

Bennet H. Barrow, Ante-Bellum Planter of the Felicianas

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The parish of West Feliciana¹ lies to the east of the Mississippi River, just south of the thirty-first parallel in the northwest corner of that section known as the Florida parishes of Louisiana.² The region was occupied early in Louisiana's colonial period, the first whites presumably having located near the Tunica Indians about 1712. Settlement progressed slowly through decades of French and English occupation. During the Spanish regime foreigners were granted land, many of the settlers coming from Virginia and the Carolinas, and by the time the United States acquired title to the territory the greater percentage of the population was American, although as late as 1828 tax collections were published in both French and English to meet the needs of a bilingual

¹ This paper was read at a joint session of the Agricultural History Society and the American Historical Association, Chicago, Illinois, December 28, 1938.

² The following works contain descriptions of the region: *An Account of Louisiana* (Washington, 1803), *passim*; Thomas Ashe, *Travels in America* (London, 1809), 294-95; Robert Baird [Richard Bache], *View of the Valley of the Mississippi* (Philadelphia, 1834), 275; William Bartram, *Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida* (Philadelphia, 1791), 432; H. M. Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana* (Pittsburgh, 1814), 282-83; Theodore Clapp, *Autobiographical Sketches and Recollections* (Boston, 1857), 65; Zadock Cramer, *The Navigator* (Pittsburgh, 1806), 73-74; J. H. Ingraham, *The Sunny South* (Philadelphia, 1860), 296 ff.; Charles Lanman, *Adventures in the Wilds of the United States*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1856), I, *passim*; St. Francisville *Louisiana Journal*, May 27, 1828; Dunbar Rowland, *Mississippi*, 3 vols. (Atlanta, 1907), II, 966; Christian Schultz, *Travels on an Inland Voyage Through the States of New York . . . and Through the Territories of Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi and New Orleans* (New York, 1810), 181; William C. Stubbs, *A Handbook of Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1895), 20; Amos Stoddard, *Sketches of Louisiana* (Philadelphia, 1812), 114-15; D. B. Warden, *A Statistical, Political, and Historical Account of the United States of North America*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1819), II, 490-91, 498, 522-23, 531.

society.³ By 1820 the parish had passed the frontier stage, the best lands having been acquired by those who were to gain economic and political control of the region during the ensuing decade.

The 1830's saw West Feliciana develop into an extremely productive area, and with the southwestern counties of Mississippi it formed one of the richest economic sections south of Mason and Dixon's line. Here was found one of the few examples of the traditional old plantation South—a region where the modern legend actually existed: large plantations, an intelligent and cultured aristocracy, a gentry of sturdy stock, an important entrepôt in Bayou Sara-St. Francisville, and great wealth based on cotton and sugar cane. Plantation homes such as Rosedown (with its formal gardens, including marble statuary, as laid out by a French landscape architect), Ellerslie, Highland, The Cottage, Waverly, and others boasted a hospitality so well described by Timothy Flint: "The opulent planters . . . have many amiable traits of character. They are high-minded and hospitable in an eminent degree. I have sojourned much among them, and have never experienced a more frank, dignified, and easy hospitality."⁴

A member of this aristocratic feudal group was Bennet H. Barrow, master of Highland plantation. He was the youngest son of William Barrow, II, who migrated from North Carolina to the Felicianas during the late 1790's and settled Locust Grove plantation on the waters of Little Bayou Sara about twelve miles northwest of St. Francisville.⁵ He grew to manhood during a period of rapid plantation expansion, received little formal education, married at nineteen years of age,⁶ and, having inherited the home place of 1,400 arpents,⁷ renamed it High-

³ St. Francisville *Louisiana Journal*, June 21, 1828.

⁴ Timothy Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years, Passed in Occasional Residences and Journeyings in the Valley of the Mississippi . . .* (Boston, 1826), 322.

⁵ For the Barrow family records, the writer is indebted to Mrs. D. I. Norwood of Highland plantation, Bains, Louisiana; Mrs. Leo Charles Browne of New Orleans; and Mrs. Wade Noland, Bains, Louisiana.

⁶ Barrow's wife was Miss Emily Joor. For the Joor family records, the writer is indebted to Miss Harriet Joor, Lafayette, Louisiana, and Mrs. Bentley Nicholson, New Orleans. Mrs. D. I. Norwood kindly lent C. B. Joor, "History of the Joors" (MSS. written in 1839).

