

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF EX-SLAVES

After reading books on Negro life from the pens of such authors as Dubose Heyward, Julia Peterkin, Howard Odum and T. S. Stribling, some of us have had the feeling that Negroes themselves should step in and make contributions from the rich sources found in their background. We have hoped that men of talent and industry would assist in this task; and it has been attempted by a few outstanding writers like Carter G. Woodson, W. E. B. Dubois, Walter White, Langston Hughes and James Weldon Johnson. Lying waiting, however, there is so much more the sources of which are daily drying up that I have been prompted to participate in this effort.

After all the story of Negro life must be told—whether by white or by black or by both. At present, both are at work. From the pens of whites, we may get reflections of ideas and attitudes impossible from Negro authors. From these persons of the other race, when they are frank and loyal to truth, Negroes are able to find out just what is in the minds of their white neighbors. The Negroes may thus understand the basis of the white people's reaction to the blacks about them even though they may not agree with them as to attitudes. One can thereby trace lines of thought as they actually develop. Likewise, black authors may interpret their people to the world more faithfully than white authors. They are able to set forth the real black man as he was, is, and hopes to be. The one interpretation may counterbalance the other.

It may be argued that with two groups of writers dealing with the same or similar problems there is danger of controversy. This we must admit. However, the very heat of the argument will reveal what calm and deliberate judgment is likely to conceal. Further, these bickerings will cause judicious ones of each race to re-

pudiate their errant fellows and set forth what will be nearer the facts. All these things grew and revolved in the present writer's mind when in 1929 he invaded this neglected field.

At that time the writer was head of the Extension Department of Southern University, Scotlandville, Louisiana. His duties carried him off the campus every Saturday during the school year to such centers as St. Joseph, Monroe, Bastrop, Minden and Ruston, in that state. While teaching the topic of slavery in a class in United States history he conceived the idea of securing views of the institution from living ex-slaves and ex-slave owners. In accordance with this plan, all students, most of whom were teachers themselves, were requested to interview as many of these persons as possible. Students were asked to seek information regarding food, clothing, housing facilities, working conditions, amusements, religious practices, educational opportunities, family life, punishments and any other information obtainable. Every member of the class entered enthusiastically into the project, and thirty-six reported interviews totaling eighty-two.

The passing of the years, the early age of witnesses at the time, and the bitterness against the institution of slavery might be arguments against the historical accuracy of everything which follows. Even the love to weave a good story for attentive listeners bids us be cautious. We notice, however, that other authors dealing with American Negro Slavery quote from ex-slaves.¹ If it is a fault, then we feel that we are in good company.

I. SHELTER—CLOTHING—FOOD

The housing conditions of Negro slaves were set forth in most of these reports. Slaves lived in one-roomed

¹ Phillips, U. B., *Negro Slavery in America*; Bancroft, Frederic, *Slave-Trading in the Old South*.

log cabins with mud chimneys and dirt floors. The openings between the logs were daubed with mud. Several of these cabins were rowed off on each side of a road a short distance from the owner's house. Such a group of houses was commonly known as the "quarters."² "Their chimneys were made of sticks, mud and grass. The fireplaces nearly took up the whole end of the cabin. The doors were cut too low for one to stand upright while walking in and out. The windows were small holes cut in the side or end of the cabin with slide shutters somewhat similar to those made for chickens to pass in and out of the hen houses. Practically, the small door was the only entrance. These quarters were built from one-half to one mile from the planter's dwelling; some were much nearer. They were mostly built in a circle, rainbow fashion . . . Sometimes holes were punched through the back of chimney fireplaces so that overseers (by peeping through these holes from the outside) could see when all persons were present."³ "Often a cabin was built about one hundred-fifty yards from the mansion for the nigger drivers to live in."⁴ In this manner he could be easily communicated with by his master.

"Generally there were no kitchens. Consequently, the cooking, if carried on at all in the cabins, was done in the big fireplace. The slaves ate and slept in the same room."⁵ "There was scarcely any furniture in the rude cabins. Bedsteads were made of poles connected by boring holes in each end and fastening them with wooden pegs. Planks

²L. M. Channell of Bastrop, referring to the J. Martin plantation of Bayou Lafourche, La.; Mary L. Swearingan of Bastrop, quoting Martha Washington, 92-year-old ex-slave.

³Mrs. L. J. Evans of Bastrop, quoting her Uncle Joseph Young of Lafayette County, Miss.

⁴Ella Alford of Bastrop, quoting testimony of Frank Roberson on a Morehouse Parish Plantation.

⁵Gertrude Smith of Ruston, quoting Fannie White on a Texas Farm; Willie R. Smith of Bastrop, quoting Rhiner Gardner, 85 years old; Callie J. Harvey of Bastrop, quoting Roan Barnes.

formed the springs; hay or shucks the mattress. Sometimes these crude beds were fastened to the walls of the cabins."⁶ "Children slept on the ground upon piles of hay or corn shucks."

"Although a cabin rarely contained more than one room, it was as much as a single, slave family was permitted to occupy no matter how large the family grew. Often more than one family lived in one cabin. W. S. Miles of St. Joseph, Louisiana, ex-slave in Alabama, told the writer that his father's family of seven lived in one room. Persons who were slaves in a low country stated that the cabins sometimes had rude floors. House slaves lived in the house of the master, but slept on the floor, winter and summer."⁷

Miss Rosa B. Johnson of Minden, giving the experiences of one ex-slave, Lee Henderson, "Just as they were related to her by him," says, "Slaves wore a heavy grade of cotton material made at home into garments. This material was very comfortable in the mild season; extremely hot when the season reached its hottest part; and very cold in the cold season of the year. Of course, they were bound to suffer. They were forced to adjust themselves to situations as best they could."

Another student, speaking of his father's experiences in slavery, says, "My father wore very coarse clothes made of crocus."⁸ James Smith of Bastrop, thus gives eighty-five-year-old Mrs. Rhiner Gardner's description of slave clothing:

"The clothing of the slaves was as crude as the rest of the things which they were used to. All of their garments were made of heavy canvas. Some of their garments were dyed, and some

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Johnnie B. Slaton of Ruston, quoting Mrs. Lue Bradford's experience on a plantation near Lexington, Ky.; Minnie J. Tims of Minden, quoting Melvin Elzy.

⁸J. E. Gray of Bastrop; Ella Alford of Bastrop, quoting Frank Roberson, says, "Every slave had two pairs of shoes a year, three pairs of pants and jumpers, or three dresses."

were not. It was not uncommon for the little boys and girls to have a one-piece garment made out of crocus bag by cutting a hole in the center of the bottom for the head and one in each side for the arms. The children wore no shoes until they were large enough to work. All the shoes for the slaves were coarse and hard. Every plantation maintained a cobbler to keep in repair the shoes which were worn by the slaves."⁹

In this same vein another continues, "The slaves wore a coarse kind of cloth called homespun. In winter the men and women were given a coarse kind of shoe made from horse hide. They were so hard that at times they would rub the skin from the feet. The children did not get shoes."¹⁰ Lue Taylor said that the women on her master's farm in Jefferson County, Mississippi, were given two dresses at Christmas time. W. S. Miles (born in 1854) reported that on his master's plantation in Pike County, Alabama, slaves wore homespun and very coarse red russet shoes. The little boys wore heavy linen dresses and "Wahoo" hats made from the bark of trees. Miles further stated that clothes were issued as needed; and upon occasions of marriage, slaves "dressed out fine in their own clothes."

For church wear and for the few parties allowed the slaves, calico and broad striped gingham dresses were occasionally issued to the women.¹¹ Clothes of the slaves were cleaned and mended at night on Sundays, or if the master was very kind, Saturday for the women and Saturday evening for the men.¹² It is to be supposed that house slaves were dressed much better than others; yet this custom is not brought out directly in the accounts. Details of issuing clothes are omitted from these narratives, a thing which is perhaps to be expected of those

⁹G. T. Griffin of St. Joseph.

¹⁰G. T. Griffin of St. Joseph.

¹¹Sarah Skinner, *Recollection in Georgia and Louisiana*; Roan Barnes, ex-slave of Morehouse Parish, called this "lowels"; he also says, "when dey did gib shoes dey wus brogans wid brass on de toes."

¹²Ella Alford, *op. cit.*

who were not past the adolescent stage during the period which they describe.

Statements regarding food are varied and interesting. Roan Barnes, ex-slave of Morehouse Parish, said:

“No cooking was done in de cabins, but all de slaves went to de cook house to eat. (No doubt he lived on a big plantation.) One woman did de cooking wid de chillun to hep her. We had greens, onions, meat and milk but never had any chicken or cake; only at Christmas time dey would give de slaves some flour and sugar to make cake. Some slaves got plenty to eat; some didn't. Some masters wouldn't give dey slaves enough to eat.”

John Johnson, ex-slave of Morehouse Parish, evidently belonging to a small land owner, says:

“Food was of the poorest type and was given to the slaves from kitchen windows by hand. On days when company came, the children would claim the plates of each person. Usually the white visitors would leave some food on the plates and the lucky little black slaves would have a joyful time eating these scraps and left-overs.”¹³

“Slaves on a plantation in Franklin Parish, Louisiana, were allowed to cook their breakfast and supper at home. Enough women were left at a big kitchen at the master's house to cook dinner for all the slaves. After the dinner was prepared it was sent to the field where it was eaten beneath shade trees.”¹⁴

Jane Robinson, ex-slave in Jefferson County, Mississippi, says:¹⁵

“Our food was cooked at the big house during working days; on Sundays we were given food to cook in our cabins. We ate in the field when we were working. For breakfast we had milk and bread which were sent to the field in carts. For dinner we had vegetables, such as peas, cabbages and potatoes with bread. In winter we had pork, beef, and sausage.”

Mrs. Sarah Skinner remarked:

“Cooking was done in an open fireplace. Food consisted of cornbread, molasses and meat in winter. There was a kind of hominy made for us from corn, which was used when vegetables were scarce. Pumpkins and sweet potatoes were often eaten.

¹³L. C. Griffin of Bastrop.

¹⁴Gertrude Smith of Ruston.

¹⁵Mamie Barkley of Bastrop.

Flour (bread) was seldom eaten by the slaves and sugar was unknown to them. Syrup was used to sweeten their foods where sugar was ordinarily used. They (the slaves) would parch corn, beat it and make a kind of coffee. Very few slaves owned chickens or hogs. Their masters would give them the fat part of the meat, but chickens and eggs were not given slaves except for sickness. Slaves often stole such things because of a desire for change."

