

NARRATIVES
OF THE SUFFERINGS OF
LEWIS AND MILTON CLARKE,
SONS OF A SOLDIER OF THE REVOLUTION,
DURING A
CAPTIVITY OF MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS
AMONG THE
SLAVEHOLDERS OF KENTUCKY,
ONE OF THE
SO CALLED CHRISTIAN STATES OF NORTH AMERICA.

Dictated by themselves.

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There were about one hundred and fifteen slaves upon this plantation. Generally, we had enough, in quantity, of food. We had, however, but two meals a day, of corn-meal bread and soup, or meat of the poorest kind. Very often, so little care had been taken to cure and preserve the bacon, that, when it came to us, though it had been fairly killed once, it was more alive than dead. Occasionally, we had some refreshment over and above the two meals but this was extra, beyond the rules of the plantation. And, to balance this gratuity, we were also frequently deprived of our food, as a punishment. We suffered greatly, too, for want of water. The slave-drivers have the notion that slaves are more healthy, if allowed to drink but little, than they are if freely allowed nature's beverage. The slaves quite as confidently cherish the opinion that, if the master would drink less peach brandy and whisky, and give the slave more water, it would be better all round. As

it is, the more the master and overseer drink, the less they seem to think the slave needs.

In the winter, we took our meals before day in the morning, and after work at night; in the summer, at about nine o'clock in the morning, and at two in the afternoon. When we were cheated out of our two meals a day, either by the cruelty or caprice of the overseer, we always felt it a kind of special duty and privilege to make up, in some way, the deficiency. To accomplish this, we had many devices; and we sometimes resorted to our peculiar methods, when incited only by a desire to taste greater variety than our ordinary bill of fare afforded.

This sometimes led to very disastrous results. The poor slave who was caught with a chicken or a pig, killed from the plantation, had his back scored most unmercifully. Nevertheless, the pigs would die without being sick or squealing once; and the hens, chickens, and turkeys sometimes disappeared, and never stuck up a feather to tell where they were buried. The old goose would sometimes exchange her whole nest of eggs for round pebbles; and, patient as that animal is, this quality was exhausted, and she was obliged to leave her nest with no train of offspring behind her.

One old slave woman upon this plantation was altogether too keen and shrewd for the best of them. She would go out to the corn-crib with her basket, watch her opportunity, with one effective blow pop over a little pig, slip him into her basket, and put the cobs on top, trudge off to her cabin, and look just as innocent as though she had a right to eat of

the work of her own hands. It was a kind of first principle, too, in her code of morals, that they that *worked* had a right to eat. The moral of all questions in relation to taking food was easily settled by aunt Peggy. The only question with her was, *how* and *when* to do it.

It could not be done openly, that was plain. It must be done secretly; if not in the daytime, by all means in the night. With a dead pig in the cabin, and the water all hot for scalding, she was at one time warned by her son that the Philistines were upon her. Her resources were fully equal to the sudden emergency. Quick as thought, the pig was thrown into the boiling kettle, a door was put over it, her daughter seated upon it, and, with a good, thick quilt around her, the overseer found little Clara taking a steam-bath for a terrible cold. The daughter, acting well her part, groaned sadly; the mother was very busy in tucking in the quilt, and the overseer was blinded, and went away without seeing a bristle of the pig.

Aunt P. cooked for herself, for another slave named George, and for me. George was very successful in bringing home his share of the plunder. He could capture a pig or a turkey without exciting the least suspicion. The old lady often rallied me for want of courage for such enterprises. At length, I summoned resolution, one rainy night, and determined there should be one from the herd of swine brought home by my hands. I went to the crib of corn, got my ear to shell, and my cart-stake to despatch a little roaster. I raised my arm to strike,

summoned courage again and again, but to no purpose. The scattered kernels were all picked up, and no blow struck. Again I visited the crib, selected my victim, and *struck!* The blow glanced upon the side of the head, and, instead of falling, he ran off, squealing louder than ever I heard a pig squeal before. I ran as fast, in an opposite direction, made a large circuit, and reached the cabin, emptied the hot water, and made for my couch as soon as possible. I escaped detection, and only suffered from the ridicule of old Peggy and young George.