⁷ Inventory of the estate of William Barrow, in West Feliciana Parish, Inventory Records, A, 327-42. Cited hereafter as Inventory Records. William Barrow left an estate in-

land, and in 1830 began his planting career. From 1833 to 1846 he kept a diary which gives a penetrative picture of various phases of Southern rural life: efforts at planting, sporting interests, the social life of the plantation, and, in many instances, personal feelings and opinions on matters public and private.⁸ He was continuously engaged in land deals; since he purchased much more often than he sold, his transactions gradually increased the total of his holdings. Full cash payment was rare, the usual procedure calling for approximately one third down, the balance within a three-year period; thus he depended upon his cotton and sugar crops to meet his payments. He was a shrewd buyer and usually purchased land at a "fair" price if not at a "bargain." At his death in 1854 he owned six plantations, approximately 5,000 arpents, appraised at slightly over \$70,000.⁹

Barrow faced the common financial problems of the Southland and attempted to work them out in much the same manner as contemporary agriculturists did in other sections of the plantation area. He was often careless and occasionally the disastrous results of his negligence turned his customary optimism into deep gloom.¹⁰ The constant purchase of land was a common Southern extravagance and therein he was no exception. Money was borrowed from banks and private individuals, and was loaned, though in much smaller amounts. Throughout his planting career he fulminated about the economic conditions of the time, the

ventoried at \$214,930.83, which included 7,160 arpents of land divided into six plantations. It also embraced 348 slaves and a secretary and books estimated at \$600. The arpent was an old French measure of land varying with the locality from .84 to 1.28 acres.

⁸ "The Plantation Diary of Bennet H. Barrow, 1833-1846," May 20, September 5, 1845. Cited hereafter as *Diary*. The diary is in one leather bound volume of approximately 500 manuscript pages. It is now in the possession of Mrs. Wade Noland, Bains, Louisiana, to whom the writer is indebted for permission to use it. Two typescript copies are at Louisiana State University, one in the Hill Memorial Library and one in the Department of Archives.

⁹ West Feliciana Parish, Notarial Records, E, 122-24, 320-21; F, 33-34, 258-59, 317-18; H, 346-48; K, 347-48. Cited hereafter as *Notarial Records*. See, also, *Inventory Records*, G, 135-43, for the inventory of his property.

¹⁰ On May 20, 1845, he wrote in his *Diary*: "By some carelessness have Lost a Letter from the Miss Swifts enclosed were two or three Blank notes & power of Att^y. to me as their agent, never in my Life had any thing to worry me as much—recollect of having it at my desk. suppose some of the children have destroyed it." He found the notes and power-of-attorney several months later. *Diary*, September 5, 1845.

antics of the politicians, and the insidious effect of the British market on the agricultural economy of the South. During the panic of 1837 he recorded in his diary that it was "all most impossible to raise one dollars. and that in shin plasters," but the bottom was not reached until 1842 when he reported that money was as "high as 4 per *ct* a month" and "scarce at that."¹¹

His commercial relations with his New Orleans factors were usually satisfactory.¹² For a period he transacted business with Finley and Company, but in 1839 changed to A. Ledoux and Company, "the best salesmen in the city," who promised to stamp his full name on his cotton bales instead of the usual B. H. B. and who immediately secured three and a half cents per pound more than he had theretofore received.¹³ It is impossible to determine accurately his yearly sales, which fluctuated between \$7,274 and \$24,839, or the amount of his indebtedness, though his diary records numerous loans.¹⁴ Ordinarily an amicable relationship existed between him and his creditors, but when one of them in 1840 unexpectedly called for his money, Barrow characterized his action as "most illiberal to make the least of it."¹⁵ A few months later he noted, "saw Mr. Turnbull [the owner of Rosedown] yesterday the only independent man to be met—Fat and pockets full of money."¹⁶ He generally collected his own loans without trouble and apparently was easily prevailed upon to endorse his neighbors' notes, a propensity responsible for many of his monetary misfortunes.¹⁷ A note for \$40,000

¹¹ *Ibid.*, January 2, 14, 1838; March 29, 1842.

¹² For a brief although excellent study of the Southern cotton marketing system, see Alfred H. Stone, "The Cotton Factorage System of the Southern States," in *American Historical Review* (New York, 1895-), XX (1915), 557-65.

¹³ Diary, September 28, 1836; October 6, 31, 1838; October 5, 26, 1839; Barrow Accounts, October, 1839; July, 1840 (Louisiana State University Department of Archives). See, also, for the above-mentioned commission merchants, New Orleans *Price-Current and Commercial Intelligencer*, *passim*.

