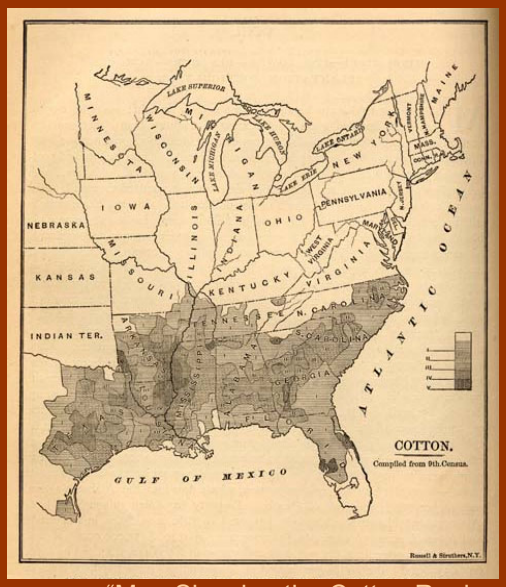
Edward King

THE GREAT SOUTH

A Record of Journeys in Louisiana, Texas, the Indian Territory, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland

Illustrations by James Wells Champney

1875 Excerpts



"Map Showing the Cotton Region of the United States"

"A Cotton Steamer"

PREFACE

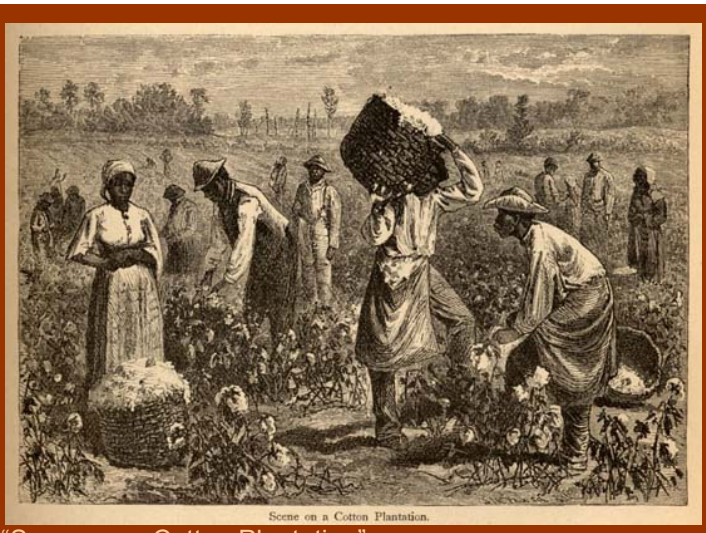
This book is the record of an extensive tour of observation through the States of the South and South-west during the whole of 1873, and the Spring and Summer of 1874.

The journey was undertaken at the instance of the publishers of *Scribner's Monthly,* who desired to present to the public, through the medium of their popular periodical, an account of the material resources, and the present social and political condition, of the people in the Southern States. The author and the artists associated with him in the preparation of the work, traveled more than twenty-five thousand miles; visited nearly every city and town of importance in the South; talked with men of all classes, parties and colors; carefully investigated manufacturing enterprises and sites; studied the course of politics in each State since the advent of reconstruction; explored rivers, and penetrated into mountain regions heretofore rarely visited by Northern men. They were everywhere kindly and generously received by the Southern people; and they have endeavored, by pen and pencil, to give the reading public a truthful picture of life in a section which has, since the close of a devastating war, been overwhelmed by a variety of misfortunes, but upon which the dawn of a better day is breaking. . . .

XXVIII. THE "SUPPLY" SYSTEM IN THE COTTON COUNTRY, AND ITS RESULTS—NEGRO LABOR—PRESENT PLANS OF WORKING COTTON PLANTATIONS—THE BLACK MAN IN THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY.

At Memphis I heard much concerning the miseries and revelations of both capitalists and laborers in the cotton country. It is easy to see that the old planters are in trouble under the new order of things. They are not willing to become farmers. "These people will never," said to me a gentleman familiar with the whole cotton-planting interest, "grow their own supplies until they are compelled to."

They choose to depend upon the West for the coarse food supplied to negro laborers, and seem totally unconscious of the fact that they can never secure white immigration, so much desired, until they raise the status of the laboring man. White labor has proved a failure in a great many sections of the South, because the laborers who come to make trial are not properly met. They are offered strong inducements — can purchase good lands on almost unlimited credit, and are kindly received — but they find all the conditions of labor so repulsive that they become disheartened; and give up the experiment. The negro along the Mississippi works better than ever before since freedom came to him, because he is obliged to toil or starve, and because, being the main stay of the planters, they accord to him very favorable conditions. Self-interest is teaching the planters a good deal, and in the cotton-growing regions of Northern Alabama and Mississippi, as well as generally throughout the older cotton States, a diversity of crops will in time force itself upon them as a measure of protection. . . .

