its most discouraging forms, satisfied that they were *above* the slave, though faring often worse than he. But the progress of the world is "onward," and the great mass of our poor white population, begin to understand that they have rights, and that they, too, are entitled to some of the sympathy which falls upon the suffering. . . . *It is this great upbearing of our masses that we are to fear, so far as our institutions are concerned.*

But crowd from [factory] employments the fast increasing white populations of the South, and fill our factories and work-shops with our slaves, and we have in our midst those whose very existence is in hostile array to our institutions.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *DeBow's Review*, VIII (June, 1850), 503.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII (January, 1850), 24-29.

Thus for a variety of reasons the attention of the public was called to the necessity of cotton factories to give employment to the poor. Leading members of Southern society were interested in the elevation of this class as a means of improving the general economic prospects of the section. Yet planters were often slow to change their patterns of thought. The editor of the *Southern Cultivator* urged planters to divert a part of their capital and labor to building and operating factories. The problem, he said, "is a lack of energy in our Southerners—they have been raised in the cotton fields, and they do not believe that any other place will be so congenial with their habits."<sup>35</sup>

Planters were asked to use their resources to furnish employment at home, rather than for the factory workers of the North. It seemed clear to many that the prosperity of the entire section would be retarded if profitable employment was not found for all the population. The cotton mill was one of the ways by which this aim could be achieved, if the poor whites were enabled to become producers of wealth. The poor brought into villages would profit from their contact with the "rich and intelligent . . . [and] be stimulated to mental action," and greater energy and usefulness.<sup>36</sup>

The advantages of this program promised reforms: a diversified agriculture would help restore land worn out by too much cotton growing, and a trade for food products would grow up between the manufacturer and the farmer; cotton factories would give employment to men, women, and children and make their idle hours productive. "And be assured the reflection was most impressively forced upon us—what a happy thing it would be could our poor . . . have a means of feeding, clothing and educating themselves?"<sup>37</sup>

To curb the fears of the more intelligent people regarding the supposed harmful effects of manufacturing labor, as evidenced in many English textile centers, assurance was given that such conditions would not be duplicated in the South. It was explained that cotton factories were not closed and unhealthy places, but were well lighted and ventilated; that such employment did not tend to cause either physical or mental degeneration among the workers. Those hands already employed in cotton mills were said to find the work exceedingly light, far preferable to the hot fields. "And taking it altogether we think it clearly susceptible of proof that manufacturing labour is a more benefitting

<sup>35</sup> *Southern Cultivator*, IV (January, 1846), 173.

<sup>36</sup> The Charlotte (N. C.) *Journal*, August 29, 1845, citing the Charleston (S. C.) *Courier*.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, September 5, 1845.

employment for southern than northern peasantry." In conclusion, it was claimed that the employment of the poor white could not fail to produce good effects on the section.<sup>38</sup>

Another fear expressed by the members of the upper class was that the rise of mill villages would merely create "hot-beds of crime" which would have an adverse effect on society generally. It was declared, however, that the mill village could only improve the poor by placing them under the paternal control of employers "who will inspire them with self-respect, by taking an interest in their welfare."<sup>39</sup> In most cases, leaving nothing to chance, the villages, by legislative action, were placed off-limits to the seller of ardent spirits, and those who failed to give up drinking were summarily dismissed from the mills.

William Gregg strongly supported the proposition that only in raising the standards of the poor could the position of the planter be improved. It was his opinion that until Charleston modernized its views and repealed the prohibition against steam engines it was doomed to languish. Gregg attacked George McDuffie and James Hamilton for their bumbling efforts with the Saluda Cotton Mill. Its failure, he claimed, had done incalculable harm to the growth of the Southern industry. Men of wealth needed encouragement to stay in South Carolina by being offered sound and profitable investment opportunities. He advocated the building of dozens of factories all over South Carolina and closed his remarks by saying that "surely there is nothing in cotton spinning that can poison the atmosphere of South Carolina. Why not spin as well as plant Cotton? . . . Is not labor cheaper with us than with our Northern brethren?"<sup>40</sup>

A South Carolina editor, in promoting the construction of more mills, said it was no departure from the views of the Democratic Party to favor manufacturing. He pointed out that the human resources of the state were the "*most available of all*" and should be employed to enrich the state and give contentment and security to the worker.<sup>41</sup> In Alabama,

<sup>38</sup> The *Charlotte Journal*, September 19, 1845.

<sup>39</sup> *DeBow's Review*, XII (January, 1852), 494-95.

<sup>40</sup> William Gregg, "Essays on Domestic Industry," *Charleston (S. C.) Courier*, September 20, 21, 30; November 21, 22, 26, 30; December 4, 6, 10, 11, 1844; January 2, 1845.