¹⁴ Diary, January 30, 1837; February 6, 1839; April 12, 1840; Barrow Accounts, 1839-1845.

¹⁵ Diary, March 11, 1840.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, October 5, 1842.

¹⁷ The generalization of Carl R. Fish, *The Rise of the Common Man, 1830-1850* (New York, 1927), 156, although perhaps hasty and inaccurate, is interesting in view of Barrow's experience with I. Desmond: "In the South . . . honor was to a large extent confused with honesty. This led to many tragedies from its misuse by the careless and by the

was endorsed, an obligation promptly settled, but between 1836 and 1846 Barrow evidently lost a little over \$22,000 on neighbors and friends. His largest loss was to I. Desmont, an English physician of "uncommonly gentlemanly manners—modesty and chastity," who later quit the country leaving him to pay between \$10,000 and \$16,000.¹⁸ The incident made a severe impression on the young planter, for in January, 1840, he remarked, "This crop would have paid every Dollar I owed—but owing to my Endorsing—Will take two more crops to clear me of Debt—never Endorse . . . for a man Extravagant & careless in business."¹⁹ Thus was the milk of Southern generosity curdled by contact with gentlemanly rascality.

Routine and production on a large plantation presented problems similar to those faced by the operator of any large economic unit.²⁰ Though production of staple crops was a major objective, there was a multiplicity of tasks to be performed during a twelvemonth: land to be cleared; stumps burned or pulled; staple and other crops planted and cultivated; buildings, implements, and tools repaired; spinning, weaving, sewing, and basket-making to satisfy the needs of nearly two hundred black folk—the thousand and one tasks the flesh was heir to on a well-organized plantation. Routine was well planned and executed: the completion of one task saw another begun and the vagaries of weather never halted slave labor long, for plantation efficiency did not allow idleness.

unscrupulous. A real Southern gentleman could rarely refuse to endorse a note if asked by another seeming gentleman. The number of families driven to penury by such careless assumptions of the risks of others is beyond belief, and in many cases the original signer of the note had nothing to risk, or protected himself by assignment to his wife or others."

¹⁸ Diary, August 20, November 9, December 19, 1839; Barrow Accounts, 1839.

¹⁹ Diary, January 21, 1840.

²⁰ The following articles will prove helpful in securing a picture of plantation routine and production in the St. Francisville-Natchez district: R. L. Allen, "Agriculture of Louisiana," in *De Bow's Review* (New Orleans, 1846-1880), III (1847), 412-17; Louise Butler, "West Feliciana, A Glimpse of Its History," in *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* (New Orleans, 1917-), VII (1924), 90-120; Mack Swearingen, "Thirty Years of a Mississippi Plantation: Charles Whitmore of 'Montpelier,'" in *Journal of Southern History* (Baton Rouge, 1935-), I (1935), 198-211; Wendell H. Stephenson, "A Quarter-Century of a Mississippi Plantation: Eli J. Capell of 'Pleasant Hill,'" in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (Cedar Rapids, 1915-), XXIII (1936), 355-74.

Barrow's money crop was cotton. His yearly planting averaged between 600 and 750 acres, which yielded an annual production of from 375 to slightly under 700 bales. In the early 1840's he began to experiment with sugar cane, finally turning to that crop as a staple shortly before his death a decade later.²¹ The making of a good crop was a source of satisfaction to the master of Highland, for appreciatory comments of visitors and neighbors were entered in his diary. On one occasion he recorded, "they have seen no crop at all to compare with it, from half leg to waist high balled & formed as well as can be for the season several grown Boles on a stalk."²² Sometimes lice, worms, grasshoppers, and other pests plagued him or plant diseases distracted his equanimity. In 1840 he wrote, "Never saw worse looking cotton. twisted trash beat in it & stained cotton blown so as not able to trace the rows, worms Eating all the Leaves off."²³ His slaves caused him little trouble, leading him to record: "never saw hands Work as Well, have never said a word to them—feeling an interest, they look a head and see What is to be done."²⁴ That they picked unusually well on occasion is evidenced by the fact that on one November day in 1838 the average picking was 364½ pounds for forty-two pickers.²⁵

Highland made a definite attempt to reach self-sufficiency. Oats, hay, and fodder were produced for livestock, corn and peas for both man and beast. The plantation truck garden had a regular crew of workers