Poor Jess, upon the same plantation, did not so easily escape. More successful in his effort, he killed his pig; but he was found out. He was hung up by the hands, with a rail between his feet, and full three hundred lashes scored in upon his naked back. For a long time his life hung in doubt; and his poor wife, for becoming a partaker after the fact, was most severely beaten.

Another slave, employed as a driver upon the plantation, was compelled to whip his own wife, for a similar offence, so severely that she never recovered from the cruelty. She was literally *whipped to death by her own husband.*

A slave, called Hall, the hostler on the plantation, made a successful sally, one night, upon the animals forbidden to the Jews. The next day, he went into the barn-loft, and fell asleep. While sleeping over his abundant supper, and dreaming, perhaps, of his feast, he heard the shrill voice of his master, crying out, "The hogs are at the horse-trough; where is Hall?" The "hogs" and "Hall," coupled together,

were enough for the poor fellow. He sprung from the hay, and made the best of his way off the plantation. He was gone six months; and, at the end of this period, he procured the intercession of the son-in-law of his master, and returned, escaping the ordinary punishment. But the transgression was laid up. Slaveholders seldom *forgive*; they only *postpone* the time of revenge. When about to be severely flogged, for some pretended offence, he took two of his grandsons, and escaped as far towards Canada as Indiana. He was followed, captured, brought back, and whipped most horribly. All the old score had been treasured up against him, and his poor back atoned for the whole at once.

On this plantation was a slave, named Sam, whose wife lived a few miles distant; and Sam was very seldom permitted to go and see his family. He worked in the blacksmith's shop. For a small offence, he was hung up by the hands, a rail between his feet, and whipped in turn by the master, overseer, and one of the waiters, till his back was torn all to pieces; and, in less than two months, Sam was in his grave. His last words were, "Mother, tell master he has killed me at last, for nothing; but tell him if God will forgive him I will."

A very poor white woman lived within about a mile of the plantation house. A female slave, named Flora, knowing she was in a very suffering condition, shelled out a peck of corn, and carried it to her in the night. Next day, the old man found it out, and this deed of charity was atoned for by one hundred and fifty lashes upon the bare back of poor Flora.

The master with whom I now lived was a very passionate man. At one time he thought the work on the plantation did not go on as it ought. One morning, when he and the overseer waked up from a drunken frolic, they swore the hands should not eat a morsel of any thing, till a field of wheat of some sixty acres was all cradled. There were from thirty to forty hands to do the work. We were driven on to the extent of our strength, and, although a brook ran through the field, not one of us was permitted to stop and taste a drop of water. Some of the men were so exhausted that they reeled for very weakness; two of the women fainted, and one of them was severely whipped, to revive her. They were at last carried helpless from the field and thrown down under the shade of a tree. At about five o'clock in the afternoon the wheat was all cut, and we were permitted to eat. Our suffering for want of water was excruciating. I trembled all over from the inward gnawing of hunger and from burning thirst.

In view of the sufferings of this day, we felt fully justified in making a foraging expedition upon the milk-room that night. And when master, and overseer, and all hands were locked up in sleep, ten or twelve of us went down to the spring house; a house built over a spring, to keep the milk and other things cool. We pressed altogether against the door, and open it came. We found half of a good baked pig, plenty of cream, milk, and other delicacies; and, as we felt in some measure delegated to represent all that had been cheated of their meals the day before, we ate plentifully. But after a successful plundering.

expedition within the gates of the enemy's camp, it is not easy always to cover the retreat. We had a *reserve* in the pasture for this purpose. We went up to the herd of swine, and, with a milk-pail in hand, it was easy to persuade them there was more where that came from, and the whole tribe followed readily into the spring house, and we left them there to wash the dishes and wipe up the floor, while we retired to rest. This was not malice in us; we did not love the waste which the hogs made; but we must have something to eat, to pay for the cruel and reluctant fast; and when we had obtained this, we must of course cover up our track. They watch us narrowly; and to take an egg, a pound of meat, or any thing else, however hungry we may be, is considered a great crime; we are compelled, therefore, to waste a good deal sometimes, to get a little.