It is interesting to note some provisions for feeding of little slave children.¹⁶

"On a plantation in Franklin Parish, Louisiana, the children of the plantation were fed in a long trough with all their food put in at one time mixed together. The food consisted of vegetables, cornbread and milk. These troughs were located in the back yard of the master's house near the big kitchen.

"The children of the plantation were fed by some old woman who was too old for field work. They were fed in a trough or dug out made from the body of a tree. These poor little children ate with their hands or fingers and put their little heads down into the trough to sip up the milk or pot licker."¹⁷

"We children ate at the big house. Our food was put in one big trough together; syrup, milk and other odd food were mixed in this trough and we children stood around eating like little pigs. Sometimes we would go to the creek and get mushel shell for spoons."¹⁸

"The children were fed from troughs made from tupelo gum. These troughs were filled with milk and cornbread or with bread and pot liquor. The children ate with their hands, each one helping himself to all his heavenly spoons could dip. One master, Rainey of Texas, fed all his slaves, young and old from troughs."¹⁹

Fannie White, who was a slave in Bowie County, Texas, says with regard to the amount of food to slaves, "Food was weighed out weekly; six pounds of meal, three pounds of meat and a little lard for a man and his wife." This was ordinary food. Mae D. Moore of Minden, quoting her father, a Kentucky slave, says, "Wheat bread was permitted Sunday mornings; a little sugar, coffee and

¹⁶Mamie Barkley of Bastrop.

¹⁷L. J. Evans of Bastrop, quoting Joseph Young.

¹⁸Mamie Barkley of Bastrop, quoting Sam Boykin.

¹⁹Mae D. Moore of Minden.

syrup would also be given on Sundays.”²⁰ Joseph Young, a slave in Lafayette County, Mississippi, says that “meat was given on Sunday mornings but regular meals consisted of ash cakes made of corn meal baked in hot ashes and a quart of buttermilk.”²¹ “We slaves had plenty to eat,” said another. “Our master raised plenty to take care of his slaves.”²² Hominy made of cracked corn was served for dinner on plantations near Bayou Lafourche, Louisiana.²³

Lee Henderson states that his master fed his slaves well in order to keep them well and strong for work.²⁴ Frank Roberson, ex-slave of Morehouse Parish, says:

“Several cooks had to cook for seventy-five or a hundred head of people. The house where the food was cooked was not far from the mansion. In the ‘big house’ only the food for the master’s family was cooked, as the mistress did not wish the odor of large amounts of food to penetrate the mansion. From this kitchen, the slaves carried their breakfast to the field where it was eaten up as soon as it became light enough to see. Dinner was sent to the field. Supper was taken from the cook house to cabins and formed the only meal normally eaten at home. No cooking was allowed in the cabin except on Sundays. Food was eaten either with the hands or sticks. I never saw a knife or spoon except in my master’s house. Pickled pork, salt bacon, black molasses, cornbread, cabbages, peas and onions were the principal food of the slaves.”

Slaves often supplemented the food issued. “Food for the slaves was usually kept in a storehouse commonly called the smoke-house. If an issue of food gave out before the allotted time, the slaves had to make shift as best they might. This led to petty theft and pilfering. Often they stole from smoke-house and chicken roost. Frequently pigs were taken and killed to repair a food shortage. The most skillful usually were able to secure through these means enough food to satisfy their own needs and

²⁰Gertrude Smith of Ruston.

²¹Rosa B. Johnson of Minden.

²²A. W. Casterman, quoting Ebleaux Washington.

²³M. L. Channell of Bastrop.

²⁴L. J. Evans of Bastrop.

those of fellow unfortunates as well.’’²⁵ One Dan Robinson, who was a slave on the Bowie plantation, was a hunter for the Bowie family. Whenever he bagged more game than could be consumed by the master’s family he was permitted to carry the excess home. In this manner he supplemented the weekly rations issued.²⁶ All slaves, however, were not permitted to hunt. This privilege was ordinarily granted only to old and trusted slaves.²⁷

“A few house servants ate from the master’s tables and fared well. House and yard slaves generally had the same kind of food that their masters ate.’’²⁸ “Lue Bradford, who was a house slave both in Kentucky and Alabama, states that it was very rare that any slave was permitted to eat cakes, pies, meats, or biscuit. She recites that in Alabama her master whipped his cook until the blood ran for eating two biscuit.’’²⁹

II. FAMILY LIFE

In no phase of slavery do we find it more cruel and heartless than in family relationships. The utter helplessness of the slave both as regards the selection and retention of a bosom mate is clearly illustrated by these testimonies. Nor do we find lacking instances in which the lord and master took advantage of his authority to force his attentions upon the powerless slave women. The forced relationships to which these women had to submit were such as living with some Negro man without any type of ceremony, sustaining this relation after a broomstick ceremony, the reading of a passage from the Bible or other book, or an actual marriage ceremony, or cohabiting with varying degrees of intimacy as the para-

²⁵James Smith of Bastrop.

²⁶G. T. Griffin of St. Joseph.

²⁷Ella Alford of Bastrop, quoting Patsy Larkin, a slave near Elma, Alabama.

²⁸Mae D. Moore of Minden, quoting experience of her father.

²⁹Related to Miss J. Slaton of Ruston.

mour or concubine of some white man or men. In every situation above save the last mentioned the slave woman was ordinarily expected to obey the catechismal injunction "replenish the earth" and thus satisfy if not glorify her lord and master.

Broomstick marriage may be regarded as the most elementary ceremony given to slaves.

"She was made to jump the broomstick as a form of marriage. Not understanding the marriage vow (she was fifteen years of age and had been brought up in Illinois and Missouri) one slave girl ran away that night to her mistress. There she remained and worked in the cotton fields until after the Civil War."³⁰

"When anyone married, all they had to do was to jump over a broom and they were man and wife. Her mistress worried her about marrying. She did not want to marry. One night when she went to her room to retire, a large man had been locked in her room by her mistress. She managed to get away that night (she was just a young girl). The next night her mistress tied her in the room with the man who, she was told, was her husband."³¹

"Their masters would often select husbands for the women and wives for the men. Many and many a time they had never seen or heard of each other. The wedding was very simple. A broom, that was made from sedge straw, tied with a string, was thrown upon the ground or floor by the master; the man would catch the woman by the hand and both jumped across that broom at the same time whereupon the master would pronounce them man and wife."³²

Mrs. Fannie White, ex-slave in Texas, says:

"The old master at times picked a wife for a man slave. At other times, he gave the Negro man the woman of his choice. They both had to jump over a broom together after which they were called man and wife. This was considered marriage for Negro slaves.

"The marriage was not the same on every plantation. Some places they would really marry and sometimes they would have a marriage feast. And some would marry by jumping over the broom. But if in case they would have a marriage feast it was

³⁰M. M. Brown of Monroe.

³¹M. L. Leary of Minden.

³²L. J. Evans of Bastrop.

just some feast—a hog, a cow, and everything that was enjoyed in those days by the people of that time.’³³

Next we come to those “reading” from the Bible or other books and actual ceremonies. One reported: “When anyone on this plantation wanted to marry the master would read a section from the Bible and declare them man and wife.”³⁴ “Another ex-slave says that if his master heard a man say he liked a woman, he would call the two up and pronounce them man and wife. Sometimes one or two verses of the Bible or lines from another book were read.”³⁵ “The master would perform the marriage ceremony by reading a portion from the Bible. If the husband lived on another plantation he could come to see his family on Sunday, sometimes, or nights in the week. Some children never saw their fathers.”³⁶

Whenever the master allowed the marriage ceremony, a marriage (especially of a favored slave) meant a festive occasion. “On certain occasions of a festive nature, the slaves were given dainty foods and sometimes wine by their owners. If a marriage between couples the owner liked occurred on the plantation he would treat the slaves to a big dinner consisting principally of pigs taken from the pasture.”³⁷ For such slaves the master showed respect for family ties, allowed slaves to marry and furnished the wedding usually at the big house.’³⁸

It seems that the master’s consent was usually necessary in all cases herein mentioned. Mrs. Sarah Skinner says:

“The masters had the say about their slaves marrying. A man slave would tell his master: I want to marry Sal over on Marse Jones place, and if the master thought it necessary he would consent. If Sal was a good work hand she would have to

³³D. A. Franks of Minden.

³⁴M. L. Leary of St. Joseph.

³⁵J. H. Carter, *op. cit.*

³⁶Ella Alford, *op. cit.*

³⁷James Smith of Bastrop, quoting ex-slave, Mrs. Rhiner Gardner.

³⁸A. W. Casterman, quoting Ebleaux Washington.

continue there with her own master and her husband could get a pass to go see her two or three times a week. Sometimes the masters would make exchange of slaves and let the man take his wife with him to his own master's place."

"If Tom wanted Sallie for a wife, he would tell his master that he wanted her for his wife and if the master said that he might have her, Sallie had to become Tom's wife, regardless of her wishes. This constituted marriage."³⁹

"There were some marriages among the slaves but men and women often went together and considered themselves married when no ceremony had been performed. The master paid no attention to their relationship and reproduction unless it was in an extreme case wherein the parties involved became extremely rude. One man often claimed several wives. Little difference was shown as a man and his wife, or so-called wife, might have or might not have lived together in the huts. A man was not responsible for the support of the family as they all belonged to the owner; that is they belonged to the master of the slaves."⁴⁰

"No license was seen, yet you had to marry and live together as one happy family. Not a man was allowed to fight or mistreat his wife, whether she was in the wrong or right. Not a man was allowed to bring a girl to disgrace; for all men were made to stay in their places, or marry the girl and support her with a smile. As a whipping was the gift given without style. Old master read the matrimony from the book of God. They needed no witness to sign, for he was king and Lord; just you live together and do as he said or take the bull whip's lashes over your head."⁴¹

The sanctity of this so-called slave family was not at all regarded by the master, as many witness.

"Rosetta Winn was sold from Virginia and brought into Louisiana. She was sold away from her little baby that was only nine months old. She never saw or heard from the child any more, though Rosetta lived to be about eighty-five years old."

"Family ties were often broken when an owner decided to sell slaves. The relationship of the slaves was not regarded in the marketing process. On many occasions family unions were completely broken. Sometimes members of a family thus separated met again—many more did not and will never see each other again. These conditions led the slaves to have but little respect for each other as far as blood relationships went. Yet

³⁹Mrs. L. M. Channell of Bastrop.