²¹ Diary, January 24, March 17, 28, November 12, 1843; May 27, July 22, November 1, 1844. Barrow's work was carried on by his two eldest sons, John and James J. Barrow. Upon his death in 1854, they took over the management of the plantation and within a few years came to be numbered among the largest sugar producers of the parish. Their crop of 1857-1858 totaled 430 hogsheads. Two years later the crop remained about the same figure, but in 1861-1862 James J. Barrow, who had taken over the management of Highland plantation, produced 650 hogsheads. At this time he was the second largest sugar producer in West Feliciana, being exceeded only by William R. Barrow, an uncle. During this period vacuum pans were used, but by 1870 he had made many improvements. He had a brick and slate roof sugarhouse and refined his sugar by steam train, vacuum, and centrifugal methods. See P. A. Champomier, *Statement of the Sugar Crop Made in Louisiana in 1857-58* (New Orleans, 1858), 3; *ibid.*, 1859-60 (New Orleans, 1860), 3; L. Bouchereau, *Statement of the Sugar and Rice Crops Made in Louisiana in 1870-71* (New Orleans, 1871), 5.

²² Diary, June 12, 1842.

²³ *Ibid.*, September 4, 22, 29, 1840.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, April 16, 1840.

²⁵ Compiled from Barrow's table of cotton pickings.

in season, and potatoes, of the Irish and sweet varieties, pumpkins, beans, and other vegetables brought welcome dietary changes. Tobacco was grown for home consumption. The orchards below the quarter yielded peaches, plums, apples, and other fruits. Watermelons were produced on a large scale and during hot summer weather blacks became well acquainted with their tasty succulence. Between seventy and eighty head of work horses and mules were kept, and three or four yoke of oxen saw service getting timber and wood out of the swamps. Cattle numbered from one hundred and fifty to two hundred head, and on special occasions the inhabitants of the quarters were allowed fresh beef. Hogs, as well as sheep, were raised in large numbers, as many as three hundred being in the pens at one time. Large flocks of the usual barnyard fowls were kept for both their fruit and flesh, and many doubtless found their way surreptitiously into the steaming pots of slave cabins.

The effective operation of a plantation necessitated the use of machinery and involved the direction of a certain amount of mechanical work. Barrow, like most planters, depended upon the hoe as the most important tool of cotton production, but whenever possible he used horse-drawn implements.²⁶ His gins and presses were steam-driven, and by the late 1830's his sawmill and grinding mills had been converted from horsepower to steam power. Machinery was operated by slaves but repairs required the services of expert white labor at an average cost of about \$2.00 per day. Breakdowns often necessitated sending to New Orleans for parts, and work ceased until blacksmiths could make proper replacements.

Barrow was not a scientific planter. To be sure, he took agricultural journals, kept fairly well abreast of the times, and occasionally made experiments, but he is not to be counted among those patrons of Ceres who were more interested in agricultural improvements than in lucrative returns. He rotated crops, he manured fields (though it is not recorded that he ever purchased guano or commercial fertilizer), and he hauled

²⁶ It is interesting to note that the planter often depended upon his "Driver" to select the hoes purchased. Diary, June 5, 1838; April 1, 1840.

rich leafy molds from the nearby timber tracts. In 1837 he tried wrapping paper around seed corn; he grafted pear, peach, and apple trees; he practiced various methods for ridding his fields of squirrels and raccoons.²⁷ But his most profitable remuneration resulted from studying and improving the mechanical working habits of his field hands.²⁸

The thesis has been advanced that the most striking feature of Southern life was that black slaves furnished the bulk of its labor supply, not that her economic system was based on a staple crop. The plantation revolved around the slave quarter and Barrow undoubtedly took more time in the general organization of his plantation labor system than did many of the planter class. Barrow prepared rules for the government of his slaves with great care and rigidly enforced them.²⁹ As he phrased it, "A plantation might be considered as a piece of machinery, to operate successfully, all its parts should be uniform and exact." The master should be considered the "impelling force," and unless he was interested in the "proceedings" on his plantations, nothing but "indifference" was to be expected from his Negroes.³⁰ The slave's life was a regulated one; his sole purpose in being was the advancement of his master's economic interests. He could not marry away from the plantation; he could not wander about the country during the holidays or inclement weather; in fact, the quarters were the center of his world, for Barrow believed that if the slave was made "comfortable at Home," if the essentials of contentment were provided for him, there would be little inclination for him to shirk his work or be dissatisfied. In his general outlook on the institution of slavery, he was typical of his time and section. He dis-

²⁷ *Ibid.*, October 27, 1837; March 27, April 13, 1838; January 22, 1840.