<sup>41</sup> Richard W. Griffin, "Florence, Alabama: Textile Manufacturing Center of the Old South, 1820-1872," *Bulletin of the North Alabama Historical Association*, II (1957), 21-24; "Cotton Manufacture in Alabama to 1860," *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, XVIII (Fall, 1956), 289-292; "Manufacturing Interests of Alabama Planters, 1810-1830," *Journal of the Alabama Academy of Science*, XXX (October, 1958), 63-71.

where promotion for cotton factories began in the 1820's,<sup>42</sup> Chief Justice Henry W. Collier spoke in favor of cotton mills:

. . . labor in a cotton factory, under the improved state of machinery and buildings, is as little prejudicial to health as any other indoor employment. There is nothing in tending a loom to harden a lady's hand; and in a well ventilated and properly heated house, such as all the large establishments of recent erection have, there is nothing to cause the *rouge* upon the cheek to fade, although the skin may become bleached by remaining so much in the shade.

Justice Collier claimed that the establishment of industry was a necessity if the poor of Alabama were not to remain "an *incubus* on the bosom" of Southern society, and reviewed the advantages and disadvantages of the South's climate.<sup>43</sup> Even in distant Arkansas the pressure for a diversified economy was felt.<sup>44</sup>

Many mill promoters were among those who insisted that companies build villages away from the corrupting influence and epidemics of the cities. These company-owned towns would enable the managers to dominate the worker and provide "every convenience to render the working people as happy as possible."<sup>45</sup> John G. Gamble, a prominent Florida planter and mill promoter, called upon his fellow planters to invest in cotton mills which would not only bring profits but would also help educate and enlighten the poor, thus strengthening the Democratic principle of the nation.<sup>46</sup>

In some factories skilled labor was brought from New England for employment as well as to train the local people. F. L. Olmsted reported that some girls had been induced by high wages to emigrate to the South "but found their position so unpleasant—owing to the general degradation of the labouring classess—as very soon to be forced to return." He reported also dissatisfaction of labor in the mills of Fayetteville, North Carolina. He was told that the girls were improvident and saved little of their wages, wasting them on foolish purchases as fast as they received them. One workman told him that slavery was the curse of the Southern poor white, and that he wanted to go to the free states.<sup>47</sup>

At Augusta, Georgia, and Graniteville, South Carolina, Olmsted saw and heard much of the poor white worker. He was told that once

<sup>42</sup> Hillsborough (N. C.) *Recorder*, November 20, 1845, citing *South Carolinian*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, February 25, 1846, citing the Tuscaloosa (Ala.) *Monitor*.

<sup>44</sup> *Arkansas State Gazette and Democrat* (Little Rock), March 29, 1850.

<sup>45</sup> *The Southern Press* (Washington, D. C.), July 16, 1851.

<sup>46</sup> *DeBow's Review*, XII (March, 1852), 279.

<sup>47</sup> Olmsted, *op. cit.*, II, 185, 357.

their indolent habits were overcome, Southerners would be the equal of New England labor. However, at Augusta the manager of a hotel informed him that only starvation would get the hands to work, and the superintendent of the mill asked him never to give them food for it made them less willing to work. Olmsted was told that "if you ride past the factory . . . you will see them loafing about, and I reckon you never saw a meaner set of people anywhere. If they were niggers, they would not sell for five hundred dollars a head."<sup>48</sup> It was exceedingly difficult for the poor to get used to a schedule and to be punctual. At Graniteville the latter problem was remedied by requiring latecomers to gain admittance only through the office of William Gregg. The promoters of the Dog River Factory on Mobile Bay sought to avoid, in part, the problem of local or Northern labor by importing forty trained French girls to work in their factory.<sup>49</sup>

As for the life and general working conditions of the Southern factory worker, too little evidence remains. By the middle fifties the practice of a quarter of a day off on Saturday had become fairly common. In addition to wages many factories offered their employees fringe benefits—free schools, churches, recreational facilities, frequently rent-free houses, and garden plots—all of which made up in part for the low wage scale. In nearly all cases employment in a cotton factory represented a distinct improvement in their way of life.

Little is known of the actual skill of the early mill hands, although occasionally mill owners praised their highly productive employees. By the early 1840's operatives were beginning to achieve considerable skill and efficiency. At Fayetteville, a factory owner reported that the girls were becoming so skillful in the operation of the spindle and loom that the price of manufactured cottons was declining.<sup>50</sup> The owner of the Rockfish Factory in the same town wrote that three girls who had worked only a few months were able to produce 90 yards of cloth a day each; more experienced hands were making 107 1/4 yards daily. It was estimated that within twenty years, with the introduction of power looms, the productiveness of weavers had increased, from five or six yards daily, about twenty fold.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Frederick L. Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country*, 2 vols. (Reprint, New York, 1907), II, 126-27.

<sup>49</sup> *Southern Advocate* (Huntsville, Ala.), December 3, 1851, citing the *Mobile Register*.

<sup>50</sup> Hillsborough (N. C.) *Recorder*, November 24, 1842, citing the *Fayetteville Observer*.

<sup>51</sup> Fayetteville (N. C.) *Observer*, October 19, 1842.

