

William John Grayson's "The Hireling and the Slave" (1855)

Slavery is that system of labor which exchanges subsistence for work, which secures a life-maintenance from the master to the slave, and gives a life-labor from the slave to the master. The slave is an apprentice for life, and owes his labor to his master; the master owes support, during life, to the slave. Slavery is the negro system of labor. He is lazy and improvident. Slavery makes all work, and it ensures homes, food and clothing for all. It permits no idleness, and it provides for sickness, infancy and old age. It allows no tramping or skulking, and it knows no pauperism.

... If Slavery is subject to abuses, it has its advantages also. It establishes more permanent, and, therefore, kinder relations between capital and labor. It removes what Stuart Mill calls "the widening and embittering feud between the class of labor and the class of capital." It draws the relation closer between master and servant. It is not an engagement for days or weeks, but for life. There is no such thing, with Slavery, as a laborer for whom nobody cares or provides. The most wretched feature, in hireling labor, is the isolated miserable creature who has no home, no work, no food, and in whom no one is particularly interested. This is seen among hirelings only. I do not say that Slavery is the best system of labor, but only that it is the best, for the negro, in this country. ... In hireling States there are thousands of idlers, trampers, poachers, smugglers, drunkards and thieves, who make theft a profession. There are thousands who suffer for want of food and clothing, from inability to obtain them. For these two classes--those who will not work, and those who cannot--there is no sufficient provision. Among slaves there are no trampers, idlers, smugglers, poachers, and none suffer from want. Everyone is made to work, and no one is permitted to starve. Slavery does for the negro what European schemers in vain attempt to do for the hireling. It secures work and subsistence for all. It secures order and subordination also. ... The master is a Commissioner of the Poor, on every plantation, to provide food, clothing, medicine, houses, for his people. He is a police officer to prevent idleness, drunkenness, theft, or disorder. I do not mean by formal appointment of law, but by virtue of his relation to his slaves. There is, therefore, no starvation among slaves. There are, comparatively, few crimes. If there are paupers in slave States, they are the hirelings of other countries, who have run away from their homes.

What more can be required of Slavery, in reference to the negro, than has been done? It has made him, from a savage, an orderly and efficient laborer. It supports him in comfort and peace.

It restrains his vices. It improves his mind, orals and manners. It instructs him in Christian knowledge.

All Christians believe that the affairs of the world are directed by Providence for wise and good purposes. The coming of the negro to North America makes no exception to the rule. ... What the purpose of his coming is, we may not presume to judge. But we can see much good already resulting from it--good to the negro, in his improved condition; to the country whose rich fields he has cleared of the forest and made productive in climates unfit for the labor of the white man; to the Continent of Africa in furnishing, as it may ultimately, the only means for civilizing its people.