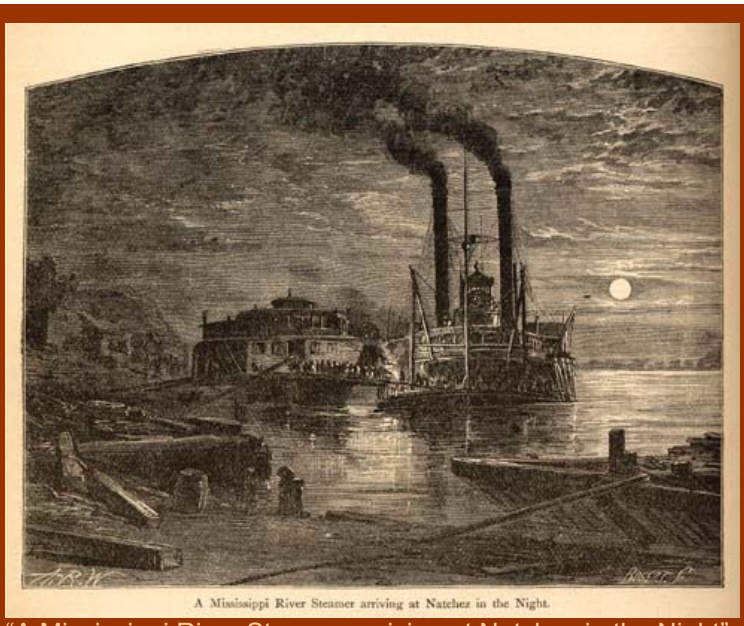

Scene on a Cotton Plantation.

"Scene on a Cotton Plantation"

There must, and will be, a radical change in the conduct of the rising generation of planters. The younger men are, I think, convinced that it is a mistake to depend on Western and Northern markets for the articles of daily consumption, and for nearly everything which goes to make life tolerable. But the elders, grounded by a lifetime of habit in the methods which served them well under a slave *régime,* but which are ruinous now-a-days, will never change their course. They will continue to bewail the unfortunate fate to which they think themselves condemned — or will rest in the assurance that they can do very well in the present chaotic condition of things, provided Providence does not allow their crops to fail. They cannot be brought to see that their only safety lies in making cotton their surplus crop; that they must absolutely dig their sustenance, as well as their riches, out of the ground. . . .

The region which finds its market and gets its supplies in Memphis, Vicksburg, and Natchez, is probably as fair a sample of the cotton-producing portion of the South as any other, and I found in it all the ills and all the advantages complained of or claimed elsewhere. Imagine a farming country which depends absolutely for its food on the West and North-west; where every barrel of flour which the farmer buys, the bacon which he seems to prefer to the beef and mutton which he might raise on his

own lands, the clothes on his back, the shoes on his feet, the very vegetables which the poorest laborer in the Northern agricultural regions grows in his door-yard — everything, in fact, — has been brought hundreds of miles by steamer or by rail, and has passed through the hands of the shipper, the carrier, the wharfmen, the reshipper (if the planter live in a remote section), and the local merchant! . . .


A Mississippi River Steamer arriving at Natchez in the Night.

"A Mississippi River Steamer arriving at Natchez in the Night"

. . . Younger men, who see the necessity of change and new organization, believe that they must in future cultivate other crops besides cotton; that they must do away with supply-merchants, and try at least to raise what is needed for sustenance. There are, of course, sections where the planter finds it cheapest to obtain his corn and flour from St. Louis; but these are small items. There are a hundred things which he requires, and which are grown as well South as North. Until the South has got capital enough together to localize manufactures, the same thing must be said of all manufactured articles; but why should a needless expenditure be encouraged by the very people whom it injures and endangers? . . .

XXXIV. THE RESOURCES OF ALABAMA—VISITS TO MONTGOMERY AND SELMA.

That which chiefly astonishes the stranger in visiting Alabama is that the superb material resources of the State should have remained undeveloped so long. He is told that, in a little less than a century, Alabama expended two hundred millions of dollars in the purchase of slaves; had she spent it in developing her elements of wealth, she would have been to-day one of the richest commonwealths in the world. The extraordinary extent and nature of her mineral stores, the fertility of her fields for cotton, the cereals and fruits, the grandeur of her forests, the length of her streams, and her lovely climate, will render her, after the dreary transition period is past, one of the most opulent of the Southern States. . . .