⁴⁰Rosa B. Johnson of Minden, quoting Lee Henderson.

⁴¹S. M. E. Ewell of St. Joseph, quoting Mrs. Margaret Baker.

there were those who were warmly devoted to each other and strove to live in the bounds of one another and who cared for their young as much as they were permitted."⁴²

Ann Eliza (née Riddle) Woodson, the mother of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, often related her experiences. In a slave pen in Richmond one day she saw a young Negro woman weeping as one dying of a bleeding heart. "Woman, why do you weep so?" the observer inquired. The reply was, "I am weeping because I am being sold away from my two little children. I'll never see them again!" Thereupon Ann Eliza said that for this very reason she should rejoice. She and her mother with several small children belonged to a poor farmer in Buckingham County, Virginia. Overwhelmed with debt from bad management, the owner had to dispose of either her or her mother to satisfy this claim. Ann, the oldest girl, but not yet grown up, begged the planter to sell her if possible that her mother might not be separated from her little children. Although put on the auction block three times and examined as one does a cow or mare for sale, however, the owner could not get the \$1,100 asked for Ann Eliza; and he finally sold the mother with two of the youngest children of one and two years respectively, leaving those of five, seven, and nine years to scout for themselves.

Another ex-slave of bitter experience said:

"My grandmother, Mrs. Julian Wilcher, who is now ninety years, will cause tears to form in the listener's eyes if he will but listen to her tell how she was treated. She said only a few of the slaves were lawfully married. In fact, whenever a woman was an extraordinary breeder, she was mated by the master to his own accord. Only sometimes the couples were happily married, and occasionally when a couple was happy, the master separated them by selling one or the other; this I imagine caused many unhappy partings. These partings caused untold grief among the slaves, for usually when one was sold, he was carried to a plantation many miles away."⁴³

"Mrs. Harriet Robinson, a Texas slave, was sold four times.

⁴²Rosa B. Johnson of Minden.

⁴³Mary L. Swearingan of Bastrop.

Being considered an excellent breeder, she always brought large prices and was always well cared for, was never whipped; but was with a broken heart constantly because she was used for breeding, as a lower animal, and was constantly separated from her children.’⁴⁴

“One ex-slave owner of Texas, who fed his Negroes on such poorly cooked food from troughs that they often ran away, had them chased down with bad blood hounds. He bred and raised his own slaves. He would select three or four heavyweight men, force each to stay in a cabin with two or three women and serve them; in this way he bred his slaves as he did his stock. If one of these selected women did not breed, she was sent to do heavier work.’⁴⁵

“Mr. Lyons also speaks of the value put upon a man and wife that had a large family, especially if the births of the children were close together. He said that man was exempted from work and the woman’s only duty was the care for the children. Likewise, if a family failed to produce children they were forced to work especially hard and soon sold so as to get couples to produce children.’⁴⁶

“If one man saw a fine woman or man on another plantation, he would buy him or her for breeding purposes in order to continue to have good able workers. If he didn’t bring them on the same farm, he would arrange for them to breed from each other. When this man wanted to see his so-called wife, he had to get special order (permit) from the master. If a man was caught off the place without this order he was subject to be punished. He didn’t enjoy the opportunity of being a help to his wife, only when his master saw fit for him to go to see her. She also said if the master or field master saw fit to whip this woman, her so-called husband could not go to her rescue at all, but could only stand back and look with eyes of tears, and listen to his poor wife suffer.’⁴⁷

We have facts also regarding the relationships between slave women and men of the master class.

“Mr. Aaron Lyons, of Bastrop, La., another ex-slave, speaks of the moral conduct of some slave masters, imposing their masterly power upon slave women and then using their children as free slaves, but not allowing them to leave the plantation. Usually children of such unions were given a home; allowed choice marriages, and in many cases taught to read. The mothers of

⁴⁴Mae D. Moore of Minden.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶Ella Alford of Bastrop.

⁴⁷Lueatha Mansfield of Bastrop.

these children were given better treatment after the children were born."⁴⁸

"Eliza Stokes, an Alabama slave and an excellent character, said that she was a field hand, but her master had her brought to the house for a house servant that he might make her his concubine. This she refused to be; he had her beaten in an attempt to force her into submission. She told her mistress about it; the mistress believed the story and sympathized with her. Later the mistress went to Texas to visit a sister, carrying the slave with her as a servant. Upon the mistress' return to Alabama, she left the slave woman with her sister, who was kind to her, teaching her to read and making her a cook."⁴⁹

"Luncendy Hall, a Kentucky slave girl—a house girl—was overpowered by her master, who was a lawyer. As a result, she gave birth to a baby girl, whose father was the master. The master's wife often tantalized the slave mother and child. The little slave girl's hair was kept cut short because they did not want it to be long like the mistress' little girl's hair. The mistress could not whip the slave woman—and the master would not—but the mistress would often hit her head with her fist. One day the slave filled her hair full of pins, heads down, points up; when the white woman hit the little mulatto slave girl, her fist was filled with pins. This slave had liberty to go where and when she pleased; lived in a room of the white people's house. However, she despised her master because he was the father of her child."⁵⁰

Mable O. Leary quotes Lettie Moonson as telling the following:

"There was a woman on the plantation who was to become a mother. The mistress thought that her husband was the father of the slave woman's girl because he did not beat the woman nor did he allow anyone else to whip her. Whenever the master left the mistress abused the slave woman. Finally the baby came. It was a little white baby. However, its father was a white man of an adjoining plantation. The mistress always believed her husband was the father. By the time the baby was six months old the mistress had beaten it to death. The mother prayed to the Lord to come and get the baby."

III. THE SLAVE AND HIS WORK

Cheap labor was the reason for slavery—its justification. Had there not been an unusual amount of work to

⁴⁸Ella Alford of Bastrop.

⁴⁹M. J. Tims of Minden.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

be performed in the New World there would not have been any slavery. What do these eighty-two ex-slaves say regarding labor and working conditions of slaves? Mr. James Smith, member of Bastrop, and teacher in Morehouse Parish, introduces thus the experiences of Mrs. Rhiner Gardner, who was a slave on a South Carolina farm:

“Slaves were kept primarily for the work they could do in the production of cotton, corn, rice, tobacco and other staple farm crops. As cotton was ‘king’ in slavery time, the typical life of a slave centered around the plantation where cotton was the chief crop. Large crops of cotton made necessary immense stretches of farm land which sometimes had to be cleared and drained. Some of the heaviest work the slaves had to do consisted in clearing the farm of trees, logs, stumps, and in digging ditches, all of which was done in primitive fashion. The clearing was usually done in the late autumn and winter after the crops had been harvested and the slaves would otherwise be unemployed. Some of the more able-bodied women slaves sometimes lent a hand in this sort of work.

“Among the slaves, persons of all ages could be found. The young and able-bodied ones were employed to do the heavier farm work, while the old men and women were assigned the lighter tasks, such as sewing for the babies and the children too small to go to the field. They were frequently charged with the cooking for all the slaves so that no time would be lost by the field hands in the preparation of meals. At times they knitted socks for men and stockings for the women. Considerable time was spent in ‘carding’ cotton and wool.

“The old men usually had acquired some skill which they turned into useful service when they became too old to work in the field. Their work was to make baskets for the cotton and shuck collars for the teams. During the cultivating season, one or more of the old men would go along to the field with one other hand to file, sharpen the hoes, thus making it unnecessary for any of the laborers to cease work to sharpen hoes. It was their duty also to keep the plow points, hoes, and sweeps bright and ready for use by rubbing the rust with brick bats after pouring kerosene upon them. In unusually busy times, this work was done by children who remained at the houses. The feeding of the horses or farm animals also constituted a part of their work. While the horses and mules were at work in the fields, the old men would put their feed into troughs in the big farm barn which was separated into ‘stalls’ just large enough to admit one ani-

mal at a time. Blindness in both man and beast was not uncommon in slavery time.

“Every large plantation kept a blacksmith shop which took care of the mending and making of a large part of the implements used on the farm. Many Negroes acquired considerable skill in this art, some shops being able to turn out wagons and respectable looking carriages. In such a shop, all handles for axes, hatchets, hoes, shovels, and plows were made. All cutting tools such as plow points, sweeps and mower blades were sharpened in the local shops.”

Speaking broadly, we may say that slaves fell into two distinct classes. The first class constituted house and yard slaves; the second class field slaves. Ordinarily the duties of a house slave kept him or her in contact and proximity to master or mistress during the greater part of the time. The very designation “field slave” is sufficiently descriptive. As a rule, house and yard slaves had a much better time than field slaves, though not necessarily so. Lee Henderson states, “His duty was to make whiskey for his master and the other whites. He says that he enjoyed his work and drank as much whiskey as he wished.” Annie Terry, with whom the writer talked in 1930, says that she was a little house girl who did nothing practically besides play with the little daughter and son of her master. Her brother was the wagoner; consequently she went to town whenever she desired.

Mrs. Mae D. Moore of Minden says:

“My grandmother, who lived in Frankfort, Kentucky, was a mid-wife, well cared for and was allowed a part of her earnings. When not engaged at her profession, she made ginger cakes and sold them on the courthouse grounds. She finally saved enough to buy her freedom and her husband’s besides.”

J. H. Carter of St. Joseph, Louisiana, speaking of his father, relates the following:

“He said he was lucky to be bought by good owners. He did everything they told him to do and did it by their orders, so it was not long before he had a good job looking after the hogs, catching and trapping wild hogs, and turkeys. He said the other farm slaves would call him ‘dat free nigger.’”

“Virginia Johnson was sold in Virginia and brought to Louisiana by her new master, as near as she can guess, at the age of eighteen—she was brought away from her father, mother, sisters and brothers. She was a house slave, but had to work about as hard as the field slaves. She had all of the work to do about the house except on Sundays, when she was given a little help from some of the women field slaves. She also states that her mistress was very mean to her, knocking her over the head many times with things until the blood would gush out.”⁵¹

“The house girl or woman was taught to spin, weave, sew, knit, and do the best cooking. The men or boys who flunked around for the master were used for carriage drivers, hostlers, taught carpentry, blacksmithing, painting and machinery. He said that Louisiana had an awful rough name and when the house or yard servants were disobedient they would threaten to send them down to New Orleans to be sold to hard taskmasters. These slaves would mourn and cry for many days until all was forgotten.”⁵²

Chock Archie, ex-slave in Alabama, told Miss Lucinda Cain of Bastrop, Texas:

“I was reared in my master’s back yard, ate in his kitchen, sometimes along with his children. I did no field work, but cared for the small children and received absolutely good treatment. I knew nothing of the cruelty of slavery except when I would go to my mother’s cabin, where I would hear talk about what had happened to the slaves; also at times I would hear crowds of white men pass, looking for Negroes who had escaped. Mr. Sam Scott, of Mer Rouge, my master’s son, recognizes me today as his black pappy and gives me financial aid whenever I ask him.”