²⁸ Of this experiment he wrote: "I am well paid for my trouble in teaching my small gang to Hoe, never saw such hoe hands as they are, two year[s] ago took two on a row—now Eaqueel to a woman, in drecting them to make a slow & sure lick in one place & to cut the full width of the hoe every time—unless reminded of it they would stand & make 4 or 5." *Ibid.*, April 16, 1840.

²⁹ In addition to the works of Ulrich B. Phillips, descriptions of plantation management may be found in Valcour Aime, *Plantation Diary* (New Orleans, 1878); Franklin L. Riley (ed.), "The Diary of Dr. John M. Phillips," in Mississippi Historical Society, *Publications* (Oxford, etc., 1897-1914; Centenary Series, 1916-1925), X (1909), 305-481; "Dr. John C. Jenkins Plantation Diary" (Elgin plantation, Natchez, Mississippi, typescript in Department of Archives, Louisiana State University).

³⁰ The "Rules for Highland Plantation" are found in *Barrow's Diary*.

approved of the abolition movement and condemned bitterly all forms of close association between planter and slave.⁸¹ On the other hand, he could not condone extreme cruelty to that underprivileged class, in one instance saying, "A meaner set than the Howells do not live—cruel and unjust in the extreme,"⁸² and in another narrating graphically, "Went to Town man tried for Whipping a negro to Death. trial will continue till to morrow—deserves death—Cleared!"⁸³ He commented in his diary on the character of certain of his slaves. On the death of Old Orange, he wrote: "A more perfect negro never lived, faithful honest & purely religious, never knew him guilty of a *wrong*."⁸⁴ When George was drowned, the entry ran thus: "a very great loss. one of the best negros I ever saw. or knew. to his family as a White person."⁸⁵ On more than one occasion he defended his slaves when accused unjustly of some crime committed in the neighborhood and once came to the financial aid of Jerry who had had \$4.00 in counterfeit money passed off on him.⁸⁶ On the other hand, he censured erring hands and once called Jim "the meanest, dirtiest boy I ever had."⁸⁷

While it is impossible to determine the exact number of black folks living at Highland plantation, there apparently were slightly less than two hundred. Barrow's accounts show that while he bought a few slaves from time to time, with one exception they were all purchased in Louisiana,⁸⁸ and that, during the entire period under consideration, he sold only two Negroes. In 1836 he sent Big Sam and Amy to New Orleans,

⁸¹ In the Diary, March 20, 1840, he wrote: "Wash. Pennington repairing my Gin—the most perfect fool I know—stands and talks to the negros &c. negros no more respect *him* than a negro."

⁸² *Ibid.*, September 15, 1840.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, May 21, 1839.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, January 15, 1843.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, October 7, 1837.

⁸⁶ In 1839 a neighbor's gin was "fired" and Dennis was blamed. Whereupon Barrow planned a call upon the neighbor, and wrote, "if he says it was Dennis I will curse him and if I ever catch one of his negros on this side of the creek will make them see sights." *Ibid.*, December 11, 1839.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, January 24, 1838.

⁸⁸ Regarding Negroes from the Upper South he wrote: "I will never buy grown negros from Va.—or upper Country—small boys and girls may do, but grown ones are not worth as much—by at least one third as our creoles—one creole will pick as much as two of them." *Ibid.*, October 18, 1836.

realizing \$1,760 for the pair and recording that they were "not worth \$5." Until the fall of 1837 Barrow employed overseers to direct his plantation labor but at that time he became so exasperated that he wrote: "More Whiping to do this Fall than all together in three years owing to my D mean Overseer—never will have another unless I should be compelled to leave—they are a perfect nuisance."³⁹ Evidently from this time until his death he depended on himself and his drivers to keep the organization moving.⁴⁰

The master of Highland believed his slaves to be above average, for he frequently mentioned their good qualities. They were well housed and fed, and received gifts of clothing and money at Christmas time.⁴¹ They were divided into rival gangs for cotton picking or other stipulated tasks, with the losing side giving dinners; and individuals sometimes worked against each other for a prize donated by the master. There were times, however, when work was not well done and he was prompted to make entries such as the following: "my Hands worked badly . . . general Whiping," or "Whipped every hand in the field this evening."⁴² From numerous notations in his diary it would appear that his slaves were a sickly lot; a closer scrutiny, however, shows this was not the case: medical attention was provided on every necessary occasion, with physician's bills during some years totaling well over \$500. Despite all precautions, lockjaw, ruptures, pleurisy, influenza, common colds, and injuries of various types were a constant source of worry.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, October 2, 1837.