The crying need of the State is capital; she is like so many of her neighbors, completely broken by the revolution, and unable to take the initiative in measures essential to her full development. With

capital operating beneficently, Alabama could so bring her cheap cotton, cheap coal, cheap iron, and cheap living, to bear, as to seize and firmly retain a leading position among manufacturing States. . . .

XXXV. NORTHERN ALABAMA—THE TENNESSEE VALLEY . . .

Of course I encountered many bitter people — men who were not at all friendly toward the North, and who declared that they were dissatisfied with the present condition of affairs; who cursed the negro, their own fate and the Federal Administration; but these were certainly the exceptions. The citizens of Alabama, as a mass, are as loyal to the idea of the Union to-day as are the citizens of New York, and have at times gone very far to welcome such reconstruction measures as are not instruments of oppression. In the sections where the lands are exhausted for the time being, or where crops have failed persistently, and the wolf of poverty is at the door, people have ceased to take any interest in State affairs, and are settling up their business and hastening to Texas. Now and then one sees a few tired and soiled men and women on the trains, and on inquiring their destination, finds they are on the return from Texas, which has not treated them as kindly as they anticipated; but, as a rule, those who go remain. . . .


On the Bay Road, near Mobile, Alabama. [Page 321.]

"On the Bay Road, near Mobile, Alabama"

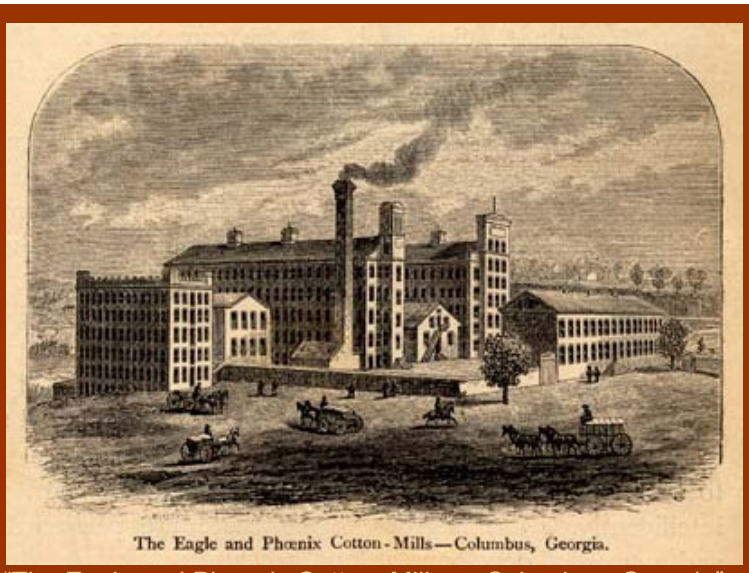
That there is plenty of enterprise in the State, there can be no doubt — no more doubt than that there is no money to assist it. Indeed, it is safe to predict for Alabama a sudden upspringing sometime into a marvelous growth, something like that of Texas, because the railroad communication is already so perfect, and the resources are so immense. As soon as a little money is accumulated, or foreign capital has gained courage to go in, we shall see an awakening in the beautiful commonwealth. It is rich in grand mountains, noble rivers, swelling prairies, mighty forests, lovely sea-coast, and everywhere there is a wealth of Southern blossom and perfume. The Northerner from America or Europe can readily accommodate himself to its climate, and can find any combination of resources that he may desire to develop. . . .

The spirit of nationality among the people in those sections of Alabama which have suffered most, has been somewhat broken, yet, according to the statement made to me by one of the most

distinguished of Alabama's citizens, these same people need but the return of a little prosperity to make them contented. . . .

XXXVI. THE SAND-HILL REGION—AIKEN—AUGUSTA.

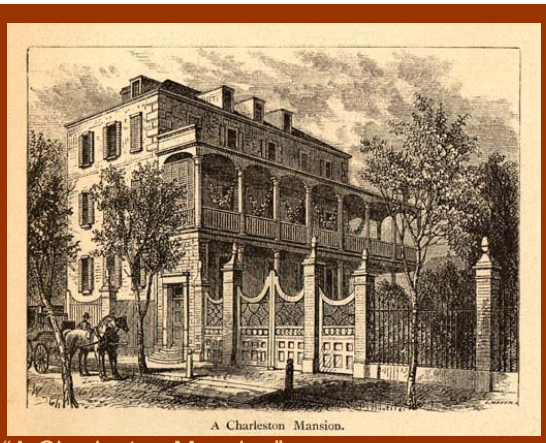
After many weeks of journeying in the South, through regions where hardly a house is to be seen, where the villages, looming up between patches of forest or canebrake, seem deserted and worm-eaten, and the people reckless and idle, the traveler is struck with astonishment and delight when he emerges into the busy belt extending from Aiken, in South Carolina, to Augusta, in Georgia. There he sees manufacturing villages, hears the whir of spindles, notes on every hand evidences of progressive industry, and wonders why it was not so years before. Alas! who can compute the sum of the lost opportunities of the Southern States? . . .