“Louis Gaston, an ex-slave in Alabama, of over average intelligence, lost his sight at eighteen years of age. He was treated well by his master. Gaston sold corn for his master and kept an accurate account of all the money, which he collected. Often his meals were sent from the master’s table. He was allowed to go to church when he desired, but was not allowed off the place at night. Once he was caught off by the patrols and whipped, being accused of having too much liberty.”⁵³

Of a Kentucky ex-slave, Mrs. Moore says:

“Fanny Johnson was used as a seamstress. Her mistress hired her services out to others. If she was mistreated, her mis-

⁵¹Lueatha Mansfield of Bastrop.

⁵²L. J. Evans of Bastrop.

⁵³M. J. Tims of Minden.

dress never allowed her to return to that place. In the run of a month, if Fanny had made a fair profit, the mistress would allow her to keep all she could earn in three days."

Mrs. Lue Bradford tells of her experience in Kentucky, near Lexington:

"I was taken into the home as a little girl and taught first how to spin and card. Of course, I stayed in the house, but had to sleep on the floor winter and summer with only one quilt. Sometimes in the winter I would catch afire trying to keep warm, as the fire would get so low I had to roll so close that my clothes or quilt would catch afire."⁵⁴

Myrah Fisher, a Texas ex-slave, states:

"The master's cook was kindly treated and allowed to feed her children in the master's kitchen off such food as was left from the master's table. She attended church with the white people and had church-going clothes as well as plenty of work clothes."

Mrs. Mary O'Guin, ex-slave of Webster Parish, tells thus her experience as a house slave:

"My mistress would surely work me around the house. I had to rise in the morning at four o'clock and sometimes couldn't retire when night came. I had to clean a six-room house and nurse three kids. When I grew older, cooking and the care of the yards were added to my duties."⁵⁵

Of the field slaves we have many reports, among which this from Mrs. Lue Bradford is interesting:

"The slaves had to work from sun to sun. The field boss would be in the field to see that they didn't play around. They would have to work until the horn sounded before they could stop for noon. In the morning, the field boss would have the record book and each person was supposed to report before starting for work and all were punished who were late. This encouraged punctuality. The slaves did not leave the field until dark. Upon arrival back home, the women had to cook supper and the men had to feed the stock and shuck corn for the next morning. Sometimes it would be ten o'clock before they finished all that was to be done at the 'big house' and stable."⁵⁶

⁵⁴Johnnie B. Slaton of Ruston.

⁵⁵Mrs. H. G. Lewis of Minden.

⁵⁶Johnnie B. Slaton of Ruston.

“Linzy Scott was an ex-slave whose master, John Carter, lived in Tensas Parish. He was a field slave and had to work from Monday morning until Saturday night. The horn would blow every morning at four o’clock and the slaves would soon be on their way to the fields to begin work at daylight. Work was from then until twelve. If the weather were really hot, they were given one and a half hours for noon. The dinner was eaten, which they brought with them when they came from home in the morning; after which they worked until night and returned each one to his little cabin, where he would sometimes cook supper and other times go to bed hungry, too tired to cook.”⁵⁷

Sam Boykin, ex-slave in Morehouse Parish, speaking thus of field hands, says:

“I was a boy in slavery times but was large enough to work. We children were given tasks to do and when we finished our tasks our work was over for that day. In the fall, we would go to the field early before the frost was melted; our feet would get cold because we would not have on any shoes. To keep warm, we would wrap up in our sacks and hide under the cotton baskets but the overseer would find us and kick the baskets from over us and run us out to work in the frost. If you picked one or two hundred pounds of cotton one day, you had that amount to pick every day or get punished.”⁵⁸

Frank Roberson, ex-slave in Morehouse Parish, writing that “working hours were from sun to sun with no such thing as over time,”⁵⁹ says further:

“Children began field work at the age of seven years and toiled until they were unable to work. Then the disabled old men and women were left at the house to watch and attend to the babies and small children of the other slaves. Slave mothers during spring and summer months would nurse their babies in the morning about four o’clock, eat breakfast and go to the field. Up to four months old, babies were again nursed at eight or nine in the morning and again at noon. Older children were nursed only mornings, noon and nights. After the crops were ‘laid by’ the men were kept busy repairing fences and clearing new ground. The women were put at spinning, weaving and knitting.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷Lueatha Mansfield of Bastrop.

⁵⁸Mamie Barkley of Bastrop.

⁵⁹Ella Alford, *op. cit.*; J. M. Simpson to Mrs. H. G. Lewis of Minden.

⁶⁰Sarah Skinner, *op. cit.*

A Mrs. Nancy Young, born in Cairo, Illinois, and having experience as a slave in Illinois, Missouri, and Louisiana, while reporting that "Slaves often worked in the rain,"⁶¹ says further:

"We slaves worked from sun to sun. The field boss would be in the field to see that we didn't play around. We had to work until the horn was heard before we could stop for noon. Sometimes we didn't have anything but bread to eat and water to drink. On Saturday nights we went up to the 'big house,' as we called it, to get our week's ration supply, which wasn't much. We went to work in the morning early just at good daybreak. Before we even went to work we had to go by the 'big house' and call the roll; this was done by each one calling his own name. For example, I would say: 'Jane, sir,' then I would go on to work. This was done to let them know who had gone to work on time or who had not gone."

Passing from work to the treatment of the slaves, one finds that, according to the testimonies of the slaves themselves, it was not so human. "On the larger plantations there was a man we called 'the Negro driver.' He would tell us what to do when we had finished one task. There was a driver with the hoe hands and one to go with the plow hands."⁶² "As a rule, his treatment of Negro slaves was very harsh. If they failed to accomplish the amount of work ordinarily expected by their masters, they were reported by him to be whipped."⁶³ "In cotton picking time, everybody was given a certain limit to reach and if any person fell below his limit his clothes were stripped from his back and he was whipped on his naked body. There was one master who whipped until the blood ran from backs to ground. Three hundred pounds per day was the lowest for some masters. My master would let a slave who picked six hundred pounds of cotton each day for three days walk around idle during the remaining three days of the week."

⁶¹Miss M. M. Brown of Monroe.

⁶²Mamie Barkley of Bastrop.

⁶³Sarah Skinner, *op. cit.*

“Mrs. Martha Washington reported that some of the conditions of slavery were horrible.”⁶⁴ “Burton Davis, a Georgia slave, field hand, plowed from daybreak until dark. When time was rushing, he was forced to work on moonshine nights. The horses were changed and rested but he had to keep on plowing.”⁶⁵ One Mrs. Emma Gray, ex-slave in Morehouse Parish, says:

“Our old master was supposed to be the best in the neighborhood, but he sometimes whipped. When he did, the men would have to pull off their shirts and the women would have to pull down their waists to receive the whippings upon naked skin. My old master whipped one lady about walking with a stiff leg until her back bled. I was whipped several times in slavery—one morning for being late. When I was about sixteen years old, the overseer attempted to whip me about plowing. I had become tired of being whipped. Old Bumpus (the overseer) hit me with a bull whip—drawing blood. I grabbed it; he changed ends and hit me on the head. I then snatched the whip and struck him on the head. This drew blood, making both of us bleed. After fifteen minutes of hard tussling, he let me go and never attempted to whip me again.”⁶⁶

“Alex Johnson was a slave whose master was Huey Young, and he lived on the Young plantation. Uncle Alex was a field slave and sometimes his work was very hard; he was his mother’s girl for four years. He washed, cooked, spun, knitted and nursed in order to help his mother, who had certain tasks to finish in a limited time.

“By daylight, each one had to be ready to begin and work until noon, when they ate their dinner which had been brought along with them in the morning and some would bring their breakfast, for they wouldn’t have time to eat before leaving home. The length of the noon hour depended upon the amount of work to be done. After noon, they worked until night. Then they would go to the cabin, get supper and go to bed. If they would stay up a good while, old master would knock and order everyone to bed.

“Huey Young was very cruel to his slaves, although his wife was very kind. He had a bench with holes bored in it through which yokes fitted. When he got ready to whip a slave, he would place one of these yokes over his head to hold him. He would simply beat him with a paddle having holes in it. One

⁶⁴M. I. Swearingan of Bastrop.

⁶⁵Mae D. Moore of Minden.

⁶⁶J. E. Gray of Bastrop.

day, Uncle Alex says, he whipped a woman until the wagoners had to carry her home in a wagon. The man (ex-master) died a few years ago and Uncle Alex just knows he was lost. During his last sickness, he didn't want anyone to do anything for him but Uncle Alex's wife, who is still living. She was a very small child when the war ended."⁸⁷

"Mrs. Pricilla Owens reported that her master treated her fairly well. He was her father. Most of the meanness was done by overseers. If the right report reached the master, he would sometimes send his overseer away. Upon one occasion, an overseer whipped a woman until the blood ran on the floor. She had not been on the plantation very long. The master had given all the slaves passes to another plantation to attend a dance. After reaching there and having so much fun, they decided to dance all night. The overseer liked this particular woman and thought she was away with some of the slaves and whipped her almost to death. For this act, the overseer was sent away to another place."⁸⁸

IV. PUNISHMENTS AND SLAVE-TRADING

Around the question of punishment hinges the most frequent bases for the argument regarding the inhumanity of slavery. Much has been said concerning cruel punishment of men and women held in bondage. Negro men and women who passed through the ordeal of slavery dwell upon this feature of punishment more than any other. It is no surprise, then, to find that statements regarding the corrections of slaves have been full and frequent in these accounts.

Lee Henderson told Mrs. Rosa B. Johnson that, "Punishment was not so severe on his master's plantation unless the slave was very unruly. Most of the whipping was done with a strap. In extreme cases persons were whipped so severely that the skin was taken off the body in spots and the clothes were discolored with blood. On some occasions one slave was forced to whip another slave." In this connection, Mrs. Patsy Larkin tells the following story:

⁸⁷Lueatha Mansfield of Bastrop.