⁴⁰ On one occasion he wrote: "I hope the time will come When every Overseer in the country will be compelled to adadopt some other mode of making a living—they are a perfect nuisance cause dissatisfaction among the negros—being more possessed of more brutal feelings—I make better crops than those Who employ them." *Ibid.*, July 25, 1839.

⁴¹ In his "Rules" Barrow explained: "I prefer giving them money of Christmas to their making any thing, thereby creating an interest with you and yours . . . if a negro is suffered to sell any thing he chooses without any inquiry being made, a spirit of trafficking at once is created. to carry this on, both means and time are necessary, neither of which is he of right possessed. A negro would not be content to sell only What he raises or makes of either corn . . . or poultry, or the like, but he would sell a part of his allowance allso, and would be tempted to commit robberies to obtain things to sell." The monetary gift for 1838 amounted to \$500, but it was increased to \$700 during the two succeeding years. *Diary*, December 24, 1838; December 22, 1839; December 24, 1840; *Barrow Accounts*, 1839, 1841.

⁴² *Diary*, January 4, April 27, 1839.

Neglect of midwives or mothers took a heavy toll of infants and many were lost through reporting illness too late for medical attention. Barrow was not a strict religionist, but "Sunday being a day of rest to the negros, I like to be about—allowance day—& they frequently want things not convenient to get any other day."⁴³ He did not force religion upon his people, and on one occasion when a neighbor's slaves were "cutting up a great many shines" he wrote that the trouble had grown out of having "preached to [them] for 4 or 5 years past—greatest piece of foolishness any one ever guilty of no true Christianity among Church going Whites—& how Expect to Preach morality among a set of ignorant beings—proper discipline may improve them and make them better."⁴⁴ Slave marriages were common at Highland and interracial promiscuity was bitterly condemned, for on one occasion he wrote: "had a general Whiping frolick. White men sending for some of my women by one of my boys. 'one eyed Sam'—a load of buck shot will be the dose if I can see them or find them."⁴⁵

Barrow was very particular about housing conditions: cabins were repaired yearly, new wells dug or old ones cleaned, and additional buildings erected to offset depredations of time. The jail, though used infrequently, was always kept in good repair. In 1838 a dance hall was constructed and was often used. Barrow was generous in the clothing allotment of two suits per year, two extra pairs of shoes for winter months, and new blankets every third year, with an occasional new suit or a new dress as a reward for good work. Food supplies were carefully watched. Meat was the foundation of slave diet and the allowance was ordinarily five pounds of "Clear good meat" per week for each slave above the age of four years.⁴⁶ Hogs, sheep, cattle, and poultry were consumed in large quantities, particularly during holiday periods. Large supplies of molasses and sugar were bought to satisfy the sweet

⁴³ *Ibid.*, March 30, 1840; also in "Rules for Highland Plantation."

⁴⁴ *Diary*, April 19, 1844. On October 11 Barrow wrote: "went to Miss Swifts. nearly all of their hands have run off. from pure impudence founded in their 'Negros.' religion, & wish by that means to run the overseer off, will see them put in order, my health permitting."

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, September 4, 1837.

⁴⁶ "Rules for Highland Plantation."

tooth of the black, and, to offer variety from the ordinary ration of cornmeal, flour was sometimes purchased.⁴⁷

The Black Code caused Barrow little anxiety, for there is no record that any violations of consequence were ever attributed to his slaves. The stealing of small articles was of course a common problem and light cotton pickings, punishments, and imagined abuses were frequent causes for the taking of French leave by the inhabitants of the quarter.⁴⁸ Barrow usually rounded up his own runaways, though on one occasion he sent for professional slave hunters. For habitual absconders he sometimes prescribed rough treatment, the description of one incident being: "ran and trailed about a mile *treed* him, made the dogs pull him out of the tree, Bit him very badly, think he will stay home a while."⁴⁹ Of a similar case he wrote: "dogs soon tore him naked, took him Home Before the other negro[es] at dark & made the dogs give him another over hauling."⁵⁰ But these were exceptional cases. Barrow believed that prospective rewards for good behavior and well-performed labor were better incentives than fear of punishment. Dinners, holidays, dances, and celebrations were common and are evidenced by a typical diary entry: "finding no Cotton to trash, sent for the Fiddle And made them Dance from 12 till dark."⁵¹

The ante-bellum plantation was not only the center of a fairly complete system of a staple economy; it was also the nucleus of the social life of the planter class.⁵² Visiting was a popular diversion, "frollics" were indulged in, many of them impromptu, and one of these Barrow described. After having "kidnapped" a number of young ladies he

⁴⁷ The purchase of large amounts of sugar and flour was an unusual plantation expenditure.