"The Eagle and Phoenix Cotton–Mills — Columbus, Georgia"

The development of the resources for manufacturing in the region extending between and including Aiken and Augusta merits especial mention, and shows what may be done by judicious enterprise in the South. The extensive cotton manufactories at Augusta and Graniteville employ many hundreds of hands. Scarcely a quarter of a century ago the Augusta cotton manufacturing enterprise was inaugurated with but a small capital. It was the outgrowth of a demand for labor for the surplus white population — labor whose results should accrue at once to the benefit of the State, and of that population. In due time the canal at Augusta was constructed.

The Augusta cotton factory, which was not at first prosperous, now has a capital stock of $600,000, upon which a quarterly dividend of five per cent. is paid. Thousands of spindles and hundreds of looms are now busy along the banks of the noble canal, where, also, have sprung up fine flour-mills and tobacco factories. The cotton-mill is filled with the newest and finest machinery, and has received the high compliment, from Senator Sprague, of Rhode Island, of being "the best arranged one in the United States." . . .



"A Charleston Mansion"

XLIX. CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA.

And why prosperity in Charleston? Mainly because the venerable city has established in addition to her important cotton trade, a large number of manufacturing enterprises, for which her location is particularly advantageous; and because her business men have an elastic spirit and a remarkable courage, which reflect the highest credit upon them. A veritable phœnix, always springing triumphantly from the ashes of terrible conflagrations, as well as from the ruins caused by hurricanes and bombardments, the South Carolinian metropolis is, in itself, a standing reproof to the too oft-repeated assertion that the ancient commonwealth lacks enterprise. . . .

LIII. THE LOWLANDS OF NORTH CAROLINA.

. . . The North Carolinians are accustomed now-a-days to wonder why immigrants do not rush into their State, and settle upon the lands which can be had so cheaply; and finding that but few come, and that the State is in a general condition of discouragement and decay, financially, they have relapsed into an indolent attitude, and let progress drift by them. In some of the small towns I found the people more inclined to bitterness and less reconciled to the results of the war than anywhere else in the South. Many towns, too, had a deserted and neglected look which was painful.

The State, of course, suffered greatly by the war. It was one of the foremost of pro-slavery communities; held nearly 350,000 slaves when the war broke out; and had a firmly-seated and exclusive aristocracy, which has naturally been very much broken up by recent events. The present population is 1,071,361, of whom 678,470 are blacks, of by no means the highest type. The revolution decreased the value of real and personal estate in North Carolina from $292,297,602, in 1860 to $132,046,391 in 1870, and the decrease within the last four years has been very rapid. . . .

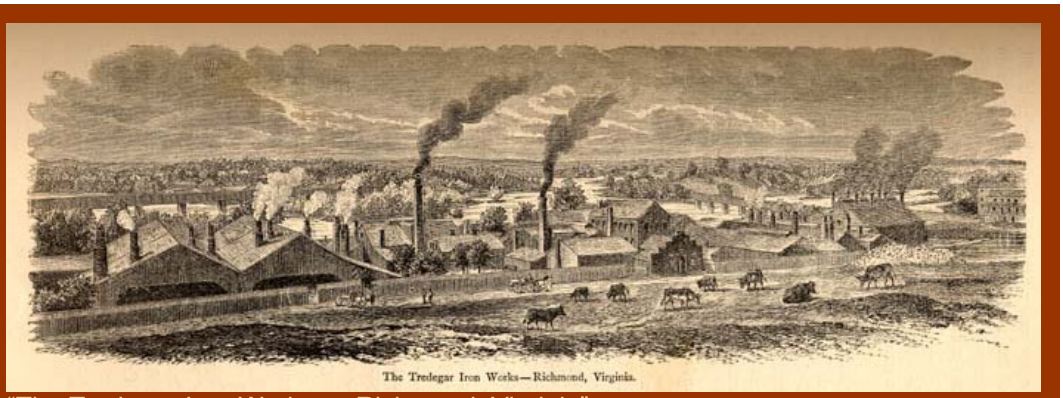
LVI. THE "SUGAR FORK" AND DRY FALLS—WHITESIDE MOUNTAIN.

