

Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes of Louisiana, 1836-1846, as Reflected in the Diary of Bennet H. Barrow. Edited with an introduction by Edwin Adams Davis. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943. Pp. xvi, 457. Illustrations, appendices, bibliography. \$5.00.)

The parish of West Feliciana, Louisiana, with "its salubrity of climate, beautiful variety of forest, its clear waters and fertile soil . . . [was] certainly one of the most favoured spots in Louisiana." Here, as in other parts of the antebellum South, the plantation-slavery regime became the basis of economic and social life. The southern planters, creators of the plantation-slave culture, were no less the creatures of that society.

Typical in many ways of that locale and society was Bennet H. Barrow, planter, slaveholder, lover of fields, woods, and streams. On the face of things, Barrow was seemingly an unimportant person. True, he owned more than two hundred Negroes, several hundred acres of fertile land, and accordingly was a well-to-do personage. But he held no high political office; he was not associated with any important movements; he was not even an outstanding agriculturist. In what, then, lies the significance of Barrow as a person and of his diary, recording the everyday events of his life from 1836 to 1846? His importance and that of this document lie perhaps in that single word "everyday." For above all, Barrow's story is the story of everyday life in one part of the ante-bellum South.

Here we see that the southern planter was first of all a farmer—a member of a rural community. His family, his crops, his Negroes—these were his principal interests and to them he devoted his time and talents. Like many another southern planter, Barrow loved country life. He was at home in the saddle, cantering over the Feliciana hills. A follower of the turf and owner of many thoroughbreds, Barrow knew how to appreciate fine horses. Frequent fishing trips along the near-by bayous and lakes provided relaxation and escape from financial cares that not infrequently plagued him. When the briskness of fall was in the air and the leaves covered the hills with red and gold, he set out on a deer hunt, his favorite sport. While Barrow read occasionally and bought some books, his diary does not leave a picture of a man who delighted in the joy of reading. Rather the informal visits to and from his neighboring friends provided opportunity for the southerner's greatest love—conversation.

Barrow was a good master to his Negroes. He was not so lenient as some and perhaps he used the whip more frequently than others. But he knew his Negroes well and dealt with them justly. Those who performed their tasks well could expect rewards in the form of cash, holidays, barbecues, and balls. Those who were remiss in the fields, or ran away, or showed "taking ways" in the smokehouse were certain to feel the whip or perhaps spend some days in the plantation jail. All, whether industrious and obedient or lazy and sullen, were certain to be adequately housed, clothed, and fed.

Barrow was no Pollyanna; nor was he uncertain in his views of men and affairs. He knew where he stood and what he thought, and one cannot read his diary without concluding that he possessed some facility of expression. For some reason, Barrow had no love for preachers. Early in June, 1841, he attended a "Verry Large Party" and had "a verry sociable time," but "as usual however the D— Preachers interfered as much as possible, attempting to draw numbers from the Party by having preaching at night" (p. 232). Nor did he think much of religion for the people of the quarter. When a neighbor had trouble with his Negroes, it was Barrow's opinion that it was due to "his having them preached to for 4 or 5 years past—greatest piece of foolishness any one ever guilty of—no true Christianity among the Church going Whites—and how expect to Preach morrality among a set [of] ignorant beings—proper discipline may improve them and make them better" (pp. 323-24).

Professor Davis, in his introduction to the Barrow Diary, skillfully synthesizes the many elements of which southern plantation life was composed. "The Expansion of a Plantation," "Highland and High Finance," "Routine and Production," "The Inhabitants of the Quarter," "Amusements and Sporting Interests," and "Bennet H. Barrow" are all chapters which, despite their brevity, successfully recreate the life of a region and its people.

The reader might have hoped for more material on the relations between Barrow and his New Orleans factors; nor can one help but wonder what Barrow did during his many visits to New Orleans. While this reviewer has every con-

fidence that Mr. Davis could readily supply the proper content for those missing entries, the diary is, after all, Barrow's and only he can be held accountable for its omissions. The editor is to be commended for his thorough and painstaking editorial work. Rightly, he has seen that it is from such documents as this that the real history of the ante-bellum South must be written. More than that, in his delightful introduction he has pointed the way to the effective exploitation of valuable source material.

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