⁴⁸ "I had rather a negro would do any thing Else than runaway," Barrow once wrote, and his punishments for this act were usually severe. Diary, October 3, 1839.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, September 6, 1845.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, November 11, 1845.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, January 1, 1846.

⁵² The social history of the Old South is yet to be written. Much interesting material, however, is to be found in the works of Phillips, William E. Dodd, Susan D. Smedes, and others. An excellent work for North Carolina is Guion G. Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina, A Social History* (Chapel Hill, 1937).

"Would not Let any Leave—got a violin player from Town . . . Let them rest & knap during the day some times. playing smut—at dark began to dance . . . never have seen A collection so sudden[ly] and so perfectly free easy & happy for two days & nights, All restraint thrown aside never enjoyed myself as much."⁵³ On occasion formal balls were attended, horseback rides and drives were common, and practical joking was enjoyed by all. Hunting was a popular sport. The hounds were followed as in Maryland or Virginia, and in addition deer, bear, raccoon, opossum, alligators, and wild fowl were hunted by torchlight, on horseback, and in parties by "standing."⁵⁴ Radcliff's Lake, Big and Little Bayou Sara creeks offered sport for the followers of Izaak Walton.⁵⁵

From the beginning of his career until 1840 Barrow was one of the most prominent racing men of his parish and state.⁵⁶ He was the second largest stockholder in the St. Francisville Race Track until he sold his interests to Daniel Turnbull of Rosedown plantation.⁵⁷ He was a familiar figure at the New Orleans tracks and for a time was an official timer at the Louisiana Jockey Club.⁵⁸ He ordinarily bet small sums and often won.⁵⁹ In his racing activities he was associated with his brother, William R. Barrow, and together they developed two horses, Fanny Bell and Josh Bell, who became well known throughout the South.⁶⁰

⁵³ Diary, January 7, 8, 1842.

⁵⁴ For an excellent contemporary account of hunting in this section of Louisiana, see T. B. Thorpe [Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter], "Sporting in Louisiana," in *Spirit of the Times* (New York, 1831-1861), XI (1841), 571. Of Thorpe the editor wrote, "His communications are sought after with the avidity of a Pete Whetstone, a Cypress, a Shingle Splitter, or a Snaffle." *Ibid.*, 385.

⁵⁵ The Barrow family had a steamer, the *Nimrod*, which was used for fishing and hunting excursions. See *ibid.*, 331, for an account of its first hunting trip. In the years following 1841 it is mentioned frequently.

⁵⁶ Speaking of "the Messrs. Barrow" and several other racing enthusiasts of the state, one correspondent of the *Spirit of the Times* wrote, "On such men, and their example and influence, depends the turf in the future . . . and without such support, the sooner it goes down the better." *Ibid.*, IX (1839), 405.

⁵⁷ Notarial Records, I, 192-93. Barrow sold his interest on March 13, 1840.

⁵⁸ *Spirit of the Times*, VIII (1838), 364.

⁵⁹ Diary, November 30, December 20, 1838; Barrow Accounts, 1842, 1843.

⁶⁰ Diary, May 5, 1838; April 2, 1839; July 23, 1845; Barrow Accounts, 1839, 1843; *Spirit of the Times*, VIII (1838), 28, 39, 60, 356-57, 364; XII (1842), 534.

Concerning the latter horse Barrow once wrote, "I believe Jos Bell is the Best Horse in the United States—First rate any distance."⁶¹