. . . As a rule, the younger men with whom we talked were hopeful, very much in earnest, generally free from the mountain rustic dialect; took in one or two newspapers, and were interested in the outer world and general legislation; but their fathers, the farmers of the "befo' the waw" epoch, were discouraged and somewhat discontented at the new order of things; looked upon mineral hunters

and railroad route surveyors with coldness or contempt; and were wont to complain of their own lot and of all the results of the war. The young and prominent men in most of the counties were good companions and enthusiastic friends; they had none of the artificial manners of the town, none of its guile . . .

[LXX.] RICHMOND—ITS TRADE AND CHARACTER.

. . . There seems but little doubt that Richmond will become one of the most important Southern centres of iron manufacture. Now that the Virginian has learned to aspire to something besides "land and negroes," and that new railroads enable him to utilize the immense coal and iron deposits of the commonwealth, it is reasonable to believe that he will improve his opportunities, and will make of the pretty capital on the James one of the most prosperous of manufacturing towns. The Richmond, Piedmont, Dan River, and New River coal-fields will add their stores to those of the mighty Kanawha valley; and the iron region which Richmond can draw upon is very extensive. Louisa, Spottsylvania, Albemarle, Nelson, Amherst, Fluvanna, Powhatan, Cumberland, Buckingham, Campbell and Appomattox counties possess fine deposits of iron ores; and as furnaces spring up in those sections, the capital will give added attention to the manufacture of iron. . . . It is safe to predict that in a generation the whole character of the city will be changed; that it will have become a sprightly centre, devoted to manufactures, and filled with huge establishments for turning raw cotton, crude tobacco, and pig-iron into serviceable articles. In twenty years manufacturers will be the aristocrats in Virginia. What planter of the Old Dominion twenty years ago would have believed such a thing possible?


The Tredegar Iron Works—Richmond, Virginia.

"The Tredegar Iron Works — Richmond, Virginia"

The rapid growth of Richmond doubtless carries sadness to the heart of the Virginian of the old school. For in the steady progress of the capital toward prominence as a manufacturing centre he sees the symbol of the decay of the society which produced him and his. He hates large cities, with their democratic tendencies, their corruption, and their ambitious populations. He looks upon the rich manufacturer as a *parvenu;* the lordly agriculturist is still, in his mind, the only fitting type of the real aristocrat. He shudders when he sees the youth of the new school engaging in commerce, buying and

selling mines, talking of opening new railroad routes, and building cotton-mills. He flies to the farthest corner of the lands that have been spared to him out of the wrecks caused by the war, and strives to forget the present, and to live as he did "before the surrender," like a country squire in England two hundred years ago. . . .

LXXXIX. IMMIGRATION—THE NEED OF CAPITAL— DIVISION OF THE NEGRO VOTE—THE SOUTHERN LADIES.

There is much that is discouraging in the present condition of the South, but no one is more loth than the Southerner to admit the impossibility of its thorough redemption. The growth of manufactures in the Southern States, while insignificant as compared with the gigantic development in the North and West, is still highly encouraging; and it is actually true that manufactured articles formerly sent South from the North are now made in the South to be shipped to Northern buyers. . . .

Until her people have recovered from the exhaustion consequent on the war, capital is and will be the crying want of the South. The North will continue to furnish some portion of that capital, but will be largely checked in its investments in that direction, as it has been heretofore, by its lack of confidence in the possibility of a solution of the political difficulties. . . .

The South can never be cast in the same mould as the North. Its origin was too different; it will not be thoroughly emancipated from the influence of the old system for several generations. It will still cherish some prejudices against that utter freedom of speech, that devotion to "isms," and possibly that intense desire for immediate material development that distinguish the North; but it will be progressive, more progressive and liberal every year. Its provincialisms will fade gradually away; its educational facilities, despite the occasional hindrances imposed by such unwise manœuvres as the projected passage of the Civil Rights bill, will increase and flourish. The negro will get justice from the lower classes of whites as soon as those classes are touched by the liberalizing influences of the times. There is, of course, still much objection to sitting with him on juries, or otherwise acknowledging his equality.

It is not the province of this volume to indulge in theories as to the grave dangers which many politicians fancy still environ the Southern question, nor is it important to speculate upon the possible determination on the part of the planters to demand compensation some day for their emancipated slaves, or to hint that they may try to establish a labor system which shall relegate the negro to serfdom. Time alone can disclose the rôle which the Southern Conservative will play when he returns to power.