In 1850 the foreman of the weaving department of the Troup Factory in Georgia reported that one of the girls in his department wove 320 yards in a day for eighty cents. "At Belleville Factory, Richmond County, Georgia, during the week ending the 8th inst. Miss Jimima Poole, on three looms, weaving osnaburgs, . . . for two running days averaged 83 yards to the loom." Her average product for one week was 210 yards a day, and the week's wages averaged 84 cents per day. In the same mill Catherine Willis, thirteen years of age, averaged 78 yards for three running days. Most mill owners were satisfied with the performance of their employees.<sup>52</sup>

The Southern poor white offered cotton mill builders a class of laborers who, unlike their counterpart in Northern mills, were docile and seldom caused trouble. Two factors account for this passiveness—the newness of the employment and the lack of European emigrants, who brought a more highly developed class consciousness with them to the North. The Southern promoters were not unaware of the possibility of labor strife, and one of the constant themes for the employment of slaves in the mills was that they could not strike. Southern labor early established a reputation for stability, and for that reason in 1848 the cotton mill owners of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, were preparing to move their machinery to an Ohio river location in Virginia.<sup>53</sup> If there were strikes, they received no publicity. A strike at the Alamance Mills of Holt and Carrigan in North Carolina was caused by friction in management. A son of one of the owners wrote of the labor problem:

I do not know as I can tell you all the cause but Kimball and some of the hands blown up at Boon for his being too tight and thought that he would get the hands to blow Boon up and then get the whole management of the Factory but uncle and your Father told him out of that I expect they will have a general clean up there amongst them.<sup>54</sup>

It is certain that the building of cotton mills offered unparalleled opportunity for the poverty-stricken whites of the South. Although the industry was small, as compared to the investment in agriculture, it was the largest single industry offering factory employment. By 1860 there were at least three hundred cotton mills operating in the states from Maryland through Texas, providing direct employment for 25,000 to

<sup>52</sup> *The Constitutionalist* (Augusta, Ga.), June 12, 13, 1850.

<sup>53</sup> Hillsborough (N. C.) *Recorder*, August 23, 1848, citing the *Scientific American*.

<sup>54</sup> John Warren Carrigan Papers, MSS. Manuscript Collection, Duke University; W. A. Carrigan, Jr. to Alfred A. Holt, October 17, 1846.



30,000 people, mostly whites. By paying wages—however small—to these poor Southerners the mills provided, directly or indirectly, improved living conditions for about 100,000 people.

The employment of this class helped increase the profits of cotton planters, who found their sales stimulated by the domestic manufacture of the staple. The employment of whites in the factories also cut some competition in agriculture. Banks and insurance companies secured new business in financing and insuring factory and village construction. The railroads, steamboat and stage lines received increased patronage as a result of the mills. Not only the South profited from its expanding industry; the cotton machinery manufacturers of the North were able to expand their market into the South.

As the sectional crisis developed, the efforts to induce Southerners to develop their own resources increased. They were urged to produce at home their necessities, to stimulate business by getting money into the hands of more individuals, and generally to make the section independent of the North. The war itself introduced many new problems for cotton manufacturers. Manpower became increasingly scarce as the Southern armies were mobilized. James C. Harper, owner of the Patterson Factory in North Carolina, wrote of this problem: "we have great difficulty in keeping hands, have several new ones—but it is uncertain how long we can keep them."<sup>55</sup> In the second year of the war there were many efforts made to keep trained workers—managers as well as employees—in essential industries. The editor of a North Carolina paper wrote that "every man should be in his place. That place is not necessarily in the army. He may do ten times as much good out of the army as in it. . . . There must be mechanics left to carry on the manufacture of cloths."<sup>56</sup> D. E. Converse of South Carolina, anxious to get into the war, volunteered, and then was placed on detached service running his cotton mill.<sup>57</sup> In the autumn of 1862 the Confederate Congress passed the Military Exemption Act, designed to keep all trained factory personnel at work. The pressure for cloth, both civilian and military, was beyond the power of the Southern industry to provide.

These war industries became an important target of invading armies, and dozens of cotton textile mills were destroyed in all parts of the South. During Sherman's Georgia campaign the workers of the great

<sup>55</sup> Letter of James C. Harper, October 21, 1861, MSS. Beall-Harper Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

<sup>56</sup> *The Daily Journal* (Wilmington, N. C.), March 28, 1862.

<sup>57</sup> Landrum, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

Roswell Mills were arrested upon orders of the General, as he considered them combatants under the terms of the Confederate Exemption Act. After the destruction of the mills they were sent by wagon to Marietta and then by train via Nashville to Indiana.<sup>58</sup> The position of such workers was complicated, for a company formed of hands of the Macon Factory helped defeat Stoneman's raid through central Georgia, and preserved for a short time the independence of Macon.<sup>59</sup>

The cotton industry, in crippled form, survived the havoc of the Civil War. Although its progress was suspended, the human resources represented by this reservoir of trained factory labor provided a sound basis for Southern industrial recovery and growth in the post-war era.

<sup>58</sup> S. B. G. Temple, *The First Hundred Years* (Atlanta, 1935), pp. 332-35.

<sup>59</sup> John C. Butler, *Historical Record of Macon and Central Georgia*, (Macon, 1879), p. 265.