The Gospel as preached in the South.

Henry Cooke Testimony, Henry Cooke a mulatto aged 21, born and allowed to live on a plantation of about 200 slaves, belonged to Mr. Richmond Nicholas Secretary of State when he left, who was in the fall of 1843 (see list of officers of the State of Louisiana in American Almanacs for 1844) the above said Henry Cooke gives the following testimony respecting the preaching of the Gospel. Cooke was a runaway slave. He has never heard any one preach (except in the town of Donaldsville, 7 miles distant from here) but an old slave fr. Virginia on the plantation—these assemble in the woods. If discovered they are whipped. These meetings are usually on Saturday or Sunday evenings late at night. Notice of these meetings is passed round to the neighboring plantations so that 2 or 3 hundred sometimes assemble. The amount of the old man (William Ellis, "Uncle Billy") preaching is: "That Jesus Christ is their Saviour, that he suffered a great deal and they must try to bear their sufferings—it will not always be as it is; God did not make them to work that way always—they must try to please their Masters and do as they say; this was the best way to get along. Some day they would be up in Heaven and perhaps look down and see their Masters down below them." This old man could read—had a Bible he concealed in the ground which he brought fr. Virginia the master had tried to discover it but could not. He discovered the Bibles of others and burned them, for which they mourned saying it was a pity and a Catholic church called Red Chinese 31 miles fr.
They should lose these books they have brought all the way from Virginia.) The old man, the plantation had two white daughters one of which the white overseer took for his wife. When Mr. Nicholas was absent at Washington being member of Congress on account of this the old man persuaded the overseer to let them have meetings of prayer while the master was absent, they were held three or four times a week sometimes but were stopped when the master returned. The singing and loud shouting was the means by which the planters discovered the meeting. When the neighbouring planters were sent for they assembled and rushed upon the congregation and all they can catch they whip. One slave on the plantation was heard praying was whipped after it he said "I must obey Massa but till the last day comes I'll never stop praying Jesus yet again he was heard to pray and again was whipped. The same remark was made "I must obey Massa but till the last day comes I'll never stop praying Jesus yet." Again the same thing was repeated till the overseer went to the owner of the plantation and told him "The slave is praying and all the damned negroes won't listen." The master told him it was "no use to whip that slave as he hadn't got any sense" that he must be removed one side away from where his cabin was. His hut was removed and he was left to pray as much as he pleased. The old man above mentioned was the only
Preachers to be found on any of the plantations around, at least Mr. Cooke knew of no others. The nearest church was a Catholic 7 miles off at Donaldsmuir. Where the slaves never attended except when they wanted and expense for going off Cooke had attended their service, but could not understand it. This was the only Church in the place. Mr. Nicholas, the owner of Cooke, would when in good humour call in his slaves and ask them whether they would like to have the Bible read to them. As master would like to have the Bible read they would say. The master would then begin to read when some one of the slaves would say "You see that word it means so and so (giving the meaning of it) massa." Who told you that? asked Mr. N. God told me massa answered the servant. Well replies Mr. N. I believe you do know some thing. Being you know so much I guess you had better have a glass of grog. At some time offering the liquor which if refused the slave was whipped until made to drink it. It being the custom among planters then to make their slaves always take a thing that is offered them whether they want it or not. Mr. N. says I can preach too as well as you you are damned fools don't pray any more when you feel bad take a peddle and go to churching. Ask me any time when you want a bull I will let you have one. This man it will be recall was Secretary of the State of Louisiana (see above)
I asked Cooke if he thought the old man who preached could read any place in the Bible—He said he believed he could. I questioned Cooke about his own knowledge of the scriptures—all he knew amounted about to this: "Jesus Christ was his Saviour. Mary was his mother. God was his father. The Jews crucified him because he taught the people how to be good—after he was crucified he went up to Heaven. He said the old man taught him this and also taught him his letters—he had learned to read a little since he had come to the North. He had heard of Adam and Eve—Judah who betrayed Jesus—but had not heard of King David, Solomon, Peter, nor the Deluge or Confusion of Tongues—I told him about the Deluge and Noah's building a great boat and how they came to be for many languages spoken at which he was much pleased. He said the old man who preached was a very faithful steady Slave and was very much looked up to by the slaves on the plantation when any got to quarreling he would settle the difficulty; his word was law.