⁸⁸Mable L. Leary of Minden.

“My Uncle was a ‘nigger driver’ and just before we were set free, my mother made my mistress angry and the mistress told my Uncle to give my mother a good whipping; he whipped her good for which I hated him although he could not help himself.”⁶⁹

Mrs. Mae Dee Moore of Minden, set forth the cruelty of a Texas slave owner in these words:

“A very cruel slave owner who lived in Harrison County, Texas, owned about forty or fifty slaves and kept a hired overseer. Slaves were beaten for the least offense. Oftentimes when a slave was tied down and beaten almost to death, this man who weighed about one hundred and eighty-five or two hundred pounds, would get on the slave and walk up and down his back, stamping, occasionally saying, ‘if there is anything I like better than my drink, it is whipping a nigger.’ Many times he would have slaves whipped to death, have a hole dug and kick the dead slaves into it.”

The following tale is related not only to illustrate a type of punishment but also to show to what extremities helplessness will lead.

“During the time of slavery, there were two women by the names of Betty and Molly. Molly was tall with coal black hair, about the age of thirty. Betty was a slave brought from Alabama and sold in Louisiana. She was very high-tempered. She weighed about one hundred and eighty-five pounds. Betty was treated very cruelly by the overseer on account of her temper. On one occasion, her punishment was to be whipped every morning for one month. This she thought horrible. She was the mother of one child named Simon.

“One day Aunt Betty and Molly got into a dispute over a cotton row in a field where they were chopping cotton. Betty struck Molly with her hoe, cutting the flesh from her face. Her punishment was so severe, she decided that she would stand it no longer. She threw her little son, Simon, in the well. They whipped her terribly about the disappearance of the child. She would never tell where the child was. There was one old slave who felt sorry for her and begged her to tell where the child was because he had heard the overseer say that night would be his last time to whip her because he was going to kill her. So she told this old slave man where her little son was. He rushed to the lot where the well was and pulled him out.

⁶⁹Ella Alford of Bastrop.

"Aunt Betty was brought to Homer and tried by the court and was condemned to die.

"On the day that she was hanged they asked her what she had to say. She only said, 'I want to eat breakfast in hell tomorrow morning with Molly McAmore!'"⁷⁰

Some ex-slaves dwelt upon the unusual practices and features of punishments. "Mrs. Monson said that women were whipped until they bled and then forced to bathe in brine."⁷¹ J. H. Carter giving reminiscences of his father recalls that:

"Many were treated as brutes, whipped and put in stocks, and I am told that some slave owners after putting them in stocks would build a fire of bark and chunk the bark while burning and let the small pieces drop on the slave while in the stocks.

"About once a year when the white folks were away, a gang of the slaves would come together and have the big time of their lives; sometimes they would get caught, which meant a good punishment, usually ending in a sound beating upon nude bodies draped across logs."⁷²

"All the slaves were checked upon at night and if one were missing, the overseer would call for him and if he (slave) had not been visiting the hut of someone on that plantation, he was hunted and if caught before he could reach his own hut, he would be given from fifty to one hundred lashes on his naked back with a big plaited leather whip made of rawhide leather. Some of these whips, he said, had nine small ends plaited; this was called a cat-o-nine-tails which would bring nine blisters at each stroke. He also said that some of the overseers were so cruel that they would pour turpentine over blisters to make the pains more severe. They thought that this would make the slaves fear such cruel punishment and not venture to leave the plantation without a written permit."⁷³

"Louisa Harris said if a slave began learning to write and let it be known, his fingers were cut off. There was a colored church on the plantation. They were never given money and just enough clothes to work in. Women were whipped as children. Their clothes were turned over their heads and they were whipped so that they couldn't move."⁷⁴

⁷⁰Minnie J. Tims of Minden.

⁷¹Mary L. Swearingan of Bastrop, quoting Bertha Pillars.

⁷²Related to M. L. Leary of Minden.

⁷³L. J. Evans of Bastrop, quoting Joseph Young.

⁷⁴Mable L. Leary of Minden.

Dr. Carter G. Woodson gives the testimony of his grandfather, Carter Woodson, a slave in Fluvanna County, Virginia. Being an excellent mechanic and cabinet-maker, he was permitted to go from plantation to plantation and make contracts for work in his own name and report periodically to his master. Functioning in this capacity, the old gentleman thought of himself as free rather than a slave. One day, then, when the overseer of the plantation undertook to whip Carter Woodson he turned the tables on the former and whipped him. His master, therefore, had him caught and tied up to afflict him with the punishment adequate for such a bold deed. On approaching the accused, the master said, "When I get through with you, Carter Woodson, you will be sorry that you ever struck a white man." Thereupon the sufferer replied, "You don't have to get through with this for me to feel that way, for I am sorry now, sir."

George Woodson, the son of Carter Woodson, and the uncle of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, had more of the invincible spirit than his father. This chip of the old block was what was called in those days an unruly slave. George grew tired of being punished even after having performed his duties faithfully, and began to strike back. One day he whipped the overseer for trying to punish him without justification; and when his master appeared upon the scene George whipped him also. This the slave knew to be tantamount to servile insurrection. George escaped to the woods and endeavored to induce other slaves to join him. Run down by blood hounds, however, he was soon apprehended and returned to the plantation, where he was so severely beaten as to bleed profusely and to have scars on almost every part of the body. To heal his wounds he was washed down in brine or what the slaves referred to as "salt and water." When George finally recovered sufficiently to go to the auction block he was taken to Richmond and sold into Louisiana, and his relatives never heard of him again. George's brother, James Henry

Woodson, the father of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, carried with him to his grave the grievance against that institution which thus deprived him of his oldest brother.

It is not at all surprising to note that much of the punishment centered around the problem of work. Hannah Towns told Mrs. M. J. Tims, of Minden, that, "If a slave were found to be stubborn he had a real hard time. The men especially were whipped if they were found not wanting to work or were sold from their family." Mrs. H. G. Lewis of Minden, quotes Tessie Moore as saying: "My mother was whipped nearly to death for not reporting to work on time. Besides, she was not allowed to eat for a day."

Another slave quaintly sets forth thus his narrative in dialect:

"My master wus name Bunkie. He wus not so mean to his slaves. He whipped only dem dat wus lazy and contrary. Some marsters wus very mean to dem. De overseer would whup de slaves if dey didn't work to suit him. Sometimes he would whup de slaves till de blood run. He would tie um and stake um out by tying each hand and foot to four stakes drove in de ground. De slaves had to work from sun to sun. Cotton picking time each slave had to fetch so much cotton or git a whuppin. When I wus bout thirteen, de overseer ask me fur my shirt case (because) I didn't pick de mount (amount) of cotton he did. I begged him to let me off an' I'd git it next time; en I did. Loter (lot of) old men and women would git whuppins case dey would let me beat um picking cotton."⁷⁵

"If a slave felt ill, the master usually gave what medicine he thought necessary. The doctor was seldom called in. The master prized a horse more than some slaves and often whipped a slave to death about abusing his horse. If a master moved, he carried his slave just as he did his household materials."⁷⁶

Mrs. Lizzie Shelton told Mrs. M. L. Leary of Minden, that:

"She would just as soon have been in hell as in slavery. Every day she had to clean the silver and her mistress would find some fault for which she was daily beaten."

⁷⁵Callie Harvey of Bastrop.

⁷⁶G. T. Griffin of St. Joseph, quoting ex-slave Robinson, of Louisiana.

“Our master would punish us by putting us into stocks. If a slave committed a bad crime, he would be put into the stocks by his head; that is, his head was put through the hole so that it would fasten around his neck. If the crime was not bad, he would be put in by the feet. Someone carried water and food to him. We were also punished by whipping with a whip made from cow hide; or a large whip called a bull whip. When a mother was sent to attend to her baby, she had a certain time to stay; if she stayed over that time she was whipped.”⁷⁷

In view of the preceding the following cases revolving around stealing will not astonish the readers. Joe Caldwell, ex-slave of Louisiana, says:

“If a slave stole anything he was whipped. The punishment for a minor offense was ten lashes on bare back. When resistance was offered, punishment was doubled or trebled; the flesh was raw and blood streamed.”⁷⁸

Lue Bradford of the same slaveholding area, says:

“My second master, a Mr. Heard, and his wife were very cruel to their cook. One day she cooked some biscuits and brought them to the table. Mrs. Heard decided that she had kept one or two for herself. Now she (the slave) was not allowed to eat biscuits at all, consequently Mr. and Mrs. Heard began questioning the cook. Of course the cook had eaten the biscuits, but forgot to wash the pan in which they had been cooked. Mr. Heard counted the number of biscuits on the table then went into the kitchen where he could see the signs in the pan; from which he was able to judge that the cook had misplaced two biscuits. Mr. Heard finished his dinner, then took the cook out and whipped the blood out of her.”⁷⁹

“Rosa Tims had a very cruel master who whipped his slaves often to keep them smart. The slaves were allowed to sing while working; but they had to turn down a wash-pot to retain the sound when they sang and prayed at home. They were not allowed to visit without a pass. If they slipped off, the hounds found them, then a dreadful whipping followed.”⁸⁰

Not all slaves were whipped as witness the following stories:

⁷⁷Mamie Barkley of Bastrop, quoting Jane Robinson.

⁷⁸Lucinda Cabin of Bastrop.

⁷⁹Johnnie B. Slaton of Ruston.

⁸⁰Minnie J. Tims of Minden.

"Mr. Johnson was a water boy in the days of slavery; he states that he was one who could talk so fast and say so many funny things that his mistress could never whip him."⁸¹

"Mrs. Mary Frances, an ex-slave woman about ninety years of age, states that during slavery time many of the slaves endured all kinds of torture in order to escape the hard punishments inflicted upon them. She tells of an instance when an uncle of her's resisted one of the overseers and struck his master a severe blow when the master attempted to beat him with a cow hide whip for not working fast enough for him. After having this encounter with the master the poor slave knew that it meant death if he remained on the place and that if he ran away the hounds would be sent in pursuit. Thus, he had to think fast of a means to escape.