The personal life of Barrow was similar to that of men of his station in the parish of West Feliciana and in other sections of the South. Optimistic though he was, the fertile lands of Texas and Mississippi continually beckoned;⁶² his indebtedness was a source of worry, and yet extravagant purchases were not infrequent; though satisfied with the organization of his plantation he would write, "am perfectly disgusted with evry thing on the place."⁶³ He confided to his diary his private opinion of relatives, friends, and neighbors. The whole Barrow family, with only two exceptions, he remarked, were "liberal & honest, and are like familes ought to be. united,"⁶⁴ but on another occasion, wrote: "Ruffins trainer Mr. Tisdale returned from Kentucky—bringing with him 19 beautifull dogs 5 intended for me lost or died—strange that only *mine* should have died."⁶⁵ Of one of his neighbors he said: "a meaner man never lived";⁶⁶ and concerning another individual, "A Mr Vidall staid . . . with me last night a perfect Jack ass Fop & *gawk*."⁶⁷ He was critical of people from the North and during the visit of two "D. Yankees," noted especially "the impudence of their section of the country," finally giving them a "hint to Leave that no southernor would mistake—ordered their horses Back."⁶⁸ His endorsing troubles led him to write, "sincerely wish evry rascal & persons causing me to be in Debt in Hell *riding a red hot iron*."⁶⁹

⁶¹ Diary, February 15, 1839. The *Spirit of the Times*, XII (1842), 534, carried the following: "Josh Bell was one of the best horses of his year. In March, 1839, he beat Wagner the 1st heat in a four miles race at New Orleans on the Eclipse Course; the next week he walked over for a purse of \$1,500, Three mile heats, on the Louisiana Course, and in the following week won a purse of \$1,200 at Three mile heats on the Metairie Course."

⁶² Diary, February 19, September 8, 1841.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, May 5, 20, 1844.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, March 11, 1840.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, October 19, 1839.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, July 2, 1840.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, October 10, 1839.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, April 26, 1843; February 26, 1844.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, May 5, 1844. On January 1, 1840, he wrote: "My course will be a Lesson to my children—that is never to loan What is not your own—if you owe any thing pay it first—I borrowed money for other persons 'friend' & now have to pay it over. Mind Who

Mildly interested in national politics, only three issues caused him real concern: corruption in public office, the annexation of Texas, and the slavery question. He was normally a Whig but bolted the party in 1844 to vote for Polk. In state politics party lines meant little to him, and he jumped from candidate to candidate with alacrity and abandon. He held to the democratic view that the holding of office was a public duty and during the period from 1833 to 1846 was overseer of his road district, overseer of the poor, and member of the Grand Jury and the Police Jury. The Police Jury's records indicate, however, that he was not regular in attendance, for he was fined on several occasions for failure to attend meetings.⁷⁰ His cultural life was typical. He subscribed to newspapers and magazines, he bought books, attended concerts, invited artists to his country estate, had his portrait painted by Tom Thorpe, the noted "Bee Hunter,"⁷¹ gave his children dancing lessons, and hired tutors for their private instruction. His parlor boasted several musical instruments; his newspaper shelf held the *Charleston Mercury*, the *Woodville Republican*, the *Spirit of the Times*, and other publications; and on his book shelves were Botta's *Washington* and Johnson's *Life of Henry Clay*. He attended church infrequently and was inclined to indulge in outbursts against wearers of the cloth, but contributed liberally to churches and to charity. His own personal code is indicated by two entries: "A Harralson died yesterday I shall loose by him \$1300. his family will be dependent on a negro woman I have a mortgage on—as a matter of course—cannot take her";⁷² and on another occasion, "so far have never injured any human being to my knowledge."⁷³

A sharply realistic view of the personality of Bennet H. Barrow will

professes to be your friend—you see a man working hard & economising help him, but see a fellow dressing fine, using fine language & they are What is called clever fellows—let them pass."

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, December 7, 1836; May 8, June 3, 1844; June 2, September 27, December 1, 1845; West Feliciana Parish, Minutes of the Police Jury, II, 88, 90, 91, 92, 103, 104, 106, 107, 109, 111; West Feliciana Parish, Records of the Police Jury, II, 4, 48, 72, 101, 122.

⁷¹ Diary, May 4, 1841; May 7, 1842; Barrow Accounts, 1841.

⁷² Diary, October 8, 1839.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, April 20, 1845.

never be sketched. He related his story briefly, sketchily, but on the whole accurately, in his diary. Frequently he interjected intimate details, each one small but in the aggregate extremely helpful for those of us who find the essence of history in human touches not ordinarily incorporated in secondary works, and revelatory of neglected elements of objective history. On September 22, 1836, he wrote: "Here I am sitting with the Baby in my lap . . . Emily criticising the History of Georgia—Caroline and John at all kinds of Mischief," and, again, on August 23 of the following year, "Attempting to learn James & John their book—had rather drive a team of mules . . . John looks one way & thinks another." Thus the common vexations of humanity beset even Bennet H. Barrow, planter of Old Feliciana.