"Immediately he set out for the woods. After crossing a small stream in a dense forest he came to a spot where there was a large hole in the ground. This was the place for him. He took trees, leaves and branches to cover it over in order that he might be protected from wild animals and storms. He made a bed of leaves upon which to sleep, and kept near him a large club which was his only weapon. He killed birds and game and other wild animals of this forest for food. He seized every opportunity to slip back to the plantation to visit the cabin in which his mother lived, so as to stay in touch with her and family. No one knew of his whereabouts but her, and she kept it strictly a secret. This particular slave remained in the forest until the hair covered his body and he looked like the animals about him.

"When freedom came, he revealed himself, went to his wife and children, who to their utmost surprise, and fright, greeted him, although they were not thoroughly convinced that he was whom he claimed to be."⁸²

Lue Bradford, who was a slave near Lexington, Kentucky, suggests that cruel masters were not always regarded with favor by their white neighbors. She says, "The Heard people were so cruel and did so many disgraceful things to their slaves that their neighbors stopped visiting them, looking upon them as a set of dirty people not even good enough to visit."⁸³

Not all punishment was administered by the masters, overseers and drivers. Patrols had a very definite hand

⁸¹L. J. Evans of Bastrop.

⁸²Minnie J. Tims of Minden.

⁸³Johnnie Slaton of Ruston.

and part in keeping the Negro slaves confined to plantations and properly terrified. Negro hunting, Negro catching, Negro watching and Negro whipping constituted the greatest sport of many youthful whites. Ex-slaves refer to them as "patty-rolls," the "patter-rollers," "patter-roses," or "paddle rollers."

"Sometimes all those who were out without a pass were caught by the patrols, severely whipped and carried to their masters. Whenever a slave tried to escape or run away from his master, he was hunted down by bulldogs or blood hounds. Sometimes slaves would be so badly lacerated by the dogs that they would bleed to death, being located by the presence of vultures in unusual numbers hovering over some lonely spot."⁸⁴

"Once in a while, they would give a frolic, and if anyone from another plantation was caught there by the patter-roses without a pass, he was beaten and sent home."⁸⁵

"The slaves didn't have any privileges. If dey wanted to go from one plantation to de udder, dey had to ask. If a young man wanted to go to see a girl, he had to ask. If he slipped away and the Paddle Rollers (they were the men that watched the plantation at night) caught him, he wus whupped with a bull whup. It wus pleated rawhide. Some of de slaves wud holler so mournful when dey git a whuppin."⁸⁶

Not the least inhuman phase of slavery was the domestic slave trade, and that practice did not fail to leave its impression upon those most affected. We were able to secure accounts of procedure from those actually involved—from those who had actually traveled in the slave coffles and experienced their hardships—from those who had been sold away from family and loved ones. Slaves were sold to clear accumulated debts and to effect a division of property among heirs. Stubborn and unruly slaves were sold as a punishment, and some because they bore blood relationship to the master. Mr. James Smith, of Bastrop, says:

"One of the saddest pictures of slave life was that presented by the wanton disregard of family ties by the owners. The

⁸⁴Mrs. L. J. Evans of Bastrop, quoting her uncle, Joseph Young.

⁸⁵M. M. Brown of Monroe.

⁸⁶Callie F. Harvey of Bastrop, quoting Roan Barnes.

buying and selling of slaves was as common as the buying and selling of horses and cattle. Families were separated never again to be seen or heard from. The fear of being sold away from the family or of having the family sold kept the slaves in constant uneasiness. If a slave was called to the house by the owner or overseer and the cause was not known by the rest of the slaves they invariably guessed that a 'deal' had been made and the person in question had been sold."

Mrs. Amelia Armstrong stated that she had "seen children sold from their mothers and husbands sold from wives." "Frank Jones, who was a slave in Macon, Georgia, was sold from his wife and three children. He never saw them again."⁸⁷ "Myrah Fisher, an ex-slave in Texas, says that when her mistress and master died, the slaves were divided and sold. She was sold from her children into Louisiana, the children being sold into North Carolina and Georgia."⁸⁸ "Often brothers and sisters were sold from each other right in the presence of their mothers and were not allowed to cry at the parting."⁸⁹

"Mrs. Bradford relates that she was sold to a slave speculator. She was brought with a drove of slaves from Kentucky to Alabama. At night the men (speculators) rented a stable for them to stay just as we see horse stables of today with no protection at all. There were seventy-five in the drove. If one would get too hot and die on the way or anything happened that would cause one to die, they would dig a hole and put him into it, put a little dirt over him and go on."⁹⁰

"Often fathers were sold from their families or mothers from their children and children from their parents' arms. Knowing they would never see each other again, this was heart breaking to both the ones leaving and the ones left behind. Slaves, who were good workers or who could read and write, were often sold for large sums, or given in exchange for some debt."⁹¹

"My mother was upon the block to be sold at one time but her mistress, Minder Cox, would not let her be sold. After the death of my mistress' father, the slaves were divided. My father

⁸⁷Minnie J. Tims, P. O. Box 493, Homer, Louisiana, of Minden.

⁸⁸Mae Dee Moore of Minden.

⁸⁹Ella Alford of Bastrop, quoting Patsy Larkin, ex-slave, near Selma, Alabama.

⁹⁰Johnnie Slaton of Ruston.

⁹¹G. L. Griffin of St. Joseph, quoting ex-slave, Robinson.

belonged to my mistress' stepmother. He was allowed to come to see us, but sometimes he had a mean overseer, who would not let him come; then he would have to slip off to see us."⁹²

"I was born about the year of 1845 in Bossier Parish near Plainsdealing. My mother was a Mulatoo—the daughter of her master, who gave to her, her sister and mother their freedom which was legal in the state of Virginia; but after the master's death, his son (white and the new master) came to the Negro quarters and asked my grandmother to let him see the papers his father had given her. The papers, once in his hands, he burned them (the papers) in the presence of my grandmother and ran from the house. Soon thereafter he sold them to the Negro trader, who took them to New Orleans and sold them from the block."⁹³

"When dey sold slaves dey wud carry them in droves just like dey do cattle and horses today. A man would be riding in front and one behind. Natchez, Mississippi, was one of the big slave markets. Dey would take chillun from dey mothers. Dey would never see each other again. Dey would examine men, women, and chillun just like dey would cattle and horses before buying um. Sometimes dey would give \$1,500; \$1,800 for one slave."⁹⁴

Just when and how many times a slave could change hands and did, may be judged from the experience of Mrs. Young, an ex-slave.

"When Mrs. Young was about sixteen years old, Mr. Bert sold her to Mr. William Gipson of Plattsburg, Mo., and finally Mr. Gipson sold her to Mr. Pratt of Plattsburg, Mo. Mr. Pratt put her in the traders yard and sold her to General Dodge. Then General Dodge sold her to a southern slave owner, Mr. Dirge Sandford. Mr. Dirge Sandford brought her from Plattsburg, Mo., to Monroe, La. This was a tiresome journey. They walked two by two, the men being chained two by two, legs and arms. They brought with them provisions to eat on the way, a herd of horses and a herd of mules. When transferred across the rivers, they were made to stand among the horses and mules. She was fifteen years old when she arrived in Monroe, La., and there were only two stores in Monroe, on the Ouachita river. Mr. Sandford put her on a block and sold her off to Mr. Tannel Hatheway of Log Town, La., in the pine hills."⁹⁵

⁹²Mamie M. Barkley of Bastrop, quoting Jane Robinson, ex-slave of Jefferson County, Mississippi.

⁹³J. E. Gray of Bastrop, quoting Mrs. Emma Gray.

⁹⁴Callie Harvey of Bastrop, quoting Roan Barnes.

⁹⁵M. M. Brown of Monroe.

“When a planter owed a debt and was not able to meet it, all of his slaves were called to the yard, placed in a circle and the creditor allowed to select from that number enough slaves to settle the debt. In some instances, the men would be ordered to pull off their shirts, the women to pull off their shirt waists, that prospective buyers might see if they had healthy looking muscles or if their backs were scarred.”⁹⁶

At all times during slavery, there seemed to have been those high-spirited souls (called “bad” by their masters) who chafed under the yoke of bondage to such a degree that they were willing to risk life and limb by running away. This study enables us to give the testimony of a few who attempted to find freedom in flight and the results of such attempts.

“Burton Davis, Georgia ex-slave, a farm hand, plowing from day-break until dark and on moonshine nights says, ‘Once he ran away, was overtaken and beaten until his back was gashed. As a treatment, strong salt water was thrown on his back; while unable to go to meals, he was fed pot licker and bread crumbs.’”⁹⁷

“One morning, my boss came around and told me, since I was such an able bodied giant, more work was expected of me. He put a task which was impossible for me to complete in the few hours allotted. When he returned, he found I had not finished it. His anger had no bounds; he struck me, drawing blood as usual; suddenly I turned upon him giving him a sound thrashing and made my escape by the help of the Lord to another far-off plantation. I found the master there not near as cruel as my former one. I worked faithfully for the new master until the Negroes were freed.”⁹⁸

“Bob Jones belonged to a man who owned a plantation on Bayou Lafourche. Bob continued to run away from his master despite the hounds and the cruel beatings. So a kind of iron halter with a bell attached to it was placed upon Bob’s head so that he might easily be caught.”⁹⁹

“I remember one morning during the slavery period, I saw a colored man on the back of our plantation, who seemed to be running away. It wasn’t long before he was lost to my sight. About five hours later, we heard some dogs barking. I was told that they were ‘nigger’ hounds. They trailed that man, I was

⁹⁶L. J. Evans of Bastrop, quoting Joseph Young.

⁹⁷Mae Dee Moore of Minden.

⁹⁸Lucinda Cain of Bastrop, quoting Jeff Barnes, ex-slave in Alabama.

⁹⁹L. M. Channell of Bastrop.

told, to the present site of Spyker Carbon plant where he killed two of the dogs in a fight with them. It was the custom for the dogs to taste Negro blood when they had trailed well. The Negro man was brought back by our field washed down in blood. This was done to make us afraid to run away."¹⁰⁰

"Sometimes a slave and the overseer would get into a fuss or fight and the slave would run away to keep from being punished. Then he would be chased by the blood hounds; sometimes they would get away. I have seen a number of slaves hiding in the woods around my master's plantation. At night they would slip to the quarters and beg for our food."¹⁰¹

V. RELIGION AND RECREATION ACTIVITIES

Accounts of religious conditions and opportunities for slaves vary. Some ex-slaves insist that every opportunity for worship was given; others claim that even the privilege of free worship was denied. Worship was a fact. The seeds of Christianity found ripe soil in breasts of black slaves often denied the right of open public worship. Negro slaves seemed to have fallen upon the most ingenious plans to gratify their desire to "Take their burdens to the Lord." Slaves attended the same churches attended by the whites, listening to the same sermons, the same songs, and the same prayers.

"On a Bowie County, Texas, farm, slaves were allowed to hold church services on Wednesday nights, Sunday and Sunday nights. They were not allowed to preach or sing loud for fear of disturbing their mistress. The old master would read the Negro Parson a chapter in the Bible, select his text, and give him some instructions about handling the subject."¹⁰²

Mrs. Rhiner Gardner of Morehouse Parish, says:

"A few slaves were usually present at most of the religious services held for the whites. They were, the carriage drivers, who after driving the white people to church were given seats at the service."¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰Emma Gray to J. E. Gray of Bastrop.

¹⁰¹Mamie Barkley of Bastrop, quoting Jane Robinson.

¹⁰²Gertrude Smith of Ruston, quoting Fanny White.

¹⁰³James Smith of Bastrop.

“Slaves went to church with their masters but there were no seats in the churches for them. They sat on the floor of the church or steps and peeped in. They did not understand any way just where or why it was the master carried them.”¹⁰⁴

“The only time slaves were allowed to attend church was on Sunday and they had to have a pass before they could go. In the morning they would attend the white folks church and in the afternoon, the church for the slaves.”¹⁰⁵

“There would be church service on Sunday. In the morning the slaves would attend church with their masters—upstairs—where a white preacher would preach. In the evening there would be service downstairs for the slaves, where sometimes a white preacher would preach and sometimes a colored one.”¹⁰⁶

“On Sunday evening, we would have church. A white preacher would preach; one was named Mr. Muller. He would teach us from the Catechism and preach. In his sermon, he would tell us how to obey our mistress and masters. Sometimes we would slip out in the bushes and have church; then we would have a colored preacher to preach for us.”¹⁰⁷

“The white minister preached to the slaves on Sunday afternoons. His text was always the same, namely: ‘Servants obey your masters.’”¹⁰⁸

“Mrs. Pricilla Owens, who was born in Georgia and was run off to Texas to escape the Union soldiers, says that slaves were allowed to have church to themselves. They had it in the quarters. The Negro slaves were sometimes forced to attend church with their masters and other times the white preacher would preach for the whites in the morning and for the slaves in the evening. He would use such expressions as ‘Don’t steal your master’s chickens,’ ‘Obey your masters,’ ‘Don’t run away, don’t lie.’ This kind of preaching was given in the afternoon.”¹⁰⁹

“On some Sundays, the white preacher would preach to the slaves, the slaves kneeling on the ground in front of the mansion porch, while he (the preacher) and the white family together with a Nigger preacher sat on the porch. Of course, the Nigger preacher, as he was called, sat on one end of the porch while old master’s family sat at the other end. We had preaching very seldom.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴A. W. Casterman, quoting Annie Washington.

¹⁰⁶Lueatha Mansfield of Bastrop, from Uncle Alex.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, from Uncle Linzy.

¹⁰⁷Mamie Barkley of Bastrop, quoting Jane Robinson.

¹⁰⁸M. J. Tims of Minden, quoting Melvina Elzy.

¹⁰⁹A. W. Casterman of Minden.

¹¹⁰Ella Alford of Bastrop.

An ex-slave gives us the gist of a typical sermon for the Negro slaves of his section. By comparison with other accounts, the sermon seems to have been universal.

“You slaves will go to heaven if you are good, but don’t ever think that you will be close to your mistress and master. No! No! there will be a wall between you; but there will be holes in it that will permit you to look out and see your mistress when she passes by. If you want to sit behind this wall, you must do the language of the text ‘Obey your masters.’

“Now don’t you steal your master’s chickens, turkeys; don’t you steal your master’s hogs, and don’t you run away; don’t talk about your mistress and master. If you do, you will not get a chance to go to heaven and sit behind the glorious wall, because here is the language of the text—on these points—then he would reach upon the porch and get a long steel strap or bullwhip and show it to the slaves saying, that is what you will get if you disobey.

“Now I will let Parson Tom preach to you because you can understand his talk.

“Parson Tom would get up and repeat everything that the white preacher had said, because he was afraid to say anything different.”¹¹¹

Statements which follow lead one to believe that at times worship of any nature was denied to the slaves.

“The slaves did not have churches as we have now. They made arbors of small pine trees. Some of them didn’t have arbors. When they wanted to sing and pray, they would steal off into the woods. During that time, most of the masters were cruel. If they would hear them (slaves) singing, they would get their whips and whip them all the way home. Whipping did not stop them from having meetings. When one place was located they would find another one. They didn’t have many preachers. Everyone was so anxious to have a word to say that a preacher did not have a chance. All of them would sing and pray.”¹¹²

“If dey had prayer meeting dey would turn a wash pot down to ketch de sound to keep de marsters from hearing um. Didn’t have no church; sometimes a white man would go around through the quarters preaching to de slaves telling dem to obey dey marsters and missus and dey would be good to dem.”¹¹³

“Slaves were not allowed to have church, but they would have

¹¹¹Ella Alford of Bastrop, quoting Frank Roberson.

¹¹²M. J. Jones of Minden, quoting Hannah Lowery.

¹¹³Callie Harvey of Bastron, quoting Roan Barnes.

prayer meetings secretly. They would place pots in the door to keep the sound in the house to prevent their masters from hearing them."¹¹⁴

Mrs. L. J. Evans, quoting Joseph Young, says:

"They (slaves) sang and prayed around their fireplaces. Someone would exhort if there was a preacher among them. This was all done by permission. The overseer would always be present to know what was being said or done."

"Andrew Jackson, ex-slave of Louisiana, says they went to church services on Sundays. The Negroes met in one or another of the cabins and held these services."¹¹⁵

"On Sunday they (the slaves) would have services after the white people had had theirs. Most times, however, the slaves held their meetings in the woods under (brush) arbors made by them. The preacher came from some other plantation; he preached about heaven and hell. There they were not allowed to pray for freedom, but sometimes the slaves would steal away at night and go into cane thickets and pray for deliverance; they always prayed in a prostrate position with the face close to the ground so that no sound could escape to warn the master or the overseer."¹¹⁶

"There were no churches as such for Negro slaves. At times the slaves would be called together by a white minister who would exhort the servants to be subject unto their masters. If there happened to be a church located on or near the master's plantation, he would allow the slaves to be called together there on special occasions and instructed by a minister. If there chanced to be among the slaves a man of their own race who could read and write, he generally preached and would, at times and places unknown to the master, call his fellow slaves together and hold religious services with them. It was to such leaders as these that the slaves owed much of their religious instructions."¹¹⁷

Mr. Kalvin Woods, who is about ninety-five or a hundred years old, says:

"When he was a slave, he always would try to preach to the other slaves and would slip about from plantation to plantation preaching. However, the women slaves would take old quilts and rags and wet them thoroughly; then hang them up in the form of a little room and the slaves who were interested about it would huddle up behind these quilts to do their praying, preaching and

¹¹⁴M. M. Brown of Monroe, quoting Nancy Young.

¹¹⁵M. J. Tims of Minden.

¹¹⁶Ella Alford of Minden, quoting Patsy Larkin.

¹¹⁷James Smith of Bastrop, quoting Rhiner Gardner.

singing. These wet rags and quilts were used to keep the sound of their voices from penetrating the air. They didn't want their masters to hear them, for they knew it meant a punishment for them. Mr. Woods says many a happy meeting was carried on behind these quilts and rags."¹¹⁸

Referring to a plantation located in Louisiana, Mrs. Channel says:

"On this plantation, there were about one hundred and fifty slaves. Of this number, only about ten were Christians. We can easily account for this, for religious services among slaves were strictly forbidden. But the slaves would steal away into the woods at night and hold services. They would form a circle on their knees around the speaker who would also be on his knees. He would bend forward and speak into or over a vessel of water to drown the sound. If anyone became animated and cried out, the others would quickly stop the noise by placing their hands over the offender's mouth."

In some localities and communities, masters allowed slaves privilege to earn and spend money of their own; others permitted the slaves to own chickens, pigs, and the like, or to have garden patches. "An ex-slave told the writer that his master willingly gave some of the slaves patches for themselves which they worked on Sundays and at night. When the crop was harvested he (the master) would sell it for them and give the slaves the money."¹¹⁹ Jane Robinson, who was a slave in Jefferson County, Mississippi, says:

"We were not given any money, but sometimes we were given patches on which to raise some truck; this (truck) would be sold and the money given to us. The truck patch had to be worked at night. I used to hold a light for my grandfather as he worked in his truck patch."¹²⁰

"Mrs. Channell says that on the Martin plantation, thrifty slaves were allowed to work at night and make a little garden for themselves."

¹¹⁸Mary L. Swearingan of Bastrop.

¹¹⁹Sarah Skinner.

¹²⁰Mamie Barkley of Bastrop.

“Many of the slaves had money which some would bury. A man by the name of Allen Jones had a shoe shop. He would fix shoes, for which he was paid well. Some had stores. They sold beer and ginger snaps. They had to fix shoes and sell in their stores at night, between times, or on Saturday evenings. Many of the slaves also had patches. They worked for the master during day and in the little patches at night. Sometimes the master would give time off from work. The most that they would plant on these patches were things to eat. If they raised more than they could eat, the rest was sold and the money given to the slaves. As they grew in finance, they were then able to buy better shoes, dresses or hats.”¹²¹

Mr. Crawford Martin of this very plantation, says, “They (slaves) got money sometimes by working on the time that was given to them, such as Saturday evening and sometimes all day Saturday. They (slaves) used this money to buy nice things that the master did not give, such as shoes and (better) clothing.”¹²² Another ex-slave says: “On some Louisiana plantations, it was permissible for slaves to raise chickens and to work small gardens during leisure. Only thrifty favorite slaves were allowed this privilege. This was called the edge of slavery.”¹²³ “Money was got by working out for white folks who did not have slaves. This was done when they were off for the week-end.”¹²⁴ “During sickness, a mistress or some old slave who could not do much work attended to the sick. In very serious sickness, a physician was called.”¹²⁵

Even in the dark house of bondage means of lightening the burden through recreation and amusement were not lacking. The customs of granting Sundays to slaves as a day of rest was practically universal. It was a practice rarely varied except in cases of extreme emergency. Our investigation showed that work was not required of

¹²¹Mary Jones of Bastrop, quoting Mrs. Hannah Lowry.

¹²²A. W. Casterman of Minden.

¹²³A. W. Casterman, quoting Annie Washington.

¹²⁴Sarah Skinner, *op. cit.*

¹²⁵Ella Herson of Bastrop.

slaves on Saturday afternoons and evenings. Occasionally, exceptionally good masters would allow slaves all of Saturday. Besides the foregoing, all recognized state and national holidays normally called for suspension of regular daily duties.

“Mrs. Amelia Armstrong, an ex-slave in Columbus, Mississippi, states that she was a servant in the home of her master and was granted permission to leave the plantation along with other slaves upon several occasions for pleasure visits. They never had any work to do on Sunday as they had a Christian hearted master.”¹²⁶

“For entertainment slaves were always given a big dinner on the 4th of July; all had picnics on some occasions. Those who liked frolics could have them on special occasions.”

“The slaves had little time or occasion for amusement. However, after the accomplishment of a particularly heavy task, such as the harvesting of a bumper crop, or the clearing of a large piece of land, if the slaves had worked to the satisfaction of the overseer, the master was usually induced to permit a big dance to the slaves.”

“Mrs. Nancy Young said slaves had very few amusements. They visited on Sundays and once in a while they would give a frolic.”¹²⁷ Mrs. L. J. Evans of Bastrop quotes her Uncle Joseph Young as saying, “The only amusements the slaves had were boxing, wrestling, jumping and dancing.” “It was stated by this man that slaves usually amused themselves by boxing, foot races, dancing (secretly), playing music on tin cans, Jew’s harps, or any kind of instrument which they could get that would produce sound. On many occasions, the whites enjoyed looking at the Negroes perform.”¹²⁸

“Some of the slave owners would allow their slaves to stage ring plays and go from house to house on Sundays.”¹²⁹ “For amusement, dancing was allowed; the overseer would give them passes from house to house on the

¹²⁶H. A. Dillon of Bastrop.

¹²⁷M. M. Brown of Monroe.

¹²⁸Rosa B. Johnson of Minden, quoting Lee Henderson.

¹²⁹J. H. Carter of St. Joseph, quoting father.

plantation, and they would dance themselves down. Dancing seemed to be the only amusement for the slaves."¹³⁰

"Usually when a slave holder gave a big festival, slaves from all neighboring farms would be invited. At times, festivals would be given for the sole benefit of the slaves of one slave holder. At this festival, the Negroes would sing and dance. Some would march and dance by the music of a banjo, others by the beating of a tin-pan. The ladies would dress in white towel dresses, with white rags on their heads. The men would dress in white duckings and shirts. Their pantaloons would be rolled up to the knees, and all would dance barefooted."¹³¹

"The slaves were allowed to have socials or balls occasionally. At times, the mistress and master would come out to see the Negroes dance and enjoy themselves; the dances that were done in those days were quadrille and other square dances. An accordion often furnished the music. On rare occasions, there were fiddles, fifes, and sometimes a drum. This same music was often carried to the home of the master when company came."¹³²

"Frequently, these slaves were permitted to have a ball or dance. Some would play ring plays, such as 'Git around Napper and git out ob de way' or 'Where yo gwine buzzard, Where you gwine crow? Ise gwine down to de new groun to jump Jim Crow. Wheel aroun and turn aroun and do jes so. Evy time you turn aroun, you jump Jim Crow.'¹³³

"De most pledger the slaves had wus playing ball, shooting marbles and playing de fiddle. Sometimes, dey would slip off to give a dance."¹³⁴

"There was nothing ever given for their enjoyment, Uncle Alex says, unless it was a big watermelon eating. There were always four or five acres planted in watermelons and during the season, they would have a big feast out under the trees. There would be plenty of whisky at all times, but they would have that to buy. They never had any money not even as much as a dollar given to them by their masters."¹³⁵

"For entertainment, they (slaves) were given big dinners on some occasions, such as the 4th of July, when they were through or up with the crops."¹³⁶

¹³⁰Gertrude Smith of Ruston, quoting Fanny White.

¹³¹Gertrude Smith of Ruston.

¹³²G. T. Griffin of St. Joseph, quoting Robinson.

¹³³L. M. Channell of Bastrop.

¹³⁴Roan Barnes to Callie F. Harvey of Bastrop.

¹³⁵Lueatha Mansfield of Bastrop.

¹³⁶A. W. Casterman of Minden, quoting Annie Washington, ex-slave in Webster Parish.

VI. DID THEY FIND THEIR BURDENS HARD?

We are not without positive reactions from ex-slaves regarding slavery. Although the majority of those questioned did not express themselves upon the institution, fourteen delivered themselves in no uncertain terms. What might be surprising to some is the fact that several ex-slaves not only feel no animus but actually long for the "good old times." The statements follow—the pro-slavery sentiments first and the anti-slavery sentiments thereafter.

One of the investigators closed his account of an interview with an ex-slave who "says that slaves fared much better than Negroes do now. He said we would be much better treated were we slaves."¹³⁷ "Lee Henderson states that he admires those days as he got along very nicely and did not have to work very hard."¹³⁸ "Some would have much better time if they were in slavery now."¹³⁹ "Priscilla Owens says, the slaves on their plantation had a much better time than most Negroes are having now."¹⁴⁰ "One old gentleman said his master was simply fine in every way. Since surrender, he has often wished for slavery again because he surely had a really splendid time."¹⁴¹

No less positive and emphatic are the statements from the other side. "Mrs. Martha Washington, aged 92 years, said to the writer not long ago that some of the conditions of slaves were horrible and the majority of masters were cruel."¹⁴² Lettie Stephens remarked to Mrs. Callie Harvey of Bastrop, "Slaves had a hard time where I was." "As a whole, I did not see much cruelty to slaves but heard of a lot. For my part, I do not care to see such

¹³⁷A. W. Casterman of Minden, quoting Elex Washington, ex-slave, near Jackson, Miss.

¹³⁸Rosa B. Johnson of Minden.

¹³⁹A. W. Casterman of Minden, quoting Crawford Martin.

¹⁴⁰A. W. Casterman of Minden.

¹⁴¹Mrs. D. A. Franks of Minden.

¹⁴²Mary L. Swearingan of Bastrop.

again. I was fourteen years old when we were set free."¹⁴³ "All of my days during the time of slavery were dark, seemingly."¹⁴⁴ "All the ex-slaves with whom I have talked, say that slavery at its best was terrible. There was no freedom, no privileges, nothing but hard labor and deprivations."¹⁴⁵ "Mrs. Lettie Monson said that all she knew of slavery was mean and unjust. She bears out the statement of others. Women were whipped until they bled and then were forced to bathe in brine. One was just about dead when permitted to stop for sickness."¹⁴⁶ "I consider the days of slavery as the darkest days of the world to my people—I mean to the Negro race. We were sold just as our masters would see fit, and many of us were driven and kicked about like dogs."¹⁴⁷ "Mrs. Lizzie Shelton reported that she would just as soon be in Hell as to live as she did in slavery."¹⁴⁸

And yet, "Lucy Hamilton, born in Claiborne Parish, four miles north of Athens, Louisiana, says that she has seen more slavery since surrender than before."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴³Sarah Skinner.

¹⁴⁴Mrs. H. S. Lewis of Minden, quoting Tessie Moore.

¹⁴⁵Callie F. Harvey of Bastrop.

¹⁴⁶Mable L. Leary of Minden.

¹⁴⁷Mrs. H. G. Lewis of Minden, quoting Mr. J. M. Simpson.

¹⁴⁸Mable L. Leary of Minden.

¹⁴⁹M. J. Tims of Minden.

It is quite interesting to read the opinions of such white persons as will express themselves to Negroes regarding slavery as they saw the institution either as children of slave owners or slave owners themselves. A. L. Osbin, one such person who lived in Tennessee during the days of slavery says:

"My father owned fifty or sixty slaves, and worked them very hard every day in the week. On Sundays women would prepare meals for the mistress, and clean the house. My father was very cruel to his slaves in every respect. I was a sympathetic boy, and my father finally listened to my plea for better treatment of slaves and improved."

Another, according to Booker T. Wagney, recalls the old days in these words:

"I was quite a kid during that time, but old enough to realize how conditions should be. My dad was a slave-holder and he did not have the feeling that people should have for people in that condition. When I was

And stepping aside to allow one of the student interviewers have the floor as the curtain is drawn on our report:

“May I add here that even though slavery has been abolished, it still exists in parts of our country. To go about and visit the large plantations where Negroes toil day after day in the fields till the end of the year when they are told by the owners that they are yet in debt—which means that they must toil yet another year, only to find themselves where they started—is indeed sad to behold. However, we as a whole have done exceedingly well as we have only had sixty-five years to get where we now stand. ‘Watch us grow.’”

JOHN B. CADE

*Prairie View College,
Prairie View, Texas.*

at the age of ten, my father had me as one of the overseers in his field because he owned so much money and land, and so many slaves.”

A very old man who was a slave owner said about two years ago that during slavery he gave each one of his “Nigger” (Negro) slaves about two pecks of meal and three or four pounds of bacon a week. Most of his slaves slept on the floor and after breakfast, at sunrise, the slaves went to the fields where they worked practically all day. He gave them about one hour and a half rest for noon. He is classed as a very mean man and even now most of the Negroes fear him. He hates Negroes and does everything in his power to harm them. It would make one’s blood boil to hear him sit and talk about what he has done to Negroes.

A. W. Casterman of Minden, quotes one Lawyer Stewart who recalled that his father owned a few slaves but borrowed slaves from folks around town who did not need them. To do this, contracts had to be made, which were quite rigid. He remembered his father hiring a man and woman under many restrictions, such as, they must have so many suits a year, must be given plenty to eat; the woman must not be put to heavy work, such as plowing, rolling logs. She could do house work or hoe; she also could pick cotton.

Slaves seldom lived together unmarried. The man might live on one plantation and the woman on another. The masters saw to it that the man went to see his wife on week-ends, but he was compelled to report for work Monday. Marriage was binding. He remembered that many of them lived together until death.

Slaves ate in the kitchen. At supper hour they ate the clearings and anything they could get. The same waitress served both master and slaves, with only a door separating the eating (or should I say dining) rooms.